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Music, Community, and Justice for All: Factors Influencing Participation in Gay Men's Choruses

Dustin S. Cates¹

Abstract

The diverse landscape of choral music includes a wide range of ensembles representing various community, cultural, and sociological perspectives. One may assume that the impetus for participation in choral music is strictly musical. However, while inherently musical, choral ensembles and their stated missions also reflect and influence the social interactions and core values of their participants (Bell, 2008; Latimer, 2008; Turino, 2008). The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that influence participation in gay men's choruses. Participants ($n = 201$) included singing members of three gay men's choruses located in the central United States. A questionnaire that included demographic information and a series of open-ended questions asking participants to offer their top three motivations for participating in a gay men's chorus was developed for this study. Participants' responses to open-ended questions were coded thematically (*musical, community and social justice*). *Musical and community factors* were found to most heavily influence involvement in the participating choruses. The mission statements of each of the participating ensembles were analyzed and found to align with factors influencing participation.

Key Words:

community, music, chorus, LGBTQ, participation

¹ School of Music, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA., USA

Corresponding author:

Dustin S. Cates, Ph.D., Boyer College of Music and Dance, Temple University, 2001 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA

Email: dustin.cates@temple.edu

Choral music is an art that transcends physical borders and cultural barriers. The act of singing together plays a role in the world's religions, governments, and systems of education. For many, group singing experiences begin as a child in churches or schools, and community choral ensembles often serve as a bridge to allow these meaningful music experiences to continue into adulthood (Bowles, 1991; Carter 2000). The diverse landscape of choral music includes a wide range of ensembles representing various community, cultural, and sociological perspectives. One may assume that the impetus for participation in choral music is strictly musical. However, while inherently musical, choral ensembles and their stated missions also reflect and influence the social interactions and core values of their participants (Bell, 2008; Latimer, 2008; Turino, 2008). Broadly, this study aimed to examine the motives that inspire choristers to engage in a community choral ensemble.

Community Music Ensembles

Community-based music ensembles play an important role in the social fabric of cities and towns around the world. These ensembles often reflect the, "...identities, traditions, values, beliefs, aspirations, and social interactions" (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018, p. 2) of a given community (Higgins, 2012; Tapson, et al., 2018). Schippers (2018) identifies three contextualized roles for community music ensembles. First, he posits community music as an 'organic' phenomenon, representing a process by which community music making is slowly developed over time and entrenched in resources from the community itself (Schippers, 2018). This context can be spontaneous, like the call and response singing of a Portuguese Sherpa and his fellow villagers (Saether, 2003), or more organized, like town bands common in communities throughout Italy (Confredo, et al., 2017). Second, he suggests *community music as intervention*, as illustrated by music created in response to some sort of need or short coming in society. One such example is Joel Thompson's (2014), *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, an extended choral work for TTBB chorus and chamber orchestra based on the last words of seven unarmed black men who were shot by police officers. This piece demonstrates a musical response to an issue some view as requiring intervention. Similarly, individuals may select to participate in a community music ensemble in response to a cultural or social issue (Gordon, 1990; Attinello, 1994; Hilliard, 2008). Lastly, Schippers (2018) posits *institutionalization in response to community needs* as the third context of community music. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the community response to shifts in the way music instruction is delivered. Abeles, et al. (1994) suggested that many of the world's finest conservatories and schools of music were developed due to the "institutional response" of the community. Likewise, the shift in the mid-nineteenth century to include music in the curriculum of American public schools, pioneered by Lowell Mason, illustrated an institutionalization of music teaching and learning (Miller, 2019).

Community music-making in North America undoubtedly began thousands of years

ago with indigenous tribes of people we now call Native Americans (Gillreath-Brown & Peres, 2018). However, community music ensembles as we know them today have their roots in the culture and religion of colonial America (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018). Amateur adult participation in community-based choirs, bands, and orchestras in the United States is wide-spread. It is estimated that there are more than 1,800 community orchestras, 3,000 community bands, and 10,000 community choirs across the United States (Bell, 2004; Cavitt, 2005; Chorus America, 2019). These ensembles offer individuals an opportunity for musical expression, social interaction, and often build upon previous experiences (Bell, 2008; Carter, 2000; Goodrich, 2019).

Community Choral Ensembles

Choral singing is the most common type of community music participation. Chorus America (2019) indicated that there were an estimated 54 million Americans participating in community choral ensembles. Community choirs play an important role in developing musical skill, fostering a sense of community, and enriching overall quality of life (Chorus America, 2019). Judd and Pooley (2014) examined the experiences of individuals who were regular community choir participants. The study sought to determine the psychological benefits of singing in a choir and found "...group singing is a joyful activity that promotes wellbeing and is life enhancing for those involved" (Judd & Pooley, 2014, p. 269). Latimer (2008) cited choral music as offering a "unique venue whereby chorister responses to various socio-political issues and events could be explored in a way that enhanced consensus of viewpoints and promoted human cooperation" (p. 24).

Current trends and research in choral music support a non-binary view of gender (Cates, 2019; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). While the leaders of many choral ensembles have begun to adopt a gender-expansive approach, gender-based choral ensembles (men's choirs and women's choirs) are still present in academic and community settings (Cates, 2019). A number of researchers have examined the nature of same-gender choral ensembles and the experiences of their participants (Apfelstadt, 1998; Freer, 2012; Parker, 2018; Ramsey, 2013). In a case study of an Australian community-based women's chorus, Southcott and Joseph (2015) found that singers were drawn to the ensemble for opportunities to socialize, make music and engage in social justice. Graf (2016) surveyed directors of collegiate and adult community men's choruses to determine social and pedagogical aspects of these ensembles. The study suggested both social (relationships, commonality, fraternity) and musical (repertoire, sound of men's voices, level of performance) elements as influencing participation in a choral ensemble comprised of singers who identify as male (Graf, 2016).

LGBTQ Community Choral Ensembles

In 1978, at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis, the world's first gay men's chorus was created in San Francisco, California (Hilliard, 2008). In 1981, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, growing to more than 130 singers since its founding a few years before, took a nine-city national tour (Gordon, 1990). The response to the tour generated discussion surrounding the musical and social aspects of a chorus comprised of gay men (Hilliard, 2008). Gay and lesbian individuals began to seek community and legitimacy and, as Schippers (2018) suggested in his discussion of *community music as intervention*, many community-based gay men's choruses began to form around the country (Gordon, 1990).

Another contributor to the rise of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer (LGBTQ) centered choral ensemble was the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA). Incorporated in 1983, GALA Choruses Inc., whose mission is "Empowering LGBT choruses as we change the world through song," serves more than 10,000 singers in more than 190 ensembles (GALA Choruses, 2018). The organization emphasizes helping new choruses, facilitating connections between established choruses, and ensuring the sustainability of the LGBTQ choral movement (GALA, 2018).

Though the history of GALA and LGBTQ community-music ensembles spans almost four decades, the body of research that critically examines these groups is quite small. Attinello (1994) investigated the participants of four gay men's choruses. The study found demographics of gay men's choruses were similar to non-LGBTQ community choruses. Many participants had previous music experience, were Caucasian, held a college degree, and ranged in age from 26 to 50. However, in contrast to their non-LGBTQ counterparts, primary motivators to join a gay men's chorus were gay issues and interacting with other gay men. A shift to social and musical factors after sustained membership as motivators for participation was noted. Attinello attributed this shift to an organizational assimilation from diverse individual motivations to communal or corporate values.

Hayes (2008) broadly discussed factors that motivated the development of LGBTQ choral ensembles. However, few researchers have examined the stated purpose of individual ensembles. Much of the literature addressing organizational mission is tailored to business and commerce, though it is common for non-profit community-based organizations to engage in the practice of developing a mission statement to focus their organization's purpose (Cochran, et al., 2008). Khalifa (2011) suggested that mission statements are defined by function, focus and form, which unite to determine the aim, content, and structure of a mission statement (Khalifa, 2011). Effective mission statements clearly communicate why an entity exists in a manner that is meaningful and motivating internally and externally (Cochran, et al., 2008; Salem, 2011).

Hilliard (2008), presented the history and development of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus (SFGMC). Kathleen McGuire, former SFGMC artistic director, described her

view of why gay men's choruses exist and why singers participate in a statement from 2003, later published by Hillard:

A lot of people have come here from places where they've been rejected by the family, or their church, by perhaps a wife, children, or siblings. Many of them come here alone, without any feeling of being wanted, and they complain about how hard it is to find a sense of community in the bars. The chorus provides that sense of community for them. Finally, they are home, and I see this at the very first rehearsal, when they've been accepted in the chorus, and they stand there, and we introduce them and sing the Irish Blessing, and everybody's in tears. They tell me time and time again, "I finally feel accepted and needed and loved" (p. 361).

While previous research examining participation in gay men's choruses exists (Attinello, 1994; Hilliard, 2008; Latimer, 2008) these studies were conducted before the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015), substantial advances in HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention (Giroir, 2020), and a broad shift toward societal inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ people (Knauer, 2020). I found no extant studies exploring the intersection of a gay men's chorus' stated organizational purpose and the reasons a singer elects to participate in the ensemble. Therefore, endeavoring to build upon existing inquiry and contribute a contemporary voice to this line of research, the purpose of this study was to investigate factors that influence individuals to participate in a gay men's chorus. The following research questions were addressed: (a) What were the most common factors that influenced participation in gay men's choruses? (b) How did these factors compare to the common themes in the mission statements of these ensembles?

Method

My efforts in the design of this research were aimed at allowing study participants to communicate the factors that influenced their participation in a gay men's chorus without imposing any predetermined concepts or ideas. The survey I developed for this study (see Appendix B) was informed by tools used in similar studies examining participation in community music ensembles (Cavitt, 2005; Confredo, et al., 2017; Latimer, 2008). Demographic questions regarding participants' gender, age, sexual orientation, race, and income, as well as questions regarding the length and scope of participants' musical study and their perception of their current skill level were included. The survey also asked participants to write open-ended responses related to their reasons for joining a gay men's chorus, including their primary, secondary, and tertiary reason for participating. The open-ended nature of these questions departs from the methodology used in

previous studies in which researchers asked participants to respond to statements utilizing Likert-type responses (Cavitt, 2005; Confredo, et al., 2017; Latimer, 2008). Scholars hold differing views regarding the use of open-response data as an element of mixed method research (Creswell, et al., 2007). Some posit the use of qualitative thematic coding and narrative inquiry methods as valid (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013; Castro, et al., 2010), while others assert that this approach lacks the researcher-participant interaction required of qualitative research methods (Yin, 2015). Therefore, I employed a quantitative, simple descriptive design for this study aimed at quantifying data for analysis and comparison. To establish validity and reliability of the survey tool, I administered a pilot survey to three singers in one of the participating choruses and interviewed them about their experience. The pilot survey participants found no difficulty in completing the survey and I made no revisions.

I selected three gay men's choruses for potential participation in this study. The choruses were selected because of their similarity in size (more than 150 singers), location (central US), and organizational structure (full-time administrative and artistic leadership and active board of directors). I served as artistic director and conductor of one of the participating ensembles at the time the research was conducted. Due to my involvement with one of the choruses and with the larger network of LGBTQ choral ensembles, convenience sampling was employed. I created the survey tool for this study using Qualtrics, a web-based survey software. I sent the invitation to participate and survey link to the combined singing membership of the ensembles by contacting the executive directors of the three choruses (see Appendix A). I asked each executive director to distribute the instructions and survey link to the singers in their chorus (see Appendix A). To avoid potential bias, I elected to keep all responses and corresponding chorus identities anonymous. Participants were not permitted to submit multiple responses. The survey link remained open for two weeks and collected data were stored in a spreadsheet saved on a cloud-based drive.

The primary research question involved participants' reasons for joining a gay men's chorus. Thus, I first reviewed participants' open-ended responses regarding their primary, secondary, and tertiary reasons for joining a gay men's chorus. While reading each response I took notes, recording the sentiment(s) expressed in each statement. I analyzed these notes for commonalities and predominant factors influencing participation and determined three themes, *musical*, *community*, and *social justice*, that emerged from the data. For the purposes of coding and quantifying participant responses, I used my initial notes to develop procedural definitions that were used to identify emergent themes: *musical* (statements pertaining to music, performance, art, stage, singing, choreography or other similar words, phrases or ideas), *community* (statements pertaining to socializing, friends, friendship, family, togetherness, brotherhood, relationships, meeting people, or other similarly worded phrases or ideas), and *social justice* (statements pertaining to LGBTQ issues, community service, betterment, making changes, activism, community,

social justice, or other similar words, phrases or ideas). Using these themes (*musical*, *community*, or *social justice*) and their corresponding definitions, I coded participant responses based on the primary theme expressed in each answer. Not all participants submitted secondary and tertiary reasons for participation. Therefore, I coded secondary and tertiary responses that were submitted but did not use them for analysis or comparison. A reliability observer read the written statements typed by the participants and coded responses using the same coding scheme (see Appendix C). Intercoder reliability between my codes and the reliability observer was 99%. The methods I utilized to determine thematic coding and intercoder reliability were in alignment with standard practices for survey-based research (Lavrakas, 2008).

After collecting participants' responses, I gathered the mission statements from the websites of the three participating choruses and GALA, the national organization advocating for the LGBTQ choral movement. Using the procedural definitions and emergent themes (*musical*, *community*, and *social justice*) gleaned from the process of analyzing and coding the survey responses as a guide, I examined each organization's mission statement to determine if there were any alignment with the three themes.

Results

Participant Demographics

The survey was sent to 451 potential participants and 201 responded; there was a 44% response rate. Respondents identified themselves as male ($n = 200$) or non-binary/third gender ($n = 1$) and ranged in age from 18 years old to over 65 years old. Twenty-nine percent indicated their age was within the 45-54-year-old category. Ninety-five percent of participants identified as gay or lesbian, 3% identified as straight/heterosexual, and 2% identified as bisexual. Eighty-four percent of participants indicated they were White or Caucasian and 73% earned between \$50,000 and \$200,000 or more per year. Table 1 on the next page presents all demographic data submitted by study participants.

Factors Influencing Participation

I asked participants to indicate their primary, secondary, and tertiary reasons for joining a gay men's chorus using open-ended responses. As previously stated, I coded the answers from each participant using the following categories: *musical*, *community*, and *social justice*. Of all participants, 48% indicated that the primary factor influencing their participation was *musical* in nature. "It gives me an outlet to sing," and "The sound of a male chorus is the most rich and sonorous in all of Western music," are responses characteristic of those categorized, *musical*.

Forty-four percent of participants cited a desire to participate within the ensemble's

Table 1. Participant Demographics ($n = 201$)

Age Range	<i>n</i>	% of Total
18-24	3	1%
25-34	30	15%
35-44	39	19%
45-54	58	29%
55-64	50	25%
65+	21	11%
Gender	<i>n</i>	% of Total
Male	200	99%
Non-Binary	1	1%
Sexual Orientation	<i>n</i>	% of Total
Gay or Lesbian	190	95%
Straight/Heterosexual	6	3%
Bisexual	5	2%
Race	<i>n</i>	% of Total
White or Caucasian	168	84%
Black or African American	14	7%
Hispanic	10	4%
Two or More Races	6	3%
Asian	3	1%
Average Yearly Income	<i>n</i>	% of Total
Less than \$25,000	20	11%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	10	5%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	23	11%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	43	21%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	31	15%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	40	20%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	22	11%
\$200,000 or more	12	6%

community as their primary motivating factor, including one singer who stated:

Being in a group of like-minded men has really done wonders for helping me be more open and accepting of myself. To see that I'm not the outsider I always felt like and that there was an entire section of the community that was like me helped me feel that I do have a place.

Social justice was the primary factor for 8% of participants. “The ability to spread our message through a communal voice to promote change in and understanding in people,” is a participant response which illustrates those emphasizing *social justice*. Respondents’ primary reason for participating in the ensemble are presented in Figure 1.

I asked participants how long they had been singing in a gay men’s chorus, 44% participants reported singing in the ensemble for 0-5 years. Thirty-three percent of participants said they had been in the ensemble for 6-15 years, and 23% participants had been in the ensemble for 16 or more years. Singers who have more recently joined the chorus may indeed have different reasons for joining than members who joined over 15 years ago. Therefore, I compared the primary reason for joining for newer participants (0-5 years participation), and more experienced participants (6-15 years, and more than 15 years). I performed a chi-square test and no relationship was found between the primary factor influencing participation and the number of years a singer participated in their chorus, $X^2(4, N = 201) = 4.34, p = .36$.

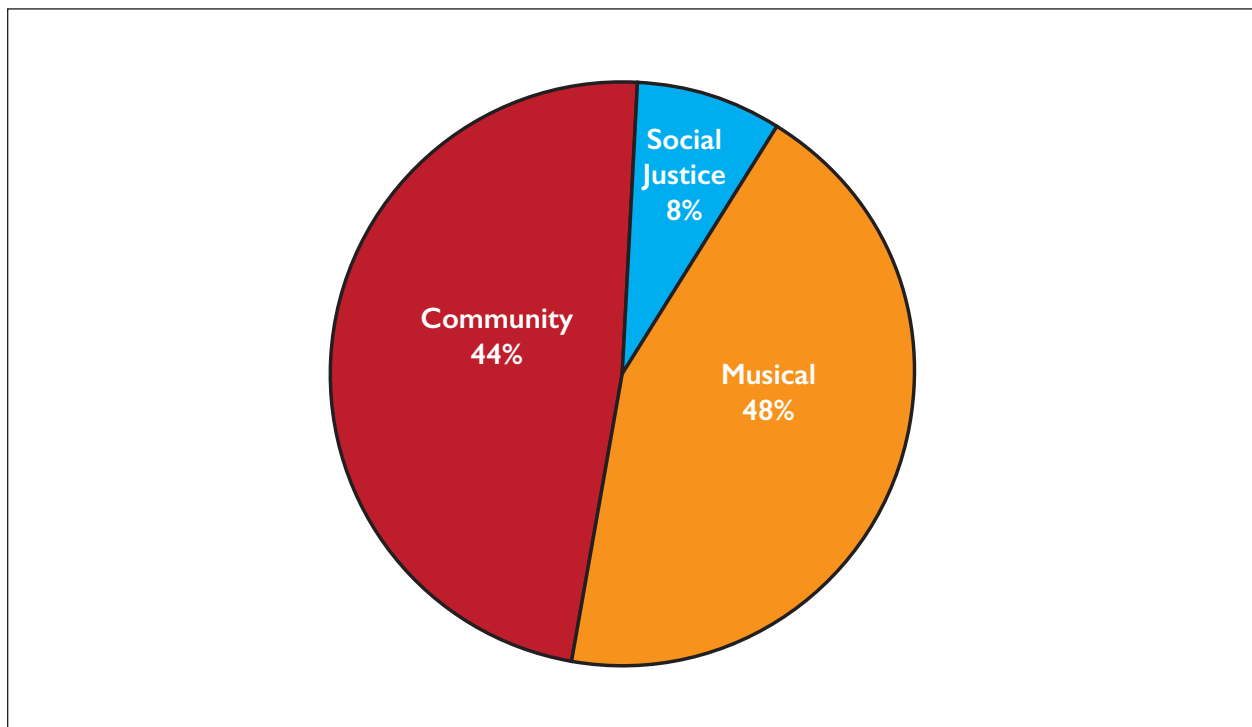


Figure 1. Primary factors influencing participation in a gay men’s choruses; percentage of participants responding within each category indicated.

While there was no statistically significant relationship found between reasons for participation and years of participation, some choristers indicated that their reasons for participating evolved in relationship to their years of participation. One study participant remarked, “I began mostly to meet other gay men who like music, but reasons for staying have evolved steadily and continue. The support of a community in times of trouble can't be underestimated.” Another participant said, “I've been in the group so long, I can't imagine it not being in my life.” Figure 2 represents the primary factor influencing participation based on the number of years a singer has been in their ensemble.

I also inquired about participation in other gay men's choruses and other choral ensembles. Responses indicated that 24% of participants had been in more than one gay men's chorus and 86% had participated in choirs other than a gay men's chorus. When I asked about their perceived musical ability, 6% of participants said “beginning,” 61% of participants said “intermediate,” and 33% of participants said “advanced.” When stating reasons for participation, a singer who reported their musical ability as “beginning” remarked, “I've never sung in a choir before. In the short time I've been with the chorus I've learned so much about music.”

Forty-nine participants responded to an open-ended question asking for other comments regarding their participation in a gay men's chorus. Of those responses, ($n = 36$) communicated *musical*, *community*, and *social justice*, themes. However, when I analyzed the remaining responses ($n = 13$), four subthemes emerged. It should be noted that these sub

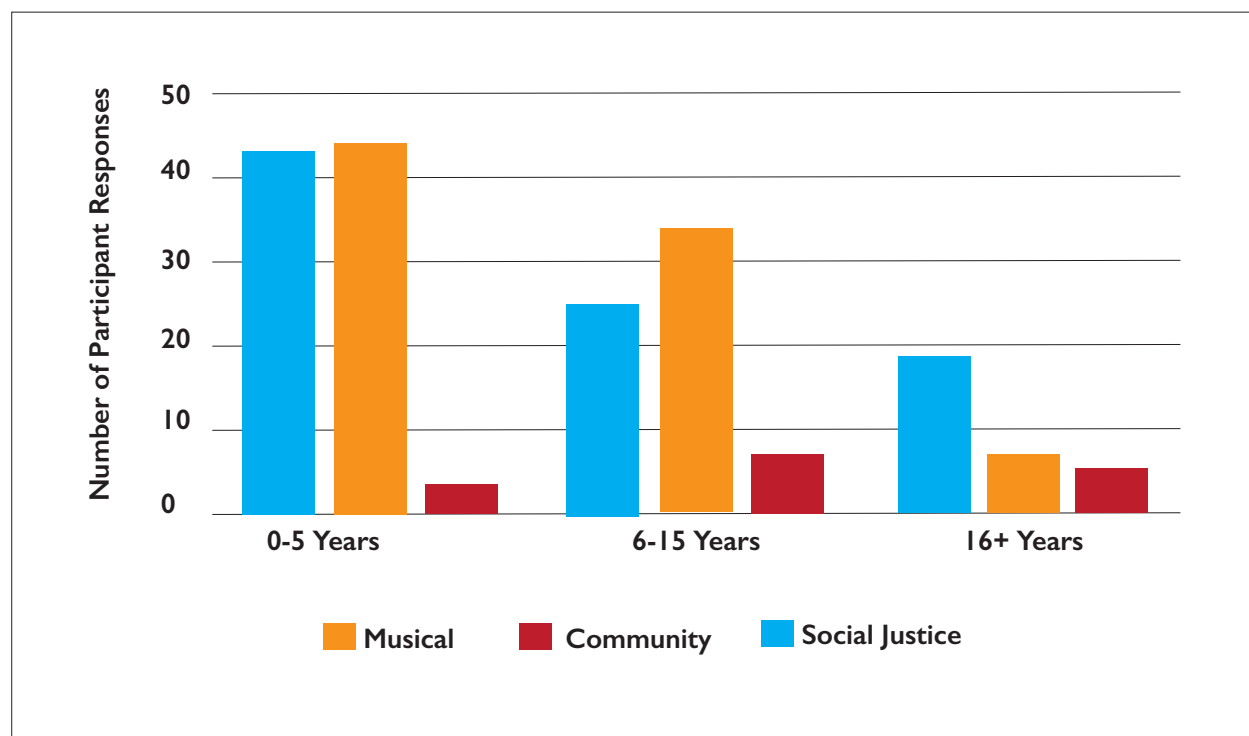


Figure 2. Frequency of primary factor influencing participation based on number of years a singer has been in their chorus.

themes were based on a small number of responses ($n = 13$) and do not represent any statistically significant findings related to participation. The four subthemes were (a) an aversion to LGBTQ programming and the use of the word “gay” in the ensemble name, (b) challenges in participation related to perceived “gay culture”, (c) a shift in participation motivation over time, and (d) participation as a religious experience. One participant said, “I’m glad that we don’t have ‘gay’ in our chorus name.” This statement and four others addressed a theme connected to an aversion to LGBTQ programming or use of the word “gay.” Participation challenges related to perceived “gay culture” emerged as another theme. “Participation can be a challenge because the men can divide into clicks,” another participant commented. Four other participants offered similar remarks addressing this theme. Three participants offered remarks addressing a change in motivation over time; one of these participants commented, “At first it wasn’t about being a part of the gay choral movement, but it certainly is now after six years of singing.” Finally, two participants offered comments connecting their motivation to participate to their faith or likeness to a religious experience. One participant said, “when I sing about the gay experience, I feel whole and complete and it brings me closer to God.”

Mission Statements

To investigate the intersection between the themes revealed in the statements provided by participants and the stated purpose of each organization I collected the mission statements of the three participating choruses and GALA, the national organization for LGBTQ choral ensembles. The mission statements of these organizations are as follows:

- Chorus #1: [*Chorus name*] provides excellence in performance while advancing men’s choral music, building community, and reaching out to diverse audiences.
- Chorus #2: [*Chorus name*] enrich[es] lives through the common language of song. Our exhilarating talent captivates audiences with unforgettable moments. Every performance cultivates a shared experience of emotions, nourishing the soul with healing and energizing effects of choral music. We help unify communities by increasing support for the cultural arts.
- Chorus #3: Gay men building community through music.
- GALA: Empowering LGBT choruses as we change the world through song.

Though varying in length and language, when I analyzed these statements guided by the procedural definitions developed to code participation responses, each appeared to communicate value in the themes that emerged in this study (*musical*, *community*, and *social justice*). Chorus #1 establishes the value of *music* both in quality and in efforts to “advance

men's choral music." The theme of *community* is directly addressed. The organization's attempts to "reach out to diverse audiences" posits their value in issues of *social justice*.

Evidenced by the use of descriptive statements such as "common language of song," "shared experience of emotions" and "unify communities," I found that the mission statement of Chorus #2 connected their ensemble to themes of *community* through *music*. The aspects of the statement that addressed "healing" and "unity" appeared to subtly endorse *social justice*. While not themes that emerged from participant response data, I found that the mission statement of Chorus #2 appeared to place value in themes of feeling and emotion.

Most succinct, the mission statement of Chorus #3 established the ensemble as advancing *social justice* related to gay men and, like Chorus #2, developing *community* through the lens of *music*.

The mission statement of GALA began by stating the organization's desire to "empower LGBT choruses." In its role as an organization advocating on behalf of LGBTQ choral ensembles, I interpreted this portion of the statement to suggest the building of *community*. The end of the statement, "change the world through song" highlighted themes of *social justice* and *music*.

Discussion

Participants of three gay men's choruses responded to questions related to demographics, music experiences, and factors influencing their participation in a gay men's chorus. Three themes, *musical* (48%), *community* (44%), and *social justice* (8%) emerged as most heavily influencing participation. These findings are similar to previous research exploring participation in gay men's choruses and non-gay community based choral ensembles (Graf, 2016; Latimer, 2008; Southcott & Joseph, 2015). However, as noted, previous research on this topic took place before a number of pivotal changes in issues impacting LGBTQ people (Giroir, 2020; Knauer, 2020; *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). Attinello (1994) found that one of the primary factors for participation in a gay men's chorus were gay-related issues, a concept in this study that was thematically coded as *social justice*. Although *social justice* emerged as a factor influencing participation there was a notable gap between *musical* (48%), *community* (44%) and *social justice* (8%). Examining the role of social justice and advocacy for LGBTQ issues through participation in a gay men's chorus may have important implications for these ensembles. Moreover, the LGBTQ choral movement was largely born in response to both the HIV/AIDS crisis and the gay rights movement (Hilliard, 2008). Implications for future research exist in studying how advances in civil rights and social justice (Giroir, 2020; Knauer, 2020; *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) have impacted the purpose, relevance, and participants of LGBTQ community choral ensembles.

The demographics reported in this study (see Table 1) indicate that this homogenous

sample is consistent with demographics reported in other studies examining gay men's choruses (Attinello, 1994; Latimer, 2008). However, with the demographic profile of the participants being primarily white, gay, and middle class, the absence of racial and socio-economic diversity reflected in this study and others (Attinello, 1994; Latimer, 2008) emphasize the need to explore cultural relevance and barriers to participation for underrepresented populations. In addition, the demographic data is largely homogenous in regard to sexual orientation and gender identity (see Table 1). Though the ensembles are called "gay men's choruses," are they indeed exclusively only for gay men? The presence of study participants who identify as straight (3%), bisexual (2%), and non-binary (1%) indicate that the gay men's choruses being examined in this research include individuals who are not gay men. The existence of these subgroups in the data may offer the opportunity for potential study of gay men's chorus participation through the experiences of those who do not identify as a gay male. Conversely, the gap between participants identifying as male (99%) and those identifying as non-binary (1%) is wide. It is also notable that no study participants identified as female. These data stand in contrast to current research pointing to a shift toward gender-inclusivity in choral music (Cates, 2019; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). Seeking to understand the implications of a non-binary approach to gender for choral ensembles who have historically embraced their status as a same-gender organization may be a crucial concept for these groups and future research.

When singers were asked how long they had been a participant in their chorus, 155 participants (77%) had been in the ensemble 0-15 years. Of this subgroup, 45 participants (22%) reported they had been in the ensemble for 0-2 years and 43 participants (21%) 3-5 years, indicating that the three choruses in this study have a notable number of newer members. While analysis did not indicate a statistically significant relationship, isolating this population to explore the impetus to join a gay men's chorus may serve as a valuable extension of this study and illuminate reasons that new singers join these ensembles. Also related to years of participation, data indicating a change in reasons for participation over time emerged. This finding is in agreement with Attinello (1994) who noted a shift from *community* to *musical* reasons for participation in a gay men's chorus after sustained membership. Exploring the factors that influence sustained participation in gay men's choruses over time may offer further insight into the internal and external variables that impact membership, attrition, and the overall experience of a singer in a gay men's chorus.

Eight percent of participants indicated that the primary factor influencing their participation in a gay men's chorus was connected to issues surrounding *social justice*. The data indicated a notable trend among long-term participants (6-15 years and 16 or more years) who cited *social justice* factors as influencing their participation. Examining this trend may potentially draw a connection between the social, cultural, and political climate of the time and motivating factors to join an LGBTQ organization such as a gay men's chorus. Further, studying the impact of advances in LGBTQ rights on the organizational purpose of LGBTQ centered organizations may prove valuable in informing the relevance and reach

of these groups.

Data related to the previous music experiences of participants showed that 172 singers (86%) participated in choirs other than a gay men's chorus. Expanding upon Bell (2008), an investigation of how previous choral music experiences shape a singer's motivation to engage in singing in a gay men's chorus could build upon the findings of this research. Study participants also reported their perceived musical ability: 6% of participants said "beginning," 61% of participants said "intermediate," and 33% of participants said "advanced." A potential extension of this study and Graf (2016) is an exploration of the variables that contribute to how a singer determines their personal level of musicianship. Examining these variables could possibly reveal collective disparities in musicianship which could then inform repertoire selection, pedagogy, and rehearsal techniques.

I found no existing research that examined the connections between the stated mission of an LGBTQ community music ensemble and the reasons an individual chooses to participate in that ensemble. The mission statements for the ensembles participating in this study and GALA were all distinctive, yet each addressed the themes of *music*, *community*, and *social justice* represented in the survey responses. Each statement approached communicating these themes differently; some directly, others indirectly. Individual participants in this study did so anonymously. However, identifying each singer's individual ensemble would have allowed for inquiry into the relationship between the stated mission of an ensemble and the factors motivating choristers to participate in that ensemble. Exploring the similarities or differences between the mission statements of LGBTQ-centered ensembles and other community music ensembles may aid in further defining the unique characteristics or likenesses between these groups.

Forty-nine study participants responded to an open-ended question asking for other comments regarding their participation in a gay men's chorus. Of these responses ($n = 36$) supported the previously established *musical*, *community* and *social justice* themes and ($n = 13$) resulted in the development of four additional sub themes: (a) an aversion to LGBTQ programming and the use of the word "gay" in the ensemble name, (b) challenges in participation related to perceived "gay culture", (c) a shift in participation motivation over time, and (d) participation as a religious experience. Each of these subthemes, while supported by a small number of participant responses ($n = 13$), may present an opportunity for future exploration in examining the socio-cultural dynamics of LGBTQ community music ensembles. Are there distinct differences between the social interactions and culture of a gay men's chorus, a lesbian chorus or an LGBTQ band? Further, are these dynamics similar or different when compared to other non-LGBTQ community music ensembles?

The findings of this study highlight the possible variables influencing participation in a gay men's chorus. These emerging factors combined with existing research on this topic have implications for future inquiry into the musical, community, and social justice aspects of the gay men's chorus experience. Participant responses regarding reasons for participation highlight the relevance of gay men's choruses in the landscape of community choral

ensembles. This research illuminates the importance and far-reaching impact of the choral art and was aptly described by a study participant, “choral singing not only satisfies one’s need to sing, but it nourishes your soul. It enriches your life and helps to build bridges not only within the community but with the world.”

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