Performing Difference:
Exploring the Social World of the
Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus

by

Benjamin Patrick Leske

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
August 2017

ORCiD ID: 0000-0001-7667-0244

National Music Therapy Research Unit
Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
The University of Melbourne
Abstract

This thesis explores member experiences of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus (the Youth Chorus), Australia’s first community choir for Same Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse (SSAGD) young people. SSAGD young people are more likely to experience social exclusion for their sexuality and/or gender identity in Australia. This thesis uses an interpretative phenomenological approach to analyse interviews with ten members, exploring the nuanced ways in which the youth chorus supports wellbeing and identity formation through choral musicking in a community setting. It is guided by a broadly hermeneutic interest in better understanding the complex individual and collective experiences of choir members. Findings, considered through the lens of Tia DeNora’s sociological framework of the music asylum (DeNora, 2013), suggest that the youth chorus offers a place of safety within the structures of the choir and with the support of its establishing choral organisation, Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus Inc. The youth chorus affords its members a place of ontological safety as a foundation to make music and socialise, within a musicking community where queer is the norm rather than exception.

This position of safety is central to the choir’s music and health ecology (Ansdell, 2014), upon which the construction and performance of difference is expressed musically and socially. The youth chorus provides its members with a musical and extra-musical platform to test out, rehearse, and publicly perform musical and social identities of difference, but where members at times also value sameness and conformity. I bring a critical perspective to the study, interpreting individual and collective identities within a gender and queer theory context. This lens highlights a tension between outwardly queer choir identity that celebrates difference and seeks to destabilise, against the value of the youth chorus as a musical ecology that affirms stable SSAGD identities.
Reflecting on the choir experience, I suggest there is a combination of paradoxes and tensions apparent. Paradoxically, understandings of choir as an exclusive place or clique contribute to the sense of safety and inclusiveness. I suggest this sense of exclusivity, which directly challenges the inclusive public profile and worldview of the youth chorus, offers a distinct perspective for community music scholars. I examine these attributes with reference to several formative conceptual ideas of Lee Higgins (2012).

I suggest the youth chorus and choral singing offers a place of gentle activism as members navigate their individual gender identity and sexuality journeys. Reflecting on recent studies of choral pedagogy, I consider implications, challenges, and opportunities for community choral leaders and facilitators who must balance these tensions when working with SSAGQ young people in choral music settings.
Declaration

The following declaration page, signed by the candidate:

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signature: __________________________

Name: ____________________________

Date: 18/08/2017 ___________________
# Table of Contents

Abstract ii  
Declaration iv  
Table of Contents v  
Glossary xiii  
List of Figures xv  
List of Tables xvi  
List of Appendices xvii  
Dedication xviii  
Acknowledgements xix  

## I: POSITIONING  20

### Chapter 1: Beginnings  21

**Catalyst**  22  
Paula.  22  
“Troubling” my positive assumptions about choral singing.  23  

**Presenting My Story**  24  
My privileges.  24  
A reflexive welcoming of my cancer diagnosis into this research.  25  

**Introducing the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus Inc and its Youth Chorus**  26  
A “choir within a choir”.  27  
A choir for young people outside of formal education settings.  28  
The instinct driving this study: An at-risk cohort of young people.  29  
LGBTI identities as “horizontal” social identities.  30  
Going beyond “at-risk”.  31  

**Valuing Language: A Choir of Same Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse People**  32  
Queer.  34  
Sexuality.  35  
Gender.  36  
Collective labels.  36  

**Scholarly Motivations and Beginnings**  37  
An interest in community music, health, and wellbeing.  38  
Music therapy as my scholarly entry point.  39  
Linking into Higgins’s contributions to community music.  41  
Community-as-hospitality, gift-giving, and the welcome.  42  
Workshops, facilitators, and the welcome.  43
Locating My Practice Home

LGBTI choral music internationally. 44
Choral music in Australia. 46
LGBTI choral music in Australia. 47

Scholarly Contribution

Overview of the Thesis

“It’s an Insular Little Queer Bubble and We Love it in There!”: Hermione

Chapter 2: Establishing Key Concepts

Prelude: Social Exclusion

The Affordances of Music for Wellbeing

Background. 57
Exploring what music is. 58
Epistemology. 58

Communicative. 58
Music-as-action. 59
Developing social understandings of musicking. 61
Music and health ecologies. 62
Music as political and powerful. 63
Musicking for health, health musicking. 64

Community music. 65

“Thoughtful disruption”: Towards a definition of community music. 66
Community music policies and practices worldwide. 69
Community music practices in Australia. 69

Integrating alternative approaches. 71

Music therapy and community music. 71
Psychological approaches. 73

Community building, music, and belonging. 75

Benefits of group singing. 76
Choirs and community building. 79
Choirs and choral pedagogy. 80
Choirs, musical capital, and musical communities of practice. 81
Choral singing and social activism. 82

Identities of Music, Youth, Gender, and Sexuality

Background: Introducing Identity. 83

Establishing a socially-located self. 83

Individual identities. 84
Social identity theory (psychology). 84
Formed within an ecological social context.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological understanding.

Musical Identities.

Psychological perspectives.
Sociological, educational, and therapeutic perspectives.
Musical leadership identities.

Youth identities.

Socially- and materially-conditioned.

Identity formation, gender, sexuality, and music.

Gender, sexuality, and queer studies in music education settings.
In music therapy and musicology scholarship.
Choirs, gender, and sexuality.
Challenging binaries of gender and sexuality in choral music.
Setting aside Cass’s staged model of identity formation.

A study of youth musical identities.
The wellbeing potentials of queer youth musicking identities.

“It Definitely Changed my Mindset on Everything”: Dylan’s Story 100

Chapter 3: Study Design 102

A: Designing the Project: Methodological Foundations and Changes 103

An axiological commitment to social justice.

Social justice in educational settings.
Defining social justice in music.
The youth chorus as a place where members sing for social justice.

Two choirs as my initial case studies.
Scholarly motivations and methodological priorities.

Developing a theoretically-informed picture.
Bringing out their experiences.
Bringing in my experiences, skills.
Initial commitment to constructivist grounded theory as method.

B: Parallel Tracks: Health Interruptions to the Research Design 114

Resolving a methodological way forward.

C: Revised Methodology: Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) 116

Phenomenological perspectives.
Defining phenomenology.
Husserl’s phenomenological stance.
Hermeneutic and descriptive phenomenology.

The case for a hermeneutic phenomenology.
Revised methodology: Interpretative phenomenological analysis. 121
Room for narrative and creative elements. 124
Multiple hermeneutics. 124

D: Completing the Project: Methods for Data Collection and Analysis 126
Selection of case study choirs. 126
Recruitment of research participants. 127
Ethical considerations. 127
Plain language statement and consent form. 128
Commitment to transcription. 129

The interviews. 129
Interview guide and advice. 131
Pseudonyms, pronouns. 132

Post-interview: transcription and analysis. 133
Personal statement. 133
Transcription. 134
Order of interviews analysed. 135

Analysis. 136

E: Four Reflexive Reflections on the Interviews 139
Prelude. 139
“Ben knows more about that”: The silent, third person in the room. 139
Being excluded: Hermione’s tertiary omission. 141
The tempering influence of interviewers. 144
Exploring interviewing skills. 145
Bringing out the unique traits of choir members. 148
Eliciting deeper responses of members. 149
Balancing directedness and “setting free.” 150
Summing up content. 153
The final interview question as a catalyst. 156

“It Saved me from Going Backwards”: Malachi 159

II: INTERPRETING 162

Chapter 4: Interpreting the Results 163

Member Backgrounds and Understandings 163
Musical backgrounds. 163
Educational backgrounds, finding choir. 164
Descriptions of choir sites. 165

Tia DeNora’s Music Asylums Framework 167
Introducing music asylums. 167
Reclaiming the terminology: “Asylum” for wellbeing in everyday life.  
Strategies for seeking music asylum.  

“The Harmonies are my Drugs”: Natalie  

Chapter 5: Interpreting the Results: Music Asylums Part I (Removal)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>175</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation: Assumed queer site (implied removal).</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation: “the hour to be yourself” a week</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A physically safe environment.</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in community.</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in a community of several generations.</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in proprietorship and obligation.</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe place for musicking.</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in routine and the everyday.</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Queer Bubble  

Judgement Within Melbourne’s Queer Community (and Within the Choir)  

The Choir Clique  

| Musical clique. | 193 |
| Social clique. | 195 |
| A circular notion of safety within choir? | 197 |

Chapter 6: Interpreting the Results: Music Asylums Part II (Refurnishing)  

| Safety For…? Performance as a Strategy of Refurnishing within the Youth Chorus | 200 |
| “The importance of that moment” (Dylan): Performing on the choral stage. | 200 |
| Performing for self. | 204 |
| A personal musical and social testing ground. | 205 |
| A quality performance. | 206 |
| Performing for an audience. | 208 |
| Having family in the audience. | 209 |
| Beyond the family: Performing for the LGBTI community. | 212 |
| Extra-musical achievements. | 213 |
| Facilitating the refurnishing of self by changing attitudes. | 214 |
| Acting out through choir. | 216 |
| Singing out and standing up: A responsibility to publicly give back. | 217 |
| Conforming and fitting in. | 219 |
| Performance repertoire. | 221 |
| Generational similarities: Imagining a queer future | 222 |
| Generational differences: Being distinct. | 224 |
Concluding Thoughts 225

“Right Back at Home”: Jazz 227

Chapter 7: Performing Difference? Choir as a Site of LGBTI Identity Performance 230

Socially-Informed Identities and the Importance of Difference 231
Understanding identity as performed. 233
Unifying through “being different from.” 234
Critiquing difference: Seeking a middle ground. 235
Performing difference. 236
Theorising musical identities. 237

Performing Musical Identities in the Youth Chorus 237
Enabling identity performance: Choir leadership. 239
Performing gender, sexual identities: A noticeable absence from the discussion. 239
Nurturing individual LGBTI identities. 241
Musical performances deepening Dylan’s sense of his gay self. 241
Musical performance challenging Nicole’s bisexual identity. 242
Challenging collective LGBTI identities. 245
Understandings of what it means to be an LGBTI choir. 245
A site to agitate and educate for social change and activism. 247
A place of leadership where members educate about identities across generations. 248

Presenting the Bigger Picture: Four Suggestions 251
A hierarchical model. 251
Summary statement. 257
A circular, two-level model: physical and conceptual sites 257
A tree metaphor. 259

III: CRITIQUING /QUEERING 262

Chapter 8: Critical, Queer, Musical Perspectives 263

Prelude 263
Setting the Scene: Locating Queer Theories 264
Post-structuralist intellectual roots. 264
Resisting the LGBTI rights movement. 265
Parallel histories: The queering of music. 266
Queer theory: Challenging identity stability. 267
Judith Butler and the performance of (gender) identities. 268
Butler’s later work and the notion of “liveability”. 269
In Practice: Challenging the Choir’s Queer Collective Identity  271

The “open secret”.  271
Applying queer theory outside of the choir.  272
The problem with applying queer theory inside the choir.  272
Balancing stable LGBTI identities versus a commitment to queerness.  274
Toward a queer ethics of community music?  275
Gentle activism as a middle ground.  276
Implications and consequences.  278
Absent identities.  278

Chapter 9: Discussion  280

Paradoxes and Tensions  280

Exclusive to be inclusive.  280
Reconciling quality musical products with “safe and supportive”.  281
Reconciling queer identity with being “as good as” other choirs.  282
Embracing queer challenges with stable LGBTI musical identities.  283

Welcoming Higgins Back In: Answers in Community Music  284

Workshops.  284
Safety without safety.  286
Conditional and unconditional hospitality.  286
True (intergenerational) inclusion.  287
Decisions within MGLC Inc.  288
Creating a “radically inclusive” community music space.  289

IV: INTEGRATING  290

Chapter 10: Lessons and Ideas for Practitioners  291

Reinforcing the Value of a Queer Choir  291
Leadership: The Importance of Mindful Musical and Social Curatorship  293
The MD’s Role  295
Rehearsal Practices: Language and Labels  297
Voice parts.  298
Working with transgender singers.  299
Challenging conventions in choral voice part allocation.  300
Repertoire: (Re)claiming a queer choral compositional style?  301

Sharing Lessons and Stories Beyond This Thesis  302

Chapter 11: Closing Reflections  304

Looking Back  305
Reflecting on the Potential Costs of Gentle Activism 305
Learning from My Brain Cancer Journey 306
Looking Forward: Representation and Changing Youth Chorus Identities 308
  shOUT: Renaming the youth chorus. 308
Concluding Thoughts 310

References 312

Appendices 336

Appendix A: Bracketing Interview (Self-Reflections) 337
Appendix B: Sample Personal/Practice Journal Entries 339
Appendix C: Sample Interview Transcripts with Annotations 341
Appendix D: Participant Plain Language Statement and Consent Form 344
Appendix E: Rationale for Changes to Ethics Application 349
Appendix F: Interview Question Guide 350
Appendix G: Member Resources (Provided at Interview) 352
Appendix H: Ethics Approval Letters 353
Appendix I: Speaking Notes for Recruiter 357
Appendix J: Checklist for Interviewers 358
Appendix K: Summary of Findings for Interview Participants 359
Appendix L: Sample of Memos: Nicole’s Interview (2015) 361
Appendix M: Individual Interview Coding 362
Glossary

This section sets out frequently used acronyms in this thesis. Where they relate to sexual and gender identity, the terms below draw upon the GLAAD media guide (GLAAD, 2016) and the Australian Human Rights Commission guidelines (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011).

Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CGT</td>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoMT</td>
<td>Community Music Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISME CMA</td>
<td>International Society for Music Education Community Music Activity Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTI</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main chorus</td>
<td>The adult choir of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus, established in 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MassiveFam</td>
<td>Massive Fam Hip Hop Choir, a project choir administered by CoHealth in Melbourne’s western suburbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGLC Inc</td>
<td>The Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus Incorporated. Established in 1990, this registered non-profit organisation and charity in the Australian state of Victoria that administers two choirs: the main chorus (Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus) and the youth chorus (Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLS</td>
<td>Plain Language Statement (part of university ethics requirements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>A collective term for persons identifying publicly and socially as being of diverse gender and/or sexuality. Queer is also used in this thesis to signal a queer worldview that rejects entrenched and conventional understandings of sexuality and gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer community</td>
<td>A collective term for persons identifying publicly and socially as being of diverse gender and/or sexuality, and who have formed a network akin to a “community of practice” (Wenger, McDermott, &amp; Snyder, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSAGD</td>
<td>Same Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse. Distinguished here deliberately from Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning (SSAGQ) people to understand those more open about their gender or sexuality and, conversely, members of the youth chorus who may be questioning their gender or sexuality but who have not yet, and may never, identify with a stable identity category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSAGQ</td>
<td>Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth chorus</td>
<td>The youth chorus of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus, established in 2005 (and rebranded “shOUT Youth Chorus” in 2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A visual location of the youth chorus using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Suggested model of the circular and self-reinforcing experience of safety</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>within the youth chorus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Schematic representation of the experience of performing within the youth</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chorus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Graphical (word cloud) depiction of key words and phrases from youth</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chorus member interviews with approximated weightings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Graphical depiction of physical and conceptual sites of the youth chorus</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Graphical presentation of tree metaphor to represent the youth chorus.</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1  Key Information about Youth Chorus Participants Interviewed for this Study 131
Table 2  Interview Participants and their Interviewers 147
Table 3  Musical Backgrounds and Experience of Research Participants 164
Table 4  Descriptions of Youth Chorus Physical, Virtual, and Conceptual Sites/Spaces 166
Table 5  Key Themes Identified from Interview Analysis, Descriptions, and Representative Quotes 252
# List of Appendices

Appendix A: Bracketing Interview (Self-Reflections) 337  
Appendix B: Sample Personal/Practice Journal Entries 339  
Appendix C: Sample Interview Transcripts with Annotations 341  
Appendix D: Participant Plain Language Statement and Consent Form 344  
Appendix E: Rationale for Changes to Ethics Application 349  
Appendix F: Interview Question Guide 350  
Appendix G: Member Resources (Provided at Interview) 352  
Appendix H: Ethics Approval Letters 353  
Appendix I: Speaking Notes for Recruiter 357  
Appendix J: Checklist for Interviewers 358  
Appendix K: Summary of Findings for Interview Participants 359  
Appendix L: Sample of Memos: Nicole’s Interview (2015) 361  
Appendix M: Individual Interview Coding 362
Dedication

Dedicated to those in need of a voice: may you find it singing in the company of others.
Acknowledgements

This thesis benefits from the ideas and generous support of many people. Above all, thanks to ten youth chorus members: you shared your stories of music, gender, and sexuality with such courage and passion!

Thanks to my primary supervisor, Katrina Skewes McFerran: for taking an interest, for your skilful tutelage of the thesis journey, but particularly for your creative solutions, generous offers, and ideas as we negotiated a way forward in the face of several health challenges. Thank you, Kat, for welcoming me to NaMTRU, for supporting my passions and scholarly pursuits, and for sharing yours.

To Felicity Baker, for your expert advice and input, particularly on methodology. To Jane Davidson, for your expert knowledge and advice and for inspiring an even more reflexive, and therefore braver, thesis. To advisory panel members, Grace Thompson and Jeanette Tamplin, for your input and encouragement at key points. To my former supervisors, Philomena Murray and Robyn Eckersley, for supporting my topic change.

To those very generous NaMTRU colleagues (staff and students), who stepped in to help with interviews – Lucy F, Jen B, John H, Laura M, Alex C, and Cherry H – a huge thank you! To Suvi, for your quiet encouragement from afar, and to NaMTRU colleagues who contributed to this study with their ideas: Elly, Bec, Mel, Meg, JuYoung, Kate, Jason, Bronte, Liz, Imogen, and Lucy B. Thanks for your friendship, inspiring discussions, and for sharing your disciplinary skills.

Thanks to Andreas Loewe for frequent lunches, the occasional Frühschoppen, scholarly discussions and shared writing projects, and above all for your friendship. To Jo, Louise, and Kathleen for your support and encouragement during difficult periods. To Gillian and Lea for seeding academic ideas that helped shape this project.

I appreciated the practical support of University staff, particularly Gabrielle, Hero, and Andrea, who facilitated a quiet study place. To successive committees of MGLC Inc (and CoHealth) for their willingness to be involved.

To friends and confidantes, for the welcome, non-choral distractions, particularly Tahli, Josh, Jess, Autumn, Anthony, Anna, Steven, Maz, Chris, Marcel, and Glenn!

To Uncle Andrew, a musician and engineer who quietly completed his PhD while supporting a growing family and building his own business: the first in my extended family to gain a PhD, and an inspiration for mine.

To my parents, Fran and Mike, for your love, wisdom, insights, and above all interest in my studies, for nurturing the musical in our family, and for providing the gift of an education. To dad, particularly for many discussions that challenge my thinking in so many ways. To my siblings, Claire and Steve, for your love, support, and willingness to hear out and challenge my ideas as the thesis took shape.

Finally, to my partner, Khang Chiem, for your love, patience, and support over a long and sometimes difficult scholarly and health journey. Thank you.
I: POSITIONING
Chapter 1: Beginnings

I feel like others have found their community as well … because they might have come in like me looking for a social outlet or they might have been struggling with their sexuality and wanted to find some, something and they found it in this choir. (Chloe¹, ¶133, preferred pronouns: she/her/hers)

As Chloe’s opening comment suggests, this thesis explores in more detail what it means to sing as a member of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus (hereafter, the youth chorus, or simply, the choir). This qualitative study offers a phenomenological exploration, a critical interpretation of the lived experiences of members of a unique community chorus² and social institution in Melbourne, Australia. Formed in 2005, the youth chorus is a choir of the non-profit organisation, Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus Incorporated (MGLC Inc), established in 1990³. MGLC is Australia’s oldest lesbian and gay choral organisation and is centred around its primary “main chorus.”

Like the main chorus, the 20-member youth chorus offers a safe and supportive musical and social place for young people from metropolitan Melbourne who, in this thesis and depending on context, may be described as Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning (SSAGQ) or Gender Diverse (SSAGD), people of diverse gender and sexuality, or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI). This understanding lies at the centre of MGLC Inc and its youth chorus’s purpose and activities.

---

¹ I use pseudonyms when discussing choir members in this thesis.
² I note an important distinction, articulated by Paul Hillier (2011, p. 65), between choir and chorus. Chorus is typically used, including in the context of this thesis, to reflect the collective entity of the group and in the social alongside musical.
³ Notwithstanding Hillier’s (2011) formal distinction between choir and chorus in the official naming of such organisations (see note 2), I use “choir” interchangeably with “the youth chorus” at times, for variety.
This thesis seeks to contribute to scholarly understandings of the potential wellbeing benefits of music, specifically singing and choral music. It is my contention that choral singing offers unique musical and social supports for young people in Australia, individuals statistically more likely to experience social exclusion, bullying, and discrimination, with associated mental health and wellbeing costs. I approach this study qualitatively, seeking to strike a different path from studies of music and wellbeing that might be described as reductionist in their distillation of measurable, transferrable essences of music’s effect on wellbeing. Rather, I attempt to capture the complex and contradictory lived experiences of a smaller group of members, using a novel framework, and explore how the choir provides a place for performing identities at the interstices of music and sexual or gender identity.

It is a testament to a period in my life as a researcher, and a reflexive element sits alongside and within this scholarly endeavour. It is also proudly and personally meaningful, weaving together three separate journeys: a practice journey as the youth chorus’s music director (MD) between 2009 and early 2015, a scholarly journey, and my personal health and wellbeing journey with cancer.

Tragically, it was the suicide of Paula (suggested pronouns: she/her/hers) that served as a catalyst for this study and highlighted its importance to me.

Catalyst

Paula. In January 2013, after nearly four years in the role of youth chorus music director, I learned of the suicide Paula, of one of our young members. Not yet 24 years old, Paula sang with both choirs of MGLC Inc. She also struggled with a serious mental health condition unrelated to her choir sexuality or choir membership. Members of both choirs sang at Paula’s funeral and learned about her accepting family, who embraced her sexual identity and took
pride in her planned pursuit of a graduate research project exploring queer history. Yet the experience of a death within this tightknit group was confronting and deeply unsettling.

I reflected on the events surrounding Paula’s death and the support provided to choir members in the aftermath, by me and by MGLC Inc’s committee members. I observed the social impact upon the youth chorus of her death: some members left the choir, while others formed even deeper bonds. I questioned my own practices as a musical leader. I was assured by individuals close to Paula that she had treasured her involvement and was a singer in several Melbourne-based choirs, that she valued the youth chorus and the friendships built and singing experiences enjoyed whilst a member. Nonetheless, in this moment of grief and loss I questioned whether singing in this choir always did its members good. Paula’s death challenged my fundamental understanding of, and trust in, the broader value of choral music. This had been a premise of my enthusiastic participation in MGLC Inc since 2008: initially as a singer, then taking on assistant/associate MD roles with the main chorus, and from 2009, as youth chorus MD. I asked what I might have changed in weekly rehearsal and teaching practices, and in my social (or, perhaps more accurately, pastoral) leadership, to better support Paula.

Paula’s legacy upon the youth chorus is a reminder of the fragility of life and of the ongoing mental health challenges faced by many in this cohort. Her story precipitated a sharpening of the therapeutic limits of what MGLC Inc and the youth chorus can provide its members. It affirmed for the committee of management the importance of referral pathways to mental health support for all members.

“Troubling” my positive assumptions about choral singing. It seems the media and popular culture in Australia often inflects choral singing with a positive and optimistic lens. When considering choral singing in the community, well-publicised Australian choral
projects such as the Melbourne’s “The Choir of Hard Knocks” (Choir of Hard Knocks, 2017) and Creativity Australia’s community singing programs (Creativity Australia, 2017) come to mind. These well-intentioned initiatives are supported by increasing scholarly evidence supporting the efficacy of singing for wellbeing, to be explored in detail shortly.

Nevertheless, motivated by Paula’s story, I wanted to challenge my understandings and explore the nuances of this typically optimistic stance, as has recently been the case in relation to community music and social justice (De Quadros, 2015). Paula’s story also served as a motivation and the determination to persevere, despite the obstacles faced along the way and drawing upon the privileges afforded to me.

**Presenting My Story**

**My privileges.** Evin Taylor (2010) describes privilege as a form of cultural currency for those who possess desired social or political characteristics. For Taylor: “Privilege is the stability society affords us when we don’t rock the boat” (p. 268). Seeking to challenge the steadiness of the boat with this thesis, I first set out the privileges and insights of the social and cultural backgrounds that inform my ontological worldview and, in turn, my practice and research. I am a third-generation Australian citizen of Irish and German heritage, with a loving family and committed partner. As a cis-gendered gay man (my preferred pronouns: he/him/his) living in Melbourne, Australia. I enjoy the challenge of completing a research degree at a leading Australian university, and continue to benefit from the privilege of an education that was nurtured initially by my parents and within a middle-class family setting.

I am passionate about issues of social justice and act on these values in life, in gentle yet decisive ways. I seek to integrate rather than extricate my own practice, memories, and experiences working with the youth chorus in support of the thesis. I am musically active as a
singer, composer, conductor, and music facilitator who specialises in teaching choral groups of young adults, with both skills and a passion for choral musicking, particularly in community settings. I am part of the research and it is part of me, recognising what might be described as relativist and co-constructed ontological foundations and subjectivist understandings of the world around me (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

**A reflexive welcoming of my cancer diagnosis into this research.** Recognising subjective understandings, a sense of authenticity is central to my story. This is a thesis informed and impacted by my experience living since 2012 with brain cancer, a diagnosis with limited treatment options and a sense of existential uncertainty as its companion. Music, for instance, played a crucial role in my recovery after two surgeries in early 2012 and I was motivated both by a desire to return to leadership of the youth chorus and to re-engage as a singer and leader in the main chorus. Yet my relationship to musical repertoire also changed over time. Where initially I enjoyed the meditative aspects of music and singing, used audiation during MRI scans as distraction and musical training (working through the score to Morton Lauridsen’s setting, “Sure on This Shining Night”, for example), following a third surgery late 2014, this piece came to be associated directly with the difficult moments of my life with cancer. This is no doubt familiar territory for music therapists and community musicians who work with music as a tool in the recovery of health.

My parallel health journey at times impacted upon the research process and shaped its outcomes. Accordingly, I strive to adopt a reflexive stance in the scholarly tradition of phenomenologist Linda Finlay (2003; 2008; 2014), and one that I believe is candidly embodied by philosopher Havi Carel (2008) in her phenomenology of illness. The challenges of this health journey nurtured both a scholarly interest and a desire to more fully understand wellbeing and the facilitation of choral musicking.
Three lifeworlds intersect within this thesis: the musical lives of young choir singers, the social experiences of these SSAGD singers and their leader, and the impact of a cancer diagnosis on the research project. I believe writing myself into this study in fact strengthens the overall phenomenological qualities of this study, affording new opportunities and ways to think about the results rather than perceiving these elements to be limitations.

**Introducing the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus Inc and its Youth Chorus**

Charles Beale (2017) asserts in his recent study of LGBTI choruses that “any social context will have embedded in it a set of underlying values, which define why we sing and what is important about it” (p. 364). Members of MGLC Inc, through the establishment of the youth chorus, sought to create a nurturing musical place for young people of diverse gender and sexuality as a minority within a heteronormative societal world in Melbourne, Australia, and recognising the choir’s broader community role as a publicly recognised choir of SSAGQ young people (Leske & Wilson, 2013).

The youth chorus, established as a “choir within a choir,” was initially conceived by the MGLC Inc committee of management as a recruitment base for younger members that would support the choir’s continued existence. In this regard, MGLC Inc might be considered an example of a social group that uses its social identities to promote change in a comparable way to the “new social movements” of the 1970s (Westd, 2004), seeking to advocate on behalf of the LGBTI community in metropolitan Melbourne, in the state of Victoria, and for broader social changes in Australia.

Conceptually, MGLC Inc seeks to agitate, resist, and subvert the gendered assumptions about choral music and a culture with heteronormative understandings of what it means to sing in a choir. MGLC Inc does so within the choral music genre, where roles and
It is shared assumptions about relationships, with the rest of the world as well as with one another, that holds social and cultural groups together. Further, we might expect that such groups should try to pass on their values to members of succeeding generations, and all social groups do, in fact, have institutions, either formal or informal, for doing just that. (Small, 1998, p. 131)

Open to members between 16 and 29 years of age, the youth chorus targets post-school aged SSAGQ young people and seeks to create what in school settings has been advocated as “a site for the creation of socially just spaces that celebrate diversity” (White & Wyn, 2013, p. 59). Singing with the youth chorus is, it seems, an opportunity for members to challenge ‘the power relations of sexuality and difference around sexual orientation’ in Australian society (p. 58). In 2010, the youth chorus extended its membership age from a ceiling of 25 years to 29 years. In an analogous way to Lesko’s (2012) study of adolescents, MGLC Inc recognised the social construction of youth: that the characteristics of younger SSAGQ people do not necessarily correlate with biological age restrictions that define many youth choruses in Australia (typically, 16-24 years). For some youth chorus members, and in my own lived experience, adolescence is experienced twice: firstly, as an obfuscated coming-of-age as a SSAGD person who conforms to (and performs) the heterosexual ideals of their surrounding heteronormative social world, and; secondly, a more authentic coming-of-age as openly SSAGD-identifying people who experience the common encounters and moments of adolescence at an older age and as “out” SSAGD people. This moment of disclosure, known as “coming out” (Manning, 2014), is referred to in scholarly settings in relation to stages of identity formation for gay men and lesbian women (Cass, 1979; Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014) including in musical settings (Aronoff & Gilboa, 2015; Parker, 2014).

A “choir within a choir”. The youth chorus operates as a choir of MGLC Inc, a non-

expectations of gender and sexuality have until recently been significant factors. MGLC Inc’s position reflects musicologist Christopher Small’s idea that:
profit organisation that supports both it and the “main” chorus. This model, uncommon for LGBTI choirs, provides both benefits and challenges for youth chorus members. Beginning with an initial seven members at its first rehearsal, the youth chorus has since grown to 20 regular members, performing both alongside and together with the main chorus for their regular performances and on its own.

Priorities for the youth chorus include performances at institutions such as universities and other social organisations for young people, and events targeting SSAGQ young people. As is common in Australia’s primarily amateur choral music scene (Leske & Loewe, in press), all youth chorus members contribute financially to the choir. Membership dues of all members form an important part of the choir’s revenue base, and the main chorus underwrites the operational costs of the youth chorus. The leadership model of the youth chorus is common for community music groups, with a paid music director and accompanist, engaged by the subscription-based membership of MGLC Inc. Choir members from both choirs are elected to oversee the choir within a committee of management. Many youth chorus members also sing with the main chorus and member interviews refer to main chorus experiences too. I noted a high turnover in membership in my time working with the youth chorus, with an estimated 30 percent of members changing annually. This reflects the specialised role of the youth chorus as a vehicle for identity formation, limited by age, but also a distinct cultural identity. In part this appears generational, reflecting the musical tastes, repertoire choices, and values of the different generations represented within MGLC Inc’s youth chorus and main chorus. Each has its distinct musical ecology, a concept articulated by Ansdell (2014) to be explored in Chapter 2.

**A choir for young people outside of formal education settings.** The youth chorus offers a musical bridge for young SSAGQ people who have typically completed their
secondary schooling, between the structured and supportive school-based musical opportunities and social programs that raise awareness of gender diversity and sexualities within these schools. It offers a safe place for young queer people at a time when programs that enable such spaces in school settings are politicised and contested within Australian public discourse (Altman, 2016; Rawlings, 2016). Internationally, while there is increasing attention toward issues and challenges faced by SSAGD young people in school settings (Bergonzi, 2015; Hansen, 2016; Knotts & Gregorio, 2011; Lapointe, 2016), it seems fewer opportunities exist for such young people in less-structured community music settings. It has the potential to affect wellbeing outward into the LGBTI community in Melbourne, Australia, and internationally.

The instinct driving this study: An at-risk cohort of young people. While other minority identities such as a person’s ethnic background and race, ability, their socioeconomic background, or their class, can all impact upon the day-to-day lives of young people in Australia, this thesis concentrates on the lived experiences of SSAGQ young people. Russell’s opening words capture a reality for sexual minority youth, and the reasons for approaching this as an “at risk” cohort:

Research on sexual minority youth over the past three decades tells us that they are among those most at risk for the negative outcomes of frequent concern in the lives of young people: academic failure, emotional distress, compromised relationships, risk behavior, and suicidality. (S. T. Russell, 2005, p. 5)

Russell’s words are backed up by a long-standing record of evidence. For young SSAGQ Australians at a crucial moment in the formation of their identities, there is evidence to suggest a considerable number encounter and must withstand bullying and abuse as they negotiate who they are. These individuals typically encounter stigma and discrimination at higher levels than their heterosexual counterparts (Field, Lewis, & Toumbourou, 2013; Hillier & Harrison, 2004; Hillier, Harrison, & Dempsey, 1999; Hillier et al., 2010; Leonard,
Marshall, Hillier, Mitchell, & Ward, 2010; Rosenstreich, 2013; S. T. Russell, 2005). Gender diverse and transgender young people face further challenges (E. Smith et al., 2014). A 2010 study by Hillier and colleagues found 61% per cent of more than 3,000 survey participants reported verbal abuse because of homophobia; 18% reported physical abuse, and 26% “other” forms of homophobia (Hillier et al., 2010). Other Australian studies have found similar evidence (Field et al., 2013; Rosenstreich, 2013). LGBTI young people, it appears, are at increased risk of suicide (Howard, Nicholas, Brown, & Karacanta, 2002), STI risk and drug use, and experience far higher rates of homelessness than non-LGBTI youth (Leonard, Marshall, Hillier, Mitchell, & Ward, 2010).

**LGBTI identities as “horizontal” social identities.** Young people of diverse gender and sexuality, as Andrew Solomon (2012) describes, represent a horizontal identity: identities that may not be not physically visible, nor passed down (vertically) between generations within family units, ethnic, or other cultural traditions. Rather, they are typically fortified through horizontal learning from those who acknowledge having a similar identity. As something that may be concealed, the choice to publicly disclose a young person’s sexual and gender identity in such a public way as a choir carries its own risks. Same sex attraction, according to Jeffrey Weeks (1996), may be a target for social oppression:

> Of all the ‘variations’ of sexual behaviour, homosexuality has had the most vivid social pressure, and has evoked the most lively (if usually grossly misleading) historical accounts. It is…the form closest to the heterosexual norm in our culture, and partly because of that it has often been the target of sustained social oppression. It has also, as an inevitable effect of the hostility it has evoked, produced the most substantial forms of resistance to hostile categorization and has, consequently, a long cultural and subcultural history. (1996, p. 41)

It seems that same-sex attraction as a variant sexual behaviour generates unique social pressures. For young SSAGQ, the tensions between increasing social acceptance in Australia and homophobia are particularly acute. A 2010 policy report into meeting the needs of
SSAGQ young people in Victoria noted:

SSAGQ young people are under intense pressure as they negotiate their sexual feelings, attractions, and identities in environments that are hostile to people who are not exclusively heterosexual and gender normative. Unlike young people who identify with other minority populations—including indigenous, ethnic and religious young people—SSAGQ young people cannot be sure of support from their families or communities-of-identity (Leonard et al., 2010, p. 1).

**Going beyond “at-risk”**. Given likely experiences of social exclusion among individual members of the choir, it is tempting to categorise SSAGD young people today as “at risk,” a definition that emphasises the potential for something negative to occur. Yet defining the choir as “at-risk” sits uncomfortably in this thesis for the disempowering way in which young people are represented, as scholars of music therapy recently explored (Fairchild & Bibb, 2016). The phrase signals a medicalised and pathologizing language. Elizabeth McDermott and Katrina Roen (2016), in recent research into suicide and self-harm for SSAGD young people, aim to move beyond positivist efforts that focus on categorising and identifying risk factors for SSAGD young people and self-harm (what), and to move beyond the victimisation of “sexual minority young people” as closely associated with depression and suicide. Rather than reiterating these now established findings and identifying risk factors, these authors ask focus instead on the notion of resilience in their study, asking why queer youth who display such risk factors do not take their own lives.

Similarly, Stephen Russell (2005) moves beyond an at-risk perspective and suggests a framework for school-based settings through which to write about the lives of young queer people (my interpretation of Russell’s term, “sexual minority youth”). Russell’s resilience approach is grounded in psychological perspectives of resilience, positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), and flourishing (S. Joseph, 2015; Keyes & Haidt, 2003).

In community music scholarship, Mary Cohen and colleagues (Cohen, Silber,
Sangiorgio, & Iadeluca, 2012) implicitly challenge the category of “at-risk youth” and instead focus on resilience. They retain the term but focus on positive aspects and solutions rather than pathologies. Similarly, I explore factors that contribute to resilience for LGBTI youth members who choose to publicly sing out their horizontal identities. Recognising the contribution of the choir to the resilience of its members in a psychological sense forms an important context for setting out the phenomena of the choir. Before continuing, it is useful to establish in more detail the specialised language used in this thesis to discuss sexuality and gender.

**Valuing Language: A Choir of Same Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse People**

The language and labels used to identify young people of diverse gender and sexuality carry much symbolic weight. Consequently, how members of the youth chorus are labelled by others around them, and the ways they challenge and reclaim these labels, go to the heart of this thesis. The youth chorus comprises of a choir of singers who share common values in not conforming to the conventions and stereotypes relating to gender and sexuality in Melbourne, Australia. Members identify as gender-and/or-sexuality-non-conforming and gather to sing together in the company of others who share these values. Beneath the LGBTI labels, members of the youth chorus define themselves in more complex ways, challenging the conventions of the dominant lesbian and gay membership within MGLC Inc.

The words that members use as descriptors are central to their choir experience and are chosen carefully it seems. For many young people of diverse gender and sexuality, language is carefully chosen to reflect their stage of disclosure of their diverse gender and/or sexuality to those closest. For some members interviewed, their “coming out experience” as a young people of diverse gender and sexuality was supported in this journey by the choir’s
public profile; for others, this process remains incomplete. This process, best articulated in the long-standing and well-known conceptual model of Vivienne Cass (1979, 1984), is problematic for several reasons. I return to discuss Cass’s model in more detail in Chapter 2, arguing it is problematic for contemporary studies, including this one. I share with Donna Kenneady and Sara Oswalt (2014) reservations about its limited use to gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, and of the relevance of such a staged model given the centrality of gender fluidity.

Language use varies widely according to professional, popular, and scholarly literatures. Careful attention to language, may serve as recognition, acknowledgement, celebration, and affirmation of the journeys of these young people. I set out below the labels to be used for this thesis, noting that, itself representative of a posture where difference is celebrated, there is both fluidity and contention in terms of the acronyms and labels used here to identify members of this community and considerable variance across countries (Beale, 2017). For the purposes of this study I make use of the media guide developed by the United States (US) based Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD, 2016), which advocates for the accurate representation in the media of people of diverse gender and sexuality. I adapt this terminology where appropriate for its common usage in Australia and refer to the collective Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) population. This acronym is preferred by Minus18 (2017), Australia’s largest youth-led organisation for gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans youth. For brevity, LGBTI excludes initials for other gender and sexual identities (such as a-sexual, pansexual, gender-non-conforming, a-gender, allies, etc.). It is intended too to signal the spectrum of other possible descriptors, such as inclusion of a plus sign (+) at the end of LGBT/LGBTI. Australia’s usage (see Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011, Section III) differs from the US where, for
instance, intersex is not commonly included and LGBT is more common. I have chosen not to use a common Australian acronym, LGBTIQ, that is used interchangeably to denote either queer and questioning. (In the US, Louis Bergonzi (2015), discussing inclusive music education programs for and about “the Other,” uses “LGBT2Q” to signal both (note 10, p.237).) I set out below the working definitions I will use in this thesis. For ease of reference, key terms for this thesis are accessible in the glossary on page xii.

**Queer.** There is power to be found in reclaiming a term that was once deployed to insult a community, and challenging those who hear it to reflect on their own position. Often deployed as a derogatory term, queer has undergone a “re recuperative appropriation” (Brett, Wood, & Hubbs, 2017) in academia in recent times, and is mentioned by several members in their interviews. It has been reclaimed in the spirit of other movements for social change and, as the Oxford dictionary relates, denotes or relates to “a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms” ("Queer," n.d.). The use of queer represents an intentional challenge to the reader – an example of “queering” this thesis. While it is more frequently used among younger SGD generations, queer is not a universally accepted term, and remains contentious for many older LGBTI people in Australia.

I use the term “queer” carefully in this thesis. As a descriptor, the youth chorus aspires to represent the collective label of a queer choir in its conscious resistance of heteronormative musical and social worlds, both outwardly to members’ social worlds in Melbourne, and inwardly within MGLC Inc and Melbourne’s LGBTI community.

Queer also functions as a posture: a statement of intent and an aspiration of how the youth chorus would like to be seen. In this use, queer extends beyond LGBTI people to all those who act on a commitment to eradicating heterosexism (Gorski, Davis, & Reiter, 2013,
This is reflected in a youth chorus and main chorus of MGLC Inc that includes several heterosexual, non-LGBTI members. In describing the youth chorus as a queer choir in this thesis, then, I seek to highlight this distinctive posture for individuals and the choir collective, in contrast to the more stable labelling of LGBTI identities. This other, more political purpose uses queer as a verb, as Judith Butler (2007/1990) suggests, and signals conceptually an attitude that attempts to “trouble” sexuality and gender, and to contest entrenched attitudes and understandings of gender and sexuality.

My discussion of “queer community” draws from member interviews and the views of the youth chorus members interviewed. Members convey a sense that they sing as part of a wider Australian and international queer movement. This collective sense of community it seems is founded upon a shared experience of being “others” within Australian society, where heterosexuality shapes the public narrative in a way that is often described as “heteronormative” (Kitzinger, 2005).

Sexuality. I refer to sexual orientation – defined by GLAAD (2016) as the “scientifically accurate term for an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex” (p. 6) – rather than to “homosexuals.” The latter term suggests a certain “medicalized essentialism” as Philip Brett (2006, p. 22) describes it, and that simplifies what are many rich and varied forms of same-sex desire. “Gay” persons, a collective adjective referring to people “whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex” (GLAAD, 2016, p. 6), is now most often used for men, although historically it related to all persons with same-sex attraction. Lesbian refers specifically to women with enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to other women (GLAAD, 2016, p. 6), noting preferences for “gay” or “gay women” for some people. Bisexual people have the capacity for enduring attraction to
both those of same or opposite gender.

Gender his thesis understands gender as something that is socially-determined, in keeping with the World Health Organisation (2015) definition as "the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as the norms, roles and relationships that exist between them.” The relationship between sex, gender identity, and gender expression is important and is based on the latest GLAAD definitions (GLAAD, 2016, p. 10). “Sex” refers to the classification of a person as male or female, something assigned at birth, and usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy.

Gender identity refers to a person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender, which may not necessarily correlate with their assigned sex at birth. Gender expression – the external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, and/or body characteristics – may be different again from gender identity. Gender expectations vary between cultures and across time, and do not fit within traditional understandings of a male and female gender binary. The World Health Organisation (2015) recognises the fluidity of genders, stating that gender norms and culturally-determined roles “also impact the health outcomes of people with transgender or intersex identities.” The adjective “transgender” is an umbrella term “for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth” (GLAAD, 2016, p. 10). Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same; transgender people may also identify as straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or queer.

Collective labels. Alongside the use of acronyms such as SSAGD and descriptors such as “people of diverse Gender and Sexualities,” at times it is useful to use a more nuanced descriptor of young people as Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning.
SSAGQ). I seek with this description to capture the stage at which many young people join the chorus. In my experience, this description fits well for some youth chorus members whose sense of self in relation to their sexuality and/or gender identity is still in question (regardless of whether ultimately resolved).

**Scholarly Motivations and Beginnings**

On beginning my research project about choir singing, I initially sought to derive a set of common factors for leaders to consider when working with youth choruses with members who may have experienced social exclusion. This “checklist” approach reflected my positivist background in international politics and foreign policy. It did not accommodate the unique qualities of every member and the similarly unique choral ecologies within which they sing. To take individual experiences seriously, I needed to unlearn the typically reductionist understandings of the world around me, and an emphasis on parsimony that underpinned my previous studies.

I seek instead to document the experiences of youth chorus members, recognising too this choir as one part of MGLC Inc, and to bring both musical elements and those that sit alongside the music. For the purposes of this thesis, I use “extra-musical” to describe these elements, notwithstanding Brynjulf Stige & Leif Aarø’s insightful discussion of the merits of “paramusical” as an alternative term (2012, pp.118-122). I strive for a hermeneutic approach to knowledge, exploring and experiencing knowledge as something constructed, shaped, built in context, and always subject to change. It is important, as Finlay (2014) describes, to dwell within the data rather than abstracting from it:

If dwelling is understood as settling “at home,” then the ethos of dwelling is hospitality. In the context of phenomenological research analysis, it could be said that we settle into the data (accounts of lived experience), respectfully embracing the
language of our hosts or visitors and making ourselves thoroughly at home with it.” (p. 126).

The notion of dwelling suggests a respect for those research participants that intersects well with community music scholar Lee Higgins’s discussion of community music as an act of hospitality (Higgins, 2012), a concept to be taken up shortly.

I came to the thesis with an interest in music practices in the everyday. Sociologist Tia DeNora (2003), in her study of the scholarship of the German philosopher and critical theorist, Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), argues that understanding music as a constitutive ingredient in the ordering of a society requires distance from established understandings yet closeness to the musical practices themselves. To this end, DeNora (2003) advocates exploring musical ingredients as they are found in action, to spend time (or, as Finlay might say, to dwell) with them:

…what is required is a focus on actual musical practice, on how specific agents use and interact with music. Such an approach makes no assumptions about ‘what’ music can do but examines music’s social ‘content’ as it is contributed through musical practices in real time and in particular social and material spaces. Only through observation of these practices is it possible to document music’s mechanisms of operation, to follow agents as they do things with music.” (DeNora, 2003, p. 41)

Community music and music sociology scholarship are both central to this study, particularly in connection to everyday musicking experiences and the potential for wellbeing.

An interest in community music, health, and wellbeing. An interest in the health and wellbeing benefits of music in community settings guides this scholarly endeavour.

Community music, an “emergent discipline” as Higgins (2009, p.1) suggests, provides the primary focus. Community music typically draws upon music education, music therapy and applied ethnomusicology. In keeping with its socialist and activist roots (Higgins, 2007, 2008; Rimmer, Higham, & Brown, 2014), community music has until recently resisted scholarly definition. Music education scholar David Elliott (2012, p. 100) describes a recent “surge” in research exploring the nature and values of community music that until recently
was the preserve of PhD dissertations and music education conferences. Elliott and Higgins (2006, 2012) are two of an emerging cohort of scholars to reflect on different diverse practices of community music across the globe and to offer deeper theoretical insights. Whilst acknowledging Higgins’s call (2009, p. 2) for research into the actual making of artistic expressions as a research into epistemological knowing, this thesis takes a different approach. It uses the example of the arts-based practice of choral singing within MGLC Inc as a focus for further investigation. In doing so, I draw upon my social sciences background to provide a distinct perspective. I acknowledge too the influence of my graduate study experience within the scholarly community of music therapy researchers in the National Music Therapy Research Unit at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music.

**Music therapy as my scholarly entry point.** While not a music therapist, I cannot help but be influenced by the scholarly debates and discussions taking place around me. Music therapy research and practice (Wheeler & Murphy, 2016) has a role in supporting, in clinical and community settings, access to music for “individuals who are not able, on their own, to locate sonic resources that can make it [the individual’s social world] better.” (DeNora, 2013, pp. 69-70). Grounded in theories of paramedical and psychological intervention (Ansdell, 2002; K. McFerran & Hunt, 2008), and music therapy benefits from both its recognition as an allied health profession in Australia and internationally, and an extensive and expert literature that supports its professional practice. I locate myself within this discipline, conscious that music therapy, as Stige describes, has “…a special responsibility in relation to the challenge of developing an interdisciplinary discourse, since it is an established discipline with bridging of the subjects of music and health as its main focus…” (2012, p. 183).

Music therapy emerged as a recognised health intervention typically practiced according to the so-called “consensus model” (Ansdell, 2002); that is, in clinical settings, and
as an interaction between expert music practitioners and patients. In recent decades, scholars have considered broader questions of what constitutes health and wellbeing, exploring the role that music therapy might play in facilitating both treatment and prevention (Kenny & Stige, 2002; Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004; Ruud, 1997; Wigram, Bonde, & Pedersen, 2002) and uses of music in a prophylactic and preventive way (1997, p. 88). Ansdell (2002) instead suggested that music therapy needed to adapt to the social changes underway and move beyond a view of health as the absence of sickness.

Community Music Therapy (CoMT) emerged as a subdiscipline of research in music therapy (O’Grady & McFerran, 2007a; Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004; Stige, 2002b, 2003; Stige, Ansdell, Elefant, & Pavlicevic, 2010), and explores the efficacy, therapeutic, and wellbeing potentials of music in community settings from a variety of musical, social psychological, and sociological disciplines. This “psychosocialcultural” model works to support both personal and social wellbeing (Ansdell & DeNora, 2012; Stige et al., 2010). CoMT perspectives (Ansdell, 2002; Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004) are valuable for this study, particularly its interest in the social context in which musicking occurs. Underpinning CoMT is a sense of social activism as it seeks to promote sociocultural and communal change through a participatory approach (Higgins, 2012; O’Grady & McFerran, 2007a), and a rigorous scholarly research base. Among other characteristics, CoMT scholars value participation, the contextualisation of musical practices, a performative element, and an ethics-driven approach (Stige & Aarø, 2012).

Similarly, community music literature engages with the act and product of being-together-in-music. I leave to one side debates about the borders between music therapy and its relationship to community music (Ansdell, 2002; O’Grady & McFerran, 2007a, 2007b), acknowledging that these perspectives shaped my entry into the study. This musical
togetherness is on display in the distinctive social and musical world of the youth chorus, a community choir that I suggest offers a compelling example of a community music practice at the nexus of community music, health, and wellbeing. I draw too from a variety of other disciplines to support the study, such as music psychology, social psychology, and music education, along with critical perspectives in music education and music sociology, and studies of LGBTI identities, gender, and sexuality later in the thesis. Returning to community music and the work of Higgins (2012), several key concepts act as points of reference to which I return periodically.

**Linking into Higgins’s contributions to community music.** Higgins’s scholarly contributions have been influential to this thesis and to my practice as a community choral leader. A prolific scholar and influential contributor as editor of the International Journal of Community Music, Higgins’s most significant contribution to date is his broad theoretical interrogation of community music and examples of practices, “Community Music: In Theory and Practice” (2012). This thought-provoking work, along with shorter studies published by Higgins both prior to and following this major work, offer a theoretical frame through which I explore and challenge my understandings of the youth chorus as an example of community music, along with conceptual insights that have challenged my practice (pp. 144-154).

A sense of justice is central to Higgins’s notion of music making, and is enacted primarily through hospitality. Community musicians, Higgins emphasises, “strive for understanding among individuals with common (albeit diverse) goals despite cultural, class, gender, economic and political differences” (Higgins, 2012, p. 136). Community musicians need to be constantly ready to welcome those they have yet to meet, and in a study of hospitable music making (2015b), Higgins explores practical examples of this understanding and potentials for music to welcome in the new. Community music profiles of musician
Wang LinLin in China, and Jamie Hillman and André de Quadros, two choral conductors working in a correctional institution in the US, support Higgins’s conception of hospitable music making: musicking that responds, “from the call of the Other and is sparked into life through an encounter of a promise toward justice” (Higgins, 2015b, p. 452).

Community music represents both an action and a theoretical stance for Higgins, reflecting a deliberate sense of justice. He makes clear that his study is not a philosophy of community music but theoretical framework (Higgins, 2012, p. 10). Higgins engages in depth with the philosophies of Jacques Derrida, the notion attributed to him of “deconstruction” (Caputo, 1997; Higgins, 2012, pp. 10-11), and the importance of language in shaping experience. Higgins makes use of this theoretical lens to challenge everyday experiences, including musical experiences, exploring the language that is used to construct fields of knowledge and thought, with a focus on how language forms around a concept to include (or exclude). I set out several important contributions of Higgins early in this thesis, with a view to returning to them with deeper insights into member experiences in Chapter 9.

Community-as-hospitality, gift-giving, and the welcome. Higgins adapts Derrida’s notion of hospitality and makes the case for its use in community music scholarship (Higgins, 2007, 2012). Derrida’s ideas are important to community music work, Higgins suggests, “because community music sets out to encourage musical access through intervention and a resistance to closure [my italics]” (2012, p. 11). A focus on hospitality as unconditional is one means of fulfilling the participatory ethos of community music (2007, p. 282) and avoiding the pitfalls of the powerful and often contested term, community. He interprets Derrida’s notion of justice for a musical context as “hospitable music making.” Having distinguished between society and community (according to German language understandings of these terms),
Higgins (2012) outlines the centrality of hospitality in community music: “hospitality encompasses the central characteristics of community music practice, broadly understood as people, participation, places, equality of opportunity, and diversity” (p. 133). Community may be conceived of as an act of hospitality and is principally a social phenomenon. The act of providing this hospitality is an act of gift-giving: a relational ideal where gift provision is unconditional rather than an exchange (pp. 152-153). This sense of belonging and identity is captured in Victor Turner’s use of the Latin expression, *communitas* (V. W. Turner, 1969), a notion to be considered in the context of the youth chorus. Higgins builds upon Turner’s communitas, and Derrida’s later works, to suggest that “community” be understood as an act of hospitality rather than the sense of a closed (and therefore exclusionary) community.

He emphasises that, as an act of unconditional hospitality, community music must always remain open to welcoming others into the fold (Higgins, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2015b): a commitment to the Derridean notion of a “community without community” (Derrida, cited in Caputo, 1997, p. 107). This study considers Higgins’s understanding of community music as hospitality against the lived experiences of members of the youth chorus, and its internal and external roles.

**Workshops, facilitators, and the welcome.** Rather than seeking musical alignment and harmonisation, community music seeks to foster diverse musicking experiences. Community music workshops offer key sites and important moments for musicking, according to Higgins (2012, pp. 144-154). Workshops provide opportunities to challenge conventions, to disrupt, and to remain open to the unknown. For the workshop facilitator, these are places to relinquish control rather than exercise it, and to give the gift of the welcome. It is in the gesture of enthusiasm for accessible music making that the facilitator may create the sense of welcome and a vibrant musicking experience (Higgins & Bartleet,
2012). As community musicking leaders, facilitators are empowered to intervene to create the welcome and nurture a sense of safety without safety. They set broad parameters but allow the musicking to set its own course.

For Higgins (2012), workshops are unstructured places in the sense that they are a starting point but without pre-determined ends in sight. Higgins says: “…the promise of the welcome constantly puts the ‘inside’ in doubt – this can be scary for both the group leader and the participants. From this formulation, the outside, or the excluded, affects and determines the inside, or excluded” (p. 143). This may not be a comfortable experience. Community music settings are therefore sites of hospitality that offer “safety without safety” (pp. 150-151). The implications for this notion of safety-without-safety and between the two sites of musicking - the inside (those included) and outside (those excluded) – offer important themes for this thesis. Having established my scholarly location, I now examine the social context of the youth chorus as an LGBTI organisation.

Locating My Practice Home

LGBTI choral music internationally. This study of an Australian LGBTI choir seeks to contribute to the broader scholarly canon of LGBTI choirs and choral music that has its roots in the US lesbian and gay choral movement. In the following section, I set out a brief history the US-based choral movement turn inspired the formation of similar choirs in Australia. The LGBTI choral movement forms one aspect of a larger movement to publicly identify as same sex attracted, a social movement emerging in the US in the twentieth century (Altman, 1982). Stephen Seidman (1995), in his survey of the development of queer intellectualism and activism in the US, notes that organised choral music formed as “an emerging voice,” with its catalyst in the June 1969 Stonewall Inn riots of New York City. Casey Hayes (2008) describes a movement brought primarily gay men and lesbian women together to form
communities through song (p. 64). John Sparks (2005) captures the distinctive value of singing in a gay and lesbian chorus or choir:

The choral connection to coming out is a common thread for thousands of gay men and women. For some it was the love of music that compelled them to face up to the part of themselves that wanted to sing in a chorus that specifically allowed them to be gay, affirming that long hidden part of their lives. For others, already open with their gay identity, singing became another way to manifest that side of their lives more fully and to combine a singing talent with social or political agendas. (p. 29)

The “Anna Crusis” women’s choir in 1975 is recognised as the first LGBTI choir in the US. The San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus (SFGMC), formed immediately following the assassination of city council member and gay rights activist Harvey Milk in November 1978, was the first choir to identity publicly as gay. The following year, the first lesbian and gay chorus in the US, Stonewall Chorale, was formed from the Gotham Male Chorus (established 1977). Gay and lesbian choruses proliferated quickly in the US in the 1980s, leading one commentator in 1990 to describe the movement as the fastest growing within choral music at that time (E. A. Gordon, 1990, p. 25). The lesbian and gay choral movement constituted “a new kind of performing arts institution” (Sparks, 2005, p. 29): created, joined, and sustained, within a climate of hostility.

Lesbian and gay choruses fulfilled several important roles for LGBTI people since this period. Sparks (2005, p. 29) quotes a former senior administrator of the US movement who asserts that to sing in an LGBTI choir is a political act. Within and from their local LGBTI communities, these choirs were sites for the singing and performance of protest, addressing discrimination and singing in support of the social rights and recognition for LGBTI people. Such protests were enhanced by the commitment of many choirs to creating quality musical performances that challenged and defied conventional understandings of gender and sexuality, particularly in the choice of repertoire and lyrics. Choirs were also places to musically attend to, through mourning and celebration, lives lost to HIV/AIDS, a
health epidemic that had a devastating impact on the gay male population in the US at the
time, including losses of many chorus members. These roles remain central to the LGBTI
choral singing movement today.

The Gay and Lesbian Association (GALA), established in 1983, administers the
North American LGBTI choral movement, with nearly 200 choruses across the US, Canada,
and Mexico (2017) and affiliate members internationally, including MGLC Inc in Australia.
Scholars have examined aspects of the LGBTI choral movement in the US, including the role
of gay male choirs (Attinello, 2006; Gregory, 2009; Henderson & Hodges, 2007; Latimer,
2008), lesbian choirs (Vukovich, 1988), the broader legacy of LGBTI choral singing in the
US (Avery, Hayes, & Bell, 2013; Hilliard, 2008), and the GALA organisation (Kari K
Veblen, Elliott, Messenger, & Silverman, 2013). Other studies focussed more specifically on
individual member choirs such as the SFGMC (Attinello, 2006; Hilliard, 2002, 2008) and
repertoire choices of GALA member choruses (MacLachlan, 2015).

As LGBTI people have found political and social acceptance in the US, the movement
has shifted toward “developing new alliances with other organizations to confront
homophobia, discrimination, and very specific problems like bullying in schools” (Sparks,
2005, p. 30). Gender diversity and support, along with awareness raising of transgender
issues, has become a focus. Musical quality remains a principal element of what Charles
Beale (2017), in his recent survey of LGBTI and queer choral music and pedagogy, describes
as “effective activism” (p. 370) for LGBTI choruses.

**Choral music in Australia.** For many thousands of years, singing was essential for
Australia’s Indigenous peoples, commonly known as Aboriginal people (Davidson, 2008).
Nevertheless, after colonisation it was modelled primarily on Anglo-European choral
traditions (and, to a lesser extent, German traditions; see Murphy, 2005), whereby oratorio

46
choirs perform large religious and secular choral works of the European canon (Wilmott, 1997). With very few exceptions, choral singing evolved as an amateur pursuit (Leske & Loewe, in press), largely without reference to the singing cultures of its Indigenous peoples. In recent decades, community choral music has developed its own traditions and distinguishing characteristics, including a deeper connection to Australia’s sense of place and to its Indigenous musical heritage (Bartleet, 2010; Bartleet, Brunt, Tait, & Threlfall, 2013; Bartleet, Dunbar-Hall, Letts, & Schippers, 2009). Community music making in Australia today takes place in an environment of decreasing government funding and, akin to a zero-sum game, with a focus on excellence distinguished from community engagement (Harrison, 2010). Community choral music in Australia today seems underfunded and underappreciated for its public health benefits, with funding concentrated primarily on school-based singing initiatives such as “Music: Count Us In” (Music Australia, 2017a). Many choirs within community settings explore and celebrate Australia’s diverse ethnic, cultural, social and other identities, including many which do not conform to historical typical choral models and conventions, including LGBTI choirs.

**LGBTI choral music in Australia.** Australia’s LGBTI choral movement, by comparison, has a younger history that is tied closely to the gay rights movement this country. David Hardy (2013) captures the more recent history and community activism of Australia’s LGBTI choral community. A gathering of singers in Melbourne, inspired by an LP record of the SFGMC’s 1981 tour of the US, led to the establishment of Australia’s first LGBTI choir, Allsounds (now, Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus), in 1990 (Hardy, 2013). The choir was established with the intention of lifting members’ spirits and to serve as a positive expression against homophobia (Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus, 2017). Sydney established a choir in 1991 (Penicka-Smith, 2011), and other capital cities followed.
The formation of LGBTI choirs in Australia and, as Frances Bird (2016) is currently examining, New Zealand, was motivated both by knowledge of the growing LGBTI choir movement in the US and as a response to growing impact of the AIDS epidemic in this country (Midwinter-Pitt, 2007). Today, an association of LGBTI choirs from Australia and New Zealand, called “Out and Loud,” convenes regularly, and a fledgling network of LGBTI choirs in South and Southeast Asia recently united as “Proud Voices Asia” (Proud Voices Asia, 2017). These choirs exist independently of Australasia’s choral movement and receive support from GALA Choruses (Beale, 2017).

**Scholarly Contribution**

This study offers the first detailed examination of what singing in an Australian community choir for SSAGQ young people means for its members, with a related interest in developing a specialist perspective, located broadly within community music scholarship, on leading queer youth choirs in Australia. The Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus is one of only two community youth choruses currently operating in Australia for LGBTI young people (alongside an equivalent choir in the Queensland state capital of Brisbane, established in 2013 (Brisbane Pride Choir, 2017)). The youth chorus occupies a unique place within Australian community choral music, and I believe has an important story to share. Fundamentally, my contribution reflects a considered axiological belief that MGLC Inc’s commitment to providing musical experiences for SSAGD young people in Melbourne is valuable.

I hope to contribute to Australian community music scholarship with a study of a post-secondary youth community choir. There is only limited published research of the activities of community choirs for people of diverse gender and sexuality in Australia (Hardy,
2013; Penicka-Smith, 2011) and even less about youth choruses (Leske & Wilson, 2013). Rob White and Johanna Wyn (2013, p. 60) describe an “overwhelming” amount of research on young people, gender, and sexualities in school settings, but call for research in other dimensions in their lives, including in leisure settings and friendship groups (2013, p. 60). While much has been written about the role of music in the lives of young school-aged students, and of musical interactions in school settings, I focus specifically on choral music and post-school aged young people.

With this thesis, I also seek to use my scholarly privilege and the spotlight it affords me to examine a community choir that would typically not receive the chance for closer scrutiny within Australia’s choral community. In my experience, and in keeping with the prevailing insights from critical or “new” musicology (Ansdell, 1997; Brett, Wood, & Thomas, 2006; Cook, 2000), such choirs may otherwise be overlooked for funding recognition in favour of organisations that promote elite over community musicking. I would be pleased to see this research support MGLC Inc for future funding and grant applications that contribute to the sustainability of the youth chorus.

I hope to contribute an expert knowledge about so-called “queer choral pedagogy” (Beale, 2017) – the leading of SSAGD choirs in community settings. In school settings, there have already been important contributions and insights emerging in the work of Louis Bergonzi (2015) and Joshua Palkki (2016). Although not primary purpose, I suggest this thesis may helpfully offer insights that supplement and develop existing community music reviews, handbooks, and practical guides (Abrahams & Head, 2017; Cahill, 1998; Higgins & Bartleet, 2012; Lamble, 2004; McKay & Higham, 2011, 2012; Moser, McKay, & Price, 2005), and complement existing insights into the choral singer’s experience and the voice (Bonshor, 2014) and choral leadership (Durrant, 2012; Jansson, 2013; Marotto, Victor, &
Overview of the Thesis

This thesis travels a hermeneutic arc that explores the lived experiences, understandings, and pre-understandings of members who sing with the youth chorus. Depicted in three parts, Part I (Chapters 1 to 3) sets the position of this thesis in relation to the scholarly and social worlds and lived experience in which it formed. It discusses the context within which participation in the choir may address social exclusion for these young singers. My personal narrative weaves its way into the study as I reflect upon the methodological decisions that changed on account of my health.

Part II of the thesis (Chapters 4 to 7) interprets member experiences with reference to DeNora’s novel conceptual framework of the music asylum (DeNora, 2013). Structuring my analysis around DeNora’s theorising, I suggest the choir affords its members a physical and conceptual space of musical and social removal and refurnishing. Members appropriate the choir’s physical sites and conceptual spaces for the refurnishing of who they are, individually and collectively. A deeper analysis of the element of refurnishing suggests members perform different individual and collective identities through and within the youth chorus.

With this analysis in hand, Part III (Chapters 8-10) takes up this critical lens to challenge the choir’s collective identity in relation to the structuring principles of gender and sexuality that brought it to life. I return to the choir’s theoretical roots as an activist organisation, born in protest, and consider to what extent it fulfils the “queer” objective mentioned in member interviews. I suggest a foundational paradox and several tensions emerge only once this fuller picture of the youth choir’s collective musical and social identity is presented. The youth chorus, and indeed MGLC Inc, shares with other gay male and
LGBTI choirs (Attinello, 2006; Beale, 2017) the challenge of balancing a common tension: between being a “safe and supportive” place for its membership on the one hand, and whose members take seriously their claim to musically represent a larger LGBTI community in Melbourne. I reflect critically on the performance of difference in relation to member understandings of the youth chorus as a place that values (destabilising) queer gender and sexual identities, and its role, understood by members, to foster its stable LGBTI identities. I suggest the choir’s ecology both challenges and sustains community music principles. Finally, I offer insights to emerge from this study for scholars and practitioners wishing to explore the queer choral experience.

In a break from convention, inserted between the formal chapters of the thesis, I briefly and reflectively narrate several individual member stories. While not exhaustive, this represents an effort to capture the depth of several member’s stories as I heard them and to draw the reader closer into the research. These short vignettes are inflected with my viewpoint, as someone who is both undertaking reflective practices (van Manen, 2015, pp. 49-60, citing the work of John Dewey) and who is himself an expert practitioner in the participatory arts (Schön, 1995; Wakeling, 2014). According to Bruner’s distinction (Bruner, 1985, as cited in Polkinghorne, 1995), each narrative is akin to a form of story-telling that reflects more closely a narrative analysis rather than an analysis of narratives. These stories may also highlight themes for discussion in subsequent chapters.

The first short vignette tells the story of 24-year old Hermione (preferred pronouns: she/her/hers). In Hermione’s story, I hear a vivid and lively depiction of the dichotomy between musical and social inclusion and exclusion. This important theme is one of several to be taken up in the review of foundational literature that follows in Chapter 2.
“It’s an Insular Little Queer Bubble and We Love it in There!”: Hermione

Hermione is a kind, compassionate, and engaged member of the choir who identifies as queer. At the time of interview, she represented the youth chorus on the choir’s management committee. I seek to preserve the vibrancy and the almost theatrical animation with which Hermione interjects and narrates her experiences during her interview, noting in parentheses changes of pitch, whispering, shouting, and other sounds.

**Inclusion and Belonging**

And um like the unspoken, and sometimes spoken, is that youth chorus is for everyone…You can be trans, you can be straight you can be gay, you can be, [parodied voice] I don’t know! (¶¶332-334)

Choir offers Hermione “a starting common ground” (¶533), a self-described “odd” character (¶505) who doesn’t easily make friends, to build friendships and fosters a sense of belonging. In her view, participating in choir fosters inclusion and makes it easier for people who lack close friendships to integrate quickly into the group. Hermione describes how the distinct aspects of the youth chorus’s musical ecology, such as its music, performances, committee activity, and the choir’s history, make it easier for new and existing members to find common ground and form friendships. Hermione enjoys both the organizational and pastoral care aspects of her role as the youth chorus’s committee representative. Several other members interviewed cited Hermione’s influence as decisive in their decision to remain with the choir.

Hermione has insight into both the youth chorus and main chorus as a singer in both. She describes the relationship between the two choirs as basically connected but very different, and talks about members of the older chorus with great affection (“I love them dearly,” ¶70). Reflecting on the sheer variety of people represented across the membership of
both choirs, Hermione depicts the adult chorus rehearsal as “60 different people, all very
different representations of what it means to be… that” (¶780). Hermione finds a sense of
belonging in this experience, saying: “you know, it gave me a better idea of how I could fit
into society” (¶768). For Hermione, the choir is an important social place, a safe place, and a
place of belonging. This sense of safety is nurtured by the youth chorus’s queer public profile
as a choir for SSAGD young people. To be queer is the norm rather than the exception in this
choir. Hermione describes with a sense of relief the choir environment:

having people who know already all of those, perfectly fine, questions about, you
know like say if you’re… ah I don’t know… you’re gender neutral…and most
everyone in youth chorus would be like ‘okay, so what pronouns do you want to, do
you use? … Other places that’s rare. Because, not caus people are, are intolerant or…
but because there’s just not an awareness… I guess we operate off that knowledge
base already and we don’t have to talk about it. (¶¶346-456)

Hermione vividly captures her experience of sense of safety within the choir when
comparing it to her high school choir: “it’s [the youth chorus] an insular little queer bubble
and we love it in there!” (¶372) For Hermione, the youth chorus is safe and supportive
because of its separateness. She describes an insularity that is simultaneously inclusive of the
members within the choir and exclusive of those outside it. The choir offers an important
platform for members to stand up as both activists and mentors. Reflecting on her own
upbringing, Hermione makes the case for providing young people with a sense of a queer
future: “we want to go into schools… cause you know, when we were 13, whatever, it would
have been very helpful!” (¶¶1114,1120) Describing the youth chorus’s wider mission of
singing for the community, Hermione says: “We just like doing that kind of thing!” (¶1126)
Musicking provides the foundation for Hermione’s sense of belonging and inclusion, and
music a “refuge for the socially awkward” (¶507): “If you play music,” she says, “you’ll
always have people to hang out with” (¶501). The youth chorus is a musical place where she
fits, finds acceptance, has something in common to talk with others about, and where she can socialize and help others. Hermione finds meaning in being needed and having the opportunity to support other members.

**Clique, Exclusion, and Musical Competition**

Hermione’s interview also reveals elements of social exclusion within the youth chorus as she describes experiences feeling a sense of clique, competition, and makes comparisons with other choirs:

…when I first joined chorus, um I felt a bit on the outside, because um there was this um, you know this little clique type thing?...Which happens with, everyone and I hate, I hate cliques. I do. They’re natural and, and they happen but one of the things I, I would like in any group of people I’m part of is that they can, um, expand. And that people make the effort. (¶¶112-114).

Hermione’s queer bubble comments suggest a sense of exclusivity – of the choir as a detached social and musical place that is special. Hermione jokingly alludes to this separateness when she says to her interviewer “you wouldn’t have heard of it because you’re not in the queer bubble” (¶418).

The youth chorus is also a place for Hermione, who happens to be a fine instrumental musician, to achieve musically. She describes herself as a perfectionist, “quite intense,” and someone who “can’t play an instrument part-time” (¶¶487, 489). She self-confidently describes her musical abilities: “I don’t usually practice at home. I don’t need to” (¶1076). Yet it seems Hermione values the youth chorus as a place where musical achievement is not the primary focus. After a negative experience studying instrumental music at university, a time she describes as “fraught with [breath in] memories and stuff” (¶466), Hermione’s interview suggests she joined the youth chorus in part because she lacks a choral music background:
…singing has always been, a fun thing! … Cause I don’t know enough about it to be like “I know that that that that, [shouted, hitting hand on table in time with word “that”] that is wrong! [shouted] It’s all wrong!” … I’m just like “It sounds pretty. That’s fine. Done!” (¶¶468-472)

It appears Hermione joined the youth chorus as a place for the enjoyment of musicking rather than to strive for musical excellence. She does not perceive a choir requiring perfect tuning or alignment of a finely tuned instrument to the exclusion of social activities. Yet the youth chorus’s musical standard plays a part in her musical evaluation: “I’ve done a lot of music. I know that we sound good” (¶1042). Audience reactions are also important in her assessment. Hermione describes her surprise at how much people enjoy the choir and her singing, saying “I know we’re good, but we’re not like, professional good. But yeah, like I don’t know, people really getting into watching us…you know we put on fun gigs!” (¶922)

Hermione compares the youth chorus to other community choirs and emphasizes its musicianship as a distinguishing factor, agreeing with her interviewer that the choir balances accessibility with creating a quality product and “working towards something” so that members have something to “bond over” (¶1054). Interestingly, Hermione sees the choir’s high turnover as helping to ensure this quality:

A lot of community choirs I know are often not very good quality…but that’s okay with them…Because they’re more about just seeing their friends every week …Whereas we have to be constantly making friends, because people come and go…And also, like we’re not gonna stick with it unless there’s a point to it…We’re busy! (¶¶ 1086-1096)
Chapter 2: Establishing Key Concepts

I outlined in Chapter 1 my scholarly motivations and desire to contribute to a study of an LGBTI youth chorus to the burgeoning field of community music, and identified a starting point in engaging with Higgins’s ideas. The following chapter sets out in greater detail two broad themes that coalesce around the unique experience of singing within the youth chorus. After defining social exclusion and a foundational premise of my study – that the youth chorus may be a tool for addressing member experiences of social exclusion – I establish music as an affordance for the exploration of wellbeing (DeNora, 2000; Gibson, 1979/2014), locating my study within community music but drawing too from several disciplines. As institutions at the interstices of music, health, and wellbeing, I explore how choirs and choral singing may be a catalyst for wellbeing. I then consider theories of identity and suggest three key identities that constitute the social realities for these choral singers in Australia: relating to youth, music, and gender and sexuality. I make the case for music as a wellbeing tool for queer youth identities.

Prelude: Social Exclusion

Hermione’s story introduces an interpretation of the experiences of singing within the youth chorus, and suggests that themes of social inclusion and social exclusion may be important elements. Hermione’s story combines elements of inclusion and exclusion and suggests that, contrary to what might be assumed of a community choir, both elements might in fact be necessary, and contribute to its functioning.

This thesis contends that SSAGD young people face greater risks of social exclusion than their non-SSAGD counterparts, an argument supported by both statistical evidence and studies of social exclusion, stigmatisation, and its impact on social identity (London &
Rosenthal, 2013). The youth chorus membership, who convene to sing as SSAGQ young people in Melbourne, is therefore more likely to include individuals who have experienced social exclusion at some time in their lives as the result of their sexuality and/or gender identity (White & Wyn, 2013). Stige & Aarø’s (2012) definition of social exclusion from within community music therapy discourse offers an entry point to understanding exclusion. These authors explain social exclusion as a “process by which individuals or groups are detached from other people, groups, organizations, or institutions, or more generally excluded from social relationships and participation in activities on the various areas of social life” (Stige & Aarø, 2012, pp. 206-207). Social exclusion may occur for a variety of related factors, including: stigmatization, attributes that extensively discredit an individual and reduce their whole person), and marginalization, a process of separation from society and “resulting in involuntary disconnection with the mainstream of productive activity and/or reproductive activity – typically associated with material disadvantage” (p. 106). Conversely, social inclusion refers to actions to reverse processes which lead to social exclusion or action to include individuals or groups previously excluded. The first part of this chapter establishes how music, and particularly singing, may foster wellbeing and alleviate social exclusion among members of the choir.

The Affordances of Music for Wellbeing

Background. Stige (2002a, p. 225) suggests there is a growing sense of reflexivity in the role of music in society – an awareness of the location of scholarship within social and cultural systems. As an example of a singing-based community cultural development activity in Australia (Dore & Pascal, 2010), this study sets up a more nuanced understanding of the nexus of music, health, and wellbeing and where the youth chorus might fit in, from several disciplinary perspectives. I first establish the core tenets of an understanding of music, as
Wayne Bowman (2007) asserts, “as a social act and social fact, instead of music as an entity to which my relationship is aesthetic, receptive, and somehow individual in nature” (p. 109). To treat music as a social fact, Bowman asserts, “…binds questions of music’s (and music education’s) significance to the ‘we’ of whose experience it is constitutive. This is to construe music as a fundamentally ethical undertaking, linked in potent ways to who ‘we’ are – to identity” (p. 109).

**Exploring what music is.** The ontology of music – what music *is* – varies widely, and with implications that are important when considering its uses in society. Taking up this shift toward multiple ontologies, Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (1997, p. 1), in their introduction to an edited volume on music, observed a generational shift away from epistemological certainty toward a recognition that “we no longer know what we know.” Their volume offers a critical approach to musicology, signified in its opening chapter by Philip Bohlman (1997). Bohlman outlines multiple ideas of what music is – ontologies of music – that are instantiated in music practices by music practitioners (p. 19). He recognises multiple ontologies of music, based in practices of individuals in the everyday rather than in philosophies and ideas, and describes a multilayered understanding of what constitutes music that is linked always to its social context, instantiated by practices of music by practitioners. Small (1998) sets the scene for this rethinking when he asserts music to be a human birthright that has been hijacked by the prevailing expert or “elitist” model of music performance prevalent in western societies (1998, p. 8). If music is to be found in the action of musicking, as Small suggests, then there exists the possibility of multiple musics.

**Epistemology.**

**Communicative.** Several theoretical positions about how we come to know music– its epistemology–sharpen the focus of this study. Music may be understood as a core human
capacity, an idea set out in Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen’s theory of “communicative musicality” (2010; Trevarthen, 2002). According to this model, humans possess the ability and are biologically “primed” for making music. Social companionship and learning, occurring within a specific cultural context, play a critical role in an individual’s musical development.

Music making may communicate motives (Stige, 2002a), be a means of communication that may convey or contain meaning (Miell, MacDonald, & Hargreaves, 2005) and, extending the notion of musical communicativity, be compared to language, albeit “not an unambiguous, discursive language” (Wigram et al., 2002, p. 39). A further distinction within music communication, captured by Raymond MacDonald, Dorothy Miell, and Graeme Wilson (2005, p. 321), is useful for this study. These authors suggest music may be a means of communication and signalling of identity through talking about music.

**Music-as-action.** Music may be viewed as a place of agency and efficacy rather than stasis. Small (1998) reframes music as action rather than object, using a phenomenological study of the concert hall and symphony experience in the Western classical tradition to set out his ideas. He reinstates an outmoded verb, musicking, claiming it for use in describing the action of music-making (p. 9). Small thereby shifts attention toward the social function of music. This influential alternative view challenges Western music scholars, articulating with conviction that music may be viewed differently; not a thing at all but an activity, something people do (Small, 1998, p. 2).

Music is therefore made within an active rather than passive social world. Small’s rich description of the act of musicking captures the variety of relationships and offers a vision of ideal relationships in this setting:
The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organised sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance image them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world. (Small, 1998, p. 13)

Music, then, becomes something powerful, concerned with the creation and performance of relationships (Ansdell, 2004, p. 71; Small, 1998, p. 193). Acts of musicking may be used to change things, to influence or to manipulate for power, status, or financial gain, or to prescribe a notion of what constitutes musicking and legitimate music upon individuals. In the choices made, musicking is therefore a political act, even in situations where no explicit politics is at play. With the symphony orchestra performance experience, Small suggests that everyone takes on a theory of musicking in the musical decisions they make, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Small’s approach is similar to an important contribution by David Elliott (1995) in his earlier advocacy of a “new” philosophy of music education, which argues music teaching and learning to be a human activity rather than aesthetic experience—“something that people do” (p. 39). Elliott similarly advocates music-as-action rather than music-as-object, and maintains that music must be viewed in its context. Drawing upon Aristotle’s notion of praxis, he argues that that action must include not only correct tasks (techné) but also right action (telos, eidos) that accommodate morality and acting truly and rightly (1995, pp. 66-67). This element of acting truly and rightly forms an important motivation for members of a choir who perceive a sense of purpose and obligation to a broader LGBTI community. Elliott’s praxis-based (or praxeological) approach to music has been debated in music education, with many scholars engaging with and debating his approach since (Daugherty;
Elliott, 1997; McCarthy, 2000; Reimer, 1996), including under his editorial guidance (Elliott, 2005). The experience of music making, or as Elliott terms it, *musicing*, sits alongside the “musickers” (musicians) and music, but does not go as far as Small’s “musicking” in its scope. Importantly for this study, Small’s definition encompasses all contributors to a musical experience, including audiences, backstage staff, venue hosts, and others. Music therefore extends beyond the practice and performance of musical artefacts to be a combination of performed relationships (Stige, 2002a) and extra- (Stige & Aarø, 2012) or para- (DeNora, 2013) musical elements. In contrast to Stige (2012, p. 186), I use extra- rather than para-musical, to highlight that many choir-related activities (such as fundraisers) do not relate directly to the music yet I contend are integral to the choir musicking experience.

**Developing social understandings of musicking.** Taking up this idea, Small’s understanding of music-in-action is compelling for its capacity to explore the lived experiences of members singing in the youth chorus in ways that extend well beyond music, including to assumptions and constructions of gender, sexuality, and identity. The social context is therefore given prominence alongside purely musical experiences. Small’s approach challenges the stripping back of music-as-object, something to be studied from afar and without a full picture of its social and cultural context. His approach moves into more critical terrain, thereby challenging conventional understandings of musicology.

Building upon early proponents such as Joseph Kerman (1985), scholars of critical musicology such as Alistair Williams (2001) and Nicholas Cook (2000) and Mark Everist (Cook & Everist, 1997), discuss this disciplinary shift away from an historically positivist footing and toward a more critical orientation. Williams asserts that the future of musicology relies on its development as a reflexive discipline, and advocates an approach to musicology that shows both how it is situated by, and shapes, music (p. 140). For Williams, music is co-
constitutive, “embedded in discourses and surrounded by ideas that contribute to its meaning” (p. 1). Indeed, the very use of the word musicology suggests a separation of subject and object that this thesis challenges: to study music is to be a part of it, whether musicking or in being complicit to its impact, by writing about it.

Cook (2000) critiques music as a static concept, and the language that accompanies it. He suggests instead:

There is, in short, a nexus of interrelated assumptions built into the basic language we use of music: that musicianship is the preserve of appropriately qualified specialists; that innovation (research and design) is central to musical culture; that the key personnel in musical culture are the composers who generate what might be termed the core product; that performers are in essence no more than middlemen, apart from those exceptional interpreters who acquire a kind of honorary composers’ status; and that the listeners are consumers, playing an essentially passive role in the cultural process that, in economic terms, they underpin…But in truth none of these things are natural; they are all human constructions, products of culture, and accordingly vary from time to time and place to place. (p. 17)

This thesis challenges the notion that music is something you know and that is “embraced within the structures of the knowledge industry” (Cook, 2000, p. 99), suggesting instead that music is also something you do: that what you know about music and its doing may be of secondary importance.

Viewed from a slightly different lens, this approach to music considers it not only as socially located but also as a valuable resource people draw upon in their everyday lives (DeNora, 2000, 2007, 2012, 2014). A central goal of this thesis, therefore, is to contribute a rich and detailed sociologically-based study of “how real people actually press music into action in particular social spaces and temporal settings” (DeNora, 2000, p. x), and DeNora’s depiction of music as a technology of the self (2000, chapter 3).

**Music and health ecologies.** Ansdell (1997) takes up this more critical reading of traditional musicology, arguing that music ought to be placed within its social context rather
than understood as “object.” Rather than something fixed, Ansdell calls for characterisation of music as ecological: “a balance of interlinking forms and processes in a context that sustains them and guaranties diversity” (Ansdell, 1997, pp. 43-44; cited again in Ansdell, 2004, p. 74). Drawing together musical lifeworlds with ecologies of health and illness, Ansdell (2014) proposes “music and health ecologies” as places “where health and wellbeing can be seen as musically influenced and managed” (p.48). Ansdell adapts an ecological model initially developed within developmental psychology by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) in relation to childhood development for a musical context. He sets out social layers that expand from individual identities to include microsystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. I explore Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model in relation to the youth chorus identity shortly.

**Music as political and powerful.** Musicking may set and shift the horizons and goalposts that shape our social actions, an understanding that forms the premise upon which music may be used in a utilitarian fashion to influence health and wellbeing. Brynjulf Stige (2002a) talks of “the power of musicking” in society. Having established music as a social activity with innate biological foundations and communicative features, I suggest DeNora’s work offers deeper insights into how music is experienced and employed in everyday life.

DeNora (2000) makes a similar argument for the political role that music can play in everyday life. DeNora takes as her starting point the work of philosopher, musicologist, and composer, Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), for whom music was “linked to cognitive habits, modes of consciousness and historical developments” (DeNora, 2000, p. 1). DeNora departs from the traditions of abstract and ephemeral writing common to music sociology and cultural studies (2000, p. x), and instead undertakes a series of close ethnographic studies using examples from everyday life. Through rich depictions such as the experience of taking a commercial flight, DeNora describes the processes by which music may be an agent of
social change or reflection as “a resource for making sense of situations, as something of which people may become aware when they are trying to determine or tune into an ongoing situation” (p. 13). Later, she describes music to be “in a dynamic relation with social life, helping to invoke, stabilise, and change the parameters of agency, collective and individual” (p. 20).

This position takes music far from its traditional epistemological position as a descriptor, communicator, or object, and toward understandings of music as a source of social power and an agent of change and that may “structure the parameters of action” (p. 20). As a technology of the self, music may function as a means of self-representation, of self-regulation, and a way of forming social alliances: it is “a device or resource to which people turn in order to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents, as feeling, thinking and acting beings in their day-to-day lives” (p. 62). DeNora (2013, pp. 135-137) writes of ecologies of wellbeing–environments in which wellbeing ebbs and flows, particularly in relation to music.

Having established music as active, social, and powerful, I discuss the merits of health musicking and consider alternative scholarly locations for this study.

**Musicking for health, health musicking.** In his 2003 doctoral dissertation, Stige calls for “further research on communal musicking and on health as participation, performance, and mutual care” (Stige, 2003, p. 456). The choir may be considered an example of health musicking (Ruud, 2012; Stige, 2012; Stige & Aarø, 2012): a musicking activity that sits at the centre of music, health, and wellbeing. Stige (2012, pp. 186-188) describes five key components of ‘health musicking,’ embodying and accompanying musical practice: arena, agenda, agents, activities, and artefacts. Of interest here are those human actors involved in health musicking (the “agents” according to Stige’s definition), including choir members and leaders - “the new health musicians” as Ruud (Ruud, 2012) describes them.
Stige (2012) eloquently makes the case for a broader understanding of health as socially determined:

As the notion of health is expanded from “not being sick” to include personal and social wellbeing, it is obvious that the health sector is only a small (though important) factor defining our health. Our education and work situation, the social relationships we are part of, and the cultural activities we take part in are all seminal influences. We do not exactly choose these things freely, as our lives are subject to financial, social, and cultural constraints, but we can seek for possibilities of making a difference in our own lives. (p. 185).

Viewing community music practices in this way fosters openness to the range of factors that may contribute to a musical experience. Within a broad disciplinary base of health musicking, we can look more closely at where this community choir, which involves the active and deliberate intervention of community musicians with the LGBTI community, may sit. Health musicking combines both music therapy and community music scholarship, to be explored next.

Recognising my professional practice base as a choral musician working in community settings, I situate this study within community music scholarship, drawing upon community music therapy and social psychological approaches in support. In the following section I discuss community music in more detail, discussing briefly alternative approaches as they relate to it, and noting that perspectives from music sociology feature throughout. I then identify key thematic literature in relation to choral singing in community settings that informs this project.

**Community music.**

*“Thoughtful disruption”: Towards a definition of community music.* Community music has flourished as a practice-orientated discipline and with a scholarly base emerging only in recent decades, linked closely to music education (Higgins & Bartleet, 2012).
Scholars gathering at the Community Music Activity Commission of the International Society of Music Education (ISME) have wrestled in recent years with definitions and concepts in community music, how and whether to delineate the field given its activist roots. The discussion below engages with “community music” as it is commonly known in English-speaking countries, acknowledging that understandings of the term differ, and that the term itself is contentious and varies internationally. Germany, for example, retains the English term in part due to the misuse of utilitarian use of music for negative ends in its history (Keden, 2003; Kertz-Welzel, 2008; Leske, 2016).

Anthony Everitt (1997), in a study based in the United Kingdom (UK), argues for use of the term “participatory music” in place of community music. Seeking to do away with community music’s territorial definitions, he calls for a definition that better accounts for the “multifarious and often provisional forms of socialisation” (p. 160). Yet given its general familiarity, I favour the conclusion drawn by Higgins (2012, p. 137) to retain the term despite, and perhaps even in celebration of, its multifaceted understandings.

Given community music has been an “organic” practice in communities for many centuries (Schippers, in press), scholars in recent times have considered how best to define community music and its facilitators (see for instance Higgins, 2006, 2012; Kari K. Veblen, 2008; Kari K Veblen et al., 2013). Katheryn Deane and Phil Mullen (2013) define community musicians as ‘…professional musicians carrying out interventions intended to have [positive] consequences other than musical, as opposed to laypeople (non-professional musicians) doing it for themselves, with results that may have [positive] consequences beyond the musical’ (p. 26, emphasis in original). Leaving aside the term “professional” in this definition – an ongoing discussion at ISME CMA around the question of qualifications and eligibility – the core understanding holds: of community musicians who take deliberate musical actions that may have extra-musical impacts.

This definition accommodates the connection between community music, community musicians, and health musicking according to Stige’s (2012) understanding. For professional musicians within an interest in health musicking – who use of music for the “shared and performed establishment of relationships that may promote health” (Stige, 2002a, p. 190) – both musical means and ends are important and are engaged with dialogically rather than in a goal-orientated fashion. In the case of the youth chorus, musical participation involves and unites both the means (people singing together) and ends (performing together), and both are important. Yet the calibration between these factors differ between different choirs and community music pursuits (discussed too within community music therapy, see Stige, 2002a, pp. 185-191). As the youth chorus study will suggest, this can lead to tensions for members and for the organisation: between goal-orientated musicking, in terms of a quality musical performance product, and; participatory musicking, recognising the health and wellbeing benefits of musicking, can produce multi-layered tensions. In the youth chorus, participation
is valued both as a means and end: members describe the importance of performance products alongside participation in their understanding of the choir. As set out in the introductory chapter of this thesis, Higgins’s dedicated 2012 study of community music theory and practice builds upon previous work (Higgins, 2006, 2007) and offers a detailed and sustained engagement with the concepts, themes, and practices of community music. Higgins eloquently describes community music is both an “active intervention” (2012, p. 3) and as “thoughtful disruption” (2015b). Community music practitioners, according to Higgins, may be regarded as “boundary walkers” (2012, p. 30): individuals who transcend structures, taking deliberate actions, and setting up practices with deliberate, positive goals in mind.

Alongside defining community music as a long-standing practice, and as an active intervention by practitioners, I suggest a third focus is required. Huib Schippers captures this additional element in a recent publication. Schippers (in press) suggests community music as consisting of an institutional element alongside its organic phenomenon and its engagement as an active intervention. He argues:

The needs of a community (or other stakeholders) are translated into an organizational structure, mostly with the aim to provide a long-term solution for the community. In most cases, the funding is sourced from central authorities that consider the community part of its brief, but largely operate outside of the community itself, and may dictate criteria that meet needs beyond those of the community (e.g. in terms of measurable outcomes or political gain). (p. 3)

In contrast to other examples of community musicking as an unstructured intervention (as set out in Higgins, 2012), it seems the institution is a fundamental structure for community music in a choir setting. The youth chorus’s organisational structure supports the community to function and enables its musicking. Yet at the same time it changes and grows, responds to, and is constrained by, its members. MGLC Inc and its main chorus thus form an important aspect of this thesis, providing structures that sustain and nurture the youth chorus.
Community music policies and practices worldwide. As an example of Australian community music practice, this study benefits from international scholarship, and the policies and educations systems in place that support community music practices and offer points of comparison to Australia. Higgins (2009) provides an overview of a range of studies internationally. In several publications, Kari Veblen and colleagues have surveyed community music and considered its future as a scholarly discipline (Veblen, 2008; Veblen & Waldron, 2012). Others have looked more critically at the discursive formation of the field (Yerichuk, 2014). A co-edited volume (Veblen et al., 2013) surveys practices of community music worldwide, using case studies and examples to highlight the breadth of activities underway. The volume provides important examples of community music practice by geographic location (such as the US, UK, the Nordic countries, and Australia), by theme (community music with at risk and marginalised groups, gay and lesbian choral music), and offers resources for practitioners.

Alongside “handbooks” for practitioners of community music in individual countries such as Australia (Cahill, 1998) and the UK (Moser et al., 2005), several country-specific scholarly provide international comparisons, including the UK (Everitt, 1997; Higgins, 2008), the US (C. L. Bell, 2008; Chorus America, 2009), and Germany (De Banffy-Hall, Hartogh, & Hill, 2016; Kertz-Welzel, 2008, 2013). The International Journal of Community Music, a dedicated community music journal, established in 2004 with close links to ISME CME, has sharpened the focus on community music as a field of scholarship. So too have professional associations for community musickers such as “Sound Sense” in the UK (Sound Sense, 2017) and the former “Music in Communities Network” in Australia (Music Australia, 2017b).

Community music practices in Australia. Several larger studies provide a policy and organisational overview of the Australian context in which community musicking takes
place, including a national research investigation into community music in Australia (Bartleet, 2010; Bartleet et al., 2009; Schippers & Bartleet, 2013), discussion of collaboration between community music and Australian schools (Bartleet, 2012) and state-based investigations (Gridley et al., 2011). Australians are active in the Community Music Activity stream of the International Society for Music Education (ISME CMA), with several Australian scholars, including Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Gillian Howell, serving in ISME CMA leadership roles.

A recent German-language publication (Leske & Loewe, in press) notes that Australia’s dynamic and thriving community choral scene retains its amateur character, and scholarly research into community music, perhaps as a result, has not enjoyed the level of scholarly attention and public profile afforded community music other countries. This is particularly the case when compared to the UK, where a community music movement thrives that includes choral music (Deane & Mullen, 2013; Higgins, 2008, 2012). Other studies within an Australian context include an exploration of the performance of identity and Australian music festivals (Duffy, 2001), and the role of choral singing in Australia within wider community music discussions, in non-metropolitan settings (Sattler, 2016), and in the Bega Valley region of New South Wales (A. Gordon, 2012). The latter two consider the important relationship of community choral music to community wellbeing: of the benefits for distinct communities that group musicking affords. Similarly, a detailed review by Carol Dore and Janice Pascale (2010) surveys the potential for community singing and community arts practices in social work. Internationally, a recent cross-national study explores similarities between community choral music in Australia and Germany (Leske, 2016). More limited and industry-specific surveys of community choral music (Masso, 2013) provide a snapshot of the Australian choral music movement. Where these scholars developed a broader picture from multiple cases, others look specifically to meanings and experiences
singing within specific Australian choral groups, exemplified in the work of Jane Southcott and Dawn Joseph (D. Joseph & Southcott, 2014; Joseph, 2009; Southcott & Joseph, 2013, 2015). The following section considers two alternative locations, music therapy and psychology, as they relate to this study.

**Integrating alternative approaches.**

**Music therapy and community music.** As a community musician, I situate this study with community music concepts and practices, but recognise there are shared experiences and some lessons to be learned from practices of community music therapy. A greater focus on music therapeutic literature reflects too my location within this scholarly discipline. In the following section, I set out my understanding of community music therapy as a discreet sub-discipline of music therapy, and highlight common themes in its relationship with community music.

Conceptually, music therapy approaches contend music may be a tool in recovery from illness and the recovery of health, whether this may be in mental health or engagement and action within a community (Solli, 2015). Much scholarship in this area talk of the benefits to individuals within the group, framed within a broader context of the potentials for musical healing in cultural contexts (Gouk, 2000). Music therapy is grounded in theories of paramedical and psychological intervention (Ansdell, 2002; K. McFerran & Hunt, 2008), and has grown into a respected allied health profession in many countries, including Australia. An extensive and expert literature has developed to support music therapy and its role in society, with studies using a range of research traditions to explore key research challenges. Music therapists “use the properties of music to motivate health-orientated behaviour, facilitate insight, and promote communication and expression” (K. McFerran & Hunt, 2008, p. 44). As outlined in Chapter 1, music therapy scholars such as Stige (2012) describe the discipline as
having a responsibility to foster interdisciplinarity given its bridging role between music and health (p. 183).

In recent decades, seeking to broaden what had been a narrower focus on therapeutic and social transformation goals of individuals, scholars have considered broader questions of what constitutes health and wellbeing in social settings, exploring the role that music therapy might play in facilitating both treatment and prevention (Kenny & Stige, 2002; Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004; Ruud, 1997; Wigram et al., 2002) and for considering the potential for using music in a prophylactic and preventive way (1997, p. 88). Challenging the consensus model several years later, Gary Ansdell (2002) suggested that music therapy needed to adapt to the social changes underway and move beyond a view of health as the absence of sickness. A broader focus on the wellbeing potentials of music emerged (Ansdell, 2002; Kenny & Stige, 2002; O'Grady & McFerran, 2007a; Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004; Stige, 2003; Stige et al., 2010) and the ensuing debate led to the development of community music therapy. Community music therapists emphasise and engage with prevention as well as treatment, consider the role of music and health in everyday life (Stige, 2012, pp. 183-184), and work with communities of priority (Stige, 2003) as well as individuals. A comprehensive 2012 study by Stige and Leif Aarø (2012) proposes seven key characteristics that characterise community music therapy according to the acronym PREPARE: participatory; resource-orientated; ecological; performative; activist; reflective, and ethics-driven. Mercédès Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2004, pp. 15-31) describe the effect of community music therapy as analogous to the ripples of a pebble in a pond. These authors talk of community music therapy’s effect – outwards from an isolated individual towards the community, but at the same time and as an extension of the traditional understanding of a ‘ripple effect’, drawing a community in and at times also creating community. The synergistic relationship to community music is evident it seems in a shared understanding of how communities are
created and nurtured through music, and in community music therapy’s underpinning sense of social activism: it seeks to promote sociocultural and communal change through a participatory approach (Higgins, 2012; O’Grady & McFerran, 2007a). To distinguish between two closely-related fields, O’Grady and McFerran (O’Grady, 2005; O’Grady & McFerran, 2007a, 2007b) capture the practices of community musicians and community music therapists along a continuum of care in terms of health, wellbeing, and illness. For these authors, community music therapists and community musicians both tend to focus on the ‘community’ and ‘wellbeing’ areas of health, whereas music therapists may work across the whole health continuum. Traditional music therapy, these authors concluded (citing Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004), was more suitable in situations of acute illness and crisis. Community musicians and community music therapists worked along this continuum, and artistic output and the flexibility of boundaries were other distinguishing factors found by the authors to be important. Participatory models of musicking in community rather than acute settings are best suited to engaging young people, and require of them a sense of responsibility to the musicking practices (K. McFerran, 2010, pp. 191-192; O’Grady & McFerran, 2007a). The choir provides a compelling example of a community musician-led musicking practice.

**Psychological approaches.** I considered several psychological perspectives for this study. Scholars with an interest in the psychology of music have studied the musicking experience and creation of individual moments of musical flow achieved when musicking together, in music therapy and other settings (Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Felicity A. Baker & MacDonald, 2013; Bakker, 2005; Byrne, Carlton, & MacDonald, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013).

The contention that choral music may foster individual and group wellbeing, backed
by a growing evidence base to be discussed shortly, has close ties to the positive psychology literature and its popular notions of wellbeing captured by Martin Seligman (2002, 2013). Seligman’s approach to wellbeing emphasises meaning and purpose, positive emotions, relationships, and accomplishment. Similarly, the notion of human flourishing or *eudaimonia* (Ansdell & DeNora, 2012; Keyes & Haidt, 2003) extends the wellbeing discourse, with Vernon (Vernon, 2014) defining wellbeing as a “higher flourishing” (Vernon, 2014, p. 6).

In social psychology, the emergence of self-determination theory since the 1980s considers intrinsic motivation and the processes by which individuals can sustain engagement in an activity. Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000) argue that, more than finding meaning of positive feelings for an activity, it must be internalised. Internalisation, in turn, relies upon competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This position has been used to explain motivation in youth engagement programs (Dawes & Larson, 2011) for instance.

While these psychological approaches are instructive, I seek with this thesis to take a different path. Rather than a focus on the individual, I seek instead a sociological understanding that engages with the social potentials (and challenges) for creating and sustaining wellbeing, and is congruent with a more reflexive approach. As Ruud (2010, pp. 142-143) observes regarding positive psychology, Seligman’s approach foregrounds empirical evidence over more humanistic approaches to psychology, and may be criticised for its lack of nuance; something found in phenomenology.

As a phenomenologically-informed study, I wanted to avoid privileging positive interactions and experiences as far as possible. In choosing not to engage with this literature in depth, I sought to avoid a dilemma faced by many scholars of music and community music who seek to identify the positive elements of a musical experience, at the potential expense of a fuller understanding. In recent times, in music therapy and its interactions with young
people (K. S. McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014), efforts have been made to consider all sides of
the musical experience. Having established music as a tool that can be used for wellbeing,
and set this within a community music frame, I now look more closely at music as a means to
build communities.

Community building, music, and belonging. Music may be viewed as a social
resource and a way to heal and strengthen communities. Gerard Delanty (2013), notes its
performative element, describing it as “a set of practices that constitute belonging” (p. 187)
134-135), taking up the delineation in German discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis,
sets out the two sides to modern understandings of community: communis (common +
defence) and communes (common duties or functions). Ansdell (2010; 2014) explores the
idea of musical community in several publications. He suggests community contains within it
both the sense of having something in common, something together with or united against,
but at the same time a sense of duty or obligation to the community (2014, p. 219). The ideal
of unity or community, Ansdell asserts, links to four elements that sit in tension with one
another: defensive work, hospitable work, obligations, and threats. Community viewed in this
way captures a self-subverting, almost paradoxical notion.

In the context of musical belonging, Ansdell (pp. 219-220) distils four types of
community: according to place, identity, practice, and circumstance. While Ansdell talks of
an individual potentially experiencing more than one type of identity, simultaneously a social
institution such as the youth chorus may fulfil all four. Ansdell sets out the complex and
contested notion of community, describing, regarding Higgins’s work (2012), how our
modern notion of community contains within it an element of subversion. Community carries
both a defensive and a hospitable element to it (Ansdell, 2014, p. 219). This defensiveness is
evident in the formation an “other” through which to relate back to the “self”, a topic I return to later in the thesis in relation to the choir.

Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2005, p. 210) discuss the importance of Turner’s idea of *communitas* in musical contexts as a performative place that is shared and good to be in together (to “be-in-place-together”). Sociologist Gerard Delanty (2013) argues for the centrality of belonging to communitas with the sense of belonging more fundamental than communitas as a social manifestation. It is, further, a place that creates a “sense of mutual presence, dialogue, levelling of social roles and flow of musical communication” (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2005, p. 210). For Ansdell, there is potential for finding community and for using music strategically, though, like any community, it may involve “both benefits and dilemmas” (221). After weighing up the critiques and complexities of community, Ansdell concludes:

Despite all of this, I think we still need to preserve a space for people’s own personal experiences of the usually positive local and immediate affordances of musicking for giving them a sense of belonging and community. (Ansdell, 2014, p. 221)

Group singing, particularly choral singing, provide an insight into these dilemmas.

**Benefits of group singing.** To recap, central to this study is the premise that singing in an important means of interpersonal, social, and cultural communication within a community. Higgins talks about music practiced in community as an example of cultural democracy (Higgins, 2012). In music therapy, Even Ruud (2004) describes both community music and community music therapy share a common belief that music may be a means to build networks and, symbolically, to empower subordinated groups. Put differently, music may attend to unheard voices (Stige & Aarø, 2012). Taking this axiological position, I can explore the wellbeing potentials of group and singing.
There are already a host of studies, both qualitative and quantitative, that explore different physiological, neurological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects to community singing, and links between singing, health, and wellbeing. Studies by community musicians, music therapists, music educators, music sociologists, and voice scholars have explored the benefits of singing for individuals, including: during individual lessons (Grape, Sandgren, Hansson, Ericson, & Theorell, 2003); in community or group settings (Bailey & Davidson, 2003; S. Clift et al., 2007; Davidson, 2008; Davies & Richards, 2002; Judd & Pooley, 2014; Kirsh, van Leer, Phero, Xie, & Khosla (2013). Sun, Buys, & Merrick, 2012); in education (K. Russell, 2007); for young people in Australia (K. McFerran & Hunt, 2008); for older people (Hallam, Creech, Varvarigou, & McQueen, 2012); in juvenile justice and rehabilitation (Clennon, 2013); and at end of life (DeNora, 2012).

Group singing, regardless of whether it takes place in a choir or a less formal setting such as a bar, sports stadium, or other social setting, is special (Pearce, Launay, Machin, & Dunbar, 2016). Graham Welch (2005, p. 254) sets out the important communicative features of singing in social and cultural contexts, including: singing as a form of group identification and social bonding; singing as a transformational cultural activity; the potential for regular singing to communicate pattern, order, and a sense of contrast to everyday work and study lives (particularly in the community context), and; singing as an agent in the communication of cultural change. It is something distinct from what Small (1998) terms “elitist” modes of performance (Bailey & Davidson, 2005), and with an understanding of belonging and community at its heart.

Scholars have explored in detail the health and wellbeing benefits of group and choral singing from a variety of perspectives (Bailey & Davidson, 2002, 2003, 2005; Busch & Gick, 2012; S. Clift & Hancox, 2010; S. Clift et al., 2007; Stephen M. Clift, 2012; S.M. Clift &
Hancox, 2001; S. M. Clift, Hancox, Morrison, Hess, & Stewart, 2010; Jane W. Davidson & Emberly, 2012; Dingle, Brander, Ballantyne, & Baker, 2013; Gick, 2011). A recent quantitative study protocol published within the discipline of psychiatry seeks to better understand the experiences of older singers (Coulton, Clift, Skingley, & Rodriguez, 2015). Betty Bailey and Jane Davidson (Bailey & Davidson, 2005) examine how expectations ascribed by singers in group settings may differ according to socio-economic backgrounds. In a more recent study, Davidson (2011) emphasises the beneficial impact of group singing for “socially marginalized” populations, suggesting key factors that contribute to wellbeing.

Others have explored scientific and physiological benefits from choral singing (R. J. Beck, Cesario, Yousefi, & Enamoto, 2000). Clift and Hancox (S. Clift & Hancox, 2010; S. Clift et al., 2007) used psychological measures to identify the benefits of choral singing in a cross-national study. These perspectives include from psychology (Bailey & Davidson, 2002, 2003; Jane W Davidson, 2008; Dingle, Williams, Jetten & Welch, 2017; Grape et al., 2003; Pearce, Launay, & Dunbar, 2015; Stewart & Lonsdale, 2016), community music (Higgins, 2015a; D. Joseph & Southcott, 2014; Li & Southcott, 2012; Southcott & Joseph, 2013, 2015), and have been translated for promotion within Australian public discourse (McPherson, 2016).

In Australia, choirs in school settings may also be sites for community music facilitators (Higgins & Bartleet, 2012). Others have choral singing and social inclusion (Ahlquist, 2006; Carpenter, 2015), and profiled the benefits of choral singing in local Victorian communities, for instance (D. Joseph & Southcott, 2014; Li & Southcott, 2012; Southcott & Joseph, 2013, 2015). The benefits of singing for SSAGD young people will be explored later in the thesis.

More fundamentally, I suggest choral singing may be differentiated from other, non-
musical health promoting activities by its ability to create an aesthetic product (beautiful music, harmonies, and experiences), and by the innate accessibility of the human voice-as-instrument. These qualities are important and central to scholarship and practice in community music. Both De Nora (2013) and Ansdell (2014) offer a more nuanced, critical perspective that challenges my initial, rather one-dimensional view of “choral singing as good for you”. Both scholars approach wellbeing in the context of musicking not simply as transactional but as ecological, the product of a gathering of countless factors and influences.

**Choirs and community building.** This understanding supports a deeper exploration of the link between choral singing and wellbeing and, specifically, examples of how it is enacted in different settings. It is important to distinguish the choral music of interest here from elite music-making and its tendency toward exclusionary practices, as set out by André de Quadros (2015). Given the central location of this choir’s SSAGD identity as an “other” in the sense of Bradley’s (2003) work on race and choral singing, and the potential of its members to experience social exclusion, a more nuanced understanding of this aspect of group singing – that is, both its benefits and potential shortcomings – is useful. In school settings, a comprehensive review of qualitative research into choral music in US educational settings highlights the importance of choirs as potentially safe places for both students and teachers, but of the importance and variability of both the choral environment and the qualities of the teacher in shaping the experience of choir members (Sweet, 2014).

Outside formal educational settings, a growing body of literature explores the value of choir singing for addressing social exclusion and for finding a sense of place within a community, recognising the associated benefits for individual and community wellbeing (Dingle, Brander, Ballantyne, & Baker, 2013; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006; Stewart & Lonsdale, 2016). Betty Bailey & Jane Davidson (2002, 2005) conducted a qualitative study of
a small choir for men experiencing homelessness, finding significant therapeutic benefits to group singing. Other scholars examine specifically the musicking experiences of singing in community choirs internationally (Ahlquist, 2006; Avery et al., 2013). Numerous studies discuss the role of singing for social inclusion in specific contexts (S. Clift & Hancox, 2010; S. Clift et al., 2007; S.M. Clift & Hancox, 2001; Dingle et al., 2013; MacDonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2012; Welch, 2005; Welch, Himonides, Saunders, Papageorgi, & Sarazin, 2014). More recent studies have explored musical and social backgrounds and motivations for choir singing (Kreutz & Brünger, 2012), the relationship between choral singing and social bonding (Pearce, Launay, & Dunbar, 2015), choral singing and the expression of identities (Avery et al., 2013), and discussed Higgins’s notion of hospitality in relation to choral singing for members with refugee backgrounds (Balsnes, 2016). In a detailed phenomenological study of the choir leader as a sense-maker and liberator, Dag Jansson (2013) sets out the role of choirs in community settings as sites of choral pedagogy – places for the teaching and learning of singing in a choir setting.

**Choirs and choral pedagogy.** An Oxford Handbook (Abrahams & Head, 2017) and studies of choral singing in schools (Freer, 2016) explore the many aspects of choral pedagogy. They build upon earlier discussions of the experiences of leading choirs and of being led by choral leaders (Durrant & Himonides, 1998; Jansson, 2013; Kemp, 2013; Marotto et al., 2001). Other scholars explore the more technical aspects of the craft of choral conducting and voice pedagogy (Durrant, 2012; Ferrell, 2015; Jordan, 1996). Less attention is paid to some of the non-musical skills required when working in community settings. In Australia, the work of organisations such as Community Music Victoria and their recent community choral leadership guide (Morgan & Community Music Victoria, 2017), along with notable UK examples (Moser et al., 2005) provide examples of dedicated, community-
focused leadership guides for singing groups and choirs. Two further conceptual frameworks warrant short discussions at this point, relating loosely to how members appropriate the choir as a musical community of practice, and the affordances choir provides as places of musical capital.

Choirs, musical capital, and musical communities of practice. Community choirs may be sites for the generation of social capital. Theories of social capital suggest a sense of shared norms, values, and understandings that together engender trust and co-operation in and among groups (Keeley, 2007) and act as a form of sociological superglue (Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). Scholars have applied understandings of social capital to musical settings (Louhivuori, Salminen, & Lebaka, 2005). Putnam’s work has been explored in Australian community music settings by Thomas Langston (Jones & Langston, 2012; T. Langston, 2011; T. W. Langston & Barrett, 2008) to examine examples of places where trust is built and where there is community and civic involvement, learning and the presence of networks. According to Langston:

…choirs and similar organizations are strong community resources, crucial in the creation of social capital that benefits the whole community. Choirs that embody strong community connection, individual autonomy, bonds and fellowship greatly enhance the chances of successful creation of social capital, by binding together people with similar interests and backgrounds to create an environment of mutual cooperation, friendship and goodwill. (T. Langston, 2011, p. 179)

Similarly, choirs might also be considered as representative of wider social groups and clubs which associate around a common learning activity that Etienne Wenger describes as “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002), with echoes in Ruud’s (1997) treatise about music and quality of life. This conceptual model describes a community built from practices – with more invested than a sharing of interests and including a shared “repertoire of resources” as Wenger (n.d.) describes. Balsnes and Jansson (2015) explored
this theory in relation to workplace choirs in Norway. Margaret Barrett (2005) applies Wenger’s model to musical settings, describing children’s communities of musical practice as: “communities in which children are active agents in the determination of the location, the participants, and the nature and range of the activities involved” (Barrett, 2005, p. 261).

Nevertheless, I suggest a more sophisticated tool is needed in the case of the youth chorus would enable deeper engagement with the meanings ascribed to the choir by its members and the implicit links between choral singing and the mental wellbeing of members, and recognise the value of the choir’s collective public identity to member experiences.

**Choral singing and social activism.** Finally, choral singing may also act as a site of social activism and protest (Ahlquist, 2006; Myers, 2011; Stige & Aarø, 2012), an element that is central to the youth chorus’s musical ecology. Choral singing is historically important in Australian LGBTI community activism (Hardy, 2013; Leske & Wilson, 2013) and is the subject of numerous US studies (Avery et al., 2013; Hilliard, 2008; Strachan, 2006). In the US, the LA Gay Men’s Chorus program that uses choral music as a teaching tool in school settings (Knotts & Gregorio, 2011). As a choir within a choir, MGLC Inc offers insights too into the key role of older LGBTI generations and the role that they can play in supporting cultural change in LGBTI young people.

It is as a site of social activism that understandings of identity emerge and diverge. For youth chorus members, the focus of their social activism relates to their identities, and how the various threads of a member’s individual identities interact, and these individual threads into the choir’s collective identity in turn. The second part of this chapter explores identities of youth, music, and gender and sexuality.

**Identities of Music, Youth, Gender, and Sexuality**
A second foundational thread that motivates this thesis is an interest in the identities youth chorus members describe in relation to themselves and the choir. I introduce the notion of identities as (broadly) socially constructed and examine music and musical identities in this context. Similarly, it is important to introduce youth identities, sexuality and gender identities, and their intersection with musical identities, as may be experienced within, and ascribed to, the choir. To do so I set out individual social identities of choir members from three positions: as young people; as musicians; and as SSAGD people.

While attempting to distinguish between literature according to each of these identity characteristics, I note that such a delineation is problematic. The identities of individual members are like a tapestry; that is, as something interwoven, where unpicking one thread risks a wider unravelling and ignores the larger picture. For these young people, it is problematic to seek to identify individual strands of their identities as they are represented in their interviews. Combining the three, I reflect briefly on the wellbeing potentials of queer youth musicking for these young SSAGD singers.

**Background: Introducing Identity.** With an understanding of identities as formed within distinctive social, and in this case also musical, worlds, I introduce several theoretical concepts that support a sociological understanding of social identities. The first concept, developing from within social psychology, establishes the difference between individual identities and group identities, suggesting that social identity theory can explain differentiation and may be “a theory of social change with an implicit agenda of equality and liberation” (Spears, 2011, p. 207). The second approach, from developmental psychology, sets identity within an ecological framework.

*Establishing a socially-located self.*
**Individual identities.** A social constructionist understanding of identities, reflected in critical social psychology perspectives, holds that individual identity is formed within a distinctive social and cultural ecology, and forms part of a person’s narrative identity – their “…internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life” (McAdams, 2011, p. 99). Three elements form and maintain identities, according to Ansdell (2014): the outer self, that is, the outer and inner evidence of the acting body; the inner processes of the psyche such as memory and imagination, and; in “the ongoing public affirmation and witness of others and the wider community” (p. 115). A flow is needed between social context, objects, and the person (p. 116).

**Social identity theory (psychology).** Spears (2011) provides an overview of the social identity approach within psychology. Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory, closely related. Social identity theory within psychology provides one approach to understanding social identities in group settings (Spears, 2011). Social identity theory emerged from the work of Henri Tajfel (1978) and seeks to describe processes of social categorisation into and between groups of people who identify themselves as belonging to a particular group (Spears, 2011, p. 203). Self-categorisation theory, captured in the work of John Turner (J. C. Turner, 1987), grew from social identity theory, and is best described as a general theory of the self. Going beyond collective behaviour, it explores self-categorisation according to different “levels of abstraction;” that is, how we categorise ourselves personally and in relation to the groups around us (Spears, 2011, p. 208). Both theories offer important background for this study, for their interest in individual member understandings and a keen sense of its collective identity.

**Formed within an ecological social context.** As a study of the experiences of singing within a choir, the social setting of the group is important. In suggesting a sociological
understanding of identity rather than shaped by individual psychological development, I suggest Martin Buber’s (1983/1923) depiction of the “I-Thou” encounter offers a philosophical entry point. Identity formation works in two ways according to Buber’s understanding: of humans engaging with the world as experience, which he termed the “I-It,” and; as a relational encounter between the individual and objects, the “I-Thou” or “I-You” (Buber, 1983). For Buber, individuals make sense of both their experiences (in this case, of choir) and their encounters with other individuals (other choir members) and objects (the choir’s repertoire, performances, management committee, and its other structures) that shape their worldviews. Susan O’Neill (2002, pp. 85-86) suggests the self-identities of young musicians may be heavily influenced by the social worlds in which they live their lives (Giddens, 1991). Members describe their experiences as musicians of course, but also as soloists, activists, leaders, organisers, performers, altruists, and as a collective of people who see themselves as special in some way.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological understanding. An ecological approach as was initially developed within developmental psychology by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) in relation to childhood development. Bronfenbrenner’s model, which has been influential in the field of community psychology (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007, pp. 172-173), provides a useful setting for the role of individuals within the choir. In a more recent study, Bronfenbrenner (2009) sets out an ecological orientation to human development, suggesting that of most importance is to understand individuals as they understand the environment around them rather than what others might understand as an “objective reality” (p. 4). He draws upon Kurt Lewin’s perspective, that what makes an environment real is something perceived in the mind of individuals who interact within and with it rather than as the “objective world” (Lewin, cited in Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Bronfenbrenner argues the development of individuals occurs
within a series of “Russian doll-like” systems that contain one another, consisting of: microsystems (such as the family, peers, or school, for example); mesosystems (links between the microsystems of family and school); exosystems (those larger social frameworks that influence the individual such as the media, politics, and social services), and; macrosystems (cultural factors, attitudes, and ideologies that shape individuals). Importantly for this study, macrosystems accommodates potential as well as actual systems. That is, Bronfenbrenner (2009, p. 26) emphasises there is room for things that could exist, acknowledging possible blueprints for the future, and allowing for critical understandings of how the world could be. This model has been used in recent community music therapy scholarship (Stige & Aarø, 2012, p. 88) and provides a useful framework in the context of the youth chorus.

The socially-constructed self, according to this understanding, is therefore socially-located: influenced and influencing the numerous surrounding systems or layers. This psychological understanding of the self as socially-located forms the basis for a sociological exploration and a segue into deeper analysis of the lenses through which individuals perceive themselves and their social worlds. I acknowledge too that the act of interviewing members for this research itself contributes to the choir’s collective voice, supporting Anthony Giddens’ (1991) assertion that “…in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications” (p. 2).

Identity formation is a reflexive project (p. 32) closely linked to the idea of self. Identity is seen by some to be part of a developmental process that leads to an enduring and singular endpoint. However, to give priority to social organisation and context, I suggest identity may be seen through a post-structuralist lens advocated by White and Wyn (2013, pp.
that views it as existing only through a point of action. Identities are the expression of one’s individual trajectory and pathway in life and of the social conditions in which this path is walked. This view of identity contends that individuals only experience a limited range of subjectivities. Their social world is constrained and shaped by specific social contexts and there are only a limited number of possible subjectivities (White & Wyn, 2013, p. 12, citing Davies, 2004).

Having established a sociologically-informed framework for identities, several further aspects refine my understanding of the youth chorus member interview experiences: youth identities, the musical identities of young people as choral singers, and the relationship of these social identities to members as LGBTI young people, and collectively as a queer choir.

Musical Identities.

Psychological perspectives. The contributions of David Hargreaves, Raymond MacDonald, and Dorothy Miell (2015; 2002) clarify an important distinction between identities formed within music and the social notion of music formed within identities. In their formative contributions to debates around musical identities⁴, these authors describe the shift away from a focus on the self (that is, the stability of the core to an individual’s personality) and toward a more dynamic view of a self that is “constantly being restructured and renegotiated” in everyday life (Hargreaves et al., 2002, p. 2). The authors draw a useful distinction between “identities in music” – identities that are formed within music and defined within cultural or social settings, such as musical identities formed of a musical genre (pop music, classical music, metal) – and the use of music as a tool to develop other aspects

⁴ An update to this edited volume is due for release later in 2017 but unavailable at the time of thesis submission. I look forward to reading it.
of an individual’s identity beyond musical identity, which they term “music in identities” (Hargreaves et al., 2002). This distinction will be considered alongside music sociology literature, including discussion of non-musical elements as a guide and resource for musical production (DeNora, 1995, pp. 310-311). DeNora later clarifies as musical affordance and appropriation (DeNora, 2000, 2007).

Sociological, educational, and therapeutic perspectives. Music, particularly the learning of musical skills in educational settings and the relationships formed when musicking, may form an important part of young people’s lives (McPherson, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2012). Music may also play a vital role in the formation of young people’s identities. Yet where there are already many studies in the context of institutional settings and with school-age populations, there are fewer examples of the work of community music groups outside of formal educational settings. This is a fragile moment where community and leisure activities for these young people support the formation, practice, and recognition of identity (White & Wyn, 2013, p. 180).

In her edited volume outlining a vast range of case studies of learning, teaching, and musical identity from around the world, Lucy Green (2011, p. 1), discusses musical identities as “forged from a combination of personal, individual musical experiences on the one hand, and membership in various social groups – from the family to the nation-state and beyond – on the other hand.” Musical tastes, values, practices, skills, and knowledge all form part of a musical identity, and Green emphasises the importance of context – how, why, where, when – in the learning (acquisition) and teaching (transmission) of the elements described above (p. 1). Similarly, Bowman (2007) relates how music making affords a sense of a collective “we” – a sense of musical identity – that may be approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives:
At the center of all music making and musical experience lies a “we,” a sense of collective identity that powerfully influences individual identity. “I am,” then, not so much because “I think” or because “I perceive,” but because “we are,” and more particularly I want to assert here, because “we are, musically.” (p. 109)

DeNora talks of the sense of ‘self” as something locatable in music and its social context, with musical materials providing the terms and templates for elaborating self-identity: for claiming or “identifying” identity. It is in the process – the use of music in this way – that identities are found, formed, and reformed.

In broader music and health literature, Ruud (Ruud, 1997, 2012) explores the value of music in everyday life. Ruud considers musical identity specifically in relation to wellbeing and quality of life, according to four contributing categories—which DeNora (2000, 2007) and Ansdell (2014) might term musical affordances, according to their adaptation of James Gisbon’s (1979/2014) notion of affordances.

Describing a community music project with young Palestinian refugees at Rashedie, Lebanon, Ruud (2012) examines musical learning within the framework of a musical community of practice. He considers the project for its broader health benefits, of which musical learning is only one part. Ruud (2012, pp. 91-93) contends that in these musical communities, health and music interact to enhance quality of life in four key ways: to a sense of bonding and belonging; to an awareness of musical experiences in relation to emotions, the body, and a sense of vitality: to agency and a sense of having a voice and their contributions valued, and; finding meaning and hope through musicking. As will become clear, these elements of Ruud’s understanding of musical identity are reflected in the interviews with choir members and provide a useful starting point. As an important part of culture and cultural experience, we can expect music to play a very important role in shaping education and behaviour. Importantly for this study, the musical identity categories of Ruud are enabled by the notion of “space.” Ruud (1997) delineates between personal space, social space, space
of time and place (p. 90), and transpersonal space; that is, finding meaning in life within a larger context (p. 95). **Musical leadership identities.** Leadership identities in music are another aspect of the choir’s ecology. Leadership, defined as “a process of social influence to guide, structure, and/or facilitate behaviours, activities, and/or relationships towards the achievement of shared aims” (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, & Taylor, 2011, p. 41), is experienced in diverse ways within a community choir setting. Studies have also explored the role of choral singing in shaping identity, with an emphasis on the role and influence of conductors in this process (Durrant, 2005, 2017; Garnett, 2009; Jansson, 2013), including as authoritarian figures (Attinello, 2006) and their role in balancing the individual singer and ensemble (Brewer & Garnett, 2012). While such studies may offer insights from a conductor’s perspective as the most recognisable example of a leader, in settings such as community choirs they may only reflect part of the story.

**Youth identities.** Understanding the challenges of young people in this social generation forms an important base for this study and the context in which the youth chorus makes music. The social contexts within which youth chorus members volunteer their time and energy, and invest financially in, the choir, influences their experiences. Due to social changes in past decades, it seems young people growing up in Western societies such as Australia experience a heightened sense of risk and a greater individualization of experiences that together foster a sense of insecurity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Giddens, 1991; White & Wyn, 2013). These twin issues impact upon a young person’s sense of self and their social world. White and Wyn (2013, p. 181) argue it is important to respect complexity within conceptual frameworks around young people, to acknowledge and study the social and structural circumstances in which young people are defined rather than take a pre-determined social category.
An ecological understanding of the youth chorus may offer an example of a community music practice. Firstly, the role of performance plays a crucial role in the experience of the group and may be a tool for wellbeing. Secondly, the shift of responsibility for the musicking away from the leader (conductor) to the individual members, whether through song choices or in the creating of a public performance that requires of members an implicit standard (musical competencies including lyrics, musical melodies and harmonies, and extra-musical competencies including stage presence). Public performances, which may be viewed as community testimonials to families, peers, and wider society, form an important part of the community singing experiences for these groups, as milestones and focal points for their work.

**Socially- and materially-conditioned.** This study focuses on the social context in which health and wellbeing are experienced by young people. As suggested in the introduction, while recognising its value in data collection elsewhere, I suggest it is not helpful to speak of ‘at risk’ individuals and cohorts. To use this descriptor may lead the reader to infer a sense of individual responsibility for what are typically structural issues (White & Wyn, 2013, Ch. 14).

It seems young people in Melbourne, Australia today are subject to the structural constraints of the society that exist around them. Forming one’s identity as a young person in this context is a reflexive, task as Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1991, p. 32) would describe it, recognising the context and social conditions that constrain and shape the social worlds of young people. In western societies such as Australia, social changes have heightened the sense of risks and insecurity, and a greater individualisation of experiences (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Giddens, 1991; White & Wyn, 2013). These twin issues – insecurity and individualisation of experience – impact greatly on the
experiences of young people in Melbourne. Wyn and White (2013) describe health and wellbeing in the context of young people as “related both to social and material conditions of life, and the quality of relationships that people experience” (p. 216). Wellbeing, both for individuals and groups, therefore relates primarily to the relationship between individuals and their social, economic, and cultural contexts that enables people to be well (p. 210).

The category of ‘youth’ in society is socially constructed, imagined, relational and endowed with meaning. The concept of youth is relational (to adulthood) and its use as a term continent upon time and place. As White and Wyn (2013) describe: “‘Young people, regardless of where they live, are faced with the prospect of reflexively constructing themselves, which means that identity work is one of the most significant processes they must engage with” (p. 181). While there are many things young people have in common, the term “youth” obscures a vast array of factors that differentiate one young person from another. For this reason, the youth chorus accepts members up to the age of 29, recognising many SSAGQ young people may not disclose their sexuality until older.

Rather than focussing on age ranges, taking up the idea of social generations may be useful to understand the two cohorts of youth in this study who may not fit typical demographic categories. These young people experience a common period of history and their lives are forged through common conditions and a common “generational consciousness” (White & Wyn, 2013, p. 11). This approach also recognises the social embedding of “youth”, and that the membership and demographics of choirs may change in time. Capturing the lived experiences of such individuals within a social generation may best be accommodated through a qualitative research study that seeks clarity through theory, but argues against theory for its own sake (White & Wyn, 2013). It is now time to examine musical identities in more detail.
Identity formation, gender, sexuality, and music. I set out in the first chapter the choir within an international LGBTI choral movement, discussed my scholarly location within the broad field of music and wellbeing, and located this study as the first of an Australian LGBTI youth chorus. As a youth chorus for which understandings of sexuality and gender identity appear to underpin member decisions to join, the significance of and interrelationship between music, gender identity and sexuality in the formation of identity, is central.

Gender, sexuality, and queer studies in music education settings. The foundations of very recent queer treatments of choral music pedagogy (Beale, 2017) have their origins in earlier, education-based discussions of the gendered discourses of music (Green, 1997, 2010). In music education, recent studies have explored the female voice and voice change (Sweet, 2015), undertaken critical studies emerged that challenge the stereotypes relating to masculinity and choral singing (Powell, 2015) and, conversely, of the voice as a female-gendered instrument (Doubleday, 2008). Freer examines the cultural barriers for males singing in school choirs – the so-called “missing males” problem in music that has long been a focus of research (Freer, 2007, 2009, 2012; Koza, 1993). More recent studies have focussed on the problems relating to engaging school-age boys in singing, the gendering of choral singing (Harrison, 2007, 2009; Harrison, Welch, & Adler, 2012), and masculinity and choral singing in Australia (Powell, 2015), which seek to embrace multiple versions of masculinity.

Broadly, this study instead locates itself in literature that explores sexuality and music education in formal and informal settings and how we might teach truly inclusive choral music to young people. It builds upon similar studies of school settings (Bergonzi, 2009/2014; Knotts & Gregorio, 2011; Lapointe, 2016) and community settings (Beale, 2017; Hayes, 2008; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2012). The challenge for choral leaders, as Joshua
Palkki (2015) lucidly set out in a recent article for a choral leadership practice journal, is to shift perceptions of gender and sexuality and address the presumption and normalising effect of heterosexuality – known as heteronormativity (Jackson, 2006; Kitzinger, 2005) – upon choral singing.

In music education, this is exemplified in the work of Lucy Green (1993, 1996) and a special 2016 edition of the “Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education.” This 2016 double issue updates research into LGBTI studies in music education in North America (J. R. Barrett, 2016), focusses on choral singing in US educational settings. It includes perspectives of students and teachers (McBride, 2016), discussions of hip hop music, resilience, and intersectionality (Kruse, 2016), LGBTI studies (Gould, 2016), and LGBTI identities found in music education settings (Bergonzi, Carter, & Garrett, 2016). It reflects a growing scholarly interest in LGBTI issues, queer studies, and sexuality within music education settings. This research may be situated within wider studies of the invisibility of sexual orientation and LGBTI concerns within formal school settings (Bergonzi, 2009/2014, 2015; Gorski et al., 2013). A challenging of heteronormativity, whether directly or indirectly, informs the recent histories of these singers as school-aged students.

**In music therapy and musicology scholarship.** In music therapy, studies examine identity of LGBTI practitioners and therapeutic possibilities for participants (Antebi & Gilboa, 2017; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2012; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2013), building upon earlier self-reflective studies (Lee, 2008). Other studies have explored the interaction from a music therapy perspective of gender and music (Hadley, 2013), including in school settings (Scrine, 2016).

Musicological arguments critically explore notions of gender and sexuality (Brett et al., 2006; Brett et al., 2017; Cook, 2000), and broader frameworks of gender within works by
composers along with other variables such as power and class (Solie, 1995). A formative contribution by Marcia Citron (Citron, 1993) discusses the role of gender to the formation of the western art music canon – concerned with uncovering inscriptions of gender that “typically function as strategies of representation and often aim to expose in some way the ideological paradigms concerning socialized women and men” (Citron, 1993, p. 121). Studies have re-investigated composers and figures in musicology within their queer contexts (Brett et al., 2006; Fuller & Whitesell, 2002; Solie, 1995). Other studies have looked to popular music cultures: John Gill (Gill, 1995), for instance, discusses in detail gay and lesbian musicians in twentieth century pop music.\(^5\) Importantly, we might argue that studies exploring the role of music in relation to gender and sexuality were omitted from scholarly discourse until the 1990s, with an edited volume by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary Thomas (1994) among the first.

**Choirs, gender, and sexuality.** There is only limited research into the experiences of choral singing for LGBTI people worldwide, with most notable research in the US and in relation to the lesbian and gay choral organisation, GALA (Avery et al., 2013; E. A. Gordon, 1990; Hayes, 2008; MacLachlan, 2015; Sparks, 2005). Other work looks at the role of singing in the construction of the gendered self (R. Faulkner & Davidson, 2004; R. S. C. Faulkner & Davidson, 2006) and singing and sexuality (Koestenbaum, 1991). Profiles of community youth choirs of post-secondary aged young adults and their role are less prolific, and relate either to individual choirs (Leske & Wilson, 2013; Naddeo, 1993) or to larger surveys by country (Durrant, 2005). Nevertheless, research into music in relation to gender

\(^5\) Interestingly, the title to Gill’s study reveals how quickly terminology in the field of LGBTI and queer studies shifts, with the medicalised concept of the “homosexual” no longer in common usage outside of medical fields.
for young people in formal education settings offers useful insights.

**Challenging binaries of gender and sexuality in choral music.** Binary understandings of gender identity run deep in choral music traditions, and have been a recurring theme within music education discourse (Green, 1994; Palkki, 2015). While particularly male and female, it may relate to a binary between homosexual and heterosexual (having observed anecdotally a hostility to the inclusion of heterosexual members within MGLC Inc). Susan Avery, Casey Hayes, and Cindy Bell (2013) examine identity with reference to LGBTI choral music in the US, and note that “singing breaks down barriers in the most non-threatening of ways” (p. 259).

In Chapter 8, I explore this critical understanding of gender and sexuality in more depth, which I delineate as “queer theory” in an attempt to highlight its difference from LGBTI identities. For now, I suggest two points for consideration. Choirs typically conform to the idea of a “compulsory heterosexuality” (Jackson, 2006; Sedgwick, 1990) and define their choral identities according to a heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007/1990; Tredway, 2014). These conventions are often unconsciously reproduced. This forms an important cultural plane upon which members of the youth chorus define themselves according to their gender identity or sexuality. However, members interviewed also have distinct understandings of their sexualities and/or gender identities, and these may not neatly be distinguished as an LGBTI and “queer” identity. In examining this second, more fluid discussion of choir member gender identities, more closely, I suggest the formative scholarly work on identity formation by Vivienne Cass (1979, 1984) is too simplistic a tool for the youth chorus. It neither represents the values of the youth chorus (as a place for all SSAGQ young people) nor the reality of the choir at the time of interviewing (as a choir that included transgender and gender non-binary singers within its membership). This element was regrettably not
represented in the disclosed sexual identities of members interviewed. I thus make the case below for Cass’s model to be set aside, and return in Chapter 8, following my analysis of the interviews, to discuss the important critical and queer musical perspectives for the youth chorus.

Setting aside Cass’s staged model of identity formation. Cass (1979, 1984) proposed a six-step model of identity formation for same-sex attracted (that is, gay, lesbian and bisexual) people, a model that continues to have a broad influence over psychology and into sexuality education, including very recent studies in music therapy (Antebi & Gilboa, 2016; Aronoff & Gilboa, 2015). A recent critique of Cass’s model by Donna Kenneady and Sara Oswald (2014, pp. 234-240) makes four key points in relation to its limitations:

1. that the limited and overly-parsimonious staged model that does not allow for changing awareness of or fluidity in sexuality;

2. that the model focusses on gay males and lesbians and consequently lacks nuance, recognising that there are such other categories of sexual orientation as asexual (not attracted to any sex), bi-omni-pansexual (attracted to both or all sexes), and heterosexual (attracted to opposite sexes);

3. that there is insufficient attention paid to the differences between men and women, the different pathways taken, and the importance of the age at which sexual identity is confirmed or affirmed, and;

4. that there is a lack of inclusion of other relevant dominant paradigms that shape sexual identity formation particularly the impact of ethnic identity.

More broadly, Kenneady and Oswald call for the model to be updated given advances in understanding gender and sexual identity since. I recognise the importance of a stable sexual identity for many choir members on the one hand, and, on the other, those for whom
gender identity and fluidity may go beyond Cass’s model. I first set out the identities as they are experienced by members interviewed, before “troubling” from Chapter 8 the assumptions that establish the gender binary as it exists in choral singing. I suggest that we might move beyond Cass’s model to a broader view of the potential of music to contribute to the wellbeing and SSAGD identities of young people.

**A study of youth musical identities.** For the young people who are the focus of this study, music is a means by which they seek to construct their identities and their sense of self. The choir’s name reflects an axiological commitment to those of diverse sexual or gender identities, and in targeting this cohort it represents publicly a minority of the Australian demographic. Musical preferences may function as a “badge” of identity for young people (North & Hargreaves, 1999). My choice of choir reflects studies that explore youth subcultures and identities (Bloustien & Peters, 2011; White & Wyn, 2013), the relationship between youth, music, and the importance of participation (McFerran, 2010), and the potential for empowering and transfroming young people through musical engagement (O’Neill, 2015). There are clear links between young people’s health outcomes and ways of living and the opportunities and constraints they face, reflecting a wider appreciation of the relationship between health and wellbeing (Stige, 2012; Stige & Aarø, 2012). These young people of diverse gender and sexuality, in my experience, often join the choir at a critical juncture in their “coming out” journeys.

**The wellbeing potentials of queer youth musicking identities.** I have explored the social world of musicking for young SSAGD young people in Australia as a means of better understanding how youth chorus members create and perform differing social and musical identities within the choir. This frame brings together the two distinct threads: of music for wellbeing, and; of youth identities as they relate to gender and sexuality. Both offer an entry
point into deeper understandings of the wellbeing potentials of queer youth musicking identities. While Beale’s recently published study (Beale, 2017) offers a lucid summary of several conceptual and practical issues that are central to what it means to sing in a US-based adult LGBTI chorus, the youth chorus’s musical and social identity, its locality, and its close and distinctive relationship with a larger, adult LGBTI choir, MGLC Inc, offer important points of distinction.

For 27-year old Dylan (preferred pronouns: he/him/his), subject of the second story of this thesis, the choir’s impact extends well beyond the confines of choir rehearsals and performances, suggesting that for some members, there may be significant wellbeing benefits.
“It Definitely Changed my Mindset on Everything”: Dylan’s Story

Dylan is a committed, enthusiastic, and fast-talking member of the youth chorus who also sings with main chorus. He is university educated and works for a law firm. Dylan’s interview reveals his appreciation the structures and systems that support the organisation (MGLC Inc) and the professionalism with which it is run while maintaining a sense of fun. Choir has changed Dylan’s life; he speaks with dynamism and with conviction of the choir’s benefits is evident throughout the interview. The body forms a key aspect to Dylan’s experience of choir, as he describes key moments in rehearsal and performance, attuned to his physical reactions in the moment. Dylan talks exuberantly about the role and impact of choir in his life, and he ascribes benefits in how he experiences his work life. Dylan narrates his work situation at the time of joining and weaves work and his gradual assertiveness together with two key choir concerts during the year. Dylan brings up his newfound assertiveness several times during the interview, and a sense of agency awakened in him through his choir experiences, including feeling greater input into decisions of the chorus. In a lengthy monologue, he talks of a deeper sense of motivation that choir has instilled in him (a sense of enjoyment he imagines is akin to “working for Google” (¶293), and a realization in him that “that’s the feeling I should be getting in other aspects of my life as well” (¶295). Choir in this sense has raised Dylan’s expectations of how he might enjoy life, and fostered a sense of activism to fight for his own happiness. He relates his choir experience back to his work situation, saying:

Um, not just the singing concert, like not the choir um even just at work like if I’m not feeling that kind of pride and that kind of strength out of what I’m doing then what’s the point of doing that particular thing or why can’t I make it that way. So I think it actually did improve other areas of my life without even meaning to. (¶295)
Dylan is a reflexive, self-aware, in a sense phenomenological person, constantly checking himself during his interview and reflecting upon his personal, corporal, and emotional reaction to the experiences in his life (in this case, the choir). In this lucid section of the interview, Dylan narrates the stark impact of his choir singing experience on his workplace:

Suddenly by June I was promoted into an even more senior role than I was aiming for and then I got promoted again in August in the same role, but more responsibility so within six months I’ve already had three job changes in the same company because they’ve just, jumped on the band wagon and said yeah okay, you’re doing what you need to be doing. So yeah, just thinking about it now I kind of probably could credit that to the way I felt thanks to the chorus, you know, because it definitely changed my mindset on everything. (¶295)

Singing in the choir has taught Dylan to be more assertive and helped him to realise he has more choice or agency to determine his experiences in life and work than he may have previously believed. Dylan aspires to make his workplace and other aspects of his social world “feel the same” as when he is at a choir rehearsal. Fundamentally, he has adopted a more active stance toward his world, looking for ways to improve or shift things rather than simply accepting them:

I think just knowing that I expect now that everything I do should have some way of making it feel the way it does for me when I attend the choir. Um, it definitely changed my outlook on the other stuff like work. And how I was going to approach it. So instead of just letting things happen and then just, sort of, you know whingeing in the background if it doesn’t work a certain way, speaking to the people that I need to speak to, to say well you know, is there a way that it can be this way? Is there a way that we can do this instead? (¶543)

Dylan describes his excitement at having input into the choir’s repertoire choices, asserting that, regardless of whether his advice or ideas are taken up, “I’m allowed to speak up about it, it’s heard” (¶555). Conscious it seems of the general exuberance with which he portrays the choir, Dylan self-reflects on his interview with humour: “Feels like an Oprah special: ‘Singing changed my life!’” (¶607)
Chapter 3: Study Design

In the previous chapter, I set the scene for a qualitative study of the youth chorus, identified my initial motivations for interrogating social exclusion in Australia, and explored how choir might relate to and address social exclusion. I set out a framework, supported by a multidisciplinary scholarly literature, around two key themes: music and its potential for wellbeing, and; identities of and in music, youth, gender, and sexuality.

In this chapter, I set out the research design and methodological shifts that accompanied my changing personal circumstances since commencing the PhD study, and draw a personal narrative and my practice into the centre of this study. It combines a central research question that asks what it means to be a member of the youth chorus, with an embrace of my role and responsibility as a practitioner who helped to shape these experiences. The thesis adopts a heuristic path that, as Clark Moustakas (1990, pp. 15) describes it. It begins with a question that guides simultaneously a research pathway and a deepening awareness of the researcher’s place – my place – in the world. In the same way as Dylan reflects upon the impact of the choir on his everyday life, I consider, across all ten members, “the cultural, every day, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing, acting, and ways of understanding ourselves as persons” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 12). Yet my role in this thesis goes beyond the professional to the personal. I am a researcher with a parallel, personal health journey that has influenced both the course of the research, my role with the choir and my vocation as a community choral music practitioner. The personal and the research journeys are intertwined and co-constitutive, and the methodological scaffolding developed to support the project is similarly complex.
A: Designing the Project: Methodological Foundations and Changes

An axiological commitment to social justice. Musicking approaches music with an understanding that it is something grounded in a discreet ecological setting and in relationships. When musicking we explore what it means to be human and to live in relationship with others around us. This approach stays true to Small’s depiction of musicking as ritualistic and, as Ansdell suggests, symbolic of an overarching pattern of ideal relationships for our personal and social lives (Ansdell, 2014, pp. 30-31). Ansdell argues that, if we seek to take Small’s perspective seriously, musicking would therefore be “necessarily both an aesthetic and an ethical matter” (Ansdell, 2014, p. 31). With an eye to the ethics of musicking, this thesis makes an explicit axiological commitment to social justice and seeks to reflect this in its study design and choice of case study choirs.

Social justice in educational settings. Applying a social justice lens to this thesis suggests that theory and practice are intertwined and embodied within a historical process, akin to Freire’s notion of praxis, that: “All educational practice implies a theoretical stance on the educator’s part” (Freire, 1972, p. 21). The notion of social justice is set out lucidly within an educational context by Lee Anne Bell (2007), who describes the challenge of uncovering the ways in which common sense knowledge and assumptions obscure our ability to see oppression.

Defining social justice in music. In his examination of the theoretical complexities of social justice in relation to music education, David Elliott (2007) outlines the difficulties of defining social justice within a music context. He resists the narrowing and delineation of a single definition; choosing instead to retain an open, provisional, and multifaceted understanding of the concept (p. 62), setting out several interweaving strands rather than a single definition. Elliott discusses legal, justice, economic, procedural, associational,
restorative, and retributive notions of justice, but it is his discussion of cultural justice that is of most relevance to this study. Cultural justice, Elliott (2007) describes, involves “many crucial matters of identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and the many forms of oppression that often attend them.” (p. 65)

The expression of identities and, conversely, their oppression, are central to Elliott’s understanding and lead to a focus on equity, equality, and concerns that stem from discrimination. Elliott takes two case studies – the first of a Canadian music educator and community musician working within the Inuit community of Arviat; the second a music teacher and former director of the New York City Gay Men’s Chorus – and establishes the primary focus of their music making as part of the social values of the communities with which they engage rather than as something aesthetically distinct, and therefore abstract from, social context (p. 85). He claims that cultural justice is always situated within a context (p. 67) and can be observed in social movements of resistance to oppression, including musical movements of resistance. Community music and music education programs, Elliott asserts, are political, cultural, and moral sites that have a role in “the selective ordering and legitimization of specific forms of language, reasoning, sociality, daily experience and style” (Elliott, 2007, p. 75). By reconceiving music education (and by extension community music) as a social movement we create and maintain social coalitions of like-minded people with an interest in social justice.

In a related way to Elliott, the writing of this thesis is more than academic exercise, and is also an attempt to bridge two worlds: the social world of the youth chorus with the academy. Academic scholarship, I suggest, is itself a practice with a distinct “practical” function of thinking, writing, publishing, and disseminating, in the same way as singing in or leading a choir. I seek to extend Elliott’s call to music education (Elliott, 2007, p. 85) to
community music; to “activate” community choral music in Melbourne as and for social change by infusing its practices with the goals of social justice and social activism.

Higgins (Higgins, 2015b) engages with the notion of social justice in community music settings, and places social justice at the centre of hospitable music making. Higgins engages particularly with Derrida’s work to emphasise the potential of justice as an invitation toward something. Higgins sees justice as unconditional, and emphasises Derrida’s assertion that: “Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law” (Higgins, 2015b, p. 447).

I suggest a social justice lens for the youth chorus is suitable for the important social justice role through its musicking and outreach as representatives of LGBTI young people. This might be understood according to Bronfenbrenner’s nested model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), with the choir occupying a distinct position in relation to the distinctive ecologies in which it operates at Figure 1. The youth chorus, one part of the umbrella organisation MGLC Inc, sits at the centre of this music and health ecology within concentric circles that include: young SSAGD people in Melbourne, the choir’s target cohort; Melbourne’s wider choral music community of which it is a part, and; its symbolic role as a choir of SSAGD young people in Australia that is part of the international LGBTI choral movement that includes the Out & Loud network in Australasia, GALA in North America, and Legato in Europe.
Figure 1. A visual location of the youth chorus using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The youth chorus as a place where members sing for social justice. While for some in the youth chorus, membership may be purely musical, social, or personal, the interviews suggest that, for others, the choir’s symbolic role as part of a broader social movement is critical. The youth chorus offers what Elliott might term groups that make music for social justice (Elliott, 2007, p. 84). Nevertheless, Elliott notes that this approach has been analysed historically by scholars such as Adorno. Adorno advocates for modernist aesthetic theories of music in the twentieth century and, as Wayne Bowman (2005, p. 5) suggests, an “enchantment with a mythical Musik an sich [Music for its own sake]. Adorno argues that a
binary exists that distinguishes between, on the one hand, inherently and intrinsically musical elements such as musical pattern and form, and on the other, those extrinsic (non-musical or extra-musical) elements. Discussing music education in Germany after the Second World War, Adorno (Adorno, 1970) argues that music should be preserved as something pure and distinct from society, able to function as a social critique of it. Music should be held apart from its social context and any non-musical or utilitarian goals that may be conveyed through the music (Kertz-Welzel, 2005).

In contrast to Adorno’s well-known position, a sense of social justice might be found, according to Elliott, in the capacity to develop “educated feelings” (Elliott, 2007, p. 86) to feel and think more deeply about music, evoking sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of others. This point was disproven in historical example, Elliott argues, as numerous examples in the case of Nazi Germany and the careers of leading classical musicians during that period prove. Elliott captures the fallacy of the central claim of aesthetic education in relation to music educators when he argues that “taken seriously it [aesthetic education] actually impedes our transformation to a socially robust and responsive profession” (Elliott, 2007, p. 87). Elliott acknowledges that, “depending on the needs and values of an individual, a community, a social group, or a nation, one or more dimensions of social justice may need to be ‘moved to the head of the line.’” (Elliott, 2007, p. 62)

**Two choirs as my initial case studies.** The study seeks to make a scholarly contribution that supports the work of musicians using music for wellbeing, and recognises choral musicking as a tool that may empower subordinated groups (Ruud, 2010). Applying this understanding of social justice then, I sought to take advantage of the privileges and opportunity afforded to me as a PhD scholar to shine a spotlight toward, and complete an extended study of, two choirs: Massive Fam Hip Hop Choir (Massive Fam) and the youth
chorus. I did so cognisant of the potential for future research papers that could support practical funding applications for both groups. It was my experience that without such a scholarly investment, choirs such these would not otherwise receive the attention and recognition that I felt befits their contribution to the communities in which they operate. I commenced this study with the benefit of personal experience of the youth chorus, and a curiosity to learn more of the transformative potentials of musicking for SSAGD young people.

**Scholarly motivations and methodological priorities.** My personal interest, explored in the introduction to this thesis, was fuelled by my professional role as a music leader within the choir and by the personal anecdotes, stories, and triumphs of individual members I gleaned in this role, along with moments of profound insight and joy in the choir’s collective performances. Given the axiological influences set out above, I designed a qualitative study that was firmly located within interpretivist traditions. This broad stance seeks to tell empirically-grounded stories, to develop a theoretically-informed picture, and does so in a way that incorporates my own skills and experiences. Most importantly, it allows for the exploration of experiences and phenomena in all their complexity. As I worked more on this thesis, I recognised the narrowness of my own ontological understandings of good research – as characterised by parsimony and neatness. My study of the youth chorus has fostered a more nuanced, complex understanding of the social phenomenon of singing in a choir. At times these experiences are tautological, even paradoxical, and in my experience, can rarely be captured neatly.

**Developing a theoretically-informed picture.** The PhD experience is a traineeship, and the choices I made reflect an evolving grasp of what was the project required, yet also the limits of my worldview. Just as the character of the businessman in Antoine de St Exupery’s
The Little Prince and his obsession with “matters of consequence” (St Exupery, 1943), I sought initially to contribute a study of significance to the field. I was motivated by a desire to find a clear theoretical picture or model of the phenomena of singing in the youth chorus, to explore leadership in the choir context, and to distil a good practice “checklist” of do’s and don’ts relating to choral leadership that could be applied universally when working with choirs. On reflection, this approach brought my previous scholarly training within a largely positivist discipline of political sciences and international relations worldview⁶ to an interpretivist study of (at that time given multiple choirs) several projects. I soon recognised the incompatibility of this broad-brush viewpoint, and gradually moved toward more nuanced and located storytelling within an interpretivist research framework.

**Bringing out their experiences.** The decision to prioritise the lived experiences of choir members shapes the methodological choices for the thesis. I sought a methodological frame of inquiry that remained open, flexible, and that took its leave from member perspectives rather than applying a pre-existing template. This stance calls for practice and practical experiences and understandings of members to take precedence over the choice of methodological tools to draw from. The writing down of any experience, as van Manen notes, is a “bringing to speech” of the focus of the research (van Manen, 1990, p. 32) and therefore an interpretation that leaves things out as it is written down by the researcher. This unavoidably involves decisions about what to exclude: the valuing of one interpretation over another or, as Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000, p. 6) more strongly put it, the suppressing of

---

⁶ Research in the field of international relations, from my experience at another institution, works largely from a positivist methodological frameworks within which states (countries) relate to each other. The constructivist international relations theoretical position of the research school at that time explores the social construction of reality between states, and argues for a state’s ability to influence social norms within an essentially anarchic global order. For more, see Immanuel Adler (E. Adler, 2013).
alternative interpretations. An alternative and insightful way of looking at this, Morse and Richards (2007, pp. 87-88) suggest, is to approach interview data as created or made with participants and the interviewers rather than gathered from them.

**Bringing in my experiences, skills.** Moustakas (1990, p. 9) describes heuristic research as “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis.” Yet at the same time he argues that, while autobiographic, “with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social– and perhaps universal–significance” (p. 15). So too it is with this thesis. I brought into my study, rather than bracketed out from it, my skills, background, and experience, viewing these as advantageous to the study. Within a practice-based discipline area such as community music I suggest this is crucial and recognises the dynamic relationships through which research, theory, and practice relate (Felicity A Baker & Young, 2016).

As I tell their stories, I hold in the background a similar, personal story of my own. As the researcher, I have carefully considered how I am represented and included directly within this study (Mantzoukas, 2004). I explore this representation in relation to my inclusion and exclusion at important points in this research project. My experiences and personal struggle to accept my sexual orientation fuelled an initial curiosity to explore the choral singing experience and its wellbeing potentials for young queer people. I recalled the struggle to reorient myself within a pre-existing social lifeworld where I was understood to be heterosexual, along with the challenges of integrating my newly acknowledged otherness as a cisgender male of minority sexual orientation into my social world.

I committed early to taking a reflexive stance to engaging with the data – to use myself within it as Kim Etherington (2004) writes – a stance requiring vigilant and active self-
awareness about my role as researcher within the research process. Finlay (2013) captures this vibrant spirit of reflexivity as “seeing afresh,” defining it in an earlier publication as:

…the process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes. (2003, p. 108)

Reflexivity calls for a broader sensibility toward the research, my involvement in it, and influence upon it; in other words, an active stance toward the analytic experience rather than static application of a particular methodology. Ruud (2010, pp. 140-141), drawing upon ideas set out by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), sets out succinctly four elements required of the reflexive researcher. Reflexive research requires a closeness and attention to detail, along with an understanding our own role and how our interpretation of the research influences what we see. It needs to pay attention to the consequences and potential impact of the research upon those being researched, with necessitates, according to Ruud, a critical perspective (to be taken up later in this thesis). Finally, Ruud calls for attention to the role of language, signs symbols, metaphors, and discourse on the construction of reality.

Initial commitment to constructivist grounded theory as method. Having set out my scholarly motivations for the thesis above, I initially chose to locate my study within a grounded theory approach. Emerging from the pioneering scholarship of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, and later Strauss and Juliet Corbin (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wertz, 2011), grounded theory seeks to develop an empirically-based theoretical model. As a systematic and comparative approach, grounded theory makes constant comparisons in a cyclical research process between the questions asked, data gathering, and data analysis – a “constant comparative analysis” as Glaser originally proposed (Glaser, 1965). Grounded theory approaches have been applied across a wide range of disciplinary areas since, including music education (e.g. Benedict, Schmidt, Spruce,
Woodford, 2015) and music therapy (e.g. Felicity A. Baker, 2013a, 2013b; McFerran, 2010; McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014; O’Grady, 2005).

More recently, the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach, associated closely with the scholarly contributions of Kathy Charmaz (2006, 2014), emerged from this tradition. CGT takes a deliberately reflexive approach and seeks to incorporate researcher bias rather than bracket it from the analysis itself. CGT accommodates reflexivity (Etherington, 2004; Rice & Ezzy, 1999) while at the same time seeking more concrete, objectivist findings in the form of a theoretical statements. CGT prioritises processes rather than outcomes, and does not necessarily seek an endpoint in the distilling of a theory but rather in the development of theoretical concepts. It is in the act of distilling the data that theoretical clarity may be developed, regardless of whether a theory is ultimately developed.

Charmaz’s CGT approach was appealing for several reasons. It is an established methodological practice for social justice research (Charmaz, 2011). It also afforded me the chance to honour the traditions and practices of community music, allow for my experiences and assumptions, and generate theoretical abstractions from the dataset, again reflecting my earlier, more positivist ambitions for the thesis. As an inductive methodology, CGT seeks to develop theoretical categories and, ultimately, a theoretical model from within the data rather than testing this against an existing hypothesis. Theoretical categories that are determined inductively with CGT are interrogated constantly against new data and until a point of theoretical saturation is reached and no new theoretical insights are forthcoming. In my case, I envisaged distilling statements about what the youth chorus means for its members and the ways in which (and processes whereby) membership of the youth chorus addresses experiences of social exclusion. CGT would have facilitated a two-way process between data and analysis, with analysis beginning immediately at the point that data is first collected, and
informed by future decisions about who to interview and the questions to ask. CGT was appealing for its methodological toolkit, particularly the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, analysis through coding, category development, theoretical memo writing, further purposive sampling, and, ultimately, the development of a central theoretical category to describe the process that was of interest (in my initial study, the process of social inclusion within the choir). A CGT approach would have functioned inductively as interviews progressed and ideas were tested and retested with choir members, to develop a theoretical model conducted using a modified purposive sampling approach that I will return to later.

Nevertheless, the personal, epistemological, and methodological pathways are interwoven into my research project, and the researcher has an obligation to disclose these. Charmaz (2014) notes that:

Researchers and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of each other. Nevertheless, researchers, not participants, are obligated to be reflexive about what they bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it. (p. 27)

As researchers, therefore, we are never truly neutral and value-free, and our task is to examine the values, privileges and preconceptions that shape our analysis. As the interviews commenced in late 2014, my health once again took precedence as faced further treatment for a tumour recurrence. This health event shaped, even determined, the limits of my PhD hereafter; it shifted the trajectory of the overall study design and necessitated a change of methodology at short notice.
B: Parallel Tracks: Health Interruptions to the Research Design

Let it go, let it out, let it all unravel.  
Let it free, and it can be, a path on which to travel. (Michael Leunig, 2017)

In November 2014, after receiving signed consent forms from interview participants and just prior to commencing member interviews, my brain cancer diagnosis once again intervened. It impacted both upon my practice as a choral leader (I resigned from the youth chorus) and as researcher (I took a leave of absence). Rather than delay the project for an extended period, I accepted an offer from my PhD colleagues to conduct interviews and collect the data on my behalf. This took advantage of the fact that members had just agreed to the interviews and were expecting to participate in them. It was also influenced by my desire to see their stories shared beyond the choir itself. Against this I balanced the potential side effects of the neurosurgery and radiotherapy, including the central question of whether I would lose my intellectual capacity to continue to study.

When I resumed my doctoral studies four months later after a period of leave for surgery and radiotherapy, I realised that CGT no longer fitted as an appropriate framework for the project. Because of the urgency of the surgery, the existing interview question guide (at Appendix F) and information in plain language statement (at Appendix D) had been retained and used, both of which mentioned a research interest in the way that choir addresses social exclusion. Yet the initial (constructivist grounded theory) study design continued to influence my thesis. It was present, for instance, in the more directive plain language statement given to members. A CGT approach required my close involvement with interviews themselves, ideally as the interviewer or at least in the review and revision of the questions asked following each interview.
Resolving a methodological way forward. As a methodological way forward, I returned to the original goal of understanding rather than explaining. I sought out a qualitative conceptual framework located within qualitative psychology, a stable of approaches that “are generally engaged with exploring, describing, and interpreting the personal and social experiences of participants” (J. A. Smith, 2008, p. 2). In keeping with the sociological foundations of the original grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2008, p. 83) such approaches allow for what Gylbert Ryle termed “thick description” in the interpretation of cultures and symbols: a concept elaborated in depth by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 6). Phenomenological perspectives are present in a grounded theoretical approach, as Ruud (2010) asserts, and a phenomenological approach emerged as a potential way forward, consistent both as a broad philosophical stance and a more specific methodological lens.

I determined phenomenology to be the most appropriate; an analytical framework that allows these phenomena to emerge and at the same time enable me to weave in reflections from my practice. I realised, after listening to each aural record that there were multiple, complex, and at times contradictory understandings of what it means to sing in the choir. Phenomenology allows for depth and individuality, focusing on the nuance, complexity, and contradictions revealed by individual members. Yet across the ten interviews I also heard common understandings of the role of choir and its musical, cultural, and social contexts; some themes seemed to be captured by one or two members, whereas others were discussed by all. Again, phenomenology can accommodate this.
C: Revised Methodology: Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Phenomenological perspectives. Max van Manen (1990, p. 13) beautifully expresses the use of the voice in phenomenology as “an original singing of the world” in a comparable way to poetry. Phenomenology takes a different stance to other research approaches in that it seeks to “do justice to everyday experience” rather than categorise or explain behaviour or develop a distinct theory (Finlay, 2011, p. 3). Phenomenology as a distinct methodology appeals to scholars of music therapy such as Even Ruud (2010) as a means to “reclaim the immediate and sensuous in musical expressions and interactions with clients” (p. 143). Musical interactions occur between a range of individuals in this study within the ecology of the choir and its musical and extra-musical activities, including its leaders and singers. In the following section, I provide an overview of and explore the merits of adopting phenomenology as both a philosophy and a discreet methodology. I draw upon the key philosophical texts and their interpretations by scholars recognised for their contribution to phenomenology in qualitative psychology, health, and wellbeing.

Defining phenomenology. Finlay (2008; 2011; 2013) depicts phenomenology as a dance between processes of reduction and reflexion (2011, p. 4). In her skilful summary of the key scholars of the phenomenological tradition, Finlay suggests that applying a phenomenological philosophy in a practical sense requires the dialectical straddling of “subjectivity and objectivity, intimacy, and distance, being inside and outside, being a part of and a part from, bracketing the self and being self-aware…” (p. 123). Phenomenology is from this perspective a nondualist way of looking at the world, and requires a similar philosophy in its use as a methodology, argues Finlay (p. 124). I explore briefly two overarching philosophical positions – descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology. In refining my journey through various methodologies, I reflect briefly on Husserl’s novel notion of
reduction before exploring in more detail the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition of Heidegger and, finally, a more recent and practical interpretation in interpretative phenomenological analysis.

**Husserl's phenomenological stance.** The influential scholarly writings of Austrian-German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) form the basis of contemporary understandings of phenomenology. Husserl drew upon phenomenological understandings present historically in the writings of Hindu and Buddhist scholars for many centuries (D. W. Smith, 2016), proposing a radical alternative to existing, positivist understandings of philosophical inquiry that seek scientifically verifiable facts. Husserl instead advocated a scientific inquiry grounded in the everyday world and a concern with how individuals experience their respective worlds. Amedeo and Barbro Giorgi (2008, p. 26) describe Husserl’s radical decision “to start with the problem of how objects and events appeared to consciousness…”

Phenomenology explores those things that structure the conscious human experience and attempts to do so from the perspective of the individual at the centre of their experience. It is used to explore the intentionality of this experience, how and to whom or what it is directed, and the conditions of those experiences (D. W. Smith, 2016). Husserl’s approach, Finlay (2011) suggests, sought to “establish the everyday experienced world as our scientific foundation; the aim being to bring forth the rich fullness of our lived world” (p. 44). Husserl (1901) famously called for “a return to the things themselves” (“Wir wollen auf die ‘Sachen selbst’ zurückgehen”) (Husserl, 1901; see also Heidegger’s discussion of his teacher’s concept in Heidegger, 1962, p. 50). Husserl sets out a notion of the lifeworld (Lebenswelt) that enables him to examine the experience of self. The lifeworld is more than an understanding of our objective selves but rather a more dynamic, active, embodied self that
experiences and finds meaning in our social worlds. Ansdell (2014) captures the sense of the lifeworld when he says: “Here we are persons, not bodies; other people are our relations; and we draw in ‘things’ that become affordances from the material world” (p. 41). Finlay (2011) describes Husserl’s lifeworld as consisting of: body-subjects that have both a sense of physical embodiment and a sense of self (or identity); sociality, or ways of relating to others culturally, ethnically, and linguistically; spatiality, or the way we occupy our lives within the world, and; temporality, our sense of time past, present, and future (p. 45).

An important “methodological constraint” (Beyer, 2016) proposed by Husserl has come to be known as reductionism or bracketing: a process of detachment or setting aside of prior understandings of the natural world and the world of interpretation, and an attempt to reveal the essence of things. Put more simply, the researcher seeks to bracket out extraneous perspectives and ideas, seeking as far as possible to ground their descriptions within the data itself. This approach fundamentally requires the adoption of a special attitude (Finlay, 2011, p. 45) and a first-person point of view (Beyer, 2016). Husserl calls for the researcher to set aside both the natural world and their interpretation of it, and to adopt instead a posture that is dynamic, curious, and committed to seeking understanding of experience from the subject’s point of view as far as possible. Husserl developed the concept of epoché as a practical tool for reductionism whereby, as Finlay (2008) captures, the researcher takes on a process of detachment from the natural sciences, from existing understandings and from the taken-for-granted attitudes of the lifeworld.

**Hermeneutic and descriptive phenomenology.** Hermeneutic and descriptive traditions of phenomenology might be described as existing at different ends of the same continuum, and distinguished according to what individual researchers prioritise. Where descriptive phenomenology is concerned primarily with epistemological understandings (of
seeking to know something through a rich and detailed description), its hermeneutic counterpart is concerned with interpretation (Finlay, 2011, p. 112). Similarly, the scholars of phenomenology also diverge: between those whose focus is on description, such as Husserl, and those who are more concerned with interpretation of these lived experiences. In the following section, I explore this more interpretive (or hermeneutic) strand of phenomenology, noting that the two philosophical positions are not as distinct from one another as they might first appear.

The case for a hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology, a notion articulated in detail by Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and in turn adapted by his student, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), provides an important philosophical foundation for my study of the experiences of choir singers. This approach moves into hermeneutics, described by Mantzavinos (2016) as the “methodology of interpretation […] concerned with problems that arise when dealing with meaningful human actions and the products of such actions” (paragraph 1). Hermeneutic phenomenology combines these two strands and seeks to “evoke lived experience through the explicit involvement of interpretation” (Finlay, 2011, p. 110). For Gadamer (1975/2004), language and understanding are linked through interpretation: “Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Interpreting forms the basis for understanding” (p. 390). Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology, concerned with what it means to “be-in-the-world,” uses language as its primary means of interpretation and draws upon a variety of lenses, including a reflexive lens (Finlay, 2011, p. 110). Heidegger sought to delineate this approach to phenomenology for its ontological concern with the nature of “being” – an ontological exploration of the nature of what it means to be human. Heidegger set out to understand how humans are the product of our social worlds; rather than a fact, Heidegger asserts, who we are is to be found in a
combination of different elements of our social worlds and how we define ourselves within it.

Four elements typify a hermeneutic phenomenology approach, as interpreted by Finlay (2011, pp. 111-115). Firstly, this approach requires an explicit commitment to the humanities, a drawing closer together of art to science that, it might be argued, has much in common with the notion of a “gentle empiricism” espoused by German author, poet, and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). Here, the researcher remains close to the phenomenon being studied without abstraction. The research begins with the cases being studied rather than a theory, in a way that, it might be argued, echoes the phenomenological inquiry of Husserl and his successors. Secondly, hermeneutic phenomenology makes explicit use of interpretation and language, acknowledging that the very act of seeking to understand something requires a researcher to interpret it in some way. This requires careful attention to the “text” of the member’s words in both the context of the discussion with their interviewer and a commitment to understanding the broader context within which a phenomenon occurs. Interpretation occurs both within the contexts of research participants and their lifeworld (the choir in which members sing and interact) and the researcher, and both are essential elements considering my interwoven personal and research journeys.

Thirdly, hermeneutic phenomenology makes a commitment to reflexivity and to acknowledging what the researcher brings to the research desk and to interviews is important. By deliberately reflecting upon our interpretations of the experience and phenomena studied, Finlay (2003, p. 108) argues it is possible to move beyond partiality. Finally, hermeneutic phenomenology calls for an intersubjective sharing between researcher and participant, and the co-creation of research findings. This final element is particularly relevant to my study

7 Goethe’s conceptualisation is taken up in relation to the Nordoff-Robbins approach to music therapy in recent years in the work of Ansdell and Pavlicevic (2010).
given the multiple interviewers involved in the collection of data.

The hermeneutic circle, a central tool first suggested by Heidegger and adopted particularly in the textual interpretation of biblical texts, guides researchers to seek out understandings and pre-understandings of a reality, is crucial to a hermeneutic phenomenology approach and a basis upon which to build my analysis of the experiences of singing within the choir. The hermeneutic circle seeks to develop a deeper understanding of a reality by moving iteratively between the whole and its parts, or between question and answer. As a methodology, hermeneutics is in the process of moving between understandings and pre-understandings that hermeneutic phenomenology is thought to foster deeper insights into the lived experience of choir members.

Gadamer (1975/2004) expanded the notion of the hermeneutic circle as a continual, iterative process through which a new understanding of reality can be developed. Importantly for this reflexive study, the subject and object are combined in what Gadamer refers to as a “fusion of horizons” of past and present, and the need to continually test and revisit our past prejudices and traditions against the present (p. 305). Concepts of the historical past are regained in such a way that they also include our own, present-day comprehension of them (p. 367). We might better understand otherness through the process of making ourselves more transparent and through subjecting to scrutiny of the prejudices we bring to present phenomena that stem from historical understandings. In the practical application of hermeneutic phenomenology, however, I chose to make use of a more recent and, I suggest, versatile adaptation, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

**Revised methodology: Interpretative phenomenological analysis.** IPA was initially developed by Jonathan Smith (1996) in the context of health psychology as an experiential, qualitative methodology that could “enter into dialogue with mainstream psychology”
In my analysis, I utilise elements of IPA as later developed in a key scholarly exposition (J. A. Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). IPA has proven popular across a wider range of disciplines including music and health, with an ability to uncover shared experiences and understandings of phenomena in both clinical (Solli & Rolvsjord, 2015) and non-clinical or community settings (Bailey & Davidson, 2003), in a detailed and yet rigorous way. As Smith (2004) asserts, IPA is a versatile and flexible methodology that is suitable for use across a wide array of areas beyond the discipline of health psychology. It is an appealing framework for its epistemological foundation that allows for detailed explorations of lived experience and how individuals make sense of that experience. IPA favours studies with small sample sizes that allow for its strongly idiographic nature, opening the possibility for rich detailed examinations of individual social worlds before wider themes are discerned. It is also flexible, inductive, and allows for themes to change and emerge during the analysis. Yet it retains an interrogative character with psychology at its core and an ability to return to psychological literature to bolster themes that emerge from the data analysis.

IPA begins with the assumption that data may provide insights into how individuals make sense of their respective social worlds (or “lifeworlds”), and their involvement in or orientation toward it (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 46). It seeks to identify, or better understand in the epistemological sense, those objects that concern individuals and the experiential claims they make of the world around them. Several significant elements distinguish IPA as a methodological approach from others. Firstly, it explores personal experience, gleaned from both attitudes of individuals toward their experiences of a phenomena such as the choir. Importantly, it goes further, seeking to understand the meanings participants ascribe to their experience of a phenomenon – in this case, not only how they feel about the choir but what the choir means to them. It seeks to make sense of the experience from an individual’s
perspective, and the meanings and images that are understood to be important. IPA commits explicitly to an interpretative and hermeneutic-based approach, and acknowledges and utilises a double hermeneutic (the interviewer making sense of the interview participant making sense of a phenomenon). This final approach draws back in the fundamentals of hermeneutic phenomenology and explores understandings and pre-understandings through use of the hermeneutic circle.

Importantly for this study of an LGBTI choir\(^8\), IPA accommodates the two distinctive hermeneutic modes that were first proposed by hermeneutic phenomenologist Paul Ricœur (1970). IPA extends the traditional hermeneutic approach of uncovering meaning (Shinebourne, 2011) described by Ricœur (1970) as a “hermeneutics of empathy.” It allows too for the uncovering the hidden or latent meanings within the experience that Gadamer terms a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Gadamer, 1984). Smith (2004) argues that both modes of engagement can be useful in building a more complete understanding of the individual experience. IPA, Smith (2004) argues, therefore accommodates both description and empathy and “a hermeneutics of questioning, of critical engagement, as the reader may well ask questions and posit readings which the participants would be unlikely, unable or unwilling to see or acknowledge themselves” (p. 46). The suspicion and questioning discussed by both Ricœur and Smith, I suggest, provides a methodological framework within IPA to question and engage more critically with several themes and elements that emerge from the interviews. I attempt to do so in subsequent chapters, avoiding as far as possible adopting prescription, categorisation, and rigidity in deploying an IPA approach, staying true to the flexibility urged of scholars using this method (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), and taking heed of more recent

---

\(^8\) I note the use of IPA methods for previous studies of sex and sexuality (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, chapter eight).
reflections on the benefits and shortcomings of the IPA approach within the stable of reflexive qualitative methodologies (Finlay, 2011).

**Room for narrative and creative elements.** Critical narrative analysis, captured in the work of Darren Langdridge (2008), offers an alternative, approach to IPA that similarly draws upon both hermeneutics and phenomenology (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 25). Whilst recognising the merits of this approach, I have taken IPA for its ability to provide an initial, empathetic analysis of the experiences of singers, yet also adopt a more critical line. Nevertheless, between the larger thematic discussions that draw upon IPA methods, I attempt to bring back in the everyday stories of these individual members, incorporating elements of critical narrative analysis. I weave in narratives and storytelling, seeking to capture the essence of individual member experiences of the choir as they were presented to their interviewer. As Finlay (2011) describes,

> Narratives offer a way into individuals’ life stories in all their particularity and richness. Through hearing individuals’ voices, we are reminded to honour and witness their experience – to truly listen. Through the story we hear how experience unfolds over time rather than being presented as a static theme. (p. 238)

Having set out the evolving methodological framework that informs this thesis, I flag briefly two further influences that have shaped its design. The first explores the impact of multiple interviewers, their styles, and techniques, and, ultimately, their influence upon the data created through the interviews. This aspect will be explored in Part E of this chapter. The implications of having multiple interviewers suggest multiple hermeneutics might be at play, discussed below.

**Multiple hermeneutics.** Because of having multiple interviewers, I propose an important conceptual distinction from the double hermeneutic notion that is typical of IPA
research (that is, of a researcher interpreting an individual’s experience of a phenomenon). A novel aspect of this thesis may be the use of a multiple observable hermeneutic layers, with several different reference points, and which function as a personal feedback loop. While Shinebourne (2011, p. 21) describes multiple hermeneutics specifically in relation to Ricœur’s hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion, I suggest a different interpretation is evident in my study, between multiple participants in the research: choir members, interviewers, and myself as researcher.

Three distinctions stood out to me. Firstly, as a researcher who was not present at the interviews, I firstly listened to, and immediately interpreted through my writing and analysis, the individual member understandings as they were told to the interviewer. Secondly, I interpreted the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, seeking to understand the momentary decisions made by an individual interviewer during the interview. Finally, at times I noted members referring to me, in three distinct ways: in the third person (“it’s funny caus Ben is gonna hear this…” Natalie, ¶118); greeting me in the first person at the beginning of the interview (Paige, Hermione), and; in the case of Paige, drawing me several times into the heart of the interview. Paige comments at one point: “I know that…they went to Hobart…for a festival Ben knows more about that because he went” (Paige, ¶323-325), while later in the interview, referring to a partner choir of the youth chorus, Diverse Harmony, in Seattle, US, she says: “Um, yeah, sorry Ben I’ve forgotten the, the name of them!” (Paige, ¶349). In each case, I was neither able to respond during the interview, nor to influence the direction of the interviewers questioning beyond the interview guide. I suggest that we see here a series of double hermeneutics occurring simultaneously, as I seek to make sense of transcripts yet am also drawn into conversation directly: an example it seems of multiple, overlapping hermeneutics.
D: Completing the Project: Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

The following section outlines the methods used for data collection and subsequent analysis in 2014 and 2015. The timeframe spans the change of methodology described above in Part A above, from an initial design with a CGT framework, to the adoption of a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology with an analysis of the data made with participants completed using general IPA methods.

Selection of case study choirs. This study was originally designed with two choirs in mind to serve as case studies and points of triangulation. The case studies for my initial topic examined two choirs and sought a greater understanding of the experiences of singing in a choir which targets young people who may have experiences of social exclusion. Alongside the youth chorus, I sought and gained ethics approval to interview members of Massive Fam⁹, a hip-hop choir based in the inner Western Melbourne suburb of Footscray. The youth chorus collaborated with Massive Fam for a joint concert in 2013, and I had the good fortune to meet the members and its convenors several times during that period. I observed that both choirs shared similar aims in fostering a love of singing with their own membership, and a focus on going beyond singing for their own support to singing out into their respective communities. Massive Fam members regularly performed and led Hip-Hop song writing and singing workshops and performances at schools in Melbourne’s western region. I suspected that members of both choirs, while performing different musical styles (Massive Fam write all original works and the youth chorus perform largely commercial or in-house arrangements), might ascribe similar meanings to their respective choir and its role in their lives. Nevertheless, and as discussed above, in October 2014, shortly after recruiting members of

____________________________

⁹ https://cohealthartsgenerator.com/projects/massive-hip-hop-choir/
the youth chorus for the first round of interviews, my health intervened once again and the project was postponed. Because of time constraints given this postponement, my focus narrowed to the experiences of singing within the youth chorus.

**Recruitment of research participants.**

**Ethical considerations.** Ethics approval was gained from the University of Melbourne in May 2014 to conduct my study (Approval ID 1441649; see Appendix H) and was supported by agreement of both the committee of management of MGLC Inc and the director of advocacy and partnerships at CoHealth (which auspices MassiveFam) to participate. While acknowledging that members may be identifiable due to the small sample size of the youth chorus and the nature of the data collection (in depth qualitative interviews), several additional safeguards were put in place. They sought to ensure, firstly, that member confidentiality was maintained as far as possible and, secondly, to minimise my influence over choir members’ decisions to participate given my role as music director of the choir at the time. For instance, I was not present for provision of information about the project and request to recruit members, which was conducted by a fellow graduate researcher at the time (and now post-doctoral fellow), Dr Cherry Hense. The submission of consent forms in a private location and to a locked box and separate communications about the project provided additional safeguards.

Recruitment of interview participants was undertaken using purposeful (Patton, 1990, pp. 178-183) or purposive (Charmaz, 2014) sampling of a discreet or homogenous group: current members of the youth chorus at September 2014. Dr Hense was included as an alternative contact point for questions relating to the interview process and for any ethical concerns that may arise. Professor Skewes McFerran provided external oversite for the project and was also my regular point of contact for consultations and advice throughout the
interview and analysis process.

Interviews were held away from the rehearsal venue and outside of usual rehearsal hours. Recognising the possible ramifications of members sharing their personal experiences during the interview, interviewers were instructed to provide all members with a resource sheet, prepared in consultation with the committee of management of MGLC Inc, that listed organisations offering additional, confidential support, including mental health support. These organisations were not affiliated with the youth chorus and MGLC Inc. The resource sheet provided to members at interview is at Appendix G.

**Plain language statement and consent form.** The plain language statement and consent form (Appendix D) set out the intentions behind the project and its interest in the way that choir might address social exclusion. The PLS was written with the youth chorus demographic in mind in an age-appropriate, concise, and engaging manner. Both the PLS and consent form noted the researchers’ efforts to protect individual privacy yet noted that, given the size of the choir and small numbers of participants interviewed, individual members may be identifiable. Interview participants were offered a summary of the study’s key findings (Appendix K) after the project.

The PLS provided to interview participants encouraged them to also submit journals in written, audio or video format during a three-month period following their interview. This deliberate strategy sought to recognise and accommodate the youth chorus as “digital natives” (White & Wyn, 2013, p. 193): a generation of young people for whom the integration of digital communication technologies is part of their everyday lives. Journals were intended to supplement interview data and to provide a point of triangulation with interview transcripts and my notes and reflections, offering an alternative option for members to develop ideas and reflect on the interview experience itself outside of the interview and in
a familiar medium. Despite prompting by several interviewers of this option, no journal submissions were received.

**Commitment to transcription.** Returning to the axiological stance of the thesis, I committed prior to commencing the interview process to transcribe and incorporate wherever possible the voices of all members interviewed. Though it diverged from a strict application of the CGT framework (according to which purposive sampling would be undertaken only until the point that theoretical saturation is reached), I viewed transcribing of, and therefore the listening to, all interviews as an important end and ethical consideration of the project. McGrath (2003) notes the potential benefits to research participants of qualitative research. Similarly, as part of a broader research project that seeks to contribute to empirical knowledge about LGBTI youth in a choir setting, the interviews may form an important part of the participants’ coming out journeys. A commitment to capturing their stories in this way demonstrates the unique worth of each story, and was made easier considering the revised phenomenological methodology.

**The interviews.** 13 members signed consent forms (Appendix D) to be interviewed following the recruitment period in September 2014. Two members did not complete an interview, either withdrawing from the project or not responding when contact was made with the interviewer. Reasons for these withdrawals are not known. Between November 2014 and January 2015, 11 interviews were conducted by six different interviewers. All interviewers were fellow doctoral researchers and members of the National Music Therapy Research Unit of the University of Melbourne at the time. All but one interviewer was a Registered Music Therapist (RMT), the Australian professional status that, according to the Australian Music Therapy Association (2017), signifies “that the individual has successfully completed an accredited course of study in music therapy at an Australian tertiary institution,
or equivalent overseas, and continues to maintain their skills through approved professional development.” Tertiary studies are completed to a Masters level and students typically have a Bachelor of Music. Music therapists are assessed against five measures of competency: music skills; psychosocial knowledge, including psychosocial theoretical knowledge and applications, theories of groupwork and group dynamics, verbal processing, developmental factors across the human life span, and external influences upon individuals; clinical and policy knowledge of the health and welfare sectors in Australia; music therapy knowledge, and; music therapy skills.

Interviews were conducted in either private locations or public places at the request of interview participants and all were conducted on or close to the University of Melbourne’s Parkville campus or its neighbouring suburb of Carlton, where the youth chorus rehearses. In September 2015, one member interviewed withdrew consent citing privacy concerns, and the member’s interview files were destroyed. Interviews were transcribed and analysed alongside one another, with each transcription analysed before further transcriptions were completed. Analysis of the first interview commenced in May 2015 and with analysis of the final interview undertaken in December 2015. A summary of members interviewed is at Table 1.
Table 1

**Key Information about Youth Chorus Participants Interviewed for this Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Preferred Pronouns</th>
<th>Interview Refers To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>Primarily main chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>Primarily youth chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malachi Day</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>Both choruses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>Both choruses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige Adams</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>Primarily youth chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>Primarily youth chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>Primarily youth chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz Dance</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>Both choruses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>Both choruses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermione</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>Both choruses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview guide and advice.** An interview guide developed initially as a starting point for the CGT methodology, reflected the use of interviewing as a distinct grounded theoretical method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). My initial intention was to approach interviewing as craft (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), a skill to develop over the course of the interviews, refining and narrowing the approach while simultaneously building skills and experience. With a grounded theory approach, I would have revised questions following each interview as my focus narrowed and a more detailed theoretical picture of the experiences of choir singing, and of the ways in which it addressed social exclusion specifically, emerged. However, given the change of methodology, interviews were instead conducted from the same interview guide (at Appendix F), with guidelines provided for interviewers conducting the interviews (Appendix J). As a semi-structured interview, interviewers could pursue comments and
themes and develop ideas as they emerged during the interview.

Consistent with the PLS, the interview guide asks a series of questions relating to the experiences of singing in this choir and the ways in which choral singing might address member experiences of social exclusion. Questions were grouped into four broad themes that interviewers might cover during the interview. Firstly, the guide asked interviewers to find more about the general backgrounds of choir members: their name, age, educational background, musical background, time in choir, their understanding of choir rehearsals and performances. Secondly, the guide asked more directed questions about how members came to join the choir, their decision to join, reasons for continuing to attend, and whether and how members disclosed their choir membership with other people in their social worlds. Thirdly, the interview guide asked interviewees to explore the meanings of choir for members, asking them to elaborate on the personal impact of choir for them, the impact of the choir upon their outside-of-choir relationships, and what members interviewed perceive to be the impact of the choir for other members. Interviewers had the opportunity to explore further how the choir is led and experiences of leadership by members themselves. The interview guide asked about perceptions of inclusion and exclusion experienced as a member, both within and outside choir. Finally, the guide asked interviewers to explore why singing in this choir is important to members. It asked for members to describe stand out experiences during their time as choir members.

**Pseudonyms, pronouns.** To ensure the privacy of individual members and meet the requirements of ethics, members were asked to choose pseudonyms during their interviews, which are listed at Table 1 alongside their ages. Members selected either a first name or combination of first and surname as their pseudonym. In a supplementary email after completion of the interviews I asked members for the pronouns they preferred when writing
and presenting their stories, in lieu of their pseudonym. These are also listed. I sought to
directly challenge the taken-for-granted dichotomies of gender and assumptions about sex
and sexuality that surround these young singers in contemporary Australia. I also sought to
affirm the understanding of gender as a fluid concept that applies to sociological research
designs as much as to designs grounded in feminist or queer theories, as Judith Lorber (1996)
argues. This understanding is core to the choir’s identity as a safe and supportive place for
same sex attracted and gender diverse young people.

**Post-interview: transcription and analysis.**

**Personal statement.** Howard Pollio, Tracey Henley, and Craig Thompson (1997, p.
48), in their phenomenological study of the everyday, suggest that the interviewer might
interview themselves before others. The interview was perceived as a means for the
interviewer to become the first person interviewed about the topic, enabling them to
scrutinise their possible responses to questions before asking others those same questions. I
adapted their novel approach for this study by setting out my own broad understandings and
pre-understandings. In keeping with a commitment to reflexivity, and to better understand my
own bias and background within the study, I completed a personal “bracketing” statement
(Appendix A) that sets out my personal background and the influences I bring to the
interview analysis.

This action sought to bring to light as far as possible, rather than bracket out, my
influences, history, and assumptions. Importantly, this statement includes and acknowledges
in advance the views and relationships that have shaped my identity as both a researcher and
practitioner. Completed after interviews were collected but prior to commencing my
transcription and subsequent analysis, the statement offers a point of reflection or
triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 1990) for the subsequent analysis and
promotes transparency. In setting out broader personal histories and statements rather than responding to specific questions, the statement reveals my axiological and epistemological positions. It may be a useful tool to pre-empt and integrate my reactions and influences as I listen in to each member’s experiences. I combined this personal statement with notes, personal reflections, and other writing over the course of the interview analysis period to locate my experiences and reactions to the interviews themselves (See example of memos relating to Nicole’s interview at Appendix L). I drew from both the statement and personal reflections periodically while deepening my analysis.

Transcription. I transcribed each interview in full and sought to preserve as closely as possible the personalities, emotional responses, and stylistic nuances of each individual member. I made notes of unusual or surprising moments during the interviews, whether based on my impression of the member, of the interviewer and their style, or of my reactions to the interview itself. Following transcription of each interview, I attempted to distil each member’s interview into a short narrative synthesis. These short summaries sought to paraphrase and capture member experiences in my own words. I wrote reflective notes at all stages of the process as I became aware of my reactions to the interview itself, exploring interesting comments and observations that I believe were omitted, or where as choir leader I have a different recollection. For instance, and as I elaborate later in this chapter, I wrote of moments where I sensed a member’s answers had been prepared in advance of the question. The question guide allowed interviewers to ask questions in several ways and from different angles, allowing me to hear things differently, in the members’ own words.

Interview transcripts are not included with this thesis to satisfy ethics obligations. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, several short narrative summaries of member experiences are included between chapters to give voice to their experiences and an
impression of individual personalities.

**Order of interviews analysed.** In contrast to the initial theoretical sampling signalled within the ethics application (which, using a grounded theoretical approach, sought to narrow the focus toward a theory relating to how the choir might address social exclusion), I first randomised the order in which I transcribed and analysed interviews. I listened to interviews in a different order to the order by which they were subsequently transcribed and analysed. This was intentional and reflected in part a deliberate attempt to achieve a sense of balance across all interviews and avoid the stronger voices within the interview mix obscuring others. I noted in my initial reflection after listening to Hermione’s interview for the first time, for instance, that her voice was influential within the mix of members. Hermione, who held the role of representative for the youth chorus on the MGLC Inc management committee at the time, offered an animated commentary of her experiences. Her affection and deep investment in the choir was immediately clear, and she often provided succinct and eloquent responses to questions.

While the role of Hermione as a leader was important, I felt it was more important to hear the voices emerging from all ten-member experiences to be truly representative of their experiences. I sensed an in-depth analysis of Hermione’s interview earlier in the order of interviews analysed may have overly influenced the descriptive language I used to describe other members’ experiences. Similarly, on hearing 24-year old James’s interview (preferred pronouns: he/him/his), I sensed a construction of a story of what he thought I wanted to hear, and a sense of being manipulated. For this reason, I set his interview aside too until a later point in time. Rather than allowing these members’ voices to be heard early in the mix, and thereby potentially overshadow the voices and potential contributions of other members, I decided to set aside their respective analyses until later in the order.
**Analysis.** MaxQDA qualitative analysis software, recognised as a versatile and powerful tool for qualitative analysis of interviews (Felicity A. Baker, 2016), assisted me in identifying commonalities and themes across all ten interviews. Cases were initially considered individually, according to the principles of IPA. Using this method, I initially coded individual comments by members *in vivo* before looking across these codes to explore broader coding categories and subcategories for each member. I sought as far as possible to retain the original language and descriptions of the members. For instance, “choir as a safe place” emerged as an important code for Malachi, while Hermione’s description of choir as “an insular little queer bubble” offers a pithy conceptualisation that contains within it several essential qualities.

With an understanding of these extracted codes and the super-ordinate themes I had observed in individual interviews, I then looked across all ten cases for similarities, differences, and unusual elements. This cross-case analysis stage, as is set out according to Smith, Larkin, and Flowers (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, pp. 101-103), provided an initial framework to make sense of member experiences in all their complexity, and highlighted broad themes and subthemes as they were uniquely expressed by individual members. The broad themes, descriptions, and associated quotes are set out in Table 5.

I highlighted themes for their frequency, or numeration, as Smith and colleagues (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 98) describe. I selected ideas and sometimes even phrases that appeared across many of the ten interviews. Broader themes - choir as a place of safety, for instance – were explored for their differences, nuances, and even contradictory understandings among members. Within the umbrella idea of safety, for instance, choir is experienced and referenced explicitly by several members as a clique on first joining, and yet for Malachi Day (preferred pronouns: he/him/his) it was an immediately warm, welcoming,
and inclusive space.

I also highlighted comments that reveal the function of the interview itself. For instance, I explore in the following section Hermione’s command of her interviewer from the opening of the interview, and the interviewer’s acquiescence, which in my experience of the interviewer I suggest would have been an intentional decision. There were also moments of significant omission or obfuscation. For instance, early in her interview, Hermione deliberately omits a key part of her musical education background as I knew it when first asked, and returns to it only later in the interview. I highlighted moments of significance for individual members that related directly to the choir’s musicking or extra-musical activities, where members were affected in some way – whether challenged or transformed. In one instance, 29-year-old Nicole (preferred pronouns: she/her/hers) reveals feeling deeply challenged, even affronted, to disclose her sexual identity publicly, by the musical repertoire chosen by the choir. It raises issues relating to social exclusion but also the important crossover between musical repertoire choice and social identity.

Several experiences emerged from the interviews as interesting for their complementarity or divergence from this mission. I understood such comments as having potential implications for how the choir promotes itself as an organisation and sought to highlight it with further discussion. Furthermore, I highlighted themes for their relevance to the study’s overarching interest in exploring social inclusion and social exclusion. Several themes chosen warranted further exploration given their close links to, and implications for, the experiences of choral singing, social exclusion, and the performance of identities. The role of insight and my practice experience was again important to establishing the case for prioritising one theme over another. Where several of these thematic inclusions were discussed in many interviews (e.g. choir as a social clique on entry), others were chosen for
the insights they offer (Jazz and Nicole’s discussion of feeling excluded from Melbourne’s LGBTI community and, in Nicole’s case, from within MGLC Inc).

The themes I have identified reflect my subjective interpretation of the member’s experiences, and reflexively engage with my knowledge of individual members and their stories, my expertise leading the group, and knowledge of community choral musicking more generally. Over time I recognised that a hierarchical approach to categorisation of the lived experiences in this case, while a valid option for many IPA analyses, did not allow enough flexibility given the intertwined and at times contradictory nature of member experiences and understandings of choir. I explored other conceptual frames to analysis the member experiences that form the basis for subsequent chapters. These written analyses extend to micro-level discussions and engagement.

In Part E, I take a short but important reflexive detour to explore the consequences of my removal from the interviews themselves. Thereafter, I introduce the results in Chapter 4 before scrutinising these in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Weaving into the analysis a more detailed engagement with emergent themes, these chapters draw upon theoretical ideas to deepen my interpretation in written form.
E: Four Reflexive Reflections on the Interviews

Prelude. I returned to my research in March 2015, after a third craniotomy and radiotherapy, to a collection of audio interviews conducted by six postgraduate research colleagues on my behalf. In this section, and prior to presenting my findings of the interviews with youth chorus members, I consider three ancillary aspects to the interviews themselves. Firstly, I reflect on my tacit inclusion in the interviews despite my absence. Secondly, I discuss my reaction to one interview as an example of this experience, where I noticed a gap between what I knew and what was narrated to the interviewer, and how the interviewer’s instincts and approach differed from my own. This example, I believe, demonstrates the possible epistemological benefits and shortcomings of being a knowledgeable silent observer in this case. Thirdly, I reflexively consider whether the sexual and gender identities of the interviewers might have been tempered the interviews themselves. Finally, I take up the unusual opportunity afforded by multiple interviewers working from a common interview guide to reflect on the broader craft of interviewing as a genuine inter-change of views (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2) between multiple interviewers and participants.

“Ben knows more about that”: The silent, third person in the room. With the decision to allow others to complete interviews on my behalf, I became an outsider to the interviews, removed from the experience, listening intently, yet drawn into the heart of the discussion by the members or the interviewers. I was conscious that my knowledge of individual singers in the group afforded me a privileged epistemological position: a chance to hear members more deeply than those conducting the interviews. This experience I suggest might be compared to Cappiello, Zanasi, and Fiumara’s (1988) notion of the “silent observer” in a group therapeutic setting. For these authors, the silent observer “is an anomalous presence within the group…paired with the therapist and becomes the object of some
fantasies, but isolated and placed in a marginal position in the group because he or she cannot communicate” (p. 227). The silent observer has been the focus within psychology and group therapy (p. 227), described as marginalised for their inability to communicate actively into the interview. This position, while initially uncomfortable, has afforded my thesis a new direction and an additional hermeneutic position at play, as I listen in on and interpret others interacting; an example of the notion of the multiple hermeneutic discussed in Part C of this chapter. I felt proud to listen in to members such as Malachi, who spoke of his difficult personal journey and the saviour-like role of the choir. There were likely benefits in my distance from the interview process, setting me apart from the members and their stories, and offering moments where, I suggest, my tacit presence in the dual role of researcher and practitioner may not have been foremost in their minds.

At times, I was drawn directly into the interview experience to reinforce, clarify, or confirm details, as the comment by 22-year-old Paige (¶325, preferred pronouns: she/her/hers) in the section title reveals. Here, Paige describes to her interviewer MGLC and the youth chorus’ interstate travel to attend a national choral festival. Paige spoke on three separate occasions during her interview directly to me. In fact, three members noted my presence explicitly during the interview: Hermione and Paige greeted me at the beginning of their interviews, while Paige and 21-year-old Natalie (preferred pronouns: she/her/hers) mentioned my presence elsewhere during the interview: “…it’s funny caus Ben is gonna hear this” (Natalie, ¶110); “Um, yeah, sorry Ben I’ve forgotten the, the name of them!” (Paige, ¶349). Still others referred to my role within the choir in a more descriptive fashion: “Ben is like a big brother to us” (Malachi, ¶44) and “Ben Leske, um, has been a really big part of my enjoyment of the choir” (Daisy, ¶175). Yet there were also moments of personal frustration as I perceived mistruths, omissions, and subtle shifts of emphasis during the interviews that I
was unable to counter or challenge. For instance, 28-year old Jazz (preferred pronouns: he/him/his) narrates his voice check experience in a way that I felt exaggerated key aspects (¶132). Similarly, Dylan’s discussion of solo allocations implies they were determined according to how often a member participates in the choir rather than their musical ability (¶154). At times, interviewers continued along discursive tracks where my instincts would have led me to take a different path, or where I would have sought further clarification. My original research question comes back into focus at this point: a study of social inclusion, exclusion, and the youth chorus. I reflect on my social identity as a researcher excluded at key moments from the conventional graduate research experience. My personal responses and reactions to moments within the interviews serve as a means of uncovering deeper insights into my experience of being excluded from the interviews. I set out two below.

**Being excluded: Hermione’s tertiary omission.** Though interviewed by strangers, the interviewers from the National Music Therapy Research Unit skilfully established trust with members that freed the members to share their stories, with an understanding that I would ultimately be the beneficiary and trustee of the audio recordings. Nevertheless, I was struck at times by the epistemological gap between my knowledge of the individual’s experience and the information they conveyed to their interviewers. Hermione is one of several interviews where I noticed this gap; the example below illustrates this experience well.

Listening in to Hermione’s interview for the first time, I noticed a startling omission when first reviewing the audio recording and a question asked early in the interview about her musical background. Asked early in her interview about the musical backgrounds of youth chorus members, Hermione responds with the following description (¶¶100-112):
Hermione started music in high school. Um, well no actually, no I started music a long time before that, I started playing piano. And then I was, not very good at that, well I didn’t really care about it.

Interviewer 1: Yeah
Hermione: And then I did um violin in primary school, and [taps table] in high school and, [taps table], yeah. Um, so… ah yes, we’re all quite musical. There is um, [sighs] I play violin and viola, [youth chorus member] is a music teacher so she plays… a lot!

Interviewer 1: [chuckles]
Hermione: ummm, [youth chorus member] plays violin badly [Hermione chuckles, Interviewer chuckles] ummm, he plays piano quite well.

Interviewer 1: hmm
Hermione: umm, [youth chorus member] plays, yeah and he wants to go for his…I don’t know, eighth grade AMEB I think?

Interviewer 1: Yeah right…
Hermione: Or something. I forget, I never did any of those so I’m just like…

Interviewer 1: [chuckling]: yep!
Hermione: [Laughs] …Ummm, yeah so learn the instruments, it’s um, we’re all, yeah we’re all quite musically inclined.

Hermione then goes on to provide examples of others in the choir and their instrumental music backgrounds, before describing her initial experience of a clique within the group (¶112). Interestingly, Hermione had failed to mention several years of study as a viola player toward a degree at a university music conservatorium. I had come to know about her significant musical background while working with the choir. Instead, I noticed Hermione employed a distinctive tactile element—the tapping of the table—as a means of distraction and to exert a sense of control over the interview: a segue of sorts to move the conversation along.

Hermione only discloses her tertiary background later in the interview, when the interviewer asks her to talk in more detail about her motivations to join the youth chorus. It seems he was seeking more detail about whether Hermione’s motives were purely musical or
partly inspired by the choir’s queer identity; by this point, Hermione had already described
the choir as a “queer bubble” several times. Hermione expands upon her musical background
(¶¶462-479):

Hermione  Well I mean music’s always been a part of my life.
Interviewer 1  Hmmmm
Hermione  Um, I like having it as part of my life. So, and um, seeing like
um I, I started a Bachelor of Music at [University Name]. Um
it’s violin, so my main instrument was viola.
Interviewer 1  Yep
Hermione  Um, so, like doing instrumental instruments and stuff is all
fraught with [breathes in] memories and stuff.
Interviewer 1  Yeah okay
Hermione  Ummm, whereas singing has always been, a fun thing!
Interviewer 1  Yeah
Hermione  Caus I don’t know enough about it to be like “I know that that
that that, THAT IS WRONG! [Shouting, Hermione hits hand on
table in time with word “that”] IT’S ALL WRONG!”
Interviewer 1  [laughing] okay!
Hermione  [quicker, sharper] I’m just like “It sounds pretty. That’s fine.
Done!”
Interviewer 1  [both laughing] Yeah cool!
Hermione  Ummm, yeah. So I I, honestly I don’t remember why I wanted to
join a choir. Um… yeah I don’t know I think I just wanted to
join something.
Interviewer 1  Yeah
Hermione  -Um [smacks lips]… but yeah no I, I like singing. It makes me
feel good.
Interviewer 1  – Yep
Hermione  That’s pretty much it.

In this later disclosure, it was striking that Hermione immediately distinguishes the
choir and singing as a place where she enjoys positive musicking experiences. She appears to
juxtapose the choir with her formal instrumental studies that were fraught with what she
implied to be negative memories (¶466). Hermione reveals in comments shortly thereafter her
understanding of the contrast between the perfectionism of formal study and the more relaxed
choir experience. It appears to me that she has carefully planned this unveiling of her musical
background, perhaps the result of her increasing familiarity with and trust in the interviewer, as a larger narrative revealing of layers of her identity, or to maintain the interviewer’s engagement in her story. Hermione engineered the progression of the interview in a way that might not have been possible had I conducted the interview myself, given my prior knowledge of her musical life.

**The tempering influence of interviewers.** Interviewers conducted each interview with admirable skill and attentiveness, yet I noted a lack of direct engagement with the participants’ queer identities. This may in part be the effect of their own sexual or gender identity on their approach to the interview: all interviewers to my understanding identify as cisgender heterosexual females or males, while all members interviewed identified and talked of their sexual identities as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. All ten members interviewed used words such as “gay” or “queer” in their interviews, suggesting an openness and level of comfort in using the terminology. Yet only two interviewers, Interviewer 1 (male) and Interviewer 2 (female), picked up and mirrored the sexual and gender identity labels used by their interview participants during their interviews, including collective use of the choir’s name and of a queer or LGBTI community.

By not employing the terminology closely associated with the choir (and by keeping the dialogue generic in this sense), despite regular cues from members, it might be argued that the potential responses elicited by interviewers were more limited. It seems the interviews, while open and supportive of members interviewed, and whether consciously or unwittingly, reflect a heteronormative societal lens (Kitzinger, 2005) in the absence of direct engagement and use of the language of the choir, despite regular cues from members. This sense of detachment from the subject matter that may be deliberate, with interviewers recognising, for instance, a limited subject area knowledge and therefore deciding to be
careful with their language; or an example of unconscious bias, or other motivation.

The interviewers’ respectful approaches and, I suggest, hesitancy to directly and critically engage with this aspect of the interview, influences and perhaps limits how I as the researcher can depict the collective voice of the members. At times, I felt the interviewers did not challenge the participants to go deeper in their analysis, particularly in relation to their descriptions of issues of sexuality and gender in their lives. Interestingly, it was the members themselves rather than the interviewers who made a point of raising their queer identities within the interviews. I felt additional insights into the fundamental experience of social exclusion in relation to sexual or gender identity could have been more fully explored. While I acknowledge that the interview guide could have targeted social exclusion and inclusion more specifically, it was always intended as a starting point for a more detailed discussion through a more critical lens. However, there were other moments when interviewers directed choir members toward and precipitated moments of insight and clarity that may not have been explored had I undertaken the interviews myself.

**Exploring interviewing skills.** Having set out the strange experience of listening in to the interviews, with a sense of exclusion yet included within the discussions themselves, and suggested an opportunity cost to my absence, it is similarly important to suggest opportunities afforded by this experience. I observed varied interviewing experiences and techniques in the work of my colleagues. All interviewers drew from a common interview guide (Appendix F), and all who volunteered their time for the project were skilled, as registered music therapists or with extensive previous interview experience. With varying techniques, these interviewers gained the trust of choir members, who over the course of the interview disclosed difficult, intimate perspectives relating to their sexuality and experiences as SSAGD young people and the choir.
Of interest in this section are the decisions taken by interviewers to go beyond prescribed questions and to allow their instinct to guide the course of the interview.

Interviewing in this sense may be considered a craft and a social practice (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 18) rather than its more recent focus in the social sciences as a discreet methodological tool. As a craft, it is something learned over time, improved with experience, and applied flexibly. Rather than striving for neutrality, both the interviewer and interview co-construct knowledge through conversation, requiring close consideration of the ethics of interviewing:

…the social relationship of interviewer and interviewee…rests on the interviewer’s ability to create a stage where the subject is free and safe to talk of private events recorded for later public use. This requires a delicate balance between the interviewer’s concern for pursuing interesting knowledge and ethical respect for the integrity of the interview subject. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 16)

Guided by an ethical concern, individual interviewers responded to the emotional reactions of choir members according to their training and intuition. They gained insights that were interesting and revealed member pre-understandings through their demonstration of sympathy for interview participants. Yet within this mix of high quality and intuitive interviewing, I observed some techniques were more effective than others. My reflections here draw upon my practice-based knowledge of both the choir members and interviewers.
Table 2

*Interview Participants and their Interviewers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Chorus Member (Interviewee)</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Interviewer ID</th>
<th>Interviewer Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermione</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz Dance</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malachi Day</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige Adams</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 sets out the interviewers alongside choir members, according to their gender. In most cases, interviewers completed interviews with a choir member of a different gender identity to their own. Given the importance of gender and sexuality to this study, and as the genders of interviewers suggest, gender identity may have played an implicit role in several cases discussed below. Before exploring the interviewing techniques that were deployed and the information elicited as a result, I recognise three important caveats that may have a bearing on the interviewing experiences. Firstly, interviewers were assigned to members randomly; that is, the assigner knew the interviewers but did not know of individual youth chorus members. Instead, the decision to assign interviewers to members was made according to each interviewer’s workload. Secondly, the physical environment did not appear to play a
role during the interviews themselves, although at times it made individual words in the audio recording inaudible. Thirdly I am unaware of how long each member spent talking with their interviewer prior to commencing the recorded interview. I recognise this pre-interview and pre-recording conversation may already have built rapport with individual members, and allowed interviewers to form an impression of the members and tailor their register and approach accordingly. In the following two sections I first reflect on my own experience of the interviews and moments of inclusion before exploring the craft of interviewing demonstrated by my colleagues.

**Bringing out the unique traits of choir members.** Dylan was an eloquent speaker, details-orientated, and someone who spoke very quickly during his interview (suggestive of a nervousness or excitement, although I recall him speaking quickly outside of the interview). Dylan’s interviewer (Interviewer 5) accommodated this well, encouraging him with minimal dialogue, facilitating the conversation and encouraging him to elaborate. In the following dialogue (¶¶286-289), Interviewer 5, recalling Dylan’s earlier comment about his corporal reactions to singing, deliberately brings a physical element back into the interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer 5</th>
<th>Yeah yeah, sounds good...yeah good, good experiences.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>Yeah, oh yeah, even just describing it now I’m getting goose bumps!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 5</td>
<td>[chuckles] Yeah I was thinking when you were describing the, um, you know that your posture changed I noticed as you were describing that your posture had changed!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>–Yes! [laughs] It was just like it was going to my head, but yeah nah I felt that way again even I was describing the first moment and it was like what I’m getting goose bumps again, yeah. So, obviously it’s still powerful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewer 5’s technique and return to this point helped to reinforce to me Dylan’s ability to articulate how his body responded to particular musical experiences such as performing, more than the musical embodiment discussed by others such as Natalie (‘the harmonies are
my drugs…I get a high off it when it really works perfectly” (¶49)), and Chloe (“that blend of
voices that we have I think is quite rare” (¶243)). It also suggested Dylan’s ability to recall
this sense of embodiment as he narrates his reaction to reliving performance moments.

**Eliciting deeper responses of members.** For 26-year-old Daisy (preferred pronouns:
she/her/hers), the interview was an important personal opportunity to talk about and reflect
upon things that she would not otherwise do. Interviewer 3 expertly supported Daisy to have
her say – allowing her to move quickly and early into a discussion of her mental health.
Having spoken with Daisy during her voice check, I was aware that this was a significant part
of her background (Daisy describes the importance of me knowing about her mental health
journey, in confidence, during her interview) but nonetheless remained very private about this
part of her story. After disclosing that she has “a little bit of social anxiety” (¶16) when first
joining in on rehearsals of the larger main chorus, Daisy describes how she overcame her fear
and decided to perform with the main chorus in part because “they’re good musically” and
performed “interesting music” (¶24). Interviewer 3 then guides the interview back to her
mention of the feeling of anxiety and, carefully reinforcing the interview as a safe
environment without time constraints, quickly elicits a deeper disclosure (¶¶25-36):

*Interviewer 3*  
*Hmmm, okay, cool. And so, when you joined the youth chorus was it not, your, did you not feel that kind of anxiety or kind of that feeling of being overwhelmed when you joined that one, or?*

*Daisy*  
Um, not so much like obviously a little bit at the start it was a bit intimidating.

*Interviewer 3*  
*Hmmm*

*Daisy*  
Or just a little bit scary because it was new. And I actually, I feel like I do have a lot of [out of breath] stuff to say about [laughing]

*Interviewer 3*  
*Great*

*Daisy*  
Okay [laughing]

*Interviewer 3*  
*Yeah, we can go as long as you like.*

*Daisy*  
Okay. Um, I actually um before I joined the chorus um I’d been having a lot of mental health issues,–

*Interviewer 3*  
*Hmmm*
Daisy —um, I mainly suffer from depression.

Interviewer 3 Hmm

Daisy Anxiety is just sort of a side effect of that. And um, I hadn’t done anything socially or with a community for a long time.

Interviewer 3’s support at this early stage of the interview made it comfortable for Daisy to regularly mention her depression and the key role the choir plays for her in supporting her social reengagement for the remainder of the interview.

Similarly, Interviewer 2 carefully supported deeper insights from Malachi, a young singer whose interview revealed a sense of rejection from his biological family and the choir’s role in filling their role in his life. asking what choir to him, Malachi responds (¶¶34-39):

Malachi The choir’s my family, my second family…um...[sounding emotional] excuse me if I get emotional [mmm]…

Interviewer 2 It’s very normal to get quite emotional in interviews, so, yeah…

Malachi Ah…choir’s become…yeah…huh, excuse me….um…[long pauses]…um…

Interviewer 2 Take your time

Malachi Um…thanks…

Interviewer 2 I’ve got a whole coffee here!

Having expertly identified the experience of “getting emotional” during interviews as normal, and set free from time constraints for the interview, Malachi felt comfortable describing in the following section in detail the rift with his biological family, and the role of the choir in “saving” him from going backwards.

**Balancing directedness and “setting free.”** Interviewer 1 quickly and perceptively understood Hermione’s desire to direct her interview, and responded intuitively. The opening moments of the interview (¶¶5-24) establish the power dynamic within the interview:
Interviewer 1  Alright, so, we’re going there. Um, all right, so, now just at the start, we’re talking to [Hermione].
Hermione  Haaaaaa!
Interviewer 1  Okay, so hello Ben when you’re listening to this.
Hermione  Hi Ben [chuckles]
Interviewer 1  And um, we’re gonna start by talking through the idea of a pseudonym. Um, so yeah...
Hermione  Ah, I don’t know.
Interviewer 1  Don’t know?
Hermione  Um, can we come back to that?
Interviewer 1  Yep, we can definitely come back to that. If something comes to you throughout the interview.
Hermione  Okay
Interviewer 1  Um, otherwise if you want, you know, shoot through an email to any of us, um.
Hermione  [laughs] I’m not going to put that much effort into it,–
Interviewer 1  Okay cool
Hermione  –I just want it to be something cool.–
Interviewer 1  okay–
Hermione  –continue.
Interviewer 1  Cool, no worries. [breathes in] Alright, so, now... let me just get this up. Okay so what, basically what I want to get out of today is, um, I’d really, ah, really like you to, to help me understand um, a little about the, about the choir. Um, Ben’s told me a little bit about it but um, not lots and lots so it’d be good to sort of get ah your perspective you know, what the about the choir. Um and,–
Hermione  –Sweetie, the chorus as a whole or just the youth chorus?
Interviewer 1  Um, both
Hermione  Okay! Cool, continue.

I suggest this dynamic reflects in part Interviewer 1’s gender (male), along with a sense of Hermione wanting to assert herself prior to making fuller disclosures to him. Hermione’s initial omission of her tertiary music studies when asked about her musical background, that she returns to later in the interview, might be seen in this light.

Interviewer 6 skilfully utilised several techniques in her interview with Jazz Dance, both to encourage him to clarify his understanding of experiences, and to contain his
interview from ranging too far from the broad topic of experiencing choir. Toward the beginning of her interview with Jazz, Interviewer 6 drew upon her emotional awareness in a way that helped Jazz to become more self-aware. Discussing a solo audition experience where he initially felt others had not stayed on to listen to his audition in the venue foyer after he’d supported them, Jazz says (¶¶195-213):

Jazz So I slept on it, the next morning felt a bit better about it. And then I actually sent an email to, one of the guys that had been there, saying, without going into too much of an emotional level, what this is what I experienced this is what happened, can you guys tell me why you all disappeared? And they said, oh because there were seats in the other room. So it wasn’t personal,–

Interviewer 6 Hmm
Jazz –which was how I took it.
Interviewer 6 Hmm
Jazz It was just, circumstance.
Interviewer 6 Was it good for you to get that clarification about–
Jazz It was.
Interviewer 6 –what had happened? Yeah...
Jazz It was.
Interviewer 6 And obviously it had an impact on your decision about whether to go–
Jazz Hmm
Interviewer 6 –on stage, as well, so–
Jazz It did have a huge, like “Inner Diva” was very difficult for me–
Interviewer 6 Yeah
Jazz –from start to finish, and because I because I AM a soloist at heart and I went for a solo part and I didn’t get there, that was another challenge.
Interviewer 6 Hmm
Jazz So... that was that was something I had to face up to,–
Interviewer 6 Hmm
Jazz –that I’m in the whole other league now.

Refraining from interjecting, affirming comments with “mmm” and seeking to affirm Jazz’s thoughts and opinions, she fostered a greater awareness for me as an observer of Jazz’s
perspective of the choir. Interviewer 3 then returned to the point of “adjusting to new roles” in music and socially for Jazz, who described in detail his karaoke background and how he ranked himself against others. Her approach helped me to see a pattern emerge over the whole interview of Jazz as a soloist, through his karaoke comments, and as a singer who values hierarchies and structures deeply, through his discussion of competitive karaoke in a musical context, and of the choir’s leadership and administrative structures more generally throughout the interview.

**Summing up content.** In her interview with Natalie, Interviewer 5 brought her own interpretation of Natalie’s comments and experiences to the interview, which she then took up. While initially uncomfortable with the idea of summarising member experiences in concise form during the interview (as Interviewer 3, for instance, did at several points for Nicole), it served to deepen the understandings and enunciations of members interviewed. For instance, in discussing leadership within the chorus, and people caring for each other within the choir, Natalie comments that “everyone sort of chips in and it’s great that way”. As the following excerpt sets out (¶¶41-45), Interviewer 5 suggests the word “caring” that is taken up initially, but then elaborated on in more depth than would I suspect have been the case this word not been seeded in his mind:

**Interviewer 5**

> So everyone sort of, I guess sort of caring about it would you say...

**Natalie**

> Yeah, yeah, everyone cares about it and wants it to continue working the way it does. [yeah, for sure]

**Interviewer 5**

> And so what do you think it is about the choir that makes people want to care about it and, you know, why is it meaningful I guess?

**Natalie**

> [breaths in]...um, I mean, it’s a group of people who have several important things in common with each other. So, even just, a group of people who come together because they want to sing beautifully already is a big drawing together because you have this common goal of making the music really good, and um, and working hard for that. But then, because it is a queer choir everyone has...
It seems this approach was less effective for Nicole, who was interviewed by Interviewer 4. In this instance, Interviewer 4’s summary of her comment did not elicit a new discussion, although it allowed Nicole to self-reflect on the impact of the choir’s gay and lesbian identity in her life (¶¶26-28):

Nicole: It was frustrating [hmmm] because I shouldn’t have to explain. It should just be a choir [hmmm], big deal, it’s… some people still wonder why you’d want to go to a G&L choir if you’re not G&L [hmmm, yep]. But I just explained to them that I’ve got a lot of friends in the queer community and I love music and I wanted to … I feel that that organisation is great because it shows the community that no matter who you are you can still create beautiful music and I wanted to be part of that. That’s how I explain it to them.

Interviewer 4: Yep. So, it sounds like joining the choir was sort of a catalyst to something in terms of communication with people?

Nicole: Um, yeah, it’s forced me to be more upfront about my views not so much coming out to everybody because that’s probably not going to happen with some people. But um, yeah, [hmm] it was a little bit of a catalyst for me.

Interviewer 4’s interview suggested to me a keenness to demonstrate his expert knowledge and understanding of the subject area, and a tendency to summarise Nicole’s comments in a way that for other interviewees might have closed the conversation down. Interviewer 4’s gender (cisgender male) may have played a role too: Nicole identifies openly during her interview as a bisexual female. Nevertheless, considered from another perspective, Interviewer 4’s comments were insightful and, I suggest, correctly recognised and reflected back to Nicole, in her register, her intelligence and analytical, legal mind. It is difficult to assess more fully without having a better picture of the extent to which such rapport was developed prior to the formal interview recording.

At times during her discussion with Jazz Dance, Interviewer 3 took a more active role, sensing the need to shift the focus toward constructive aspects of Jazz’s experience and to
offset what felt on reflection to be a tendency toward negative comment. I acknowledge this may be my own temperament and sense of optimism, something I know is shared with Interviewer 3. Nevertheless, I felt a focus on negative experiences from Jazz. For instance, at the beginning of the interview, Jazz revealed an experience that, unbeknown to Interviewer 3, was repeated at intervals throughout his interview: of an unsuccessful audition for a solo singing role in his high school musical, *The Pirates of Penzance*, suggesting a focus from an early age on solo voice performance. Jazz narrates how he was “dropped” to the chorus (¶22) and as a result “swore I’d never do chorus again, at that stage” (¶24). Interjecting at this point, Interviewer 3 shifted the tone of the interview back toward the present day, saying: “It sounds like music’s been a really big part of your life, for a long time?” (¶25) A combination of sympathetic tone and reinforcement of his musical background that implicitly challenged Jazz’s focus on rejection, provided him a bridge that he used to return to discussing his enjoyment of music and singing.

At other times, Interviewer 3 intervened to shift the mood in a calmer direction that is consistent with my experience of this interviewer’s warm and trust-engendering temperament. Describing excitedly his successful voice check for the choir, Jazz says (¶¶138-148):

Jazz: Um, and I posted it on my Facebook and I, I ramped it up a little bit and said, “I’ve passed my audition for the choir, I’m a bass 1, go me!”

Interviewer 3: Hmmm
Jazz: And, EVERYBODY LOVED IT!

Interviewer 3: Yeah. So there’s really positive feedback—
Jazz: Yep,—

Interviewer 3: —to you sharing that news.
Jazz: —there was, and,—

Interviewer 3: hmmm
Jazz: —every time we, I’ve done three shows with the choir and I’ve run [fundraiser event] this year,

Interviewer 3: Hmmmm
Jazz: —which was a big job. And I’ve advertised it extensively. To everyone at work, everyone on my social media, um, talking to people about it. Um
getting people there is a bit different, but, people supporting me has not been absent.

It seems Interviewer 3 seeks to shift Jazz’s more private comments and return the discussion gently and tactfully to the choir, in the process helping Jazz to recognise some deeper understandings of his choir experience. Jazz disclosed to Interviewer 3 a childhood where it was difficult for him to ask for help within his immediate family, Jazz describes how, “when you grow up with that, it makes life difficult (¶521) … because that’s so consciously what you come to expect” (¶523). In the following excerpt from this discussion (¶¶524-529), Interviewer 3 elicits a discussion of Jazz’s leadership role within the choir as one of the keys to its meaning in his life:

**Interviewer 3**  
I just was sort of reflecting as you were saying that about that relationship with your stepdad and, you know it must have been very challenging at times for you personally. When you think about the relationships and I suppose the connections you were talking about—

**Jazz**  
Hmmm

**Interviewer 3**  
—before as well that you’ve developed in the choir, I wonder if that’s different from what you experienced at home and also how that’s different and what that’s done for you perhaps? Yeah.

**Jazz**  
It, it is very different. It’s improved my confidence to be able to ask for help.

**Interviewer 3**  
Yeah

**Jazz**  
And, to actually, because ev-, because, even though sometimes I didn’t feel like it, everyone was backing me to make this [event] work.

*The final interview question as a catalyst.* The final question of the interview captured for several members some of the most valuable understandings of their experiences. The question of whether there was anything else members wanted to share about the choir before closing the interview, prompted several members to respond with a lucid and insightful summary of the experience. In the cases of those for whom the interview’s ending
provided the most lucid commentary, their willingness to remain open—to avoid gestures or words to suggest the end of the interview—provided the room for members to reflect more deeply. The approach of two interviewers in three interviews will be taken as examples.

In answering Interviewer 1’s question, and after a noticeable pause, Hermione responds by capturing her insights into what the choir means as a community (¶1002):

hmmm… I think that the quality of the community and the experience is heavily influenced by, um, the members and their openness to forming a community. And by the leaders and their facilitating of inclusive and happy sort of place.

This begins a discussion of choir leadership that I will return to later in this thesis.

Interviewer 1 encourages Hermione, using neutral comments and responses including “hmmm,” “yeah,” and “okay” that allow Hermione room to elaborate.

Similarly, Interviewer 1 again allows the space for Paige to articulate her ideas about the choir’s collective identity and the incongruence of its name (¶¶523-530):

Paige —I think it doesn’t, it doesn’t represent the choir well. Calling it the, I mean the youth bit’s fine, but the Melbourne “Gay and Lesbian” Youth Choir? Like, no [chuckles]—

Interviewer 1 Yeah
Paige —we have, people in our choir who are, bisexual and people who are, asexual and we have people, um, of many other, variations, I guess [chuckling]—

Interviewer 1 Hmmm
Paige —um, in the choir and I think it should, I think it’s um, just an issue because, we’ve had this name for a long time and they need to—

Interviewer 1 Yeah okay
Paige —um, I think it’s hard to, to make it official, but um, that’s the only thing I don’t like about choir, the name.

Interviewer 1 Any suggestions?

With the question “Any suggestions?”, Interviewer 1 allows for Paige’s elaboration of her view about the choir’s name, and takes an interest in finding out more A more detailed
discussion of possible names and the limitations of the choir’s “Gay and Lesbian” brand follows.

The open stances of both interviewers (1 and 2)—their willingness to remain open to further information until the interview’s end—are demonstrated not just in the words chosen by the interview but in manner. Interviewer 2 demonstrates this in her interview with Malachi (¶¶109-116). After asking Malachi if there’s anything else he’d like to add, the following discussion ensues:

Malachi I think I’ve talked a lot!

Interviewer 2 You’ve said some amazing things, it’s really interesting to hear about it, yeah, thank you so much...

Malachi I think for me my personal experience may be different to others, I don’t know, um, because I have a lot of difficulties coming out [yep], you know, in my past. So for me, finding a place where I was…I was able to work on that was really very important for me [right], whereas other people…Hmm, I don’t know, I can’t speak for them. Other people may just see it as a group of people just singing. But for me it was a beautiful step in my journey. [mmm] Um, so, yeah, I think for me it’s definitely heightened the experience [yep], because I was really lost but it helped me get back on track. [hmmm]

both [concurrently] Yeah…

Interviewer 2 Oh, well I’m really glad you found it [yeah, me too] and that it…it’s been such a positive experience for you [yeah].

Malachi I don’t know what I would have done without it.

Interviewer 2 Hmm, sounds like you’ve gotten a lot out of it that you’ll carry with you over to [name of city] too.

Malachi Yeah, yeah. That confidence I’m definitely going to take with me. Confidence in who I am and where I’m going.

By demonstrating an openness to further discussion in her response to Malachi’s “I’ve talked a lot”, Interviewer 2 allows room for a deeper reflection from him.
“It Saved me from Going Backwards”: Malachi

Malachi, a 24-year-old member who identifies as gay and male, offers two insights into the choir in his life that will be elaborated on in the following chapter. Firstly, Malachi’s sense of optimism and faith shines through his interview along with an understanding of the choir as a saviour figure. Secondly, Malachi picks a tangible and evocative symbol of the choir – a ritual of drinking tea together – to describe the sense of community he perceives.

Optimism and Choir as a Saviour

I take Malachi’s story for its focus on the choir as a saviour of sorts – for its use of music as a vehicle for overcoming adversity. Malachi describes choir in familial terms, as a physical and spiritual home for him, and as a place that saved him from “going backward” in life. Choir has fostered in him a sense of self-worth that underpins his ongoing coming out journey with family and friends. Going back to his biological home would mean returning to a place where, he describes, “I would have had to…not be myself anymore” (¶24). Despite some significant challenges to which he alludes during the discussion, a sense of optimism and hope nevertheless infuses Malachi’s interview. Early in the interview Malachi describes the rift that the disclosure of his sexual identity to his family has created:

…yeah. I guess I’m a big family guy and so it was really hard for me to go through this, kinda, rift, with my family, this past two years of coming out. It was really difficult, um…caus I love my family and I love being around them and not being able to share experiences with my family. (¶52).

What is lacking in his description is a sense of finality. In an earlier description (¶44), Malachi talks of the rift as something temporary rather than something final. In his choice of present tense (“I’m a big family guy”), then past tense (“it was really hard for me to go through… it was really difficult”) then to present tense (“I love my family”), Malachi sets
apart comments about the rift from his hopes for a reconciliation with his family at a later date, that he discusses later in the interview:

…I think we are, my family and I are having a bit of a… we went away from each other for a while and we will come back together eventually I know. They’ll come round eventually or something and, I will be always be close to my family but the choir was there for me when I wasn’t. (¶60)

This matches my impression of working with Malachi: a warm-hearted, personable, and generous person with a room-brightening smile and an effusive, infectious sense of positivity.

I sense that the family separation relates too to a deeper fear of rejection from Malachi’s family on spiritual grounds. Spirituality and a Christian faith play an important part in Malachi’s life; who left his family home in Queensland for Melbourne with his sexuality suggested to be a primary reason for needing to move out. Rejection and hope of a reconciliation with his family sit at centre of Malachi’s world, and are tied closely to an anticipation of acceptance by his god. It seems the choir represents Malachi’s saviour-figure, a stand-in family and a safe and nurturing place. Early in the interview, Malachi became emotional in his discussion of the meaning of choir, stopping several times and blowing his nose as he describes choir as a place that “saved” him:

Choir is…choir’s just a place where I can be me and it…it means the world to me. Like it…honestly it saved…it sounds like the biggest cliché but it saved…it saved my life…not that I was going to die but it saved me from going backwards. [hmmmm]. Um, it helped me go forwards, which is something I really needed to do. And so it’s a lifesaver… (¶41)

Toward the end of the interview, Malachi describes his spiritual journey and difficulties reconciling his Christian faith with his sexuality. His discussion of the church ties in closely to his biological family difficulties.

I still have a faith in God and I still believe…um, I still… yeah I still believe.. ah, I don’t believe exactly what I used to believe so yeah, I probably left a lot of my beliefs behind, a lot of negative beliefs about the world… I was able to leave behind. And I think that I have more of an understanding of God as a loving God now. And not a
judgmental God that just wants to change me and is a bit disappointed in me. (¶74) He later reiterates the role of choir as redemptive: “I was really lost but it helped me to get back on track” (¶111).

The choir’s Christmas concert was a catalyst for refurnishing Malachi’s religious background within a queer musicking setting. Malachi reflects on his journey and the stark difference to his upbringing, where “growing up in a Christian home I’ve always celebrated it in a certain way”. Malachi says, “it was more of a fun celebration, more about being joyful and jovial and…whereas back in the day it was all about ‘how do we remember, how to we thank God and how do we…feel sombre and reflect”’ (¶80)

**Sharing Cups of Tea**

Malachi describes the ritual of having or sharing cups of tea, a social aspect of the choir’s weekly rehearsals and a tangible symbol of home and safety for him. I am aware of the importance of tea for Malachi: while not mentioned during his interview, he worked at the time for a tea vendor. Malachi (¶¶74-76) talks about his decision to wear a teacup on a lanyard as his token item for a 2014 concert that explored the idea of home and belonging:

Malachi: So nice to hear stories of what home means to people and we had tokens about what home means to people on us and… I had a little teacup caus [hmm] I think that when you go home and…tea is.. tea is the first thing that… “oh, do you want a tea” [Yep]. Wherever you are, “do you want a tea?” [Chuckles] You feel at home [Yep!] and that’s the way you can have that safe environment like choir, for me, is through tea.

*Interviewer 2* Through tea?

Malachi: Yeah. We drink a lot of tea at choir, we have a tea break!
II: INTERPRETING
Chapter 4: Interpreting the Results

Malachi’s creative depiction of a group of singers sharing each other’s company and finding safety over cups of tea, suggests there is an extra-musical “hospitality” (Higgins, 2007, 2012) that accompanies and augments the youth chorus’s musicking activities. While spiritual journeys did not feature in the other interviews, Malachi’s discussion of the importance of the choir for his personal spiritual journey suggests the significant role of religion in his life as a young queer person (Y. Taylor, 2016). It conveys a sense of the significance with which this choir is held by its members, particularly as a place of safety. In addition to the basic information in Table 1, I first set out the general physical and conceptual spaces referred to by members in their interviews, and discuss their common musical and social backgrounds. This I suggest sets the scene to interpret member experiences in more detail.

Member Backgrounds and Understandings

Musical backgrounds. As might be assumed from a choir whose membership is voluntary and requires a financial contribution, all ten members described the choir as a musicking opportunity. Interestingly, all ten members interviewed also indicated some form of musical background. Membership of the choir was therefore a return to, or continuation of, musicking in member’s lives. Table 3 sets out each member’s musical backgrounds as disclosed during their interviews. Eight of ten members (all except Paige and Jazz) disclosed studying music or a musical instrument at high school, or a musical instrument or the voice privately. All but one member (Hermione) described a singing background, whether a solo singer, having had singing lessons, or having vocal performance background). Four of the ten
members interviewed talked about having previous experience singing in a choir, whether at school or as an adult.

Table 3

*Musical Backgrounds and Experience of Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Music Studies</th>
<th>Solo Singing</th>
<th>Choir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malachi</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermione</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Educational backgrounds, finding choir.** Hermione comments that members singing with the choir are “largely middle class” (¶84) with the privilege of an education that, I suggest, has fostered an interest in choral singing. This is reflected in the members interviewed, all of whom had completed high school and most of whom were university students or graduates. As an example of a safe environment for young SSAGQ people (Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2012; Tropiano, 2014), members typically found out about the choir online. Six members of the youth chorus talk about finding the choir within this environment, describing an internet search for a choir in Melbourne as their starting point for making contact. Others described seeing the choir in concert or at public events as providing
the incentive for them to join.

**Descriptions of choir sites.** Interpreting the results in the chapters that follow, I present themes that emerged from the co-constructed data, including the physical places or sites within which the choir’s musical and extra-musical activities take place; and the conceptual spaces, the meanings, and themes that members ascribe to the choir. Table 4 sets out the physical places, looser “sites” that are linked to a place where musicking described by choir members in their interviews as where “choir” happens. These may be physical sites such as rehearsal rooms or performance venues, even particular stages, or virtual places such as social media pages and websites.

Beneath the physical sites, and true to the hermeneutic commitment of this thesis to look beneath the surface, I suggest there are also conceptual sites at play, summarised in Table 4. Members may discuss these sites explicitly in relation to physical sites and tangible products or resources, such as feeling safe within the choir’s weekly rehearsals, feeling proud when performing solos within a piece on stage with others, or feeling supported or judged by others for their singing ability. Conceptual sites tend to be experiential or abstract (statements or inferences such as “choir feels like”), are not always easily distinguished from and may overlap one another. Conceptual sites may be tacitly observable: distilled from other descriptions of choir such as its role as a musical and social testing ground or as a place of inter-generational role modelling.
### Table 4

**Descriptions of Youth Chorus Physical, Virtual, and Conceptual Sites/Spaces**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical sites:</strong></td>
<td>Youth chorus choir rehearsals; main chorus choir rehearsals; rehearsal breaks (tea breaks); rehearsals of individual voice parts (sectional rehearsals); musical performances; choir voice checks; the rehearsal room; specific performance venues/ stages (e.g. Federation Square); choir camp; choir events (non-musical); choir cabaret; weekly social activities (post-rehearsal drinks and meals); committee meetings; annual general meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virtual (online) sites:</strong></td>
<td>Choir social media groups; choir website; weekly email newsletters; other media practice tracks available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptual Spaces:</strong></td>
<td>Safe place from the outside world; family; home; clique; queer bubble; a place for young people; physically safe; a place where queer is normal; special; a musical testing ground; musical achievement; good quality music; guaranteed friend time; shared musical and extra-musical accomplishment; a place to form close friendships; a place to stand out; a place to come out; to contribute; to speak out for queer rights; a place to give back; a place to support other young queer people; a place to perform; to be distinguished as a soloist, musical or extra-musical leader; to be an ensemble singer; a place of judgement for sexual and/or gender identity; inter-generational socialising; inter-generational mentoring and role-modelling; conforming; deepening social and familial relationships; role modelling for other SSAGD young people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The key information set out in Table 4 offers a reference point for the following chapters as I explore different conceptual lenses through which we might gain greater insights into the experiences of youth chorus members. I suggest conceptual sites relate closely to and reflect the attitudes and worldviews of the individual members.

In subsequent chapters, I present results against two overarching frameworks: in Chapters 5 and 6, using Tia DeNora’s music asylums (DeNora, 2013) and, in Chapter 7, with reference to the psychological perspective of musical identities (MacDonald et al., 2002;
Miell, 2017). Exploring themes in written form, I argue that reduction to neat structures risks losing the nuances and detail. Nevertheless, summarising these written interpretations at the conclusion of Chapter 7, I offer four possible ways to summarise these results.

Safety emerged as a critical element to the success of the choir as experienced by its members and was it seems a fundamental element of its music and health ecology (Ansdell, 2014). The remainder of this chapter introduces the first overarching framework of the music asylum developed by sociologist Tia DeNora (2013) in “Music asylums: Wellbeing through music in everyday life.” DeNora’s novel approach connects music explicitly to safety, and accommodates wellness, social connection, and aesthetic experience – all themes recognised in interviews with youth chorus members. I apply this framework in relation to the youth chorus in subsequent chapters.

**Tia DeNora’s Music Asylums Framework**

*Introducing music asylums.* DeNora offers a versatile conceptual tool that supports a critical and nuanced interpretation of both the conceptual and physical sites identified in her interviews. She does so from an epistemological standpoint that understands musicking to be ecological, and thus useful in maintaining wellbeing. DeNora’s study extends and reimagines Erving Goffman’s influential work on the experiences of inmates of a mental hospital, “Asylums” (Goffman, 1961). Goffman’s study set out to understand the identities formed within the social world within a mental hospital and to develop a “sociological version of the structure of the self” (p. xiii). Goffman’s study of individuals living within a mental asylum was one of five examples of what he described as “total institutions”, that is, “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered
round of life” (p. xiii). Inmates within total institutions were separated from social intercourse with the outside, and this separateness was often evident in the physical attributes of the institution itself such as walls and fences (p. 4).

DeNora’s approach disconnects Goffman’s notion of total institutions of the asylum from its conventional usage in relation to physical locations such as asylums, hospitals, or convents, and shifts the focus to individuals or groups. In doing so, DeNora attempts to recover the original meaning of the term, which she describes as “shelter, safe space, place for living and flourishing, room in which to create, play and rest” (p. 33). DeNora seeks to develop a conceptual framework that is set free of the formal institutions, and with specific reference to music. Rather than physical sites (or sets of established practices and treatments in the specific mental health setting in which DeNora locates her study and extends Goffman’s), DeNora talks of asylums as conceptual spaces that form around sets of practices that may be achieved for any time or place. Asylums may be found both alone and in concert with others, and are social constructions that are inherently political places that hold and balance tensions within them. They are perceived as separate in some way: disconnected from physical groups of people and communities.

Asylums may be physical or conceptual sites and I suggest in the choir’s case the asylum is constituted within a specific physical site (choir, its rehearsals, performances, and associated activities) and its associated conceptual sites to be explored further shortly. An asylum’s rooms may be physical, such as a sanctuary or safe place in daily life such as a café, a corner, or a place of leisure but it may also be abstract: an interaction with another person or a more ephemeral use of one’s physical, social, or other environment, including sonic environments, to, in a colloquial sense, “take a breath.” The temporal understandings of this moment vary greatly – from instants to a prolonged period. DeNora’s notion of asylum shows
“how materials in one’s environment are used for repositioning, broaching new topics or seeing new things, making space for dreaming, pleasure and difference, even if short-lived” (p. 47).

DeNora acknowledges and extends Goffman’s implicit distinction between the institutional object of the “Asylum” and the more abstract asylum-seeking activities that take place within the institution. While finding these in the many collective “removal activities” Goffman describes, such as band playing or choral singing (DeNora, 2013, p. 49; Goffman, 1961, p. 69), I believe she develops Goffman’s study further with an emphasis on the social worlds of individuals within institutions. I suggest DeNora’s framework, to be explored in detail as it applies to interviews with members, provides a useful tool for wellbeing programs beyond formal and institutionalised health settings. I suggest it extends too to musical ecologies such as the choir, where there appear to be important extra-musical benefits of musicking activities that are key to community music interventions (Deane & Mullen, 2013, p. 26).

DeNora explores the wellbeing potential within the social world of the music asylum and the extent to which they may function as places that of wellbeing. DeNora demonstrates her thesis with a study of a community music therapy program at the Borough Centre for Rehab, Interaction, Group Activity, Hospitality, and Training (BRIGHT), a centre for mental health based in the UK. BRIGHT’s singing programs and choir performances offer many insights into the dynamic experience of group singing, of interest to this study. However, before continuing with this important concept, I believe it is important to first briefly discuss my deliberate use of terminology and address concerns this may raise in the mind of the reader.
Reclaiming the terminology: “Asylum” for wellbeing in everyday life. It is timely to pre-empt and address two potential issues relating to use of the term asylum. Conventional understandings of asylum, derived from the Greek term *asylon* meaning inviolable, evoke images in contemporary society of an institution that is for the care and maintenance of individuals with mental illness, or of people who seek asylum from places of conflict in global political discourse. More abstract definitions of the term deriving from this original definition describe the notion of a place of refuge, shelter, or protection that is inviolable ("Asylum," n.d.). I am conscious of the significant baggage of the word asylum in history and contemporary global politics and debates around seekers of asylum worldwide. Such historical baggage along with its contemporary usage requires a justification for using the term. The notion of escaping a hostile environment and finding safety within the choir environment features across all ten interviews, and as such I believe the choir strives to provide such an asylum in the abstract sense of the term. As I will outline shortly, sharpening the focus to explore not only asylum in the abstract but asylum in the context of music is instructive. DeNora has examined this concept in detail with her framework of music asylums (DeNora, 2013, p. 49) that forms the point of focus for this chapter.

In its historical usage, asylum has also been linked to the queer community. Homosexuality was listed as a sociopathic personality disorder until its removal from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973 (American Psychological Association, 2003) and there is a history of stigmatisation of queer people that links closely to this issue. Yet these same reasons create an opportunity to reclaim the term and adapt it

---

10 I note the recent conflation of these two issues in contemporary discourse. Laurie Berg and Jenni Millibank (2009) explore the complex issues of identity relating to asylum seekers who claim asylum based on their sexuality (lesbian, gay, and bisexual), and the impact of understandings and pre-understandings of decision-makers upon claimants, for instance.
specifically to a musical context, as DeNora has done. The music asylums concept affords a framework to better understand the complex, difficult, multi-faceted, and at times even contradictory world of singing in this youth chorus. Use of the word asylum and conceptual framework of music asylum in this thesis might, ironically, be seen for its emancipatory potential.

**Strategies for seeking music asylum.** DeNora (2013) identifies two distinct strategies that together contribute to creating music asylums: removal, and furnishing/refurnishing. Through music, DeNora writes, individuals may create room: “…asylums can be created through removal; they can offer protection against a distressing social world. As such, the asylum is a place for fantasy day-dreaming and the recovery of personal time and rhythm.” (p. 55) Individuals may also create room through refurnishing in the remaking or renegotiation of their social worlds:

…asylums can be created through refurnishing, and here they involve collaborative play that remakes or renegotiates social worlds. Refurnishing allows actors the latitude to be and act in certain ways, to feel at ease while doing so and to pursue various projects and trajectories that involve navigating (which is also the making of) social space/time. (p. 55)

The music asylum in a group setting such as a choir, therefore, is created and maintained collaboratively (pp. 95-96). Members furnish and re-furnish a physical or conceptual site, or both, for the purposes of their own wellbeing. Strategies of removal and refurbishing are revealed in the way individual actors relate to one another and to their social environments. In the cases of both removal and refurnishing, DeNora sets out how these strategies seek to achieve the same end: “room or respite from irritant features of the environment, ontological security, control and creativity, pleasure, validation of self, sense of fit, flow, comfort, ease and a feeling of being in focus” (p. 55).
Having set out renewal and refurnishing as ideal types (p. 56, table 3.1), DeNora qualifies that the distinction between both is rarely as transparent. Instead, the strategies are more fluid and as is clear in the case of choir members, strategies of removal may also simultaneously refurnish an environment, or shift from one to the other as they experience. Although she sets out in table form distinctions between the two, I suggest the choir offers a compelling case for both renewal and refurnishing, although it is listed as a refurnishing strategy only in DeNora’s typology. While in most cases I suggest refurnishing is clear in choir settings, this study offers both may be a part of the choir ecology. The following two chapters apply DeNora’s concept to the youth chorus. The following story depicts Natalie’s impressions of the youth chorus, and offers vivid metaphors of aspects of the choir that afford her a sense of safety.
“The Harmonies are my Drugs”: Natalie

“…the harmonies are my drugs,” declares 21-year old Natalie (preferred pronouns: she/her/hers), “I get a high off it when it really works perfectly” (¶49). I know Natalie to be a confident and articulate law student who is not afraid to speak her mind. Her interview manner reflects this. Natalie’s interview reflects a deep commitment to the youth chorus and its meaning in her life: as a queer-normative social place to regularly see her close friends and where she can sing in harmony with others. A discerning and experienced chorister and singer, the choir’s musical aspects take precedence for Natalie:

…even if there…if I hated all of them I would still if we sang really well together get the joy from the singing because I do and I always have…it helps that we’re all really good friends… it probably makes us sing better as well. (¶49)

Yet for Natalie it is also about balancing quality and enjoyment: the youth chorus caters to her musical background and drive for quality, but with a social aspect she values and a more egalitarian management structure in place than in her prior experiences with other, more hierarchical choirs.

“Assumed Queer Until Proven Straight”

Natalie’s queer identity is a key aspect of her involvement in the youth chorus. Joining youth chorus is one of two formative experiences Natalie describes vividly as she discusses her coming out journey (the other is her time studying overseas). Natalie is most passionate when describing the importance of a physical space where individuals were assumed to be queer rather than assumed straight – a place that “just takes a huge weight off that you forget about most of the time but then you’re in there and you’re like: “I have this weight I was carrying around!” (¶55) Both the youth chorus and main chorus have this in
common. Choir provides a place for Natalie to perform her queer identity publicly and proudly. She is passionate about the choir’s outreach activities at universities and desire to sing in high schools, for her a chance to make a difference to young people.

“Sit on the Floor Friendships”

The youth chorus is at the base of Natalie’s close network of relationships: it’s where she met her housemate, her girlfriend, and where she’s made many close friends, including former high school colleagues. The “young” identity of the group appears to be important for Natalie who is herself among the youngest of its members. Camp is an important social outlet for Natalie and the focus of detailed discussion during her interview. At choir, Natalie enjoys regular “guaranteed friend time” not easily found in the real world for young people who have left school. Singing together and socialising over food are key ingredients in this experience. Choir is also a place for Natalie, who tends not to socialise with larger groups of people, to experience the larger group interactions of the youth chorus. Natalie has formed many “sit on the ground friendships” within the choir: “the kind of friends where you end up sitting on the floor in any situation…caus you’re just so comfortable” (¶47). Choir is an intensely close-knit place according to Natalie; a bit intense but in an agreeable way:

…people stick around so clearly it’s the kind of, um, close family that you want to be a part of rather than the one that freaks you out and makes you feel like an outsider. We’re pretty good at drawing people in. (¶45)
Chapter 5: Interpreting the Results: Music Asylums Part I (Removal)

In this section, I explore the notion of safety with specific reference to DeNora’s notion of removal. That is, a place of escape, of “protection against a distressing social world” (2013, p. 55).

Safety

Safety provides the base for choristers to remain members and a platform from which other themes emerge. Four members describe safety as having a familial quality. Natalie, for instance, relates the experience of joining the choir to being a member of a family:

So every time we get a new person, particularly in youth chorus, we pretty quickly draw them in. [yep] I mean, I think we’re a bit intense but I mean, people stick around so clearly it’s the kind of, um, close family that you want to be a part of rather than the one that freaks you out and makes you feel like an outsider. (¶45)

Five members mention the word “safety” explicitly in relation to the choir but it was implicit in the discussions of all ten and at its most basic provides a premise for remaining a member of the group.

Safety appears to be a quality nested within and nesting the larger theoretical framework of the music asylum. In providing a place of safety, DeNora’s framework allows us to better understand what constitutes a place of safety, and to scrutinise how the choir creates and maintains its goal of being a site for wellbeing through musicking. There are different understandings among individual members of what constitutes safety, how and where it is found, how it is maintained, and, conversely, undermined. A key aspect is a sense of implied removal captured in Natalie’s comment about a place where is “assumed queer.”
Foundation: Assumed queer site (implied removal). Five members describe choir as a place where they were assumed queer rather than non-queer: a place where being queer is the norm rather than the exception where they may test out and reinforce their queer identities. Choir in this regard provides sense of ontological security built upon musical foundations but extending into social “belonging” in the world for young people who all have common experiences of fundamentally not belonging in their respective social worlds for reasons of their gender and sexuality. It affords a platform to form close friendships with other queer members with choral singing as a focus of the community.

For a limited period, each week, while engaged in musical or extra-musical activities of the choir, members describe being in a place where they are assumed queer rather than assumed heterosexual or “straight”. This sits outside their everyday experiences of living in an otherwise heteronormative social world (Jackson, 2006; Kitzinger, 2005), and suggests members value choir as a place that is implicitly removed from the outside world. For members with a common experience of not fitting into the social worlds of their quotidian life, this is a powerful realisation: here, queer people are in the majority. Chloe talks of a special connection between choir members that is different from school choirs she’s experienced. She believes the connection is because “we have a shared experience of being queer, and that adds something to the choir because we all, kind of understand what the other has been through. Might not be exactly the same but…we’ve got a, an inkling.” (¶¶480-482)

In her view, the “bridge building together” through a common experience of coming out and queerness forges a deeper and more specific connection that distinguishes the queer choirs from other community choirs, including women’s choirs. (¶¶482-486) Chloe goes further here, describing the youth chorus as a young queer choir with “similar values and ideas to share” (¶488). Earlier in his interview, James affirms this when he describes the choir as a place where “You know, people come, um, just to be themselves and, not have anyone, I
guess ask questions about anything” (¶93). Hermione reflects similar sentiments in a stream of consciousness moment within her interview. She describes the youth chorus setting in more depth, noting that she distinguishes youth chorus and main chorus later in her interview), and reflecting on the relief she feels about not having to explain her queer identity within the choir:

…having people who know already all of those, perfectly fine, questions about, you know like say if you’re… ah I don’t know… you’re gender neutral… and most everyone in youth chorus would be like “okay, so what pronouns do you want to, do you use?” … Other places that’s rare… Because, not caus people are, are intolerant or… of course, in high school they probably would be…um, but because there’s just not an awareness. And so we can, we can, I guess we operate off that knowledge base already and we don’t have to talk about it… (¶346-356)

Then, within the last moments of this excerpt, Hemione (¶358-364) discloses the primacy of her sexual identity in defining who she is:

Hermione
And it is a part of who we are but it’s not, you know… obs, obscure everything else!

Interviewer 1
Yeah. It doesn’t define you or…?

Hermione
No it does but it–

Interviewer 1
It does, doesn’t

Hermione
–but it, like it’s just easy.

Interviewer 1
Yeah.

Hermione
And you don’t find that much in mainstream society.

Interviewer 1
Yeah

It is “mainstream society” who struggle to find the language to relate to her identity. Paige describes the youth chorus with a sense of relief, as a place where assumptions were not made about her sexual identity:

I, wanted to join the choir because there are so many assumptions made about me. And it was the only place I’d ever been in where the assumption was, first of all the assumption wasn’t made, but, when it was made it was correct! (¶63)

Describing her time on a university exchange, Natalie beautifully articulates the
experience of the choir in her life and the wider importance of similar physical sites in the lives of other young queer people:

And so that threw me into a world where everyone is assumed queer until proven straight rather than the other way around, which, everyone I know who’s queer finds those environments very important, because being assumed straight is exhausting…because you have to […] come out all the time, and you never know how those situations are going to go. But if you’re in a room where…everyone is assumed queer…like a queer lounge or a gay choir…it just takes a huge weight off that you forget about most of the time but then you’re in there and you’re like, “I have this weight that I was carrying around.” (¶53)

As Natalie articulates, the choir provides a musical example of DeNora’s concept of removal. The notion of a music asylum offers a compelling way to understand this idea of an assumed-queer space. Yet the counterpoint to this inclusive sense of removal is a more exclusive understanding of the choir’s social identity as a musicking place that is for queer people. Hermione articulates this trait succinctly and memorably when she describes the choir as “…an insular little queer bubble and we love it in there!” (¶372), recognising it as both a place that is good to be in – akin to Turner’s communitas – but a place deliberately set apart from the outside world.

**Foundation: “the hour to be yourself” a week** A related notion is captured by James, who at one point in his interview becomes an observer of the choir. James describes its role as a safe place for other members to be themselves:

The safe space, and the hour to be yourself, like, a week. And, um, I’ve never needed that safe space myself, or, thought I needed that safe space, um, but, it’s just, I guess, highlighted just how important it is, um, to have, or, you know. (¶110)

As his first comment suggests, safety for James then is constituted through removal: time out from an environment of perceived exclusion or oppression. While distinguishing himself as not needing such a place, James understands the importance of such places for others. He captures a common theme among members who all describe this sense of removal in slightly different ways, and who understand safety as a distinguished from other phenomena (for
instance, safety from a hostile or socially exclusive outside world). Nevertheless, James’s comment reveals two distinct approaches to understanding what it means to be safe from a hostile world external to the choir or “out there.” The first privileges the conceptual site created within the choir while the second highlights the distinction with the outside world. Both can be seen as strategies of removal and refurnishing according to DeNora’s typology.

A physically safe environment. Members find safety in the physical sites of choir rehearsals, performances, and other social gatherings and in doing so, support the youth chorus’s public profile as a “fantastic, safe, and friendly environment in which to develop their singing skills” (Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus, 2016). Malachi’s voice is strong on the theme of safety and in his depiction of the choir as a home and a family. He describes Malachi describes choir as a safe place six times during his interview. For him, it is a sanctuary for Malachi, a place to “be me” in a “safe community environment” (¶30), and “a safe place where I could work out my life and my issues at that time” (¶24).

He describes his first rehearsal with the choir:

The energy in that room was just so… uplifting and welcoming. And so, yeah, it felt like I was going into a… a safe place where I could work out my life and my issues at that time [embarrassed chuckle]. (¶24)

Malachi’s uses the analogy of a teapot and of the rituals of tea-drinking to create a picture of the choir. Elaborating on the choir’s recent concert, “No place I’d rather be: A musical journey celebrating and exploring home and belonging”, Malachi says:

…where you are is where your home is. Like, where you put your love and, you know, your trust and faith and um… so choir for me is a big home for me… wherever I go in life, there’ll be people and there’ll be places that will eventually become home. Um, and I think I haven’t felt …at home for a while, um, because it’s just…I’ve been here for a year and a half, two years and…um, it’s just…like what does home mean to me and… home is where I can be me and I can be…you know, a group of people that love and support you. (¶65)
Malachi chose to wear a teacup to symbolise what home and belonging means to him as part of the choir’s performance dress. Reflecting on this choice, he says:

[It was] So nice to hear stories of what home means to people and we had tokens about what home means to people on us and... I had a little teacup cause... I think that when you go home and... tea is the first thing that... “oh, do you want a tea”. Wherever you are, “do you want a tea?” You feel at home... and that’s the way you can have that safe environment like choir, for me, is through tea... (¶65)

Other members describe the choir environment less explicitly about physical sites or objects, and reveal conceptual understandings of safety afforded by the “safe and supportive” public profile. Choir for them as a community and a place of belonging, and routine.

Safety in community. The physical site of safety creates, nurtures, and reinforces the conceptual site of a choir community. Members discuss the sense of choir as a warm, welcoming, and implicitly safe place to be along similar lines to the Victor Turner’s notion of “communitas” as it was originally conceived as a shared place that is good to be in together (1969), and advocated in a musical context by Mercédès Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2005, p. 210) for its ability to foster a sense of mutual presence, dialogue, to level social roles and facilitate a flow of musical communication. This is reinforced by the recent findings of Bridget Sweet (2014) of the importance of safety in classroom-based choral music education in the US.

Just as Malachi describes in the narrative vignette that introduces this chapter, this sense of community is apparent from an early stage. Jazz describes a feeling of belonging from this first rehearsal. On arriving, Jazz describes a warm and social environment with “a lot of welcoming” (¶66) and where he had the opportunity to meet “a lot of people very quickly.” (¶68) Jazz relates the positive emotions associated with choir rehearsals as feelings of not wanting to leave, and values the chance to form new friendships:
It was nice to be somewhere and not have this want to leave. That if I pulled, if I grabbed whoever was walking past and started a conversation, whether I remembered their name or not [interviewer chuckles], I would, um, it would be easier to have a general conversation. And, who knows what will grow from that. (¶96)

Front of mind for members such as Chloe is a sense of finding a “tribe” of like-minded people with similar interests. She describes a feeling of finding “my people” (¶379). Chloe highlights the social aspect of the choir community, saying early in the interview that choir “was my new social group and it was really wonderful coming to this really accepting little community and making friends and, and now most of my best friends are in choir!” (¶27). Chloe’s friendships allow her to ask for assistance and be confident that members will help if they can:

I feel like I’ve definitely made some fantastic friends out of choir, and– Hmmm –um, people that I can, you know, ask, a [brave?] statement but if I said you know “can you do this for me?” they’d be like “oh yeah no problem!” (¶385-387)

Chloe used to participate in a queer-friendly sporting activity in Melbourne and discerns the differences between this social group and her choir friendships. She describes a sense of familiarity and ease with which she can socialise with choir members outside of rehearsal hours that suggests safety, saying “we do social things outside the choir with them and I never feel like I’m imposing on them whereas I might have felt like that with the previous group” (¶383).

For James, the feeling of inclusion and community is tied to the organisation’s larger purpose or mission. James initially sought out the Main Chorus to join a queer choir. Learning that he could also sing with the youth chorus was a bonus” (¶51). He describes his surprise at realising “just how much of a community it was, um, much more than I was expecting” (¶14). Later in his interview, James, who has an interest in queer history, links this sense of inclusion within the organisation as being a part of a larger community:
I could have joined any choir I guess, you know, just like a choral society, or just a, like a church choir, um, and it would have been many, you know mainly about the music I guess and, if I met [unclear] people I could have been friends with them and even if I hadn’t then it wouldn’t have been a big deal if I wasn’t friends with them. So singing in, but singing in [main chorus] and [youth chorus] is essentially, I guess, not even about the singing it’s, it’s part of something much bigger. Um, it’s yeah, it’s part of a community, um, that, definitely transcends the singing. (¶99)

Daisy describes the choir with the word “community” more than 20 times during her interview. She relates to the social role of the choir in an analogous way to Chloe, describing the importance of being part of a community and the sense of optimism in the possibility of social encounters beyond the safety of a choir rehearsal:

…joining the choir just made me feel like I had this place where I could go that was a sense of community. Um, and then I had all these people that I could call upon if I wanted to see them outside of choir and, and you could socialise with them in other contexts like, I, I don’t really know how to articulate all this! (¶64)

Daisy relates her upbringing in a country environment and the “automatic” sense of community engendered within this environment, and juxtaposes this with her struggle to find a “bigger picture” community (¶64) outside of a small friendship group after moving to Melbourne. Daisy values the pastoral support offered within the choir, saying “it’s also really nice to have people who just care about knowing what you’re up to and that sort of thing” (¶62). Daisy distinguishes the choir as something special and difficult to find within Melbourne in her experience. Later, and in a more impassioned tone, she steps back from the choir to advocate for community as something that must be sought out in Melbourne:

…I think you, each of us has to actively find their community within Melbourne—Hmmm—because you can’t really expect it to come to you and if you don’t, it’s just really hard to stay motivated and inspired without a community around you. (¶70-72)

It would have been useful to explore this high motivation Daisy had for community as a general concept, to see if there were other familial or broader social factors affecting her passionate striving for community. Whatever its origin, community is a vital construct for
Daisy in relation to the choir and its role in her life.

Natalie describes the choir as a community for its lack of hierarchy, comparing it to her experience singing with a national performing choir she describes as “very professional”. Rather, she talks of MGLC Inc as akin to a school choir in that it is singers have a significant amount of direction over the music, where there is less of a hierarchy, and where she feels she is contributing equally:

School choir is similar to MGLC in the way that in school choir we all…it was all very equal with the director and there was a lot of student direction, and so it was all sort of a community of singers and we definitely have that at MGLC where, though the directors are sometimes telling you to shut up, um, everyone sort of feels like they’re contributing in an equal way, yeah. (¶33)

Safety in a community of several generations. The sense of community within the wider choir spans several generations and is mentioned as a key factor in member interviews. The two choirs within the organisation MGLC Inc offer members the chance to interact regularly, including singing joint repertoire in performances. These interactions provide a sense of belonging to a group and contribute to the sense of safety for these younger members. Hermione, a singer in both choirs, describes the important mentoring relationships with members of the adult choir that support the validation of self-identity within the youth chorus. In answer to a question about the choir’s role in her life, Hermione highlights both the importance of inter-generational support and differentiates the support she receives from that of her biological parents:

Um, support. Yeah, support. [Support?] Yep. Um, I find it comforting to talk to the older members of the choir sometimes. [Hmmm...] Because, they have more life experience than I do. [Yeah] And, they’re just, nice and mums-ee, sometimes. [Yeah?] And that’s comforting. [chuckles] Also, they’re more… inappropriate than my mother is which is also comforting! (¶675-684)

Finding comfort in maternal and sometimes inappropriate conversations with older
women in the choir, Hermione points to the contrast with other key figures in her life such as her parents, capturing the importance of finding a shared horizontal social identity (Solomon, 2012). As set out in the opening chapter of this thesis, Solomon understands social identities such as sexual orientation as not typically passed down from parents to child in the same way as vertical identities such as language, cultural heritage, ethnic background, or social norms. Instead, these horizontal identities must instead be learned from others in society with similar identities, often found in peer groups. Hermione reflects on what Solomon might describe as support for her horizontal identity development, afforded to her by the older female choristers from a different generation. This important aspect of the choir’s mentoring role and this generational aspect was intentional in the formation of the youth chorus in 2005.

Similarly, main chorus members recognise, invest, and share in the creation of a safe community within MGLC Inc and its youth chorus. They too seek recognition within this community as mentors and advisors. James describes the importance of the youth chorus for main chorus members, relating a mini-performance of the youth group to the main chorus during a rehearsal for the Christmas concert:

their response was just, fantastic I guess, like it was really supportive. And, I guess they were really impressed and, yeah it was really nice and, yeah, they want to support young people, and, I think they know how important the youth chorus is to, a lot of its members. (¶39)

For Natalie, the generational aspect is important for the ease with which generations can interact from a shared sense of being different:

…there’s a few people who aren’t queer but still the majority of people have the um…the coming out experience in common or, um, the hiding, the shame, depending on your generation it could be different levels or where you’re from, I mean, like, someone born in 1940 is still going to have the same experience as someone born in 1989 in Brisbane, for example…you know, there’s so much that…that we share and so it’s easy to relate across generations and with people that you’ve just met, just then. So every time we get a new person, particularly in youth chorus, we pretty quickly draw them in… I mean, I think we’re a bit intense but I mean, people stick around so
clearly it’s the kind of, um, close family that you want to be a part of rather than the one that freaks you out and makes you feel like an outsider. We’re pretty good at drawing people in. (¶45)

As Natalie alludes, this intergenerational aspect is shared with older MGLC members who sing in the main chorus, and for whom MGLC Inc has been formative in fostering a sense of safety.

**Safety in proprietorship and obligation.** Being in control of one’s environment is central to the notion of security, an idea that is reflected in the descriptions of pride and propriety over the choir. Describing the act of singing within the choir, Hermione describes what it means to sing in the choir, saying that after a performance “we have a shared, we all have a shared part in making something…And, you know, it usually goes alright and um, and you know, people bond over that. You feel, you feel proud I guess!” (¶¶545-547). Dylan describes the factors he considered prior to joining the choir, and the seriousness with which he took his role:

Yeah, I had to caus I was thinking, if I’m gonna commit my weeks to it and go once a week I’m gonna to have to make sure it’s something I actually want to do…I assumed that there was some kind of financial you know output as well you know membership and that sort of thing so I thought if this is something I’m paying membership towards I kinda want to be you know set from the start. (¶166)

Dylan reflects on making the right decision in joining the choir, saying “I didn’t make a mistake in committing for a whole year umm so, it’s um, yeah, very much a reinforcement and a, a drive to keep that going” (¶293).

For some members, these everyday routines are described in terms of responsibilities and obligation. Nicole and Jazz describe their responsibility to the group in the context of the performances. Describing what it feels like to be included in the choir, Nicole says: “It feels great. You feel like, if you don’t go, you’re putting…you’re letting someone down so you’ve got that sense of responsibility and um…I don’t know... you feel special” (¶32). I hear in
Nicole’s comments echoes of Higgins’s two-sided understanding of community set out in Chapter 2.

**A safe place for musicking.** This sense of safety extends to the way in which member’s experience rehearsals in a way that might be described as the affordance of musical safety. Members express this aspect of the choir’s foundation slightly differently. For Malachi, choir is a place where he feels safe to make mistakes. He says:

> it’s a way for me to express…in a group where there’s really no judgement because you’re all singing together. It’s a way for me to get that creative energy out in a place that’s safe…caus there’s no one going “Oh, I heard you do that wrong note.” If you do a wrong note it’s kind of…it’s ok because some else is doing the right note and it will counteract your wrong note. So it’s a safe place to work out how to sing and how to sing together … (¶20)

Similarly, Hermione and Natalie approach this as a conceptual space where perfection is not required. This is an approach I consciously and regularly nurture within rehearsals – the principle of “Wrong and strong!” as I was once taught by a musical mentor.

**Safety in routine and the everyday.** A sense of safety may also be found in the routine, mundane, and everyday musicking and extra-musicking activities of the choir. Those moments of ontological security DeNora describes might alternatively be viewed according to the positive psychology literature as flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013) – a concept that has been explored in relation to choral music (Bailey & Davidson, 2002), in the relationship between music teachers and students (Bakker, 2005), composition and therapeutic song writing (Felicity A. Baker & MacDonald, 2013; Byrne et al., 2006). This ontological security contributes to a sense of removal, one of the key aspects taken up by DeNora.

> In a book entitled *Making Sense of Reality* (DeNora, 2014), DeNora argues for the importance of the everyday and the tendency of scholars to sideline everyday phenomena in favour of the extraordinary. In their interviews, members spoke in detail about the everyday
mechanics of the choir from warm ups to how camps are run and who runs them, the rehearsal and voice check process, solo auditions, and so on. These elements I suggest are crucial to the idea of safety. Choir conventions and social norms contribute to a sense of safety in an equivalent way, it might be suggested, to the safety of working within a large bureaucracy, led by musical staff, and the MGLC Inc committee of management. As a committee member at the time, for instance, Hermione explained in detail the committee’s function committee roles and processes, and her involvement in the choir’s strategic planning discussions. Others describe their roles in organising concerts (Natalie) and extra-musical events (Jazz). Dylan describes his positive impression of the choir’s strategic direction and supporting structures:

I feel like we are actually doing what we set out to do. And because it’s set up like an organisation they have, you know, a committee, they have you know, minutes, they have general, annual general meetings and that sort of stuff it feels very professional because it is that but with a fun element. (¶291)

Safety and an ontological security is to be found when separate or removed in some way. To feel safe is to not only feel physically safe and safe within the everyday routines of the choir, but to experience conceptual sites of welcome, inclusion, and to feel a part of a community that, as youth chorus members describe, spans two choruses and several generations. At the foundation of these descriptions of choir is also an understanding that it is a special place.

**A Queer Bubble**

Hermione refers to a queer bubble image several times during the interview, it seems in relation to the safety it provides in her life. Hermione’s interview suggests two distinct
understandings of this bubble. On the one hand, the queer bubble evokes a sense of a cocoon, of a place of removal inside the choir and the creation of a music asylum within an assumed-queer place. Once again, safety provides the basis for the maintenance of a “queer bubble”, and seems to reflect a deliberate effort to foster a sense of removal within the choir, as expressed in DeNora’s framework. Returning to James’s opening statement about the choir as a “safe space”: “The safe space, and the hour to be yourself, like, a week.” (¶110). James’s comment suggests that at other times in a choir members’ week they are not themselves, or their true selves, and goes to the heart of queer identity that will be explored in the following chapter.

Yet at the same time, Hermione’s queer bubble comments also convey the sense of detachment and insularity she feels within the choir in relation to those outside the choir community. The youth chorus is, according to this understanding, a place where safety is created through the distinguishing of those inside the choir from those outside the choir. At one point, Hermione even establishes a sense of difference from the interviewer when she jokingly says “…you wouldn’t have heard of it because you’re not in the queer bubble” (¶418). Hermione’s comments suggest the choir is a refuge from the world “out there.” This safety is reinforced in the specialness of the setting for its members: a place where queerness is assumed (the inverse of their everyday experiences). The external world combined with an internal sense of being special and fitting within the choir generates what DeNora terms “ontological security” (DeNora, 2013, pp. 44-45).

There is a broader sense within the choir of a conceptual site where the self is secure and safe within its boundaries, and a site where the diversity of individual selves of the choristers are respected and celebrated as something special. Paige links back to the physical site of choir and the importance of it being a safe place, and emphasises what she
perceives to be discrimination in other environments:

I think that it is incredibly important to have spaces, safe spaces for people, um, who are part of minorities and... who are discriminated against, or may be discriminated against in other environments. (¶61-63)

James describes choir as “a queer community that’s for everyone who is gay or lesbian or whatever” (¶103). While he has not encountered issues coming out himself and says he feels “quite strong and confident within myself when it comes to dealing with my sexuality on a day-to-day basis” (¶93), James nevertheless acknowledges the crucial functions of the choir as providing a safe space for young queer people, saying: “to me I’m like, ‘why does it need to be? Aren’t we all in a safe space anyway?’ and that sort of thing. And it’s definitely, a thing” (¶93). In fact, James’s statement contradicts other moments in his interview where he alludes to an unresolved issue with his older brother.

For Nicole, who speaks primarily about the main chorus in her interview, this sense of difference from the outside world is heightened and linked to feelings of injustice that underpin her interview. Nicole talks of the normality with which members describe their friendships and relationships with others, emphasising the contrast to “the rest of the community”:

That’s a big lesson, ‘caus everyone there is just so happy and when they talk about their relationships there’s no hesitation it’s just completely natural and I don’t feel that in the rest of the community but…um…it’s nice that we’ve got this space. (¶138)

Malachi, for whom—as was set out in the preface to chapter 4—the choir played a saviour-like figure, reveals a struggle to reconcile his sexual orientation and desire to live openly as a gay man on the one hand, with his contention (interconnected for him to his biological family), that his Christian religion was automatically negative to the realization of his sexual identity (Y. Taylor, 2016). In this regard, it seems the choir provides Malachi with
a spiritually protective environment.

Judgement Within Melbourne’s Queer Community (and Within the Choir)

Alongside a feeling off exclusivity or being special within the choir, two members talked of feeling excluded in other queer environments. Nicole and Jazz both describe the choir as a place safe from judgement of queer people within Melbourne’s queer community, suggesting that the sense of removal the choir provides is not found in queer space within a heteronormative society, thus it offers a discreet queer space within a queer community.

While Jazz does not mention the “queer” community in his interview, he talks about the sense of judgment he feels from the gay male community. Jazz describes himself as someone who doesn’t “fit in very well in a lot of places” and singles out the gay community as a place where he certainly hasn’t “done that well.” (¶54) Later he describes the sense of exclusion he perceives in more detail:

I find…the gay community very, very exclusive. There is this very, high standard idea of what people should and shouldn’t be. And, it’s like being back in high school. If you, don’t like something or if you don’t do a specific something, you will be excluded, and mercilessly. (¶86)

Nicole suggests that the experience of safety from judgement that affords removal and asylum is not experienced by all members. Nicole initially described choir as place where:

I feel included, I feel like I’m part of something and I don’t feel that I’m being judged or whatever. I don’t have to answer…for myself. I can just be who I want to be, it’s great…/[hmmm]/ it’s a great feeling. (Nicole)

Later, responding to a question later in the interview about whether she has ever felt excluded within the choir, Nicole describes a sense of exclusion:

Um… no, I don’t think anyone has gone out of their way to make me feel excluded. There’s a part of me that still feels that when I tell people I’m married to a man and
I’m bisexual that they’ll look at me like I’m somehow privileged because I’m able to hide in this heterosexual illusion but I’m not. (¶74)

Nicole’s sense of belonging is described in juxtaposition to a sense of being judged in a negative way. While choir offers Nicole a safer place where she does not feel overtly judged for her sexuality, she nonetheless experienced feelings of exclusion, for as a bisexual woman Nicole does not identify within the gay or lesbian majority within the choir. Nicole casts doubt on her comments immediately after saying them, saying:

I think that’s more my own feelings though. I don’t think anyone in the choir has actually done anything or said anything to make me feel that way. Because when I tell people my story they’re quite open to listen to me... (¶74)

Nicole refers to a wider sense of exclusion within the queer community of Melbourne in her next statement:

…‘caus I found when I was coming out it was people in the queer community who were giving me the most judgment rather than my heterosexual friends…Which I found really interesting… Um…I didn’t expect that. (¶76)

Nicole’s description of the choir alludes to a sense that there are established sexualities in the choir that may lead some members to feel excluded. The site of the sexuality dynamics within the choir might at times preclude some members. Nicole’s experience will be discussed when considering the implications of this research.

**The Choir Clique**

The process of finding a sense of safety within the choir to create a music asylum was not necessarily an easy one and a sense of clique was described by members. There are explicit barriers to entry on joining, including the age restriction of 16-29 years, and the loose voice audition process. Nevertheless, seven of the ten interviewees described implicit barriers that suggest a sense of exclusion fostered within the choir even though it is mainly described as a socially inclusive place. These interviewees described an initial sense of a clique within
the choir – of feeling on the outer – before eventually finding their way into the group. Paige describes her impressions of joining the choir, saying “when I first started it was a little bit more ‘clique-ee’ than it is now.” (¶47) Hermione describes her initial intimidation at the choir’s close social bonds and a personal dislike of cliques:

Um, yeah, ah, is when I first joined chorus, um I felt a bit on the outside, because um there was this um, you know this little clique type thing? ... Which happens with, everyone and I hate, I hate cliques. I do. (¶112-114)

21-year old Natalie captures the process of moving from outside the group to inside:

It was really small then... was like 10 regularly people [coughs] ...um... they had that close relationship that I was initially intimidated by, um, but then, at some point during the year...I found myself just in it. And then it was...um... yeah it was just...great. (¶53)

Later in the discussion, Natalie suggests possible reasons for this sense of clique:

I remember finding them to be very good looking and very comfortable with each other. [yep] [giggles]. Um….and they’re all like hugging everyone and like screaming when their friend arrived, because it was the first day of the year they’d just had a bit of a break. And so everyone who was…not new.. was very excited…to be there, and knew each other really well. (¶57)

Jazz suggests that cliques are necessary parts of any group. When asked whether he perceives social exclusion within the choir, he argues that: “There will always be and it’s going to be the case wherever you go in my experience, that there will be groups and cliques….simply because that’s the way humans work they need that level of bonding” (¶675-677). Nonetheless, not all interviews suggested a clique was experienced by all members interviewed. Malachi experienced the opposite on joining, speaking of a sense of warmth, familiarity, and of “fitting in” right from the first rehearsal: “the first time I went there, there were so many smiles and so many hugs and…I just felt like I fit.” (¶26).

Both musical and social self-selection perpetuates the sense of clique in the choir. Daisy mentions in passing a friend she took along to a choir rehearsal but who did not return.
I have experience of several similar cases from my own time leading the group. Those peoples’ voices are unheard within this research and would not, I contend, be foremost in the minds of members interviewed. A musicianship standard exists for all new members, which is the result of the median abilities and of my teaching goals, repertoire, and performance selections. Interviewees frequently mention inclusivity and being open to all, yet they are perhaps more accurately describing the environment that is created within the group itself. In my experience, those who do not feel themselves to be of sufficient musical ability, rarely return. For those people, and despite my best efforts, the spirit of Higgins’s notion of community music as an act of hospitality (Higgins, 2007, 2012) was not achieved. This raises important implications for this choir which aims to provide inclusive community musicking, for the work of its leaders, and for my own practice as a community musician committed commitment to social inclusion. I return to this discussion later, but for now, consider the musical clique of the choir in more detail.

**Musical clique.** Most members interviewed narrate with a sense of pride the choir’s musical achievements and discuss its perceived musical quality. The sense of musical clique may be detected in commentaries about the choir’s quality and contributes too to the choir’s specialness and the exclusion of the less musically skilled. Members describe the importance of choir as fulfilling a need for musical challenge in their lives. As Table 3 sets out, eight of ten members (with the exceptions of Paige and Jazz) have previously studied music, whether a musical instrument or had voice lessons. All but one member (Hermione, who has tertiary instrumental music training) talked about a background as a singer, whether as a solo singer, having had singing lessons, or other vocal performance opportunities such as karaoke competitions. Four of the ten members interviewed talked about having previous experience singing in a choir, whether at school or as an adult. Chloe shares with pride how choir is recognised by others for its musical quality:
So, I feel like they look at us as a quality choir that, I guess… in the queer community I’m not 100% sure how we’re perceived caus I’m not I don’t know asked the same people– [Sure!] –but, musically I think we think we stand out. (¶149-151)

Daisy defers to the judgement of her piano teacher, a “really big part” of her life prior to moving to Melbourne (¶80) to attest to the choir’s musical quality:

To our first concert I invited my piano teacher from Mansfield. And she was really impressed with the performance and actually that did mean a lot to me because, she is, yeah so she’s, if if [sic] [piano teacher’s name] says something is good then it’s good! (¶99)

Hermione judges the choir according to her own musical experiences and previous tertiary level instrumental music training, and values the musical quality:

...you know when you’re tuning something? And it’s like clear as a bell, like that perfect alignment. We don’t have to be there. People will still enjoy it if we’re like, a little slow or, maybe we got that note wrong. That’s okay. And so he doesn’t, freak us out, with that kind of stuff. Though like it still sounds good. Yeah? I know that. (¶1034-1042)

Hermione distinguishes the youth chorus from other community choirs, emphasizing the level of musicianship and focused rehearsal time as factors in what makes the choir special: “I’ve done a lot of music and I know that we sound good… But, um, and that is a focus, that is THE focus of when we’re in rehearsals” (¶1042-1044). Several members talk of rehearsals as a time of intensive focus. There is a sense of musical competition implicit in Hermione’s comments too. I will explore this as a tool that refurbishes youth chorus members in the next section.

Natalie conveys a sense of the importance of musical quality for the choir. Natalie, an experienced chorister with a considerable musical background including studies in voice, experience singing with several school choirs, a community chamber choir, and as a member of a nationally-acclaimed girls’ choir, captures a balance between the musical and social. Natalie enjoys the youth chorus for its variety of repertoire and, like Hermione, regards the
choir’s aesthetic musical products and standard as important. In discussing the singing experience within the youth chorus, Natalie clearly prioritises musical quality that is augmented with social connections:

the fact that we’re singing beautiful music with a great harmonies…and I’ve said before that, um…it’s really cheesy I can’t believe this is a thing that I say…but um…the harmonies are my drugs…I get a high off it when it really works perfectly…um so even if there…if I hated all of them I would still if we sang really well together get the joy from the singing because I do and I always have…it helps that we’re all really good friends…it probably makes us sing better as well. (¶49)

Natalie enjoys the sense of musical removal and clique within the choir, a clique that, according to DeNora, refurbishes choir members through a sense of exclusiveness but that at the same time risks being over-assertive in the type of musical quality it prescribes. Focussing on musical quality over inclusivity risks leaving members with different musical abilities behind, and can jeopardise the refurbishing effect of the choir and in a way that DeNora, drawing upon Bourdieu’s understanding, views as a form of symbolic violence (DeNora, 2013, p. 56, table 3.1).

Social clique. Nine members talked explicitly about the value of choir as a social outlet. Natalie, an eloquent speaker, and student of law at the time of interview, again offers a clear example of choir gatherings as offering a consistent time for cultivating friendships that was not easily accessible as a young adult who had just completed school. She explains that “when you walk in, particularly once everyone you love is there apart from your family, it’s the time of the week where I see everyone, like it’s guaranteed friend time” (¶49). Natalie talks about choir as special time that combines singing and socialising over food. Choir is a place where ‘friend time’ is built into the choir’s structures of regular rehearsals and performances. The regularity of social contact that choir provides is important for Natalie, who tends not to socialise with larger groups of people and who enjoys the social time that
she feels is otherwise not easily found in the real world after finishing high school. Natalie refers several times to her preference of individual interactions with friends rather than group activities, a mode of interaction afforded by a small group such as the youth chorus where members sing in small sections. The sense of safety fostered within the choir creates close friendships and social bonds within the group that Natalie eloquently describes as “sit on the floor friendships”:

Caus though I have some uni friends, they’re still more acquaintances friends rather than the really close…sit on the floor…I don’t know why sitting on the floor for me is like close friends [interviewer laughing]. [Natalie laughs] But you know the kind of friends where you end up sitting on the floor in any situation [hmm, yep]…caus you’re just so comfortable. (¶47)

Natalie talks of the choir camp is an important social outlet and talks at length about the importance of this experience for her, expressing excitement at youth chorus plans for the 2015 camp. Natalie describe the choir as a bit intense but familial in that people stay with the group: “I mean, people stick around so clearly it’s the kind of, um, close family that you want to be a part of rather than the one that freaks you out and makes you feel like an outsider” (¶45). Dylan jokingly describes this intensely social experience as “cult-like”, saying “…without making it sound bad, it feels like a cult in how good it is because everyone just sticks together” (¶661). The choir clique may also be noted in its setting as a social site, which members describe with a sense of specialness. Choral singing provides the social glue that binds members and distinguishes the group from other queer social organisations, yet the balance between musical and social elements is different for each member.

To summarise, At the heart of the choir is a place of musical and social safety that meets DeNora’s description of a place of removal from the everyday. It sets the members apart from their daily experiences, creating an assumed queer place and a queer “bubble” of sorts. It provides a sense of ontological safety necessary for members to recreate (or
refurnish) their identities. I suggest that the sense of safety may in fact be perceived as circular. I set this out below before exploring the choir as a place of refurnishing in Chapter 6.

**A circular notion of safety within choir?** The complexity of the choir experience is revealed through DeNora’s asylums framework. Choir meets DeNora’s call for room and respite as a conceptual site of musical removal that reinforces feelings of separateness or exclusiveness from the outside world, linked closely to the idea of being safe. Choir is a site of musical removal that reinforces feelings of safety, welcome, and familiarity, all of which, it seems, contribute to member understandings of the choir as an inclusive place. At the same time, choir members value the sense of exclusivity that is fostered by its profile as an assumed-queer musicking and meeting place. Yet the experience of at least one member suggests a sense of exclusion for not conforming to the hegemonic social identities of a choir of cis-gendered gay men and lesbian women.

Thinking further about the notion of safety in terms of removal, members share a stake in the success of the choir with choir leaders, and therefore have a role to play. This parallels similar discussions among scholars of music therapy, captured in the work of Randi Rolvsjord and Hans Petter Solli (Rolvsjord, 2015; Solli & Rolvsjord, 2015). Rolvsjord explores how music therapy clients possess and make use of their agency in a mental health context. Rolvsjord argues that the therapy process empowers clients, and she outlines the agency they possess through active participation (Rolvsjord, 2004). This finding echoes a study by Elizabeth Parker (2014) of the social identity of adolescent choral singers in a high school setting, where social cliques were found to be limit social identity formation. In the case of the youth chorus, it seems, the clique contributes to the sense of “team” Parker identifies in her study.
In the musical ecology of the choir, I suggest we might understand it as a site that provides wellbeing by establishing a sense of safety. Safety is created and maintained in a circular and self-perpetuating fashion and draws both exclusion and exclusion into its construction. I attempt to depict this process graphically in Figure 2. I suggest the empowerment of members within the group is reliant upon their input. The choir’s public profile advertises it to be a safe and socially inclusive physical environment motivates new members to join, and is reinforced by the comments and testimonials of its existing members. On joining, however, it becomes an exclusionary place, a “clique.” This clique of this musical and social environment fosters and sustains deep social bonds, described by members as familial, with music the common social glue. As a member, social and familial bonds are strengthened in a setting where queerness is assumed, which in turn validates the choir’s claim to be a safe, socially inclusive place.
Figure 2. Suggested model of the circular and self-reinforcing experience of safety within the youth chorus.

As a site where queerness is assumed, these social and familial bonds are strengthened and the youth chorus’s claim to be a safe, socially inclusive place validated. Having established the foundation of safety upon which youth chorus members engage with the choir, I turn now to other elements that reflect the wider wellbeing goals of the choir once this sense of safety has been established. I discuss these elements in the following chapter, in relation to DeNora’s illustration of refurnishing and the work of BRIGHT.
Chapter 6: Interpreting the Results: Music Asylums Part II (Refurnishing)

Safety For…? Performance as a Strategy of Refurnishing within the Youth Chorus

Having outlined some of the tensions and contradictions that constitute a sense of safety and removal within the choir as described by its members, I now consider member experiences through the lens of refurnishing, DeNora’s second strategy for creating room for a music asylum. The voices of individual members reveal multiple conceptual spaces that provide asylum through refurnishing: from the choir’s musicking activities such as repertoire choices and decisions about where and for whom to perform, to its normative vision of what the choir ought to be and do, to its extra-musical event coordination and support for the more routine aspects of the choir’s work. A clear picture emerges of the fundamental role of musicking within the youth chorus.

I detail the function of choir as a place to perform for self and for others, to test social boundaries and binaries of gender and sexuality, and to explore new and differing identities. I also explore the role of choir as a place of ambition, where members test themselves against musical and extra-musical goals and challenges, fostering a sense of accomplishment. The analysis is framed in keeping with DeNora’s idea of the refurnishing of selves – a form of collaborative play that can remake or renegotiate social worlds (p. 55).

“The importance of that moment” (Dylan): Performing on the choral stage. As a choir, public musicking performances are among the most familiar of refurnishing activities. Members perform for self and for others, indeed, performing is a means for choir members to deepen relationships with key audience members. Exploring how members draw upon the choir as a space to act up and out, the analysis reveals how to stand up publicly and sing against the sense of social exclusion and discrimination they perceive within the community.
fulfils a mission in an evangelistic sense of advocating on behalf of other SSAGD young people and acting as role models. This sense of performance is evident within the larger choir organisation as a place that draws together people with a common interest in singing yet from a diverse range of socio-demographic backgrounds. It is a place where youth chorus members can imagine a future for themselves and fit in. Finally, safety provides a platform for members to test themselves and to achieve, both musically and extra-musically.

Of all the members interviewed for this study Dylan captures with astute self-awareness the excitement his first public performance, for a marriage equality concert at the State Library of Victoria in 2014:

I felt like a celebrity for a moment … and it was just, that moment and I felt my posture change and I suddenly straightened up a lot more and I was just walking towards that stage and I was yeah, it was a mind-blowing feeling and I don’t know how to like, I guess it was a mixture of adrenaline and you know pride and, I don’t know, self-awareness of what the situation is. (Dylan, ¶282)

Dylan’s lucid, reflexive description of these first moments and the corporal changes he observed as he walked onto stage for the first time suggests an experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013) Dylan is keenly aware of his physical reactions and embodies these in his narration of the experience.

All members interviewed talked of performing publicly as a centrally important, demonstrating it seems the importance of these examples of collaborative play, as DeNora would term them, in refurnishing the social worlds of members. Typically, such performances were held in public places and for an audience. Again, the maintenance of a sense of safety – or removal as DeNora proposes – underpins these performances, affording a sense of ‘safety in numbers’ when on stage, and with the support of musical leaders. With a platform of safety established, members experience sensations of wellbeing and flourishing.

It is important to note here that performances take on a higher significance in a community
choir setting such as the youth chorus than in more traditional music therapeutic settings such as the BRIGHT program described in DeNora’s study. Where DeNora describes an important moment of public performance for the BRIGHT Singers in the hospital foyer and on the wards later that afternoon (Chapter 7, pp. 121-133), the primary focus of her study was a program that allowed for internal performances but was otherwise, it seems, a removed physical site and closed to those not aware of the program. For the BRIGHT singers, it was an unusual performance and their first in a non-mental health venue (p. 121).

In the case of the youth chorus and MGLC Inc, choir performances are significant but far more common. Moreover, they are open to the public and members often join with the expectation of performing publicly with the group. They are advertised widely in Melbourne, particularly in the queer press and occasionally beyond in local newspapers. Events are promoted heavily online and using social media channels. Audience members might include individuals not known to any individual member of the choir, something members are aware of when they perform. My findings affirm previous studies, in therapeutic, educational and community settings, that suggest the importance of public performance for personal development and as a means of communication with the audience (Bailey & Davidson, 2003, 2005; Carpenter, 2015; O'Grady & McFerran, 2007a; McPherson, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2012). It might be argued that a sense of removal is retained by the choir when it performs publicly on stage. Paige alludes to this in her comment that “there’s something about singing together and, especially so many people who joined a choir don't like to sing, on their own” (¶261). Members perform publicly but do so form the safety of a group of queer singers who perform together.

Performing is understood both a means and an end for members, which is crucial to refurnishing of its members, as DeNora suggests. Yet performing is also a creative act and site for innovation and expression. For physical sites such as public performances for
audiences, it is the culmination of sustained work in rehearsals and other extra-musical preparations, a statement of achievement both for oneself and for others in the audience that day. It is a means of proving oneself musically in a public setting, a demonstration of commitment to seeing a project through to its fruition, and a commitment across an extended period. Yet performing is also a means. For a queer choir such as the youth chorus, it is automatically a bold political statement about the values and identities of the members collectively performing on stage, often before an audience that includes individuals with intimate knowledge of the life experiences of individual members.

Performance is significant in what it represents for members and it sits at one end of a continuum that for some drives their participation in the choir. Public performance is subject to the attendance of members and is the culmination of a process that involves regular rehearsals and smaller performances within the choir (often performing to other members of MGLC Inc), dress rehearsals and finally public performances. Figure 3 seeks to represent schematically the experience of performing with the choir and the layers described above that culminate in the public performance.

![Figure 3: Schematic representation of the experience of performing within the youth chorus](image)

Performing is a statement of commitment to musicking with the group and of support for the choir’s values of safe and supportive musicking for young queer people. However, it is not compulsory. Members always have the option of not attending rehearsals or
performances if they don’t feel comfortable doing so. For James, this came as a surprise and revealed for him an important distinction to other, performance-focussed choirs he had previously sang with:

I first joined the youth chorus and it was coming up the first concert, um, you know, Ben was saying like, “Anyone who doesn’t feel comfortable being on stage their not obviously you don’t have to sing.” Um, and, that was quite a foreign idea to me, um, just because, like, when I’ve, you know, been in choirs and orchestras, back, you know, before, when I was a teenager and, older, you know you wouldn’t join if you didn’t want to be on stage…to perform. Which is, which shows just how much it’s not necessarily about the singing…and, more about the community I guess. (¶¶109-110)

Yet for others, as the figure sets out, various stages of performances, including singing publicly in the company of others during rehearsals, performances for the main chorus during rehearsals, or public performances, may refurnish the self through musicking.

**Performing for self.** Solos form an important part of the performance experience of some members and may help to refurnish a sense of self, but carry too a risk of egotism and over-assertiveness, as DeNora sets out (2013, p. 56, table 3.1). For some, performing is for the showcasing of individual musical abilities alongside skills building, within rehearsals and publicly. Jazz views the choir as an opportunity to improve his solo performance skills, describing himself as “very self-taught” and with only two years teaching experience compared to other members with longer singing experience. With a background in competitive karaoke singing, Jazz is one of several members who describes choir in relation to the opportunity to sing a solo. On the one hand, he is cognisant of the musical quality of the choir, saying “it’s a whole new level to be performing in the choir where there’s, everyone has, has a rank of singing, it becomes it does become a challenge because their skill is different to the skill that you need at the local bar” (¶225). Yet on the other, Jazz talks of what distinguishes him from others in the choir, describing his karaoke and stagecraft skills from the perspective of members looking on:
I do know I have skills, that others don’t have. And things that they could, they could dream of doing I’m sure, it’s not lost on them, but doing it, and having the courage to stand up and do it…is what separated me in that crowd. (¶237-239)

The value of solo opportunities for Jazz becomes apparent during a detailed discussion of auditioning but missing multiple solo opportunities:

It did have a huge, like “Inner Diva” was very difficult for me…from start to finish, and because I because I AM a soloist at heart and I went for a solo part and I didn’t get there. (¶¶207-209)

Jazz describes being on the outer both musically and socially and with his love of karaoke performance it seems he approaches choir from the perspective of someone who needs to stand out. In some respects, Jazz is in some respects similar to DeNora’s character, “Peter” (2013, pp. 118-120), whose musical preferences and social detachment from the BRIGHT group separated him from within the group, and who was unwilling or unable at the time of interview to move toward the group’s musical activities and preferences.

Jazz uses the chance to stand out as a soloist as an opportunity for refurbishing within the music asylum of the choir. He measures his improvement against comments by his karaoke friends when he sings with them: “…after three, three shows at choir, I went back to karaoke and they all said: “You’re doing better, you sound awesome. YESSSS!!” (¶243).

Jazz’s interview was striking for the difference between how he described his choir experiences and others’ impressions. In Jazz’s story I recognise nevertheless the important role of the youth chorus and his as one valid appropriation of the opportunities of youth chorus performances.

**A personal musical and social testing ground.** The choir’s performance agenda also provides a musical testing ground for members and a place to achieve personal goals. It refurbishes member identities as achievers, and adds a performance meta-narrative to those already told in the individual repertoire choices, as Nakamura describes in relation to musical
effects and the way they empower sexual minority communities (Nakamura, 2014, p. 4). This testing ground is both individual (in the case of soloists described above) and collective, with members rehearsing and performing repertoire that challenges as a collective.

Nicole offers a clear example of the sense of achievement and choir as a testing ground. Choir tests and challenges Nicole’s sense of what it is to be musical. As a big heavy metal fan, choir stretches her musical tastes as she learns new repertoire far from her preferred musical genre. Choir is a personal musical accomplishment, allowing Nicole to confront her fears, to test her abilities, to take responsibility for achieving to a high standard with the encouragement of her musical leaders, to perform, and to achieve musical success in her public performances:

  not only do I get to learn music that I probably wouldn’t go out of my way to learn, because I’m more into heavy metal than classical. So for me learning the music that we’re doing it’s…it’s a stretch. But I love it because it puts me out of my comfort zone. (¶30)

Nicole feels like she belongs in choir, and is safe and supported to show off a different side of herself:

  I think a big part of it is a sense of belonging, that you’re part of something that possibly with your career or with your family and friends that you don’t get to be…you don’t get to show off a certain part of yourself. (¶61)

In music, Nicole finds a source of pride and defiance. The sense of musical achievement and opportunity to sing music that is out of her comfort zone tests Nicole and in doing so provides a source of pride.

**A quality performance.** Chloe, 24, and Daisy, 26, describe how choir is recognised by others for its musical quality. Chloe is proud that the youth chorus has a reputation for quality, and stands out musically (¶151). She talks about how, when talking of the choir with others, they sometimes recognise it as being a great choir. She believes the youth chorus “sounds fantastic” and has a reputation for quality singing but also having fun on stage.
(¶143) She highlights the contrasts in previous choir concerts where “we’ve dressed up in really crazy outfits” yet at the same time “sung something really beautiful” (¶145-147). Daisy values the opinions of those closest to her, and particularly her high school piano teacher, whose musical judgement she trusts as someone with “really high standards” (¶101).

To our first concert I invited my piano teacher from Mansfield. And she was really impressed with the performance and actually that did mean a lot to me because, she is, yeah so she’s, if, if [piano teacher’s name] says something is good then it’s good! (¶99)

Daisy describes her reaction to her teacher’s comments: “that felt really good to have that acknowledged that it was a good musical performance, not just a social gathering” (¶101).

Hermione talks about the differences between the youth chorus and other community choirs, emphasizing the level of musicianship and focused rehearsal time as distinguishing factors, saying: “it [youth chorus] still sounds good…I know that. I’ve done a lot of music and I know that we sound good” (¶1042).

Members seek out and achieve musical quality through performance. For Nicole, Chloe, Daisy, and Hermione, then, choir is a quality musicking place appropriated in a way that fosters a sense of musical achievement and of extending themselves musically. This fundamentally refurnishing aspect in turn transforms them by providing a resource they may draw upon in future. Solo performance is another important aspect to achievement that is discussed earlier in this chapter. I briefly discuss here a slightly unusual perspective on the refurnishing potentials and potential risks as observed within the choir. Choir also represents an opportunity for members to distinguish themselves as solo singers.

Jazz shares his preference for solo singing early in the interview when discussing his high school background and interest in acting and drama. He tells the interviewer about dropping out of drama class for a year after not being offered a major or titled part for the school musical, but being “just, dropped to chorus” (¶22). Jazz describes how there is always
Jazz believes himself to be a talented soloist and performer who has joined choir to boost his singing skills. He talks about unsuccessfully auditioning for solo parts several times during the interview but of persisting with putting himself forward for auditions undeterred. I believe the opportunity to audition for solos, to perform as a soloist, and to have a supportive audience is critical to Jazz’s ongoing involvement in the choir and provides refurbishing for him. This is highlighted by his self-belief as having “a wide range of vocal talent when I sing” and of the role the choir has played in developing his talent. (¶18) He relates a story that captures his self-belief:

I was talking to one of my neighbours a few years ago he said “Oh there’s someone who’s in our apartment building who sings. Do you know who that is? He’s really good!” I’m like “Yeah, that’s me.” [clears his throat] So, music’s just everything to me. (¶30)

And yet at other times in his interview the ensemble is clearly a crucial part of Jazz’s experience of the choir. Members of his voice section (bass) are integral to Jazz’ view of himself “singing better”, and exist in a relationship of dependence. As Jazz comments, “I depend on them to help me to sing better!” (Jazz, ¶673)

**Performing for an audience.** As Dylan’s comment about his first choir performance and “the importance of that moment” (¶245) demonstrates, the value of a supportive audience as a vehicle for affirming their identities and an act of refurbishing. Choir performances feature as significant spaces for more than half of the members interviewed. Most members talked with pride of the recognition they found in the audiences for whom they performed in addition to recognising their own performance as significant. Dylan describes a further moment of awareness at his second concerts where family were part of the audience. An even larger number of family members attended this second concert in 2014 that explored ideas of
home and belonging through music. Dylan recalls his feeling waiting in the wings:

So yeah, when I was in the holding area and I realised how many of my family were coming I just went “oh wow this is actually very important to me it’s…I didn’t realise up until that moment how important having them there, having myself be a part of it and having that outlet was, you know, important to me…” (¶248)

For some, like Chloe, whose parents flew interstate to hear her perform a solo in a concert, the choir provides an opportunity to reconnect to her musical self. As Chloe describes, “that was really wonderful caus they hadn’t seen me sing since I was 16 and, to see me on stage again as a performer and I’ve, grown up and I’m, more confident this time (¶177).” For Daisy, the experience of singing in the choir was personal. She found refurnishing in the act of performance, yet having an audience was of lesser importance. Consistent with other members interviewed (Chloe, Dylan, and Nicole), Daisy suggests that close family and friends attending were most important but that ultimately:

that doesn’t really factor into my thoughts too much, um, it’s obvious, it’s sort of more about um, what I’ve achieved and what the choir has achieved. I don’t…really mind too much what they as an audience thinks of us. (¶95-97)

Choir offers Daisy the opportunity to invite her father to watch a performance and in this way to reconnect/reconcile with him. Daisy’s dad “hasn’t really been actively involved in my life very much at all” and she spoke of how nice it felt “that he put in the effort to come” to her concert. She relates his attendance back to her own story at this point, saying “I guess it felt good to HAVE something to invite him too. Hmmm. So I could be, so that, I don’t know. To show him that I'm doing something” (¶¶105-107).

**Having family in the audience.** Daisy’s comment notwithstanding, to be heard, to have an audience is important, particularly if members of the audience are family. Members utilise the choir’s collective identity to demonstrate their personal queer identities to family in
the audience. Dylan was one of several members whose interviews suggest a desire to prove themselves to family and friends and to share their enjoyment of choir with them. Dylan captures his recognition of the significance of his family attending a musical event that openly acknowledges and celebrates his sexuality – connecting two distinct aspects of his life through the choir:

Um, and it’s also yeah I think it’s really being part of that gay profile it’s, I think, my family have always been cool with it and, you know, never had a problem. Um, they’ve accepted when I’ve had a partner at the time and, umm, but never really done anything that sort of said to them “hey, be a part of something that’s a part of what I am”, you know, so having them come to a music concert of mine and a gay-related thing of mine, it definitely opened up that door as well and I had like my nan, and my aunts and cousins…and they all came and it was really fun and it was just like, there was a moment where it almost brought a tear to the eye when I realised the importance of that moment. (¶¶243-245)

Dylan could deepen his relationships with family through a musicking experience that was linked directly to his sexual identity, in this way providing the opportunity to integrate two distinct and important aspects of his life into one in the eyes of those audience members in attendance. Dylan had not intended to connect these distinct aspects of his life by joining the choir, but describes how it had simply turned out that way. I recall similar feelings during the first performance my parents attended when I was a singing member of the main chorus. It was an emotional moment a profound feeling of acceptance and affirmation of my sexual orientation almost a graduation to another level. I sang to them, sharing my voice with them and in doing so finally could celebrate my identity openly in front of them.

For other members, choir refurnishes their sense of family when it would otherwise be absent. Malachi provides an important insight into this key role for the choir in his life. The rejection by his biological family of his sexual identity has created a void in Malachi’s life that choir fills. He describes the choir (referring her to both youth and main chorus interchangeably) is variously a “big home” (¶74), a “second family” (¶42), and a place
"where you put your love and, you know, your trust and faith" (¶65). In the absence of a supportive family, the choir has assumed a familial role in Malachi’s life. He describes his biological family’s difficulty in understanding why he would join a queer choir, saying “I only really told them in September this year, that I was in the choir, um, because they just…they don’t understand it” (¶52). Choir fills a familial role for Malachi. He describes choir members as “really good people”, Malachi asserts that “that’s what family is it’s um a group of people living life and taking good care of each other [mmm] and being there for each other” (¶48). Malachi goes as far as to assign choir members familial roles:

…kind of a family away… like a family that I could have because I’ve lost a little bit of my family. Um. Yeah. So they’ve just become…you know Ben was like…he’s like a big brother to us all and…all my friends are like brothers and sisters. Then there’s the older people in the older chorus who are like mums…like [main chorus member], who is like a mum to us… (¶44)

The absence of family and friends at concerts is in fact quite painful for some members, as Jazz describes after a performance:

I invited upwards of 100 people to attend. People I knew. And I gave them heaps of notice, weeks of notice, and several reminders. No-one turned up. Not a single person that I knew was there in the audience. And… like I hoped someone was going to be there. (¶150)

The role of an audience in validating the experiences of choir members such as Jazz is highlighted by its absence. Jazz sought validation instead in the comment of other choir members in the audience that night (namely, the choir’s president, whom Jazz greatly respects) who recognised his contribution to that specific performance. In doing so, this leader provided a refurbishing of Jazz’s self with the addition of another successful choir performance – a new resource that Jazz could draw from as a memory and achievement into the future.
Beyond the family: Performing for the LGBTI community. For James, the ability to connect with the choir to queer history provides a sense of place and temporal belonging that is refurnishing. As a choir member from overseas who is living temporarily in Melbourne, choir membership enables James to connect to others in ‘his’ queer community. James describes his plans to join a gay male choir on his return home, having been inspired by his experiences at MGLC. Choir offers James a sense of being part of a much larger queer community. James takes a keen interest in queer history and wrote his university honours thesis on the topic. For him, choir provides the chance to learn across generations and to hear the stories of older members of main chorus. At one point, prompted by the interviewer to elaborate on the idea of what he means by “a/the queer community,” James talks of both his amazement at being able to talk with older main chorus members who joined the choir more than 20 years ago. James conveys a deep sense of connectedness, symbolised by his choir membership, to a wider queer community and to a common queer history. James goes into further detail on each of these layers later in the interview:

Um, and so it’s definitely a community in that sense, but it’s also part of a broader queer community in that it’s I guess connected with ... I mean I call it My History, even though it’s not my history, as in, I was not part of this, but, I feel that, I am, a part of, the gay rights movement, or the history of it, because I am, allowed to freely express myself, [hmm] with no, well, I don’t know [chuckles], I don’t really have any fears, uh, but you know what I mean like [yeah] with no fears for anything, and us [...] that’s because of people that, um, you know fought for, my rights, you know, I guess... (¶101)

James captures the activist impetus of choir for him, describing choir as a place that has helped him connect with the queer community. As he describes, “it’s just, there’s still things to fight for and stuff so...Yep...so I want to be involved more.” (¶120-122) He describes the pressure of social norms of marriage and bearing children along with the prejudices associated with gay people (¶126). For James, the fight is about changing perceptions “so that
people don’t, need to come out or people don't, aren’t concerned when they choose to, that something, something bad might happen” (¶128). James has a sense that choir has “already helped people, um, have the strength to do what they wanted to do, and, and come out to people.” (¶130) This is evident in both my own experience as choir leader and referenced by comments of other members interviewed, including Chloe (“it is a good way of outing yourself in public”, ¶33). A sense of refurnishing lies once again at the heart of these acts of pronouncements and resilience, as members stand up for, make and remake their identities.

Several members talk of the need for choir to be recognised for its musical credentials in spite of the sexual and gender identity of its members, referring to a sense of being just a “normal” choir or achieving normality through the medium of music. Nicole, describing in more detail how she disclosed her membership of the choir to others in her family, says:

It should just be a choir [hmmm], big deal… I feel that that organisation is great because it shows the community that no matter who you are you can still create beautiful music and I wanted to be part of that. (¶26)

Natalie’s comment suggests a sense of refurnishing that is dependent upon the needs of others rather than to prove self. The choir might, it seems, support the self-esteem of its membership in the way it provides a voice for members needing to prove themselves normal against non-SSAGD choirs. I return to consider member understandings of the “normal” community choir in Chapter 9.

**Extra-musical achievements.** While choral musical performance is a significant element, members reveal a sense of achievement in other ways beyond the musicking. Hermione brings to the choir other musical resources which are utilised as part of the overall musical experience of the choir. This echoes Rolvsjord’s (2010) use of client resources and strengths within music therapy, moving beyond the treatment of deficits. Jazz hints that choir is a place where his solo performance opportunities to shine are limited; he refers repeatedly
to unsuccessful solo auditions during his interview. In its place, Jazz proudly describes how he has cultivated a reputation within the choir for his extra-musical achievements. Jazz coordinated a fundraising event for the choir and returns several times to his leadership role during his interview, describing the event in minute detail. Yet in return for his commitment, Jazz reveals his expectation of being publicly acknowledged and rewarded for his achievement:

…when the fundraising event came around and I was planning it and I put it in front of the committee they came— huh— they, well, they didn’t come back to me I read it in the minutes that they didn’t want ME to host it, they wanted [member] to host it. And my, competitiveness AND my jealousy rose quite heavily because my thought was, “Ex-cuse me, who’s putting all this together, who’s.. given up their time, money and effort? If I’m going to put it together, I’m going to host it!” And so I compromised with them and said [member] can do the emceeing, I will do the questions. And they said yes, that’s acceptable. So... if it if there’s a competition time I came a draw at that time. But there isn’t a competition because [member] is not like that. (¶217)

Jazz talks of his pride in achieving a successful fundraiser and of his sense of competitiveness in being recognised for his achievements. By contrast, other members interviewed (such as James and Natalie) reveal an understanding of the extra-musical tasks of the choir (such as setting up chairs and the keyboard in preparation for rehearsal), as a responsibility of membership of a community or volunteer-led organisation that is acknowledged without a sense of reciprocity. For Jazz, the everyday tasks associated with the running of the choir (cleaning up coffee mugs after the Inner Diva performance, for instance (¶160)), reveal an understanding of the extra-musical is an extension of the choir as a staging ground for achievement. The experiences Jazz describes contribute greatly to how he furnishes his sense of self as a leader with the choir.

Facilitating the refurnishing of self by changing attitudes. Music may function as a musical model and prism through which other social situations are viewed. For Dylan, the choir takes on the role of standard-bearer for other aspects of his life. Dylan attributes a
fundamental attitudinal change to the social experience of the choir and its musical ecology, with a positive effect on his physical self, to the choir. This shift results from, in his opinion, having a voice within the choir – in terms of repertoire selections, concert opportunities, etc. Given his positive experiences within the choir, Dylan describes, imagining what it would be like to work at Google (“they’ve got this amazing workplace” ¶293), how he has learned to expect similar levels of satisfaction in other aspect of his life, particularly his workplace (¶293-295):

Dylan… it’s um, yeah, very much a reinforcement and a, a drive to keep that going, and just to remind myself that’s the feeling I want to have every time. And if it’s not happening that way then I need to reassess why it’s not happening and then figure it out, you know.

Interviewer 5 Cos that’s such a strong feeling yeah?

Dylan Yeah, yeah. But it’s also made me realise that, that’s the feeling I should be getting in other aspects of my life as well. Um, not just the singing concert, like not the choir um even just at work like if I’m not feeling that kind of pride and that kind of strength out of what I’m doing then what’s the point of doing that particular thing or why can’t I make it that way. So I think it actually did improve other areas of my life without even meaning to.

Dylan extends this powerful refurnishing of his self by attributing several concrete changes in his life around the time of the concert to his changed mindset that was prompted by the choir. This includes, true to Dylan’s embodied way of describing his choir experiences, changes to his physical health:

… I became more assertive and it wasn’t even like I sat there and just thought I need to be doing this more it was just more I started meeting with people that I needed to meet with and saying to them, look, this is not on I need to start knowing where my career is going, and, obviously completely separate to music, but I think just the attitude that I felt um, was more need to take care of myself and need to make sure I’m getting what I need out of life, and yeah. Suddenly by June I was promoted into an even more senior role than I was aiming for and then I got promoted again in August in the same role, but more responsibility so within six months I’ve already had
three job changes in the same company because they’ve just, jumped on the bandwagon and said yeah okay, you’re doing what you need to be doing. So yeah, just thinking about it now I kind of probably could credit that to the way I felt thanks to the chorus, you know, because it definitely changed my mindset on everything. (¶295)

I’ve even lost a lot of weight in the last, however many months caus I’ve just been better about myself […] (¶601)

I can’t factor enough of how amazing the um, the singing side of it has done for my life, um, so it’s insane. (¶605)

**Acting out through choir.** Choir provides a symbolic space and conceptual place to act out: to perform different identities and versions of self within the choir and act out identities outside the choir to the wider community, at times deliberately challenging the orthodox or most commonly held views. In performing these different identities, members may also be seeking to perform what it means to be different from the mainstream, which some recognise with a sense of obligation to improve the prospects of future generations of queer young people. Dylan captures the various layers of choir as a place of furnishing in relation to its LGBTI identity. Responding to a question about the choir’s role in his life, Dylan (¶¶241-243) describes the importance of its connection to the gay community alongside the choir as a musicking and social outlet:

**Dylan**

I guess being connected to the gay community, gay and lesbian etcetera community it’s just ummm, I don’t go to parades I don’t go to you know, protests or any of the the lobbying that they do in the community and that sort of thing, and, already I’ve been part of the marriage equality protest, or more of a rally I should say, protest makes it more aggressive, ummm yeah so we did that down from state library and walked all the way down to the parliament-

**Interviewer 5**

-oh yeah

**Dylan**

-and it was GREAT you know, a lot of news coverage and we got to sing with an amazing artist who was part of our show for the day and he did a single where we sang the background and, umm so that was something I don’t think I ever would have done in my lifetime if it wasn’t for this, ummm yeah we did a, a gay wedding marriage equality concert so it was very tongue and cheek and we did you know everyone dressed up in their wedding best so we had people in their wedding dresses and, just something that was very tongue and cheek it was so comedic at points but was also so poignant to the, the
movement, and so I felt like it was almost a political stance without being too aggressive about it and it was just warm, light-hearted, families were invited. Um, and it’s also yeah I think it’s really being part of that gay profile…

Dylan’s comments capture the sense of a community, a musicking site for political activism in a very public but non-aggressive way, and a sense that members view themselves as public performers who challenge attitudes toward gender and sexual identities and promote a positive view through choral singing.

**Singing out and standing up: A responsibility to publicly give back.** Choir in performance is a place to stand up for self and against social exclusion. The refurbishing of selves is aided by the choir’s role as a place to come out publicly. Members perceive themselves to be part of an activist organisation. Natalie describes her experience performing on a university campus:

we were trying to tell everyone the name of the choir as often as possible just in the hope that someone who needs to hear the name of the choir would hear it and be able to come and…notice. (¶129)

Yet choir also offers the possibility to give something back: a place where members find meaning, take responsibility, and feel a sense of commitment, community-mindedness, and altruism. Several members describe how important it is for the choir to perform publicly as a gay and lesbian choir. Nicole’s interview suggests a deep-seated desire for social equality and change. She uses her choir membership as a reference point to raise awareness about her sexuality and in doing so to educate about and explain her sexual identity to others (¶24-26):

Nicole  It’s interesting because some of my friends and family know that I’m bi, whereas others don’t [hmmm], so for the ones that know that I’m bi and have a lot of friends in the queer community they were completely “oh yeah, obviously you’re going to join a gay and lesbian choir, why wouldn’t you do otherwise”—

*Interviewer 4*  *Sure*
Nicole—but the other people that assume that I’m straight and very passionate about gay and lesbian rights, they weren’t quite sure why I joined a gay and lesbian choir. So I had to explain it a little bit—

Interviewer 4  Ok
Nicole—differently.
Interviewer 4  And what was that process like?
Nicole  It was frustrating [hmmm] because I shouldn’t have to explain. It should just be a choir [hmmm], big deal, it’s… some people still wonder why you’d want to go to a gay and lesbian choir if you’re not gay and lesbian [hmmm, yep]. But I just explained to them that I’ve got a lot of friends in the queer community and I love music…

James captures the activist impetus of choir for him, describing choir as a place that has helped him connect with the queer community. As he describes, “it’s just, there’s still things to fight for and stuff so…so I want to be involved more.” (¶120-122). He describes the pressure of social norms of marriage and bearing children, and talks of the common perception in his eyes of gay people as “just, all fucked up” (¶126). He perceives the fight to be about changing perceptions “so that people don’t, need to come out or people don't, aren’t concerned when they choose to, that something, something bad might happen” (¶128). James has a sense that choir has “already helped people, um, have the strength to do what they wanted to do, and, and come out to people.” (¶130) This is evident in both my own experience working with the choir and several comments made by other members interviewed. A sense of refurnishing lies once again at the heart of these acts of pronouncements and resilience, as members stand up for, make and remake their identities. As a choir for SSAGD young people, many members describe its importance as a place to give back to others. There is a sense of responsibility internally to other choir members, demonstrated in Nicole’s comments about its goal-orientated approach:
It feels great. You feel like, if you don’t go, you’re putting…you’re letting someone down so you’ve got that sense of responsibility and um…I don’t know.. you feel special. That sense of responsibility and um…I don’t know.. you feel special. (¶32)

Members also find meaning in the choir’s altruistic activities, often referred to within MGLC Inc as outreach. It is clear this responsibility goes beyond the choir to the wider queer community and those exploring their sexual or gender identity. Here the choir perceive themselves to be role models, distinguished from others in their ability to publicly sing in support of their own sexual and/or gender identities. Several members discuss how important it is for the choir to perform publicly as a gay and lesbian choir. Chloe talks about two roles of the choir in her life. Firstly, as a “good way of outing yourself in public” (¶43); that is, a platform for her and others to come out of the closet and disclose their sexual or gender identities publicly to others. Secondly, it is a site where Chloe believes members are viewed as role models:

…performing as a, a queer choir is important because we are representing our community and people are seeing us in a positive light. And especially for, I think we’ve done some performances in universities and it’s good for, like young queer people to see other queer people out there being happy and not, you know, it’s, you get a – what am I trying to say? – um, sometimes LGBT community we don’t have enough positive role models out there. So it’s good to have those people out there. (¶185)

Conforming and fitting in. Members describe a sense of obligation to conform to the social and musical norms of the choir when performing: an interesting juxtaposition that appears to refurnish identities by providing structure and certainty for those members who are so inclined. Musically, they articulate a tension between wanting to embody their musical experiences distinctively and the need to conform when part of the larger choral group.

Members discuss the need to blend in and conform with other members of their voice part, and to harmonise vocally across parts. This supports the sense of musical clique within
the group discussed earlier in this chapter and explicitly mentioned in Natalie’s comments about musical harmony (harmonies as her drugs) and Chloe’s comments on musical blending (“it’s a brilliant feeling to feel your voice blend in to the crowd” and “I love when the whole choir sings very quietly”, ¶115).

Jazz recognises the need to conform to a choral singing style, and to match pitches (both of which are essential to choral singing), saying that “part of my singing in a group is I tune in to the person nearest me and my voice” and describing how he could “link into” the voices of other basses in performance” (¶326-328). Jazz describes his voice as something distinct from him, that he observes and develops rather than something within him.

Describing the difficulty of rehearsing Eric Whitacre’s “Seal Lullaby”, Jazz says:

Beautiful song.– Hmmmm. VERY difficult, because we had to produce the notes, the way the song works, is it’s in waves, so the notes have to, move up and down quite smoothly. And in, and, they have to be held. And me holding notes takes a lot of effort. Hmmmm. Because my voice occasionally hitches and the note goes funny for a moment. (¶412-416)

Again, Jazz acknowledges the benefit of singing alongside others: “Um, so that was a big learning curve and doing it with other people made it so much easier.” (¶418)

Conformity extends to performance practice too. Nicole and Jazz both talk of the need to learn to move in synchrony when performing. Nicole describes: “When I was performing I noticed that most people didn’t move around so much, whereas I was sort of bopping around. I have to learn how to not do that so much so that I don’t stand out” (¶55). Jazz has learned to conform to standards for choir movement rather than the freedom of karaoke performances:

I’m very performey, very dancey… and in the choir I actually have to, I’ve learned I actually have to turn that down. That was, that was a big step, because on karaoke night you can do anything you want! The stage is yours! At choir you’ve got to just, stand there and be calm unless you have dance moves in which case “yes I can jazz that up.” But, that, that was one thing I’ve learned as well. (¶233)
For a performer with a proclivity toward solo singing and performing, Jazz clearly finds the movement aspects challenging. Yet his perceptions of the musical quality of the choir motivate his willingness to conform and perhaps even offer a refurnishing of self in the act of conforming to the conventions of the choir.

**Performance repertoire.** Repertoire choices are an essential element of refurnishing in the choir, and repertoire is carefully programmed by the musical leaders in consultation with members for its positivity, suitability for a queer choir, and underlying messages of hope, pride, and often, defiance. Both the ideographic elements of the repertoire and the pieces or musical artefacts are considered. James recognises and nicely depicts the intention behind repertoire choices for song choices, saying:

> when a song is chosen, I guess, this will always try to be linked back to, you know, like, our gay identity. It’s not like, it’s not contrived, but, um, the choir like, a lot of the song choices are based on the fact that, we’re a gay choir, um, in terms of like, supporting, us” (¶109)

Recognising the potential for an unsuitable song choice to undermine the sense of musical asylum and jeopardise the sense of safety within the choir and therefore potentially it as a place of music asylum, repertoire is reviewed for its social, cultural, and temporal context. At times this may be as important as its musical and lyrical content. As director, I recall introducing a song to the choir for an important youth outreach project, without consultation with youth chorus members as to the suitability of the artist who popularised the piece. Despite the work’s uplifting lyrics, several members described with concern this artist’s historical recording of a song that was widely denounced as homophobic (a song that I had not found in my research for the project). It became clear the artist was unsuitable for the project, although the piece was performed several years later in concert without the context.
Generational similarities: Imagining a queer future

Looking at the intergenerational membership of the choir from a distinct perspective – this time in relation to how the mixing of multiple generations refurnishes member identities – these young members clearly value interaction with older generations in the main chorus, whether through directly in physical sites such as rehearsals or social activities or, more abstractly, valuing what these older members represent. Intergenerational interactions within the choir support and nurture a sense of removal. Yet there is also a sense that, in their interactions with and discussions of older members, youth chorus members can identify mentors and envision a future for themselves within the queer community. In other words, the wider physical site of a choir of multiple generations facilitates a conceptual site where members may refurnish or reimagine their future as queer people. When asked by the interviewer whether participation in the choir has helped Hermione to feel included more generally in society (¶767), she responds:

Hmmm. Yeah I’d say so. Also, you know, it gave me a better idea of how I could fit into society…because I remember watching main chorus for the first time. [Yep] I was just helping out with the raffle tickets, cause they asked. [Yep] Um I hadn’t, I hadn’t gone to a rehearsal before with main chorus, just youth chorus. I was watching them, and there is just such a variety of people. (¶768-774)

These mentors need not be modelled in the same way as parent-child relationships. Hermione captures a moment in her story where older choir members supported her in an unconventional way at a time when she was feeling inadequate. As mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to Hermione, I have attempted to convey a true impression of her interview by describing her animations and embellishments in eclipses. Describing a moment at a wedding of a choir member she attended, Hermione compares herself with other choir members who were also present:
But at the time I wasn’t feeling very good about where I was in life. All these accomplished adults and I’m just kind of [whispers] doing nothing, so, [loudly] anyway! (¶690)

Hermione then related the response of an older member of the choir to whom she disclosed her feelings:

So I said that to [main chorus member] who is like 60 or something. She’s like [very softly] “Oh it’s okay Hermione, just get drunk! … “Thanks [member]! That’s, probably not helpful but…you tried! That’s good!” Um, or, you know, hug me and feed me chocolate…Hahaha [big laugh]. Um, so that’s nice. (¶690-694)

For Hermione, adult choir members support her struggles in ways she finds surprising and refreshing. The youth chorus provides an opportunity for its younger members to learn the stories and often the struggles of older members of the queer community. James and Dylan talk about the choir’s “two-minute intro” project: an extra-musical element during the main chorus rehearsal where members introduce themselves and share a little of their lives. James describes with a sense of pride the support provided between members of the main chorus:

the main chorus, they were doing these two-minute introductions to people, like members of the chorus basically, and there was um someone, who came out very late in life, um, and the chorus is sort of instrumental in helping him and supporting him to do that, and, I just, you know that’s amazing. (¶95)

Similarly, Dylan describes the experience of hearing member stories as he argues for the intangible benefits the choir provides its members:

I mean it can still be hard for people these days but, back then especially and so when they first joined it was an escape because they didn’t know how to be a gay person in their real life other than singing…So yeah you hear these of people almost tearing up about the effect that it’s—had. And it’s just, it hit’s your heartstrings and I’m sitting there going ‘wow!’ You know, shit! [chuckles] Yeah, so, there actually is a definite um, life-changing factor for others as well that I’ve heard of… (¶641-647)

These opportunities to share stories across generations, facilitated within a musical setting, provide opportunities for all choir members, not only those interviewed, to find a sense of fulfilment and of refurnishing.
**Generational differences: Being distinct.** Generational mentoring within the choir is not always reflected in such positive ways. James captures a subtler generational tension within the organisation’s youth chorus and main chorus, consistent with other sites of music asylum, that musical ecologies may also be political. James talks about the youth chorus needing to prove themselves within the organisation. Describing how the youth chorus takes a leadership role at the choir’s annual rehearsal and social camp in 2015, he says: “so I think, ah, as long as we do a good camp, we’ll be fine” (¶37). James alludes to tensions between both choruses and, after prompting by the interviewer, explores his comments further:

I think some people […] view the youth chorus as young, hooligans essentially. [Both James and Interviewer laugh] Yeah! Ha-ha! I mean, I mean, um, and, and in return I guess, some of the youth chorus members maybe view the older choir members as, old, and, not understanding them as young people. (¶41-43)

Hermione discusses the different cultures that have developed within the youth and adult choruses: “…for instance the main chorus and youth chorus are quite, um, basically they’re connected but they’re very different” (¶28).

This tension reinforces a sense of difference and removal for youth chorus members within the wider organisation, beneath which a strategy of refurnishing is evident as the youth chorus identifies and distinguishes itself because of its youth. Hermione highlights these generational differences when discussing awareness of queer politics, gender, and sexual identities (¶298-300). She describes a lack of awareness of main chorus members about some of the different letters of the “LGBTQIA” (queer) community (¶302-306), explaining that younger members have friends of diverse gender and/or sexuality who care more about such labels. While not done often, nor with malice, Hermione depicts some “stupid jokes” of main chorus members as counterproductive (¶314). Hermione regards this as one reason there may not be as youth chorus is more appealing to some younger members, and describes her objective to change attitudes in main chorus:
I'm trying to change that, but um, that’s... that’s why, that’s why youth chorus can be easier for people. Not just caus it’s you know just young people. But for the young people it can be easier because, you know we’re on the same wavelength and people don’t make stupid jokes. (¶310)

Concluding Thoughts

DeNora’s music asylums framework offer an insightful means of understanding the experiences of singing within the youth chorus, and the strategies of refurnishing and removal that contribute to its thriving ecology. In the choir’s case, the initial removal provided primarily through safety is essential to the subsequent and concurrent refurnishing that takes place in the social lives of choir members, inside and outside the choir. Choir provides the physical sites and musicking experiences of removal and time away from an “assumed straight” society. The musicking experiences themselves refurnish individual members and provide a platform to collectively perform outside Hermione’s “queer bubble,” as a choir of queer young people.

Through the idea of removal, DeNora might offer us a way to understand the critical importance of a sense of safety for the youth chorus, how this is established and maintained. DeNora’s framework allows members to take on strategies of refurnishing in different ways, testing and performing identities within the creative musicking environment of the choir in a similar way to McFerran’s (2010; 2011) discussion in both private and public settings, with the metaphor of the mirror and the stage. I have found members value the choir as a conceptual site of ontological safety, and understand safety within the choir to be circular and self-reinforcing. Yet in the same way as DeNora’s (2013) political asylums describe, it is also political place where contests for recognition, moral entitlement, differentiation, and public recognition are played out. Similarly, there is a politics of suppression at play that is revealed in comments by members about conforming to the social norms, vocal sections, and hierarchies that form part of the choir. Music may be a means of structuring consciousness it
has been argued earlier in this thesis. There is an intrinsic potential, therefore, for music to act to shape consciousness, and, particularly relevant to this thesis, to shape understandings of health, illness, and wellbeing. The physical sites and structures of the choir influence members and how they see themselves, their relationship with others, and the qualities they ascribe to the choir.

A more fundamental tension can be explored here that, alongside safety, sits at the heart of the choir’s identity. The choir promotes an institutional identity and LGBTI public profile as being for SSAGD young people, and with performances that aim to both celebrate and raise awareness of LGBTI issues in Melbourne. Its explicit profile as an LGBTI identity may at times sit uncomfortably with its other function of being a safe and inclusive choral musicking place. Both elements are critical to the choir’s foundational principle of safety, as set out in Chapter 5. The tussle between both is core to and sustains the choir as a music asylum, yet the tension between the two reflects the inherently political nature of the music asylum that was discussed when introducing this framework. I consider several implications for this in Chapter 9.

Looking across the interviews, it seems that beneath the physical act of performing with the choir on stage multiple identities are performed. Even Ruud (2010) describes identities as a combination of self-view and how we are viewed by others - “self-in-context” (p. 40). Identities are socially constructed, as are “normal” and “queer” as members have described in their interviews. In the following section, I explore the implications of the music asylum for member identities and the proposition that, within the collective safety of choir, members test out, take on, and perform different identities which may be refurnishing.


“Right Back at Home”: Jazz

Jazz Dance (preferred pronouns: he/him/his), a self-confident 28-year old member of the youth chorus, sings in both youth and main chorus, and who joined both choirs concurrently in March 2014. Jazz describes joining the choirs to “expand my singing abilities, my social horizons, and just to see what would happen” (¶8). Most of Jazz’s discussion relates to his experiences singing and socialising within main chorus. It was clear from the length and energy of the interview that Jazz enjoyed the opportunity to share his impressions of the choir. Jazz draws upon other voices to support his comments and their significance; he uses the collective pronoun “we all” multiple times in his interview in relation to his choir peers, and attributes comments to musical staff and others in key leadership roles.

Jazz describes himself as some who doesn’t fit well in lots of places and particularly in the gay community. He joined the choir hoping it might be different: “because there, hopefully wouldn’t be as much stereotyping there wouldn’t be that exclusion, that everyone’s got something in common so there’s a starting point for conversation” (¶54). Jazz joined MGLC Inc after seeing a performance, and noticing “there was this awesome sense of how much fun they were having, and how much of a connection there was between everybody” (¶46). He describes the feeling of belonging right from the first rehearsal as a warm and social environment with “a lot of welcoming” (¶66) and where he had the opportunity to meet “a lot of people very quickly.” (¶68) Jazz describes this sense of a welcoming environment by imagining its inverse: he describes a feeling of not wanting to leave. Choir offers Jazz a place of optimism and the potential to build friendships over a common interest:
It was nice to be somewhere and not have this want to leave. That if I pulled, if I grabbed whoever was walking past and started a conversation, whether I remembered their name or not [interviewer chuckles], I would, um, it would be easier to have a general conversation. And, who knows what will grow from that. (¶96)

Jazz presents himself as a talented soloist and performer who has joined choir to boost his singing skills. Describing himself as very introverted, he says he is “a lot better on stage in front of everyone rather than talking to everyone” (¶104). Solo opportunities provide his primary motivation it seems for Jazz to continue singing with the choir. At the outset of his interview, Jazz describes how his mother, to whom he enjoys a close relationship, “tried to convince me for a few years to join the choir” but Jazz resisted, preferring to sing his own thing (¶10). Jazz describes in careful detail several unsuccessful solo auditions with the choir, and emphasises how important it is to his concert experience to see familiar and supportive faces in the audience.

Although describing a clear preference for solo singing, Jazz enjoys performing with the choir, describing the experience as “just happiness” and comments that “it’s been a long time since I’ve been on stage with a group singing…in a performance. And I felt, right back at home” (¶302-304). Jazz describes his corporal reaction as he sings individual repertoire. Talking about the choir’s rehearsal of “Shadowlands” from the musical “The Lion King”, Jazz describes how:

Every time we sang it, and I, I hope we sing it again, my spine tingles and arches and I, I LOVE this song the, the power we build up singing it, and the burst of power that comes through. It’s, wonderful. It’s one of those songs you want to listen to and want to sing. And singing it with everybody made the song that much better. (¶334)
Reflecting generally on the performance experience with choir, Jazz describes the high he experiences from performing as a sense of not wanting to leave stage:

And I didn’t feel like, because sometimes when I’m in a group and I don’t want to be in that group. Or even if I say I’m going to be there and I get there and it’s like “Nuh, I want out of here.” Yeah. There, there times where that happens even around my good friends there are times where I’m like I just want to get out of here. In choir performances, that’s not there. I just want to be there on stage with these awesome people singing. (¶310-312)

What singing in this choir means to Jazz

“The choir, the choir to me is a wonderful social outlet. It’s where people gather together, they do what they love doing … [and] they all go out to dinner afterwards”. (¶247)

After describing the choir as “both socially linking and community based” (¶611), Jazz describes the choir:

“…from a non-sexuality point of view. It’s a lot of people who, come together, to work on a singing production that they all feel strongly about. Hmmm. That, with, while supporting each other and doing a lot of social things in between, a group of people sing, and perform.” (¶¶617-619)

Choir for Jazz is a chance for queer people to do things that everybody else does: “And the choir really shows that, amongst all of us that, as a group, we can still do things that are, that everybody else does! We get together as a group and sing” (¶426).
Chapter 7: Performing Difference? Choir as a Site of LGBTI Identity Performance

As a group of people who at times may choose to sing publicly as an LGBTI choir, the choir’s sexual and gender identity is central – it may be deployed publicly to reveal how members see themselves and how others see them. Having set out how the choir functions as a site for the removal and refurnishing of members as an LGBTI choir, it is useful to narrow the focus to explore more specifically how members understand gender and sexuality as relayed in their discussions. At this point, a more critical application of hermeneutics becomes important. Acknowledging that all knowledge is situated and located, the interpreters of this knowledge themselves shape how things come to be understood. Gardiner (1999) sets out this critical interpretation well:

The hermeneutic approach stresses the creative interpretation of words and texts and the active role played by the knower. The goal is not objective explanation or neutral description, but rather a sympathetic engagement with the author of a text, utterance or action and the wider socio-cultural context within which these phenomena occur (p. 63).

I first set out my theoretical understanding of what constitutes (creates and maintains) social identities and the central relationship of difference to understandings of the self. I draw upon the pithy distinction by Raymond MacDonald, David Hargreaves, and colleagues (Hargreaves et al., 2015; MacDonald et al., 2002). These authors describe “identities in music”– socially constructed categories that afford a musical identity, to use DeNora’s (2007) language, whether as a professional musician or a less precise sense of musicality. Identities in music are shaped by cultural factors and, as these authors assert, are essential for connecting engaging with music over the lifespan (Hargreaves et al., 2015, p. 760). “Music in identities”, by contrast, concentrates on appropriation, or: “how we use music within the development of other aspects of our individual identities” (p. 760). Music in identities is of
interest in this chapter, as members explore queer social identities through their appropriation of the choir.

In their interviews, members suggest how the choir’s musical affordances support greater engagement with, yet also challenge, their LGBTI social identities. Central to their identities I suggest is an understanding of living differently as LGBTI young people in Melbourne. Members describe themselves as different for the distinctly “queer” worldview the choir seeks to project, and for its “surprising” musical quality. Yet in this choir setting, tensions arise with some of the elements of conformity expected of collective musical performances of “sameness”. I consider the choir may also be understood as a collective platform for social identity formation through music. These examples depart from DeNora’s notion of the refurnishing of self with the choir as a music asylum and provide an alternative interpretation.

**Socially-Informed Identities and the Importance of Difference**

Sociologist Richard Jenkins (2014) offers an entry point to understanding identities in more depth. Identity, according to Jenkins (p. 6), is important as an organising principle that is, at its most basic, “the human capacity–rooted in language–to know ‘who’s who’ (and hence ‘what’s what’).” Identity is better understood as a process rather than a static classification. Jenkins asserts that identity may be powerful, as is often a motivator of behaviour. Remaining with a sociological definition for identity, Goffman (1959) has once again been formative in developing conceptual understandings of identity. Goffman’s work, which sets out the “presentation of self” when interacting in everyday life – that is, the way we as individuals perform our identities and present ourselves within our social world – has influenced a number of studies relating to the performance of self (Shulman, 2017), including
in relation to music (DeNora, 2013). Jenkins challenges the traditional bifurcation between
the individual and the collective in social sciences research. Approaches in social psychology
(Langdridge, 2008) tend to favour individuals and construct their identities within the
framework of the individual, while sociologists favour the social and collective. Jenkins’
model is appealing for its inclusion of both, and their incorporation into three core elements:
embodied individuals, interaction, and institutions. All three operate simultaneously and
cannot easily be split. They offer a foil through which to explore the youth chorus in more
detail.

Giddens (1991) suggests that identity is socially formed, without a core self-identity,
and with multiple identities that can change according to where an individual is to be
identified. We therefore develop multiple selves according to the situation, in keeping with
Goffman’s view. Belonging to a social group is essential to the identification and
development of a social sense of self. This sense of belonging is not a stable element, but
rather subject to contest and, therefore, political. Establishing a sense of balance for the
concept of ‘identity’ is at the heart of my thinking about the relationships between concrete
individual behaviour and the necessary abstraction of collectiveness. Collective identity – a
collective achievement of individuals – may be a very powerful tool that can generate more
than the sum of its parts.

Jenkins (2014) suggests: “Although identification always involves individuals,
something else – collectivity and history – may also be at stake” (p. 4). He cites the example
of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardis Gras as an example of a public affirmation of an
identification that is both individual and shared, an occasion: that may (or may not) affirm
individual sexual identities; to have a good time, but also; a shared ritual, celebration of
collective identification and a political mobilisation.
What are the characteristics of the institution, the collective identity of this choir? Having established the notion of identity as socially constructed and therefore something that may be performed, I then turn to the central elements of identity in this thesis – the choir members – and to the choir’s collective identity. As a voluntary, opt-in organisation, it seems the members seek out the choir for the political statement made by its openly queer collective identity. Paul Attinello (2006) supports this in his survey of the gay male choir movement in the US, describing members as having a “survival-based need for strong political identity” (p. 334). An examination of structures of power in keeping with the philosophical position of Michel Foucault (1978) may not appear necessary; it seems the sense of belonging required to sustain the group’s collective social identity takes priority over a focus on the examination of structures of power in relation to sexuality. While this is true on the surface, looking more deeply into the experiences of singing with the choir suggests several power struggles at play.

**Understanding identity as performed.** Fundamental to my understanding of identity is that it is socially constructed and therefore something that may be performed. Difference, as Seidman (1995) relates, is a key organising principle of identity, key to an identity’s existence and never truly silenced:

> The affirmation of an identity entails the production and exclusion of that which is different or the creation of otherness. This otherness, though, is never truly excluded or silenced: it is present in identity and haunts it as its limit or impossibility. (p. 130)

Extending Goffman’s (1959) formulation of identity as the presentation of self, Jenkins (2014) suggests that social identities are to be found in resemblance to, but particularly in difference from. This suggests what Jeremy Brent (1997) describes as “community as division”: the construction of a self upon “the construction and rejection of ‘others’” (p. 75). Language is therefore central to identity, providing the capacity for humans to distinguish who’s who and what’s what (Jenkins, 2014, p. 6). I propose that the youth
chorus’s LGBTI identity and queer worldview is the central element, upon which this choir defines itself as distinctive, and distinguished from, among other youth and community choir in Melbourne. This provides the basis for members to perform different musical and social identities in and through the choir.

**Unifying through “being different from.”** The choir’s relationship to the performance of difference is complex and, it seems, needs to be more than simply the celebration and nurturing of difference. Jenkins (2014) warns of the danger of focusing too far on difference, arguing that a balance needs to be struck for social theory to be able to theorise – to find abstractions and generalise.

At first glance, it makes perfect sense to focus on the experiences of individual singers and their identities that are formed within the choir’s musical ecology. The “inside-outside polarity” described of Diana Fuss (1991), who explores identities as performed from a critically perspective, in the context of gay and lesbian studies, has in common with Jenkins (Jenkins, 2014) the notion that difference is essential to the formation of social identity. In gender theory, Judith Butler’s (2007/1990) separation between identity and difference relies upon retaining separateness: identity is then something that is done “with” something rather “in” something. This allows Butler to distinguish the two. A central contribution of Butler’s work is to critique gender performativity and expose categories of identity: “the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, neutralize, and immobilize” (p. 7).

Yet with a clearer understanding of the choir as a music asylum, notably providing safety through removal and refurnishing, tensions surface. The choir’s pursuit of a “politics of representation” as a “subaltern” ¹¹ or minority or “subaltern” group according to Charles ¹¹ Noting the original use of this term in postcolonial scholarship by Antonio Gramsci.
Taylor’s definition (1994, p. 23), sits uncomfortably with the choir’s role in nurturing identities within the group. The choir’s identity is more complex than its minority status.

Jenkins (2014) alludes to this in his assertion:

> There are pressing public issues that are simply not addressed by proclaiming the positivities of difference, or arguing for tolerance and pluralism. They concern collective belonging, collective disadvantage and, not least, the relationship between the freedom to be different, on the one hand, and equality and collective responsibility, on the other. (p. 27)

Nevertheless, in addition to its representational role, the choir is also a setting that, as has been explored in relation to DeNora’s notion of removal and the music asylum, must be more than simply for the celebration and nurturing of difference. It may be argued that a focus on difference limits the ability to draw wider conclusions.

**Critiquing difference: Seeking a middle ground.** In its place, Jenkins (2014) calls for a model of identification within which sameness and difference are on an equal footing. Rejecting Bauman’s (1999) call for a return to essentialism in identity, Jenkins argues that it is, “perhaps, time for a return to a politics which recognises responses to collective ills other than the purely privatised and individualised” (p. 27). In the choir’s focus on public performances where audience members are challenged and where members perform collectively their LGBTI and queer identities, the youth chorus seems to have struck its own balance between the collective and the individual. Jenkins contends that “invocations of similarity are intimately entangled with the conjuring up of difference” (p. 23). Identity politics therefore requires difference as a key organising principle. For the youth chorus, and indeed, MGLC Inc, it seems this holds true: the organisation forms a musical and social community united around difference: being distinct from, different to, others outside the choir and recognising and embracing difference albeit within some less obvious limits, within the choir.
Similarly, in his critique of Butler’s focus on difference, Jenkins (2014) is critical of what he describes as Butler’s (among others) utopian approach, arguing that “foregrounding difference underestimates the reality and significance of human collectivity” (p. 23). Focussing only on difference, Jenkins argues, “flies in the face of the observable realities of the human world (p. 23). It seems Butler goes some way toward acknowledging the significance of human collectivity in her discussion of liveability in her later work (Butler, 2004). Taking up the notion of the choir as a place where queerness is assumed, a place of safety in Hermione’s queer bubble, we can explore more deeply how these identities are enacted within the experiences of the youth chorus members, musically and socially, individually and collectively.

**Performing difference.** We might consider difference as something based in communication across and between cultures. Warren (Warren, 2008) presents a contrasting view of difference that foregrounds identities over difference. In a reflexive exploration of the performative elements of difference in relation to his encounters with race as a classroom teacher, Warren takes up Butler’s notion of performativity (Butler, 1988, 2007/1990) and sets out how the concept of repetition of acts such as gender allowed him to challenge the stability of concepts such as whiteness and race in his own scholarship. This stylised repetition of acts sets up a system of rewards and punishments for deviance from the binarised understandings of gender in this case –establishes difference and sameness. Warren offers a compelling argument for why Butler’s focus on how we come to know ourselves through gender is relevant for this thesis. For Butler, acts of performing gender are repeated, whether through speech or action (Warren, 2008, p. 295). Given members of the youth chorus choose to freely associate according to their gender identity and sexuality, and celebrate the history of these sexualities, I suggest a focus on the construction of these identities as they are reproduced best serves the
thesis.

More broadly, Warren argues it is important to focus on identities rather than on difference (Warren, 2008). There are moments where division can create positive outcomes rather than constraints. Difference should not be conflated with opposition. Hence the importance of not focussing on pathological understandings of difference captured in phrases such as “at risk”, but instead, on the identities formed within the choir; that is, a focus instead on capacities within the choir more than on their sense of social exclusion.

Theorising musical identities. We can now bring the musical and social elements of the choir together and consider how identities are performed within and outside it. I return here to an idea from previous chapters—that, as DeNora notes, all music is political, and the musical space is a political space. I understand musical identities to be fundamentally dynamic: a self under constant restructuring and renegotiation (Hargreaves et al., 2002, p. 2). Musical identity, then, can include patterns of musical taste or preferences, likes and dislikes, broader identities formed within music and constituted by music, but also how music is used as a resource for developing identities. I turn to examples from the youth chorus to explore the complexities of musical identities in more detail.

Performing Musical Identities in the Youth Chorus

I suggest members make use of the choir’s musical identity to perform different identities, for themselves, to themselves, and for and to the youth chorus as a collective. At one end of the spectrum choir is a place to stand out, to distinguish oneself, while at the other end members understand it as a place to blend in, conform. Hargreaves and colleagues’ concept of musical identities (Hargreaves et al., 2015; MacDonald et al., 2002) might be brought together with gender to explore the ways in which the choir affords members a place
to explore queer identities in music. In the background, it is clear that the performance of identities reflects Ruud’s understanding of musicking as a tool that contributes to quality of life (Ruud, 1997, 2012), but that at times can also challenge it.

Remaining within a musical context, I adopt a critical lens that begins with the notion of gender and the gender binary in musical settings, engages briefly the ideas of critical musicology set out in scholars such as Cook (2000) and Solie (1995) in particular. Once again, queer musicological perspectives (Brett et al., 2017; Brett et al., 2006) will be considered later. With an eye to the core elements of what queer music looks like, I return to identity and engage with the idea of musical identities, and particularly, gender/ed identities in music (Dibben, 2002). Susan O’Neill (2002) sets out role of ideology in relation to young people’s perceptions of themselves as musical:

Young musicians’ constructions of who they are and therefore what is possible or appropriate, and wrong or inappropriate forms of musical engagement, all derive from the ideology of lived experience. Only by raising our awareness of the possibilities and constraints afforded by particular ideologies can we hope to transcend the boundaries of what it means to be a musician. (p. 94)

As young people who are at the centre of this study find their way in the world, as choristers and queer people, the role of hope is central: hope for a more just future, for understanding, and for authenticity. The youth chorus is, I contend, a musical environment where the choir’s social identity (as a gathering of same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people) is on the same level as its musical role. In this section, I employ the term queer as an ideal that reflects the identities members perceive themselves to be performing, identifying as SSAGD, yet at the same time valuing a stable identity. In a later chapter, I consider a queer theoretical stance that fundamental challenges the stability of identities.

Understanding identity as something that is performed and stable, I will now look more closely at identity performativity, how it is led, and how identities are reflected in
members’ musical and social understandings of what it means to sing in the choir, MGLC Inc, from the perspective of the youth chorus.

**Enabling identity performance: Choir leadership.** For Hermione, the formation of the choir’s musical and social community and the stability of its identity is something co-created between members and leaders. In the final part of her interview, Hermione reflects on the experience and qualities of leadership:

> I think that the quality of the community and the experience is heavily influenced by, um, the members and their openness to forming a community. And by the leaders and their facilitating of inclusive and happy sort of place. (¶1002)

Broadly, leadership in this choir setting might be regarded as a musical affordance that gives space, license, and encouragement. Hermione perceives my leadership as about setting free rather than controlling, which I interpret as an ability to set broad parameters yet beneath this to foster flexibility, choice, and empower individual members. Hermione talks of the MD “allow[ing] people to express themselves” and a leadership approach that “always gives us space” (¶1004). Hermione suggests the MD’s role is to “curate” the music (¶1010): to maintain a general oversight over the choir and its musical standard, but an openness to input from members.

**Performing gender, sexual identities: A noticeable absence from the discussion.** Several members talked of choir as a place to explore and perform different genders and sexual identities during their interviews – a phenomenon I observed too as the choir’s music director. Malachi describes choir as having enabled him to perform an identity that is more flamboyant. “I’m allowed to be the person that…likes to wear bowties or…who…you know is a bit flamboyant and…you know loves to be the centre of attention sometimes” (¶32). Chloe talks about choir as a place where she can talk about intersectional feminism and queer theories with others (¶¶488-492) and Hermione discusses in detail her
nuanced understanding of gender in relation to the use of pronouns within the choir (¶¶348-350). Natalie discusses the choir’s queer identity at several points. Repertoire was a key element in the descriptions of members. Jazz (¶¶292-296) and Dylan talk in detail of the repertoire chosen, with pieces specially commissioned for US gay and lesbian choirs, to be performed for a concert advocating same sex marriage. This repertoire cleverly co-opts gender stereotypes as a form of protest. Hermione describes choir as a social place where she is accepted including but not only for her sexuality: a place for everyone as she describes, with reference to her gender and sexuality, but also separately from it:

And um like the unspoken, and sometimes spoken, is that youth chorus is for everyone. Hmmm. You can be trans, you can be straight you can be gay, you can be, [parodied voice] I don’t know! [usual voice] You can be… and also I’m quite unusual. Just, separate from my sexuality. (¶332-334)

Nevertheless, I was surprised by the lack of discussion of queerness within the interviews, particularly given my knowledge of the members interviewed. These moments would have provided an opportunity for a more critical delving into member understandings of these terms, and a discussion of how they are enacted within the choir. For instance, I noted across all ten interviews the absence of discussions of the choir’s annual rehearsal camp in relation to performing genders and sexualities. Discussion of camp did not feature strongly in the interviews and where it did, was instead discussed in relation to the intense socialising and musicking time. I recall the experience of camp for both youth and main chorus members, featuring a “camp cabaret” variety night that typically features many musical performances by members in drag and gender non-conformist outfits, with associated language, dress, cultural appropriations, and lyrics that explore and subvert gender and sexuality. I can only suspect that sitting beneath these positive comments and member anticipation of hosting the camp cabaret as a youth chorus in 2015, was not only anticipation of the musicking community, but also an anticipation of performing different
genders/sexualities within this safe environment. Had I been able to conduct the interviews myself I would have explored the camp further. I return to this point in the concluding chapter of this study.

**Nurturing individual LGBTI identities.** The following two contrasting examples suggest the choir as a collective identity platform that individual members appropriate in relation to their personal identity. Both members appropriate the choir to perform their personal LGBTI identities to family in the audience – Dylan as a gay man and Nicole as a bisexual woman – and thereby to deepen their relationships.

**Musical performances deepening Dylan’s sense of his gay self.** Musical performances serve as prominent places to test out and to deepen social, and particularly queer, identities. For many members, the choir is a place to disclose their sexual or gender identity publicly, not only through performances but also the announcement and promotion of such events (and disclosure of their membership of a queer choir), including concert promotion on social media. The choir’s LGBTI profile afforded Dylan an opportunity to strengthen both his musical identity as a singer and performer, and deepen recognition of his social identity as a gay man, with his family. Dylan was one of several members whose interview suggested a desire to express his queer self (as a gay man) more fully to family and friends. Here he captures how the choir’s gay marriage themed concert allows him to express his queer identity more fully:

…my family have always been cool with it and, you know, never had a problem. Um, they’ve accepted when I’ve had a partner at the time and, umm, but never really done anything that sort of said to them “hey, be a part of something that’s a part of what I am”, you know, so having them come to a music concert of mine and a gay-related thing of mine, it definitely opened up that door as well and I had like my nan, and my auntsies and cousins… they all came and it was really fun and it was just like, there was a moment where it almost brought a tear to the eye when I realised the importance of that moment. (¶¶243-245)
Dylan lucidly describes the feeling as he waited in the wings for MGLC Inc’s second major concert of the year, knowing there were eight more family members in the audience:

So yeah, when I was in the holding area and I realised how many of my family were coming I just went “oh wow this is actually very important to me it’s…I didn’t realise up until that moment how important having them there, having myself be a part of it and having that outlet was, you know, important to me... ([248])

*Musical performance challenging Nicole’s bisexual identity.* The choir provides affordances in the form of musical artefacts such as concert experiences, through carefully chosen repertoire. Repertoire is carefully reviewed by music staff for its musical, lyrical, and contextual suitability for a queer choir. Several members described these repertoire choices in ways that suggested they affirmed individual social identities and offered a sense of resilience through singing: Malachi reveals his love of Christmas repertoire; Hermione captures the choir’s comedic performance of the theme song to the Australian soap opera, *Home and Away*, and; James describes of the power of the repertoire from MGLC Inc’s *Our Big Gay Wedding* performance. Yet in Nicole’s case, the repertoire directly challenged her social identity.

Nicole reveals a dilemma as she rehearses for the performance by the main chorus of “Harvey Milk” the opera in concert (Boon, 2015; Wallace, 1995) in early 2015. The choir rehearsed the chorus role for a concert performance of the opera, which tells the story of Harvey Milk, elected to the San Francisco Board of supervisors in 1977 as the first openly gay elected official in the US. Milk was murdered along with the Mayor of San Francisco by a fellow board member less than a year after his election. The opera was to be performed for the public at a prominent location (St Kilda Town Hall), and as a feature performance of *Midsumma*, Melbourne’s annual queer arts festival.

Nicole does not talk of the work’s technical difficulty which I recall was a great
challenge for most other participants in this project. (Had Jazz been involved in this performance, for instance, I suspect he might have referenced its technical difficulty as he hints in his comment that the choir sings in a “whole other league” (¶213).) The performance challenged Nicole for the exemplar set by its protagonist, Harvey Milk, and his worldview, the spirit of which is captured in a line from the opera’s libretto: “out of the closet and into the streets”. The spirit of Milk’s worldview is reflected in this notable speech:

…every gay person must come out. As difficult as it is, you must tell your immediate family. You must tell your relatives. You must tell your friends if indeed they are your friends. You must tell your neighbors. You must tell the people you work with. You must tell the people in the stores you shop in…Once they realize that we are indeed their children, that we are indeed everywhere, every myth, every lie, every innuendo will be destroyed once and all. And once you do, you will feel so much better. (Milk, 1978; see also Shilts, 1982; Tropiano, 2014, p. 46)

In her interview, Nicole comments:

I know it’s difficult with Harvey Milk musical that we’re doing [ah, yeah] it’s all about coming out of the closet and just taking the plunge. But there’s part of me, because I work in the legal industry, that makes me feel maybe I can’t necessarily do that with everybody. (¶36)

Milk’s speech precipitates an internal struggle for Nicole, between feeling obligated to speak out always in support of queer rights on the one hand, and a struggle with a sense of guilt and defensiveness at not feeling at liberty to do so on the other. Nicole protests that not everyone can come out the way Harvey Milk did. Nicole’s comments about Harvey Milk reflect other aspects of her life where she is regularly confronted with decisions about whether to disclose her sexual identity, particularly in her workplace. She advocates for a strategic approach as a counter to Milk’s idealism, asserting her right to “be clever” about how to approach individual situations:

You just…you just do it, you just have this part of yourself that reminds you of where you are and that the world isn’t perfect and that people are going to judge you and if
you want to get through life and you want things to happen you need to be clever about how you approach it. (¶36)

Nicole, who was rehearsing this work at the time of her interview, refers to this project several times during the interview, with greater intensity, suggesting her musical identity was confronted by her social identity in a significant way.

Recalling Nicole’s desire to be challenged or tested musically as core to her involvement in the choir, the deliberate choice by the main chorus music director to rehearse the Harvey Milk repertoire suggests not just a musical challenge but a sense of social threat perceived by Nicole, and attests to the social power of repertoire, lyrics, and the symbols contained within the repertoire that bridge the musical and social. Nicole’s broader interview suggests an internal battle between acquiescence on the one hand and active resistance on the other. The Harvey Milk opera challenges the expression of her personal social identity through its public performance within the choir. It challenges the limits of Nicole’s public activism.

In her response, I note a refurbishing of self as Nicole argues for a level of activism she is comfortable with (disclosing information selectively) alongside a “clever” approach to her social world. Indeed, Nicole’s daily life suggests she is confronted with regular decisions about whether to disclose her sexual identity, particularly in her legal workplace. At the end of the interview she reflects:

[Choir] sort of made me start to analyse what I’m actually like in my life and I’m like well am I actually that open and um…um there is a part of me that is reserved and [yeah] I bet Harvey milk brought that more up as well. [mmm]. Um… but I think I’m in a good place with that now. I think that…he had a great philosophy about everybody coming out of the closet but it doesn’t always work that way and unfortunately we have to prioritise things in life which is horrible but… [hmmm] (¶174)

Where Dylan’s experience with the choir has empowered him to be more assertive in his
legal workplace, for Nicole the Harvey Milk repertoire provided a different challenge to her openness about her bisexual identity and affirmed for her that “there’s a part of me that is reserved” (¶174) and she is comfortable with that.

**Challenging collective LGBTI identities.** Social theorist Richard Jenkins asks the question: “If knowing who’s who is essentially, or even largely, a matter of fission and exclusion, then where does the ‘more-than-the-sum-of-the-parts’ that is the enduring mystery of everyday human life come from?” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 25) The choir, an example of “collective mobilisation in the pursuit of shared objectives,” is also an example of collective politics. For Jenkins, such politics involves “collective imaginings of similarity as well as difference” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 25). These shared objectives go to the choir’s collective identity as a chorus of LGBTI singers.

Members expressed different understandings of the collective identity of the youth chorus in their interviews. In a comparable way to DeNora’s delineation between places of removal and places of refurbishing, the social identities described by members who sing in the choir reveal a tension between the organisation’s obligation to individual identities and how its collective identity was expressed. Overwhelmingly, it was seen is a place of belonging, of support, and of scaffolded opportunities for social activism: fighting for queer rights within a collective musicking setting. The latter understanding of the choir reinforces the value of performing for creativity and wellbeing (McPherson, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2012). It reflects a concurrent yet very different social identity that is at times enacted in its performances: a collective social identity as an activist choir, a choir of high quality with an almost evangelising role as a model for young queer people. Further, as a youth chorus, its distinction is generational both within MGLC Inc and outside.

*Understandings of what it means to be an LGBTI choir.* In the same way as
auditions challenged Jazz’s individual social identity as a soloist, the choir’s collective identity rests on its ability to turn on two central yet contradictory points: its ability to be “different” socially as a queer choir; yet its ability to be measurable against other choirs musically and according to the social expectations of youth and adult community choirs in Australia today. In the latter part of his interview (¶424-434), Jazz talks about the choir “from a non-sexuality point of view”, but offers an insight into how he views the choir in relation to its LGBTI social identity:

Jazz          I think it’s a presentation that, ah, a lot of people in society and, I, you don’t run into it as much but there are still a lot of preconceived ideas,—

Interviewer 6  Hmmmm

Jazz  —and a lot of stereotypical ideas. And the choir really shows that, amongst all of us that, as a group, we can still do things that are, that everybody else does! We get together as a group and sing. There’s, when, especially from my experience watching a performance rather than being a part of it, there’s not, there’s clearly no — how can I put this? — a lot of the stereotypes are just not there, there’s nothing present. Yes there is that little flamboyance that you expect, and that’s fine, that’s okay. Because I’ve, I’ve seen straight men being just as flamboyant, huh-mmm!

Interviewer 6  [chuckles with Jazz]

Jazz  Trust me I have!—

Interviewer 6  [chuckling continues]

Jazz  —um, so the natural amount of flamboyancy that might appear is there, but it’s not, but a lot of, it just displays people as people.

Interviewer 6  Hmmmm

Jazz  And especially with “Big Gay Wedding” and “No Place I’d Rather Be”, people coming up and making personal statements, showing that: “yes, I am homosexual or lesbian” or in a few people they’re, they’re actually heterosexual! And saying that “This is my journey this is what I’ve experienced” and I hope people are reflecting on that. And, I hope people are reflecting on that and saying “ooh it’s not just about these stereotypes. This is what people go through,”—

Interviewer 6  Hmmmm

Jazz  —“I’ve been through something like that!” So there’s that level of, bringing people closer to who we are and
understanding who we are, rather than letting the stereotypes flail out of control.

Jazz’s final comment of wanting to bring people closer to understanding who we are “rather than letting the stereotypes flail out of control” captures an important pre-understanding of the choir that belies a sense of conformity – of wanting to be “just like” other choirs. For the choir’s collective identity, this sense of similarity is clearly important. It seems an internalised standard may be at play, one that I have experienced as a drive toward producing quality musical artefacts in the concert experiences and of mastering difficult repertoire. By seeking to be like other choirs, youth chorus members seek sameness, and a measure against which they may evaluate their collective musical performances against others. I will return to this point after applying a more critical lens to the choir’s collective identity, in my concluding reflections.

A site to agitate and educate for social change and activism. Choir is a site where members take on identities as activists, role models, and public advocates for their community. This is particularly important for Chloe. She describes youth chorus performances as making an important, role model-like contribution for other young queer people:

…performing as a, a queer choir is important because we are representing our community and people are seeing us in a positive light. And especially for, I think we’ve done some performances in universities and it’s good for, like young queer people to see other queer people out there being happy… (¶185)

Continuing her commentary, Chloe offers an important insight into the queer community outside the choir at this point:

…and not, you know, it’s, you get a – what am I trying to say? – um, sometimes in the LGBT community we don’t have enough positive role models out there. So it’s good to have those people out there. (¶185)
Dylan describes his feelings of the choir in relation to a concert supporting marriage equality in Australia: “I felt like it was almost a political stance without being too aggressive about it and it was just warm, light-hearted, families were invited” (¶243).¹²

Natalie captured the choir’s focus on “reaching out” as a collective to its peers. Talking of one experience performing publicly at a university campus, Natalie describes how “we were trying to tell everyone the name of the choir as often as possible just in the hope that someone who needs to hear the name of the choir would hear it and be able to come and…notice.” (¶129) Describing this “awkward” experience, Natalie explains its broader importance:

the reason why we would say yes to that gig which was very awkward but like good that we did it…um…was because…um…you know on campuses is a good place for the youth chorus to be just because of the whole like…happy and out group of singing people is just a positive thing for a questioning, struggling person…to see while they’re walking across campus… I know that I would have…felt that if I had ’ve seen them before I joined…that’s what we’re hoping that we’re putting out there [yeah]. And we’re try and make that work. (¶¶131-132)

Natalie perceives the choir’s collective identity as having the capacity to influence individual identities.

A place of leadership where members educate about identities across generations. There are several distinctive collective identities within MGLC Inc relayed by members and the youth chorus and the way it perceives itself in relation to the main chorus, as understood by members. It seems the choirs differ epistemologically – on the claims they make as singers

¹² I note the opposition to same sex marriage within the queer community, and the challenges presented by what some in the community hold to be an ideal relationship and the ensuing homophobia of public debates that is damaging to queer communities, both in Australia and internationally. Butler (2004) engages with the tension between resisting homophobia within the debate while resisting the push for marriage to be “the most highly valued sexual arrangement for queer sexual lives” (p.5).
and representatives of the queer community. The youth chorus is understood by its members as a place to discuss gender politics, queer theory, and intersectionality (Chloe), and where there is an understanding of and engagement with broader issues affecting the LGBTI community (Hermione). These differences are most pronounced between several LGBTI generations represented within the choir. Hermione describes here a broader awareness among youth chorus members, and a desire to influence the broader organisation (¶¶298-310):

Hermione …of the major differences between main chorus and youth chorus is the amount of um, actually should I say that? With the age thing um–

Interviewer 1 Hmm
Hermione Ah, I don’t know how much you know about, um, queer politics type stuff. Nothing?

Interviewer 1 Nah not a lot.
Hermione Okay that’s alright! Um, that’s fine. I was just ah… so, you know how the GLBTQIA

Interviewer 1 Hmm
Hermione Well, a lot of people in main chorus don’t really know what some of its letters are.

Interviewer 1 Ah okay
Hermione And they don’t really… you know they’ve got busy lives. They don’t really have time to look this stuff up and… you know and, so youth chorus is more… like we have friends who are those other different letters and–

Interviewer 1 Hmm
Hermione –we care more about that so.

Interviewer 1 Yep
Hermione So yeah that’s um, I guess where, we’re more educated in that kind of stuff. I’m trying to change that, but um, that’s… that’s why, that’s why youth chorus can be easier for people. Not just caus it’s you know just young people. But for the young people it can be easier because, you know we’re on the same wavelength and people don’t make stupid jokes–

At the time of the interviews, the youth chorus was preparing to organise the Saturday night camp cabaret for the first time, something normally allocated to one of the four main
chorus voice parts, such as the soprano section. James, who sings with both youth and main chorus regularly, talks of the youth chorus needing to prove themselves to the main chorus at the 2015 choir camp, claiming “as long as we do a good camp, we’ll be fine” (¶37). Initially, he describes feeling supported by main chorus members to perform for them during rehearsals for the Christmas concert, saying: “they want to support young people, and, I think they know how important the youth chorus is to, a lot of its members” (¶39). Yet, when reminded shortly thereafter about the sense of tension he had mentioned between the choirs, he elaborates:

I think some people […] view the youth chorus as young, hooligans essentially. [Both James and Interviewer laugh] Yeah! Ha-ha! I mean, I mean, um, and, and in return I guess, some of the youth chorus members maybe view the older choir members as, old, and, not understanding them as young people. (¶¶41-43)

James’s comments suggest he perceives a tension between generations in the choir, and a performance of what it means to be a youth chorus member, in contrast to the main chorus. Yet his understandings were more nuanced. James completed a history dissertation on a gay rights topic and, at other times in the interview, he describes feelings of gratitude toward the older members of the choir. James draws the sense of community and the queer community together:

…it’s definitely a community in that sense, but it’s also part of a broader queer community in that it’s I guess connected with … I mean I call it “MY History”, even though it’s not my history, as in, I was not part of this, but, I feel that, I am, a part of, the gay rights movement, or the history of it, because I am, allowed to freely express myself… I don’t really have any fears… that’s because of people that, um, you know fought for, my rights, you know, I guess (¶101)

James talks of the choir as a means of connecting to this part of his history, “my history” as a gay man, and a sense of connection to a wider queer community. Similarly, Chloe reflects upon her impressions of members of the main chorus and the diversity of individuals within
the group:

it’s nice for us to look up to the main chorus because there are some fantastic people there… it’s really diverse commun… careers, life experience and so, naturally we want to talk to them… We feel supported by them and, I think they enjoy seeing us as a little group, I don’t know, the new generation! [laughs] ([187-191)

Presenting the Bigger Picture: Four Suggestions

Having explored in previous chapters the experiences of singing within the youth chorus according to DeNora’s music asylums framework and with a focus on the performance of identities, I attempt to present these emergent understandings from four different perspectives, and consider how well they capture the youth chorus’s complex music and health ecology.

A hierarchical model. Smith, Larkin and Flowers (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) suggest a table model that is hierarchical in nature, with the refinement of categories and sub-categories from interview transcripts. I set out this model in below (summarised using a word cloud in Figure 4), noting that it is not exhaustive in its coverage, and captures key points only. Nevertheless, this approach was less helpful in exploring the inter-relationships between the categories, which emerged as more organically linked and fluid that adhering to rigid structures. I suggest the microanalysis discussed in previous chapters sets out these relationships more authentically. Alternatively, a short narrative summary may be an alternative means of summarising the findings.
### Table 5
**Key Themes Identified from Interview Analysis, Descriptions, and Representative Quotes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Category</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Indicative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontologically Safe</strong></td>
<td><strong>Related categories</strong></td>
<td><strong>Proudly queer; achieving musically; being part of something</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed Queer (Foundational)</td>
<td>Queer bubble (safe inside)</td>
<td>And so that threw me into a world where everyone is assumed queer until proven straight rather than the other way around (Natalie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir as clique</td>
<td></td>
<td>it’s…an insular little queer bubble and we love it in there! (Hermione)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe place within LGBTI community</td>
<td></td>
<td>Um, yeah, ah, is when I first joined chorus, um I felt a bit on the outside, because um there was this um, you know this little clique type thing? (Hermione)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically safe</td>
<td></td>
<td>The energy in that room was just so… uplifting and welcoming. And so, yeah, it felt like I was going into a…a safe place where I could work out my life and my issues at that time. (Malachi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety to be musical</td>
<td></td>
<td>it’s a safe place to work out how to sing and how to sing together … (Malachi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td></td>
<td>I just felt like I fit. (Malachi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A home</td>
<td></td>
<td>choir for me is a big home for me (Malachi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in choir structures</td>
<td></td>
<td>Um, we can just talk about “Oh and we’ve got this concert coming up, we’ve got this gig coming up. This is what we do, um, here’s, here’s how main chorus goes, we have committee, this is our structure. This is, this is our history.” Um you know you talk about the organisation you talk about the music, you talk about, um, like what kind of music have they sung before, what do they know (Hermione)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close friendships</td>
<td></td>
<td>you know the kind of friends where you end up sitting on the floor in any situation [hmm, yep]…caus you’re just so comfortable. (Natalie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A family</td>
<td></td>
<td>it’s the kind of, um, close family that you want to be a part of rather than the one that freaks you out and makes you feel like an outsider. (Natalie)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Being part of something

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related categories</th>
<th>Proudly queer; performing selves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A special place (with responsibilities)</td>
<td>I don’t know.. you feel special. That sense of responsibility and um…I don’t know.. you feel special (Nicole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer bubble (exclusive)</td>
<td>...you wouldn’t have heard of it because you’re not in the queer bubble (Hermione)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir as social meeting place</td>
<td>when you walk in, particularly once everyone you love is there apart from your family, it’s the time of the week where I see everyone, like it’s guaranteed friend time (Natalie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir as intergenerational meeting place</td>
<td>you know, there’s so much that…that we share and so it’s easy to relate across generations and with people that you’ve just met, just then. (Natalie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir as place to make a difference</td>
<td>...it’s part of something much bigger. Um, it’s yeah, it’s part of a community, um, that, definitely transcends the singing. (James)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a community</td>
<td>…joining the choir just made me feel like I had this place where I could go that was a sense of community. (Daisy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Achieving musically

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related categories</th>
<th>Proudly queer; performing selves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musically distinguished</td>
<td>So, I feel like they look at us as a quality choir that, I guess…musically I think we stand out. (Chloe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir enabling personal growth</td>
<td>if I hated all of them I would still if we sang really well together get the joy from the singing because I do and I always have…it helps that we’re all really good friends… it probably makes us sing better as well. (Natalie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proudly musical</td>
<td>we have a shared, we all have a shared part in making something…And, you know, it usually goes alright and um, and you know, people bond over that. (Hermione)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to achieve musically and extra-musically</td>
<td>Ontologically safe: achieving musically; proudly queer; being part of something</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Performing Selves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related categories</th>
<th>Ontologically safe: achieving musically; proudly queer; being part of something</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecting and deepening relationships</td>
<td>I think, my family have always been cool with it and, you know, never had a problem. Um, they’ve accepted when I’ve had a partner at the time and, umm, but never really done anything that sort of said to them “hey, be a part of something that’s a part of what I am”, you know, so having them come to a music concert of mine and a gay-related thing of mine, it definitely opened up that door as well (Dylan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing for self</td>
<td>...it’s sort of more about um, what I’ve achieved and what the choir has achieved. I don’t…really mind too much what they as an audience thinks of us. (Daisy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing ground</td>
<td>So for me learning the music that we’re doing it’s…it’s a stretch. But I love it because it puts me out of my comfort zone. (Nicole)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performing generational difference
I think some people […] view the youth chorus as young, hooligans essentially. [Both James and Interviewer laugh] Yeah! Ha-ha! I mean, I mean, um, and, and in return I guess, some of the youth chorus members maybe view the older choir members as, old, and, not understanding them as young people. (James)

Performing, standing out
I think a big part of it is a sense of belonging, that you’re part of something that possibly with your career or with your family and friends that you don’t get to be… you don’t get to show off a certain part of yourself. (Nicole)

Proudly Queer
Related categories
Performing selves; Being part of something

Being proud role models
…performing as a, a queer choir is important because we are representing our community and people are seeing us in a positive light. And especially for, I think we’ve done some performances in universities and it’s good for, like young queer people to see other queer people out there being happy and not, you know, it’s, you get a – what am I trying to say? – um, sometimes LGBT community we don’t have enough positive role models out there. So it’s good to have those people out there. (Chloe)

(Re-)furnishing self through social and musical world of choir
it’s just, there’s still things to fight for and stuff so…so I want to be involved more. (James)

Other
Pastoral leadership
I think that the quality of the community and the experience is heavily influenced by, um, the members and their openness to forming a community. And by the leaders and their facilitating of inclusive and happy sort of place. (Hermione)

Musical leadership
And, you know, he discusses the song choices with us. Um, it’s about making it a joint effort. He’ll lead us, obviously…and he curates the music, like he’s not going to be like, he’s he’s gonna choose it….But we’ll have some say. (Hermione)

Repertoire challenging LGBTI/Queer Identity
I know it’s difficult with Harvey Milk musical that we’re doing [ah, yeah] it’s all about coming out of the closet and just taking the plunge. But there’s part of me, because I work in the legal industry, that makes me feel maybe I can’t necessarily do that with everybody. (Nicole)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outliers and Contrasts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conforming to choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of not belonging/exclusion within choir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*I note many possible quotes could be included here; this table provides a single comment that captures the particular aspect of the choir experience.*
Figure 4: Graphical (word cloud) depiction of key words and phrases from youth chorus member interviews with approximated weightings.
Summary statement. A short statement that draws upon IPA understandings of the notion of the double hermeneutic (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), offers another way for me to make sense of the choir experience. I set out below the tensions, common, and divergent strands of performing difference in the social world of the youth chorus, representing my attempt to make sense of how these ten members make sense of the youth chorus:

The youth chorus provides for SSAGQ young people a place of musicking and music asylum whenever it convenes musically or socially. Choir is for its members a social and musical community where members are assumed queer, and a setting that affords them a sense of ontologically safety. Choir affords a musical and extra-musical platform of safety that members appropriate to test out, rehearse, and publicly perform their individual and collective queer musical identities.

The construction of difference, expressed musically and socially, is central to this music and health ecology, resulting in member experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Difference and, to a lesser extent, conformity, is valued and performed at different times and in different ways. Choir nurtures the individual LGBTI identities of its members yet allows them the flexibility to act out their queerness and diversity within and outside the choir: what it means to be different as SSAGD young people and choristers in Melbourne.

I set out two further models, using graphical depictions rather than tables and text, to make sense of these experiences in different ways.

A circular, two-level model: physical and conceptual sites  Another way to interpret the experiences of the youth chorus delineates between the two “layers” of the experience (Figure 5). That is, between the choir’s physical sites and its conceptual sites. Set out in graphical form below, this aspect builds upon an earlier distinction between these two aspects of the choir experience set out in the introduction to Chapter 4 on page 158.

Conscious of the inherently interwoven, messy nature that is inherent when seeking to categorise lived experience in a social setting such as a choir, and taking
inspiration from a recent publication by Tia DeNora (DeNora, 2013, p. 87, figure 5.1), I attempt to set out my understanding in several ways. I suggest the circle is open and permeable rather than closed and solid, reflecting the choir’s complex and perhaps tautological profile as a distinct community choral organisation that establishes and defines itself, yet takes pride too in its stated aim of inclusivity. The sites and spaces of the choir, including rehearsals, camp, performances, the audience, extra-musical events, and presented as typically being outside the circle. While the youth chorus was the primary focus for this study, the main chorus served as an important reference point for members, particularly when discussing the inter-generational aspects of the choir. For several members, the main chorus was the focus of their discussions.

Those physical elements are listed outside the circle, and given greater prominence according to my interpretation of their importance to member experiences of choir. Rehearsals, for instance, form an important part of the youth chorus experience, for instance. Conceptual experiences listed within the circle (such as “finding safety” or “being queer” bring together different strands of individual choir experiences introduced in Chapter 4. At times, these conceptual elements extend beyond the circle (for instance, “Leaders and role models” and “singing out”), representing the taking of these elements outside the choir’s “queer bubble.” The main chorus is represented as a smaller, distinct circle according to this interpretation, with the familial and intergenerational aspects important from youth chorus members perspectives.
A tree metaphor. Finally, I explored the metaphor of the tree as representative of choir: a living thing that occurs in nature and represents well I suggest the experiences of young people seeking to grow and develop their social identities as SSAGD young people through musicking. The tree model is set out at Figure 6.
Figure 6: Graphical presentation of tree metaphor to represent the youth chorus. Image created by author.

The tree’s roots, the foundation of the tree, are the choir’s social world or queer bubble, inside which the heteronormative assumptions made outside the choir are reversed, regularly and for a set period. This provides a place of relief, of removal and refurnishing simultaneously, for members. This is a place where members are assumed queer rather than straight. Members talk of safety as they understand it and in diverse ways, akin to different descriptions of a solid tree trunk. Sitting securely at the top of the trunk, and forming the base of the tree’s branches, are member understandings of the choir that distinguish it as a special place, a place of musical and social clique, and of deep social and musical bonds. The tree’s roots and trunk, and the member understandings that sustain the trunk, afford members a platform from which to expand.
and experience the choir differently, challenging and testing themselves, achieving, trying out and on different musical and extra-musical identities.

These performative elements are enabled by the scaffold of safety (the tree trunk) and a foundational overturning of the everyday social worlds of members in this musical setting. These things facilitate member performances of their musical and social selves as young queer people out into the world. Participation in the choir carries with it musical and extra-musical responsibilities that I suggest also refurnish member identities. Members feel accountable to the group for its performances. An important note that, to preserve the safety as a coming out space, performing is not essential, as James noted with surprise when I first mentioned this at a rehearsal. Members also share in the success of performances and accomplishments, and can rightly take pride in their achievements. Finally, I suggest the tree metaphor itself structures the experience and places limits on members – places where they need to conform (in terms of performance practices and part singing) to “fit in” to the choir’s expectations of them.

I have established how both individual and collective identities in music are performed within the choir, including the performing of individual and collective identities as young LGBTI singers in Melbourne. In Part III, I return to the choir’s core identity as queer. Given the centrality of gender and sexuality to the choir’s collective identity and its members, this part attempts to redress a core feature to this choir’s identity that I suggest did not feature strongly in interviews.
III: CRITIQUING /QUEERING
Chapter 8: Critical, Queer, Musical Perspectives

Prelude

The first part of this thesis embarked primarily on a phenomenological project, attempting to capture the ecology of the youth chorus, its openness, and the limits of openness suggested at the time of interview. Yet contrary to what might be expected of a study of a queer youth choir and suggestive of “the tempering influence of interviewers” that was explored in Chapter 3 (Part E), I have struggled to bring a queer theoretical lens into the centre of this study. For reasons described in earlier chapters, I believed that member descriptions of their experiences within the choir initially warranted a broader sociological approach. Ultimately, I have found the need to introduce an explicitly queer lens. This final hermeneutic “turn” of the thesis, then, applies critical, queer, and gender-informed theoretical perspectives to the phenomenological experience of singing with the youth chorus.

Member discussions of the choir’s collective identity as queer do not reflect the true modes of inclusion and exclusion that persist within the group, represented in member experiences and worldviews. Using a distinctly queer lens, I investigate sexuality and gender identity in the context of member’s social and musical worlds to uncover the systems of power and knowledge that have shaped member understandings and pre-understandings. I explore what might be the limits of queer identities as they are expressed musically and extra-musically for the youth chorus. I also question the extent to which the choir challenges, through music, individual and collective social identities as SSAGD young people. These two questions reveal a deeper paradox and tensions within the choir that will be developed in the Chapter 9. Considering MGLC Inc and the youth chorus from a poststructuralist, queer theoretical lens in more detail, suggests a
deeper tension at play with echoes in the historical gay liberation movement: between a political stance that seeks to transform and one that might best be described as a politics of assimilation (Seidman, 1995, p. 118).

**Setting the Scene: Locating Queer Theories**

**Post-structuralist intellectual roots.** The roots of queer theory lie in post-structuralist intellectual thinking and a project that seeks to uncover and celebrate a “post-identity” cultural politics. Seidman’s (1995) overview of queer theory suggests a field that is by no means unified. Of interest for this thesis are queer theoretical positions that draw from French poststructuralism, and the work of French poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault (1926-1984). This movement rejected structuralist positions that established fixed foundations for knowledge yet also challenged experience as the primary means of finding knowledge (that is, a phenomenological position).

Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (1978) offers a basis from which to elaborate upon this thesis. Foucault challenged conventional understandings of sexuality in setting out how it is deployed politically, and inspiring subsequent analyses of sexuality, as “array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity-formations, and knowledges, in both women and men” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 29). For Sedgwick, sexuality is closely linked to physical and sexual acts and, according to such a viewpoint, is cultural, socially constructed, and relational (Sedgwick, 1990). This reflects an axiological belief that better understanding of those things that structure our society – in this case, in choral music, gender, and sexuality – can confront inequality. Before setting out queer theoretical perspective and a key author to be engaged in this study, I set out the important historical context of queer theory as a reaction and a
means of interrogating the stable identities theorised in the LGBTI rights movement (Seidman, 1995).

**Resisting the LGBTI rights movement.** The roots of queer theory may be traced to a resistance to the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay identities. Seidman narrates (Seidman, 1995, pp. 68-75) the emergence of a new movement, seeking to carve out a distinct identity for homosexuality and created in opposition to the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality. In the early 1970s in the US, a national lesbian and gay cultural apparatus formed, that combined intellectuals and activists, and with its roots in the gay liberation movement. Similarly, the lesbian and gay movements matured as a stable political apparatus with stable communities. The intellectualisation of homosexuality from this time coalesced around a stable cultural identity, leading to subcultural communities within the Lesbian and Gay umbrella. Community building became the focus, in a way that marginalised the early liberationists.

Queer theory emerged from within the resistance movements of the feminist and lesbian and gay rights movements that challenged and resisted entrenched hierarchies of gender and sexuality. Politically, the queer movement coincided with the politics of HIV/AIDS with the transformative aims typified in organisations such as ACT-UP (Burki; Carlomusto, 2015).

The disconnect between theorists and activists of these two camps widened. Successes of the gay and lesbian movements in carving out their place against a heterosexist mainstream prompted a more public call for acknowledgment of differences *within* the queer community. As Seidman (1995, p. 124) notes, “Differences that were submerged for the sake of solidarity against a heterosexist mainstream erupted into public differences to coalesce socially.” These differences grew from skirmishes to
a general war over the social coherence and desirability of asserting a lesbian and gay identity. Gay politics and its basis on a unified subject had been challenged at its core.

**Parallel histories: The queering of music.** Similarly, in music, critical theory research seeks to uncover and question those musical structures and institutions that are taken for granted, “natural,” and therefore incontestable. In musicology, Nicholas Cook (2000, pp. 98-99) builds upon the challenge to conventional musicology posed by Joseph Kerman (Kerman, 1985) and sets out how music institutions “normalise” the construction and maintenance of a historical musical canon of masterworks. Even more fundamentally, Cook critiques the normalisation, by educational institutions such as universities, of a specific Western musical culture, along with the definition of what is understood to be “music” according to these definitions. Cook and others (Citron, 1993; Solie, 1995) explore musical artefacts through a gendered lens in more detail. Interestingly, the word queer here is not strictly used according to its current understanding, but instead in reference specifically to gay men and lesbian women (Fuller & Whitesell, 2002; Gill, 1995).

It is only recently that scholars have considered critical theoretical perspectives within musicology, challenging and provoking a rethinking of long-standing traditions by exploring what a queer musicology might look like. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas’s *Queering the Pitch* (1994) was a pioneering study of music from a gay and lesbian perspective, from which a number of important critical contributions relating to music, gender and sexuality followed (Beale, 2017; Benedict et al., 2015; Cook, 2000; Cook & Everist, 1997). One reviewer of Brett’s work (Miller, 1994), notes that:
While philosophers and theoreticians have poeticized the power of music, the field of musicology has ordered and rationalized the “feminine” chaos of music, asserting music’s mathematical linearity and its audible signs of compositional masculinity—thereby creating an elite discourse. (p. 192)

Brett’s discussion challenges these tacit conventions and the marginalisation of gender and sexuality in music. In its second edition (Brett et al., 2006), the book extends its discussion to consider intersectional issues relating to music and gay and lesbian studies in particular—expanding the discussion to include race, class, and emerging perspectives in queer music studies (Brett et al., 2006, preface to the second edition). As scholars of music redress the deliberate omission of sexuality from musicology literature, a new queer musicology has emerged that supports the choir as a place for queer musicking.

**Queer theory: Challenging identity stability.** Queer theory emerged as a reaction to the increasing institutionalisation of the gay and lesbian rights movement and challenged the normativity of this movement. In the same way as feminist political thought, it is concerned with uncovering binaries of power—in this case, the gender binary.

Queer theory draws on the critical approach of French poststructuralism and its focus on exploring power relations according to a Foucauldian approach (Foucault, 1978) within texts using deconstruction; that is, an approach that seeks to disturb and displace hierarchies by “showing their arbitrary, social, and political character” (Seidman, 1995, p. 125). Queer theorists “imagine the social as a text to be interpreted and criticized”. Queer theory criticises LGBTI theoretical approaches as a “disciplining, normative force” that unwittingly reinforces the very dynamics of exclusion and hierarchy that it opposes in relation to the mainstream heterosexuality-homosexuality dyad.
Conceptually, queer theory rejects the uniformity of gender identity that had emerged with an organised and institutionalised LGBTI movement, queer theory “challenged the very basis of mainstream gay politics: a politics organized on the premise of a unified subject” (Seidman, 1995, p. 124). Queer theorists sought to deconstruct in the sense of disturbing or displacing the power of dominant hierarchies of homo/heterosexuality by uncovering their political and social characters (Seidman, 1995, p. 125). Typified in defining contributions by scholars such as Eve Sedgwick (1990), Fuss (1991), and Butler (2007/1990), it places homosexuality as an object of analysis, setting out how a matrix of (hetero)sexuality ordered the social world, captured in Butler’s notion of a heterosexual matrix (2007/1990; explained concisely in Tredway, 2014). Gender and sexuality are therefore questioned or “troubled,” as Butler’s defining contribution captures, as an ordering principle of society.

Queer, according to Seidman (1995), is founded in difference: an oppositional positioning against both the heterosexual and homosexual mainstreams. Taking up the notion of trying to be different, Seidman captures the goal of queer theory and politics: “to expose and disturb the normalizing politics of identity as practiced by the straight and lesbian and gay mainstream” and queer politics “mobilises against all normalized hierarchies” (p. 118). Within the context of a study of identities such as this, queer theory views homosexuality not as a minority social identity but treats it as an object, seeking to uncover the power and knowledge regime within which the category of homosexuality is constructed (p. 135).

**Judith Butler and the performance of (gender) identities.** I take the work of Judith Butler, one of queer theory’s most prolific thinkers, as a starting point for exploring queer theoretical approaches in the context of the choir and the performance
of identities of queerness. In a 2001 interview, Butler defines the queer conceptual approach specifically in relation to identities:

> My understanding of queer is a term that desires that you don’t have to present an identity card before entering a meeting. Heterosexuals can join the queer movement. Bisexuals can join the queer movement. Queer is not being lesbian. Queer is not being gay. It is an argument against lesbian specificity: that if I am a lesbian I have to desire in a certain way. Queer is an argument against certain normativity, what a proper lesbian or gay identity is. (para. 5)

The foundation of Butler’s analysis lies in an understanding of gender as performative—as something we do rather than are—in an analogous way to Small’s notion of musicking. Butler (1988) takes a phenomenological approach to gender, challenging its perception as something with agency and from which other actions follow, and instead describing it as an identity established through the “stylised repetition of acts” (p. 519). Butler’s later works, including her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (2007/1990), engage with the notion of gender performativity. Gender is therefore always socially located, and shaped by social institutions around it. In the field of music, numerous studies have since explored aspects of Butler’s theoretical position (Brett et al., 2017; Brett et al., 2006; Fuller & Whitesell, 2002; Onsrud, 2015; J. Taylor, 2008, 2013).

Performativity is also discursive; that is, language plays a key role in how identities are constructed. It is important to distinguish too between actual performing (on stage) and performativity as a discursive act in everyday settings. These acts, Butler asserts, construct the pathologies of gender and sexual identity, which are formed socially and in response to perceived norms that exist around them (in keeping with Mead’s notion of the dog barking). The choir accommodates both.

*Butler’s later work and the notion of “liveability”*. We have identified the stability found in LGBTI identities as challenged by queer theory and the troubling of
gender and sexuality, and explored briefly how music has caught up more recently to this critical social challenge. Both elements are present in the youth chorus, and it seems a quest for liveability sits at the heart of the choir’s social world. Butler’s later work, *Undoing Gender*, and offers a theoretical rapprochement of sorts and suggests a way through for my analysis of the youth chorus and this tension.

Butler’s questioning goes to the ontological question of what it means to be and to exist in a society; she challenges the adequacy of current definitions to take account. I suggest Butler’s theorising around gender extends to the performance of sexual and gender identity more broadly. Butler asks, “what is a liveable life, and how can life be lived in the context of gendering?” (Butler, 2004, p. 4). She acknowledges in the opening pages of her collection of essays the notion “liveability” and both the potential benefits and shortcomings to the undoing of gender:

> Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one’s personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim. (p. 1)

Given the unpredictability of human existence, Butler seeks diverse ways to “undo” gender:

> I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation. (p. 4)

Butler sets out the tension for individuals (the “I”), constituted by norms and dependent on them, yet attempting to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative distance from them (Butler, 2004, p. 3). Butler’s approach to critiquing
liveability in relation to gender offers a pithy critical framework for exploring the collective identity of the youth chorus. Butler suggests a critique of liveability as:

An interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation. (Butler, 2004, p. 4)

This later work of Butler’s accommodates both “more inclusive conditions” for living, yet with the space to resist assimilation. Similarly, young members of the youth chorus seek out stable LGBTI identities, with all the breath and diversity of human life that the acronym cannot accommodate. These identities are engaged with, challenged, and above all, supported, within the choir’s social space. At the same time, as a queer choir, they retain the space to challenge the stability of these identity labels. Brett (Brett et al., 2006) captures a dilemma for such choirs, for it is these SSAGD members who represent the agents of change of the next generation. It is they who can most influence the world in which they live. With an understanding of this tension between resistance and sheltering, explored in relation to gender theory by Butler, I will return to the choir’s negotiation of its queer and LGBTI identities.

**In Practice: Challenging the Choir’s Queer Collective Identity**

The “open secret”. The choir’s contribution to music goes further in its public linking of gender, sexuality and music in a way that neuters the notion of an open secret.

Writing of what he describes as the “open secret” of Benjamin Britten’s homosexuality during his lifetime, Philip Brett (2006) suggests it was Britten’s non-acknowledgment of his sexuality that “allowed him to manoeuvre effectively in British society,” to live openly with another man, Peter Pears, for whom he composed music, to return to themes related to his sexuality, and to enjoy a successful and high profile career (Brett,
2006, pp. 18-19). While Britten might be considered a role model in many other areas, in relation to his sexuality, the “discretion model” he adopted, Brett suggests, was deeply problematic, and held him in a closet of his own choosing. Brett reflects on the broader collusion between the closet and the role of the musician, saying:

> What good is the “discretion model” Britten maintained, and musicians still maintain today, if it merely reinforces dominant culture by confining sexuality to the private sphere while making it obscurely present in public discourse as an unthinkable alternative? How many of us have offered something better to any musical adolescent who thinks her/himself unique in feeling different, alone, and ashamed? (Brett, 2006, p. 21)

**Applying queer theory outside of the choir.** Reflected in comments about standing out and being different made by Nicole, Natalie, and Hermione in earlier sections, and implicit in the terminology used across all ten interviews, the youth chorus seemed to value non-conformity to musical and social conventions. It might be viewed as a musical community of practice that is queer in its stance to the world.

Several members also distinguish this stance from the social identity of the main chorus, and acknowledge a generational difference between the two that mirrors the scholarly movement, discussed above, from gay and lesbian studies to queer theory. Consequently, the choir’s external profile not only displays a sense of safety set out in a circular fashion in Chapter six, but is also of a place where queerness—difference from the heterosexual, everyday social worlds of its members—is embraced, nurtured, and celebrated. This external image is important; it amplifies the role of the youth chorus as a choir that resists identity stability and actively subverts, through music, the influence of heteronormativity on the formation of social identities in Melbourne. This is not the case inside the choir.

**The problem with applying queer theory inside the choir.** The choir seeks to enact a
queer worldview: a place where, internally, the assumptions of the heteronormative world “out there” are inversed and, externally, challenging these social understandings through public performances that cultivate “anti-oppressive practices,” as Sue Baines (2013a, 2013b) terms in relation to music therapy discourses. This is a space for the performance of gender and sexuality. It provides the theoretical stage from which members may perform gender, where challenging, as Butler (2007/1990) describes of gender performativity, “categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, neutralize, and immobilize” (p. 7). I sense an element in the interviews of being set free within the youth chorus rehearsal and performance environments to explore gender and sexuality, with the safe and ‘assumed-queer’ environment, as well as the queer bubble, serving as the affordance.

There seems to be an inherent tension here. On the one hand, the collective identity of the youth chorus is built upon celebrating difference from the heteronormative mainstream in Melbourne. On the other, in its internal social ecology the youth chorus seeks to reinforce a sense of stability for these identities of difference: in the case of the ten members interviewed, as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people. To state this another way, the choir seeks to challenge, resist, and subvert the heteronormative mainstream identities and celebrates an identity that is built upon inclusiveness of diverse genders and sexualities, while internally reinforcing the stability of those very identities. This conflict, between two binarised identities, was apparent in the interviews.

I suggest that the choir as a collective, in its public profile and performances, offers an example of “queering” as it is known in social science research (Brett et al., 2006; Lapointe, 2016). Yvette Taylor (2016, p. 15) describes in their recent study of
queer-identifying religious youth, how queering intervenes “in the normative structures, discourses, and practices that construct and police sexual and gendered subjects.”

**Balancing stable LGBTI identities versus a commitment to queerness.** Taking up Butler’s notion of liveability, there is a tension in how the choir balances its commitment to queerness. Accepting DeNora’s argument that music is not a neutral object but rather may be used politically (as has been explored in relation to discourses around music in Nazi Germany, for instance (Kertz-Welzel, 2005, 2008, 2013; Leske, 2016)), the comments of Chloe, Hermione, and Natalie come into focus. All describe the choir’s role as a role model for other young LGBTI people. The choir might be regarded as having a responsibility to the community in which it sings, both musically in terms of the aesthetic products it produces, and socially, to its assumed role in refurnishing the lives of others who see them as happy people singing. Considering this, and with a sense of choir members seeking to perform difference, we can turn a more critical eye to the phenomenological experiences of singing in the youth chorus. Specifically, in relation to gender, we can explore the gendering of music, recognising that gender, power, and privilege are linked and often enacted musically.

A number of studies have combined music with an exploration of Butler’s performative approach to queer theory (that is, exploring gender as performative and discursive), for example in school classrooms in Norway (Onsrud, 2015) and the US (Bergonzi, 2009/2014, 2015). The concern is with what gets left out of the homosexual/heterosexual binary (Fuss, 1991, p. 2). Fundamentally, studies such as these challenge the tacit societal understanding that heterosexuality is compulsory; to reverse a legalistic turn of phrase by Natalie, during her interview: that we are assumed straight until proven otherwise.
Toward a queer ethics of community music?

Queer critics have refused to give social and moral articulation to the key concepts of difference as they invoke it to critique the compulsiveness to identity in modern Western societies. If we are to recover a fuller social critical perspective and a transformative political vision, one fruitful direction is to articulate a politics of knowledge with an institutional social analysis that does not disavow a willingness to spell out its own ethical standpoint. (Seidman, 1995, p. 139)

Queer theory seeks to position itself as oppositional both to homosexuality and heterosexuality, “analysing homosexuality as part of a power/knowledge regime rather than as a minority social identity” (Seidman, 1995, p. 135). For this reason, it has rightly received criticism as an oppositional theory that seeks to destabilise first without a clear end in sight, and that does not consider sufficiently the ethical and political standpoints of its position. When the focus is primarily on the politics of difference, the question arises as to where a stable ethical foundation can be found, in keeping with Butler’s liveable life. Community music scholarship, with echoes in Higgins’s work (Higgins, 2012), but primarily taken up by Wayne Bowman (W. Bowman, 2001, 2009), offers a way forward that is located in the celebration of otherness.

The youth chorus seems attractive for the combination of stability and challenge it provides its members – stability that places limits on otherness - and for its creation of a regular choral musicking place. The youth chorus ecology captures in microcosm a key tension arising from its diverse identities. Its identity as a choir for stable LGBTI identities internally conflicts with an external image reflected in comments of some members that it exists to stand against the stability of identities. I suggest this difference is embedded within the choir’s cultural context and the LGBTI and queer social movements from which it emerges. Interviews suggest that, for the main chorus from whom the youth chorus grew, the stability of its primarily lesbian and gay identities is
paramount and it preferences these identities. For the younger members of the youth chorus particularly (comparing Nicole and Jazz to Natalie and Hermione, for example), growing up in a generation for whom gender fluidity is taken for granted, it seems they understand the choir’s role as embracing queerness or difference. Yet members nevertheless seek out stable, queer identities, whichever label they may take on within the broad spectrum of sexual- and gender identities. Bergonzi (2015) sets out this tension between queer and LGBTI identities in the context of school music education programs.

**Gentle activism as a middle ground.** One way of summarising key findings from the interviews is to consider youth chorus members as offering an ethical way forward when relating their understandings of the seemingly contradictory goals of finding stability while embracing difference. This is uncovered in the attitudes and values that underpin their musicking experiences.

These goals, it seems, do not fit neatly together, and there are tensions between them. The first is the valuing and celebrating of difference within the choir, and being seen to celebrate difference outside it. The second is the sense of community within the choir, found in the choir’s social closeness, its musical and social clique, and in a respect for the different generations within MGLC Inc. The third core value for the choir is the importance of its musical and performance products, the result of a drive for musical quality. In combination, this drive for musical quality and the enabling conditions for the formation of a choir community generate a conformity or sameness that I suggest is an understood and accepted feature of membership of this choir.

The youth chorus maintains a public identity as an activist organisation, yet retains a nurturing environment within the group. Poised between conformity and
activism, the notion of a gentle activism could be appropriate for understanding the role of the youth chorus, echoing similarities to uses in music scholarship of Goethe’s notion of “gentle empiricism” (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2010) and of staying with the phenomenon, emphasising the importance of people-in-music. There are important examples of activism on behalf of the queer community that may deliberately seek discordance and to be jarring, to change things. Many queer and LGBTI activist movements in Australia fulfil this role. These important organisations notwithstanding, I suggest the choir takes a gentler approach that balances both its internal duty, an external understanding of its role as activists, and desire to be visible in this role. Beale (2017) talks of the “quieter activism” of Jennifer, a transgender member interviewed for his study, and Jennifer’s desire for visibility within the choir as a collective (p. 369). I suggest it reflects a broader change in community music practices among both participants and practitioner, a “quiet radicalism” suggested in a recent survey of community music practitioners in the UK (Rimmer et al., 2014, pp. 27-37).

The collective identity of the choir allows members of the youth chorus, through musicking, to challenge and test out the tensions inherent in its two polarised roles, which I suggest reflects a gentle activism in and through choral music. In this regard, the represent a milder form of subversion to that discussed by Jodie Taylor (2008, 2012) in relation to popular music. In discussing music as “an oppositional response to heterosexual hegemony,” (J. Taylor, 2012, p. 218) Taylor describes “queer culture makers” as “social commentators and cultural activists who use music as a non-violent form of social protest.” (p. 218). Yet her sentiment appears to be stronger than what is noticed within the youth chorus; she describes queer musicalised activities as “seditious, embodying an outlawry mentality. They are provocative, transforming, rebellious riotous and anarchic; never passive, obedient or contrite.” It seems the sense of identity
stability moderates the subversive, queer drive within the youth chorus, and a gentler form of activism prevails. Carefully scaffolded, each youth chorus member can appropriate the choir to act out, to sing up, to fight for queerness, but always from a place that nurtures and supports their quest for stable queer identities. This recognises the importance for a life well lived, as Butler’s later work (Butler, 2004) acknowledges. This I suggest is well-captured by Taylor later in the same discussion, when she captures how music can transform:

“[music] facilitates a transformative space in which people may feel more at ease to experiment with queer modes of gender and sexual performance…They are angered by social injustice and attempt to allay the pains of injustice through amusement, pleasure and playfulness, while also remaining critical of the conditions that cause oppression…using music as a non-violent form of social protest” (J. Taylor, 2012, p. 218).

**Implications and consequences.** In the following section I pre-empt several potential criticisms of gentle activism as not being sufficiently direct for the choir’s purpose. Iris Young (1990) describes how: “Social justice…requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction and respect for group differences without oppression” (p. 47). The reproduction of and respect for differences within the choir should not preclude its role as an institution that challenges oppression of the rights of young people of diverse gender and sexuality. Too strong a focus on one can obscure and minimise the other.

**Absent identities.** Similarly, it is worth recognising those identities missing from these interviews, and the implications of their absence for the study. Given, as Young (1990) argues, group differences are cross-cutting, allowing space for many cultural and group identifications such as place, class, and ethnicity, alongside sexuality and gender, is vital. Remaining open to the intersections of identities forms an important part of challenging exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural
imperialism, and violence, that for Young constitutes different faces of oppression (1990, pp. 39-65). Here the use of key literature that explores intersectionality in gender and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991; McDermott & Roen, 2016), in relation to music (Carter, 2014; Scrine, 2016), and even recent specific work relating to gender identity and choral music for young people (Palkki, 2016) come into focus. Those members interviewed did not allow for the exploration of other gender and sexual identities, nor how these identities intersect with ethnic identities, class identities, and of dis/ability. Class differences were mentioned in passing by Hermione when she says (¶¶84-90):

Hermione: So people who think “I want to join a choir!” those, it’s, you know for the most part it’s going to be middle class people.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, *that’s interesting*–

Hermione: Caus we have you know, the time and, we’ve probably been encouraged to do music more.

Interviewer: *Yeah, okay*

Hermione: We’ve had the resources.

Interviewer: *Yep*

Hermione: So we see this as a fun thing.

Intersectional perspectives would have offered deeper insights into the relationship between singing in this choir and experiences of social exclusion for reasons other than sexuality or gender identity. As described earlier in relation to the sense of musical clique, those potential members who did not meet the implicit social and musical standards of the choir, or did not find meaningful social connections with existing choir members, did not return. The absence of these SSAGQ young people in shapes the current member experience; their tacit acknowledgement of a discreet standard of singing required within the choir contributes to its sense of “specialness,” built upon a foundation of musicianship.
Chapter 9: Discussion

In previous chapters, I explored understandings of youth chorus members and the key findings emerging from their interviews, and critical and particularly queer theoretical perspectives. At the centre of the choir it seems two values live uncomfortably alongside one another, and their calibration shifts frequently according to the makeup of the group and its leadership. On the one hand, community is observed in the formation of a safe and supportive musicking environment and fostered through music. Accommodating difference, on the other, is evident in the choir's focus as a place for everyone, and a queer social identity that is distinctive, allows for, and celebrates, a plurality of identities. I now revisit this central paradox briefly and explore several related tensions, from two distinct perspectives: of individual members, and from a broader organisational perspective of MGLC Inc. Further, these tensions offer interesting comparisons to several key concepts outlined by Higgins in relation to community music that will be revisited.

Paradoxes and Tensions

Exclusive to be inclusive. Member interviews reveal a paradox or central tension at the heart of this choir’s identity, the consequence of its internal and external profiles that both seek to address social exclusion. Inclusion within the youth chorus and its “queer bubble” is built upon a sense of exclusiveness. This is made clearer in relation to public performances: social exclusion is essential to facilitating this choir as an inclusive musicking place. In fact, it seems that inclusion and exclusion exist in a dependent relationship to one another in this choir. Understanding the choir as both a community of identity based on gender and sexuality, and at the same time a musical
community of practice according to Ansdell’s (2014, pp. 219-220) categorisation, highlights this tension. I suggest several interwoven tensions emerge from this central tension.

**Reconciling quality musical products with “safe and supportive”**. Musical products and aesthetic value of singing distinguish this from other wellbeing activities SSAGD young people may be involved in. Choir Member understandings of the choir as a safe and supportive musical ecology have been explored extensively in previous chapters, yet sit uneasily with the drive to produce quality musical products. Musically, members describe the choir as known for and distinguished for balancing “surprisingly good” quality with its ability to “put on fun gigs” (Hermione, ¶¶920-922). Members also speak of the choir’s role as a role model for other young SSAGD people in Melbourne – of the choir’s symbolic role.

Performing plays a key role in this this tension. In performing, it seems this choir distinguishes itself from other community music groups, community singing programs, and community music therapy groups where perhaps the process (rehearsals) carry more weight than the aesthetic products (performances, repertoire). The musical value of the choir is measured by its members both according to how it meets their musical expectations and how it is received by their audience. Collectively, youth chorus member experiences suggest a worldview that the best way to combat social exclusion and homophobia is to surprise an audience with the musical quality a queer choir’s singing.

Each time the youth chorus performs publicly it also makes a collective, vocal statement that is suggestive of the personal gender identities or sexualities of its members. Social identities are explored and performed from these galvanizing musical
experiences, alongside the formation of musical identities such as being choir members and soloists. It sings proudly as for diverse sexualities and gender identities. Members experience the youth chorus’s impact individually, yet with reverberations collectively for the choir.

**Reconciling queer identity with being “as good as” other choirs.** A related yet distinct tension relates to comments by several members that they seek to be “as good as” other choirs. There is a sense among several members of the need to prove themselves musically, to be “good enough” to sing alongside other (presumably non-queer) choirs. Nicole talks in her interview of choir as proof that “no matter who you are, you can still create beautiful music” (¶26). Nicole’s comments echo a significant element to the value the choir places upon the musical artefacts it produces – a decision that distinguishes it from other community choral groups, guided I suggest by a sense of obligation to be role models for other young people in Melbourne’s LGBTI community, and a belief that performing publicly as a queer choir holds potential for collective activist.

As a choir that publicly proclaims its outsider- hood and a social identity, this tension brings into sharp relief the type of musical quality members value, and the priority afforded it over other aspects of the choirs work. As has been set out in results above, musical quality and achievement through performances seem crucial for members. In the introduction to her edited volume of theoretical contributions to lesbian and gay issues, Diana Fuss (1991) reflects on the idea of homosexual production: she sets out the dichotomous existence of those who are visible or “out” as queer, but who simultaneously recognise their otherness as something negative (a “negative interiorization” of homosexuality according to Fuss, 1991, p. 3). Yet they also refuse to
be represented in this way. Fuss (1991) captures this tension beautifully:

To be out, in common gay [in sense of queer] parlance, is precisely to be no longer out; to be out is to be finally outside the exteriority and all the exclusions and deprivations such outsiderhood imposes. Or, put another way, to be out is really to be in–inside the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible. (p. 4)

I suggest for the youth chorus a sense of “negative interiorization” is one element that motivates these comments. To be “out” is a motivator that fosters a sense of exclusiveness within the choir, and a compulsion toward quality and to be just like other choirs. However, I sense this interiorization is one of optimism and pride in their collective achievement and musical quality rather than inferiority.

**Embracing queer challenges with stable LGBTI musical identities.** Linked to the dichotomy of exclusion and inclusion, and identities of insider- and outsider- hood, member interviews suggest a third fundamental tension related to the identities of members. On the one hand, the performance of queer public identities, performed and explored through music, is for many members reflects their appropriation of the choir to perform queer identities in music, adapting the definition of Hargreaves et al. (2015). These may be performed both individually and collectively, out to a public audience or within the choir’s safe environment, and may seek to resist the stability of their social identities. On the other hand, the choir itself supports the musical identities of its members (music in identities), finding musical and social roles within the choir, such as Jazz’s discussion of being a bass, or Hermione’s recollections of her interactions with the altos of the main chorus, for example. These experiences afford a sense of identity stability for members, contributing to the sense of safety and removal within the choir.

These identities exist in a tense exchange with one another within the ecology of the youth chorus. They may be collective rather than individual, created through the
choir performance experiences. Choir is both a site for standing up for a queer identity and finding safety inside of that same identity. The experience of activism is gentle rather than severe, suggestive of hospitality in combination with activism that moves closer to the conceptual roots of community music: an opportunity for musical and social activism as young queer people from a platform of a safe and supportive environment.

To restate the tension at the heart of the chorus: musical quality, creative and aesthetically pleasing and surprising products, performed to an audience, sit at the heart of the youth chorus. The choir sings as a public symbol of defiance and subversion for what they say about gender and sexuality in a queer fashion, yet on the other hand reinforce the stable LGBTI identities of individual members.

**Welcoming Higgins Back In: Answers in Community Music**

Returning then to Lee Higgins’s ideas around community music set out in Chapter 1 of this thesis, I suggest some interesting comparisons may be made with the youth chorus experience. In particular, I explore Higgins’s discussion of unconditional hospitality and of welcoming of those we have yet to meet. The importance of the social and personal wellbeing aspects to the musicking experiences of choir members shares echoes of his depiction of Brazilian community bands in the *suburbio ferroviario sector* (Higgins, 2012, pp. 101-102). Similarly, the relationship between the youth and main choruses echoes the role modelling and mentoring of choral veterans in Canada’s “Getting Higher Choir” (p. 113).

**Workshops.** Given the musicking experiences within a choir setting typically involve a longer-term investment than the immediate workshop experiences described
by Higgins, a different lens is required. The focus of this study is less on the individually-focussed experiences and moments captured by Higgins (recognising that useful comparisons may be made with psychological perspectives including flow states and experiences of flourishing (Ansdell & DeNora, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; Keyes & Haidt, 2003)). Instead it can be found in the longer-term projects, relationships, and achievements that furnish the choir’s social worldview. The experience of the youth chorus may require a distinctive understanding of community music, tailored to the overlapping roles of its social and musical identities, publicly and privately.

I suggest there are several differences that differentiate the youth chorus from Higgins’s understanding of the musical workshop. Firstly, it seems the youth chorus seeks and values harmonisation, literally: the harmonisation of voices in song – in a way that challenges Higgins’s (2012) notion of the workshop as a democratic space and “the pursuit of equality and access beyond any preconceived limited horizons” (p. 145) within the workshop setting. The choir is community music focussed, and the notion of community is practiced as a hospitality and sense of welcoming. Yet its welcome is limited by the deep social bonds and sense of musical and social clique evident in the choir member’s interviews. There is a valuing of improvisation and creativity within Higgins’s music workshops suggestive of a freedom that it seems goes further than the structured environment of the choir.

Here, Higgins’s understanding of communities without unity (rather, as acts of hospitality according to Derrida’s conception) differs from what choir members reveal to be both valued and required in terms of the choir’s structures and the push for public performances, and quality musical products. Yet at the same time, moving toward the
notion of community beyond unity (Corlett, 1989; Delanty, 2013, pp. 131-148) where stable identities are destabilised rather than affirmed, choir does not conform to, and at times actively resists and subverts, conventional choral music practices seen in other Australian choirs.

**Safety without safety.** Higgins talks of safety without safety. Maintaining a safe climate for risk-taking: replacing the security of the familiar with the safety of the workshop environment, and recognizing that the workshop facilitator can advance success through the possibility of failure. This climate of risk taking is augmented for youth chorus members as they perform publicly, affirming their difference, their alignment and support for, and in most cases their lived experiences of, being a person of diverse gender and sexuality. I suggest it is therefore a crucial element of the choir and the way it addresses social exclusion. It seems musical performances reflect the collective negotiated values of a choir and the choices they make: in the case of the youth chorus, when to subvert, and when to resist choral identities ascribed to them. These choices are manifest, for instance, in the choice of performance dress, positioning on stage, allocation of voice parts according to a male/female gender binary, the positioning of the conductor at the front. There are many frontiers, new futures to explore in seeking equality, with an end goal of improving the lives and facilitating the social inclusion of SSAGD young people. But similarly, from a critical perspective, a choir might also perpetuate or conform to, and therefore remain complicit in, the very oppression they seek to fight.

**Conditional and unconditional hospitality.** Higgins (2007, 2012) talks of community music as “unconditional hospitality” – of regularly challenging boundaries and ensuring that they remain flexible and porous enough to always welcome new
members. While sound in principle, it sits uncomfortably with the deep social bonds, built upon safety, that sustain the youth chorus within MGLC Inc, and nurture its members in the public performance of their sexual and gender identities. I suggest in this instance it is unhelpful to talk about “unconditional” hospitality, but rather of the importance of a choir that values social inclusion strongly yet offers a conditional hospitality as its compromise – balancing its dual internal role with an external sense of role-modelling, a commitment to quality and being “as good as” other choirs. This reflects early discussions of Julia Koza (1993/1994) that set out the unequal power relations in school choir settings on the basis of gender and, in her case, gay male sexuality.

It seems this is acutely felt within LGBTI community choirs outside of school settings. Attinello (2006) describes a twin responsibility to the social and musical commitments of LGBT choirs within the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus. He calls for an “ongoing dialectic” between the two (Attinello, 2006, p. 334). Similarly, Beale (2017) captures the key tensions within LGBTI choirs between musical quality, inclusion, and activism. Leadership in this setting is important, with greater priority afforded to the aesthetic products (the end products) as well as the musicking (the rehearsal, learning, and teaching experiences) than would typically be the case in other community music and music therapeutic settings.

**True (intergenerational) inclusion.** Maintaining a stance toward unconditional hospitality is important. This is evident when considering MGLC Inc as a whole organisation. Through its youth and main choruses, the organisation offers a lucid example of a social and cultural group that, to return to Small’s (1998) quote at the outset of this thesis, holds within it the seeds to inter-generational sharing and the passing down of social and cultural knowledge:
"It is shared assumptions about relationships, with the rest of the world as well as with one another, that holds social and cultural groups together. Further, we might expect that such groups should try to pass on their values to members of succeeding generations, and all social groups do, in fact, have institutions, either formal or informal, for doing just that." (p. 131)

MGLC Inc, members, it seems, value these relationships and the passing down of values across cultures, reinforcing contested identities outside the organisation. As Nicole’s experience of perceived exclusion from the lesbian and gay majority suggests, the task for the chorus, and indeed for future social justice research into musicking and social exclusion, is to maintain an inward as well as outward gaze, toward those on the margins, the minorities within minorities.

**Decisions within MGLC Inc.** Inclusion and exclusion are more complex than this simply binary suggests. While outside the bubble, the choir’s queer identity challenges the heteronormative world in which choir musicking and performing occurs, internally it is a different story. The choir’s internal mission seeks to fortify and celebrate the very identity politics that queer theory resists—in this interview set, primarily as out and proud gay men and lesbian women. Interestingly, although not a member of the dominant social groupings within the choir (lesbian women and gay men), Nicole nevertheless feels a sense of place within the choir that is afforded by its queer profile. Nicole chooses to remain a member of the choir, and talks highly of it, despite implying a sense of exclusion for her bisexuality. She understands the choir, I suggest, as a place open to all who share in a queer worldview.

Within MGLC Inc, the youth chorus represents a new generation and the potentials of a queer choir. It seeks to balance a choir identity that nurtures and fosters acceptance of fluid gender and sexual identities for young queer singers on the one hand, and in doing so creates and teaches a queer identity that accommodates and brings
to the wider musical ecology of MGLC Inc a different understanding of gender and sexuality. This is at the same time challenging for some members that value the choir’s stable, primarily lesbian and gay, LGBTI identities. Over time, through dialogue, challenge, support, and even confrontation at times, a queer identity of stability may form. With a sense of queer-normativity that reverses the gender and sexuality norms that exist outside the choir, stability may ultimately be found in the group’s diversity.

**Creating a “radically inclusive” community music space.** These ideas lead to a questioning of how community music can support LGBTI young people, with the goal of a queer choir. In music therapy, Candice Bain, Patrick Grzanka, and Barbara Crowe (2016) extend previous scholarship (Ahessy, 2011; Antebi & Gilboa, 2016; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2013) by describing the need for a “radically inclusive” music therapy. The notion of radical inclusion is an interesting one, and captures a tension inherent with LGBTI and queer music that has been documented elsewhere (J. Taylor, 2008, 2012), including in relation to choral music (Beale, 2017). Non-therapeutic spaces such as the youth chorus hold much potential to be “radically inclusive” and focused on wellbeing, whether music therapists or expert community musicians. The following chapter revisits the original purpose of the thesis: seeking to contribute practice-informed insights to community music scholarship.
IV: INTEGRATING
Chapter 10: Lessons and Ideas for Practitioners

This thesis has explored deeper understandings of musical and extra-musical elements, working in tandem, that shape member experiences of the youth chorus. It has also sought to shine a critical lens on the choir’s queer profile and set out the paradoxes and tensions that result. I have sought to demonstrate the complex and often tautological music and health ecology of the choir as it is experienced socially and musically. In the following section, I suggest some ideas and possible lessons for practitioners working with choirs that include SSAGQ young people. I first revisit the question of the value of a queer choir, and reflect on leadership required in this context. I then reflect on the importance of language, seeking to challenge choral convention and practice and the categorisation that takes place when choral identities are formed, and the implications for facilitating a musically inclusive place for queer people. This requires an examination of what “queer” choirs, choral singing, choir communities, and a “queer” compositional style might look like, with a view to better supporting SSAGQ young people.

Reinforcing the Value of a Queer Choir

Having explored the complex and even paradoxical experience of singing within the youth chorus, it is worth returning briefly to the comments made at the beginning of this thesis about the value of the youth chorus within Melbourne. For many members of the youth chorus, including all interviewed for this study, choir affords a sense of belonging and joy through choral music and can be a fun, social, musicking outlet. I suggest the choir is at the centre of an ecology of wellbeing and refurnishing through music for these young people. The deep sense of belonging that is reflected in member
interviews is foundational for LGBTI choirs, as Beale discusses (Beale, 2017, pp. 366-369). Performances, and the intertwined relationships between members, MD, and audience, contribute to this sense of belonging. Ansdell (2010b) discussing Small’s understanding of performing and its link to community, suggests:

…the group is performing not just the music, or themselves, but the whole ecology of relationships: to each other, to their context, to their culture and its many complexities and conflicts. They are creating community through their musical performance. (p. 37)

For members interviewed for this thesis, the youth chorus also plays a significant, symbolic role as a refurnishing activity that nurtures and challenges both musical and social identities. DeNora (2013, p. 60) describes how, if one’s wellbeing is dependent upon being able to refurnish one’s self, then “a constraint on the opportunity to pursue refurnishing activities is a threat to wellbeing. Thus, the social structure and distribution of resources and opportunities for refurnishing the world is of crucial importance to wellbeing” (DeNora, 2013, p. 60). The music asylums framework illustrates the way the youth chorus provides a physical and ontological place of separation, a weekly social activity that offers members a gift (in the spirit of Higgins’s notion of gift-giving) in that it reorders the heteronormative order of everyday life for these members, if only for a discreet period. It furnishes members with a sense of normality away from the everyday that is a different normality, a queer normality.

From this place of safety, the choir is a supportive, nurturing environment within, and a platform or spring board from which to perform to the world. By linking opportunity to wellbeing and suggesting that society can play a wider role, DeNora suggests a way for the structures of our everyday worlds to accommodate diversity and difference and to enable participation, and particularly musical participation, in musical settings and more generally. I suggest this insight may extend further–beyond this choir,
beyond choral singing as a recreational pursuit, and, indeed, beyond this social identity—to others who experience social exclusion in some way for their physical abilities, ethnicity, or socioeconomic position.

The youth chorus’s queer identity is central to the experiences, meaning, and identities of its members, both in what it provides them personally and in what it represents socially and musically and for their relationships. In the following section, I set out some ideas and ideals—departing from the lived experiences of youth chorus members that offer insights into the contradictions of inclusion and exclusion, conformity, and subversion. I consider what could be for the youth chorus and offer ideas that may be relevant to other choral musicking practices.

**Leadership: The Importance of Mindful Musical and Social Curatorship**

A mindful curatorship of the, at times, fragile identities of young LGBTI singers, their journeys as members of a largely invisible minority living within a heteronormative majority, and the musical and social challenges they face, provides important support. Palkki (2015) selects language carefully when discussing leadership within a school education perspective in his study of masculinity in choral singing, referring to school choral leaders as “choral-conductor-teachers” in a way that is similar to the youth chorus MD. Palkki argues that if, as choral-conductor-teachers, we share a desire to shield young people from oppression based on gender and sexuality – and this is a core part of the youth chorus’s mission – then we need to also examine how this sense of exclusion persists through the structures of choral music (Miroslav Pavle Manovski, cited in Palkki, 2010, p.27).

MDs can actively resist the gender binary by challenging gender as the only way
to determine voice type (as a soprano or bass). They may openly transgress choral conventions in their repertoire choices, recasting women’s choir repertoire for tenors and basses, for instance. At all times, they should seek to balance musical challenge with a nurturing, familial choral environment. These themes form an important part of the LGBTI choir singing experience as scholars in community music and choral pedagogy have set out (Avery et al., 2013; Beale, 2017). Palkki (2016) talks of modelling inclusive learning in classrooms that extends into community choral settings: a place that is open to vulnerability without prescribing it, and where the choral leader’s task is to enable a sense of openness to vulnerability. The ability to draw upon lived experience may also be valuable.

Taking the ideas of these scholars and their understandings of LGBTI leadership further still, the age and stage of the youth chorus’s members might be considered. This is a profound test of the resilience of younger members as they challenge themselves and their social worlds, growing adolescence musical and social identities that challenge preconceived ideas of gender and sexuality. Their stand simultaneously poses challenges for and from the main chorus of MGLC Inc, a choir of several generations of LGBTI activists and singers.

Where the main chorus’s experience I suggest has largely been to confront their position in the same-sex-attracted/heterosexual binary, for the youth chorus there is a drive to resist this binary and its support of stable LGBTI identities as a means of freeing up space for queerness: for the freedom to explore the spectrum diverse genders and sexualities in safety. The youth chorus, as part of MGLC Inc and with access to several generations, must fight within MGLC Inc and outside it, and it uses musical performing as one important means to do so.
The MD’s Role

Recalling Hermione’s comments in Chapter 8 that the MD’s role is to “curate” the music (¶1010) and that the quality of the community and the experience is heavily influenced by members and their openness to forming a community alongside the leaders who facilitate an “inclusive and happy sort of place” (¶1002), it is possible to suggest some distinctive traits for leaders of LGBTI choirs. Beale (2017) reflects on leadership in an adult choral setting, describing leadership in a queer choir as going beyond musical curation to include role modelling and the setting of social behaviours and expectations. There is a sense of joint ownership and responsibility with the choir for its repertoire and musical fortunes. The MD, Beale asserts, plays a role akin to a church pastor, empowered within the rehearsal “to create the safe place and facilitate the sense of belonging, as well as direct the rehearsal” (p. 367). To this end, the MD goes further than a community music facilitator. They act as a role model too, explaining and modelling the values that underlie the social behaviour in the room. It seems a “passing on” to others of a queer or LGBTI musical culture, its symbols, and values, is crucial. The MD strives to deliberately instil a valuing of musical and social inclusion, and to nurture diverse musical, social, and gender identities within the rehearsal. This requires an ability to suspend judgement and the patience to guide the learning of part singing within a choir environment, such as developing an understanding of and capacity for harmonising in multiple parts and blending with other voices. The MD also has a key role in challenging dominant paradigms of choral music – guiding the subversion within their own choir.

Within rehearsals, the MD influences the affirmation or undermining of a fragile sense of inclusion within the choir’s musical ecology. I recall one experience leading a new member rehearsal night of the youth chorus in 2014, after a successful recruitment
drive at Melbourne’s queer cultural festival. Ten new members joined 20 existing members for the rehearsal, boosting the choir’s size substantially. While I felt the rehearsal was musically challenging, inspiring, and with a clear sense of welcoming, on reflection there were moments within the rehearsal where I inadvertently closed the circle. As a device to shift the rehearsal mood, at times I included affirming comments about the skills, talents, and personal traits of individual existing members. I was confident these traits would be recognised by and resonate with existing youth chorus members, but on reflection, the choice to use this approach excluded prospective new members. Such comments remained closed to them. In my attempt to convey a sense of the choir’s close-knit community, I inadvertently and implicitly closed the circle to new members, perpetuating the very sense of musical and social clique mentioned by members interviewed for this study. I now recognise the careful scaffolding of rehearsals to teach both new musical skills and foster an inclusive, encouraging, and collaborative social environment can be undermined by such comments.

I suggest MDs make deliberate social, musical, and symbolic interventions into the group dynamics of the choir, at times choosing to disrupt and unsettle this ecology: a commitment to “community without unity” (Brent, 1997; Corlett, 1989), drawing closer to Gerard Delanty’s (2013) postmodern understanding of communities beyond unity (pp. 131-148). At times, they may favour or acknowledge those within the circle, risking a symbolic closure of it to those outside as a way of deepening the bonds within it. At other times, they may work consciously to unsettle the circle, to bring new or newer members into the group, providing the continuous, uncomfortable welcome that is required of a queer-aspiring choir. MDs work both with impartiality toward members, acting as musical and social conciliators of the delicate balance of the musical and social within the choir. Yet at the same time they act with partiality toward the choir-as-
collective, protecting its core values and nurturing a music and health ecology, and striving for a place that welcomes outsiders in. More practically, careful planning of interactions with the choir through rehearsals and performances can support an MD in this process, yet there will always be an element of intuition and experience required when reacting to and pre-empting social interactions in this ultimately political environment.

The experiences of the ten members interviewed for this thesis suggest the youth chorus’s musical ecology provides a nurturing environment for SSAGQ young people. In this section, I consider what is needed practically to offer Higgins’s gift of the welcome to gender diverse singers. Here, the music director plays a key role.

Rehearsal Practices: Language and Labels

A range of scholars have suggested that gender pronouns and imagery in choral music may be reclaimed as a tool for subversion (Antebi & Gilboa, 2016; Beale, 2017; Brett et al., 2017; Brett et al., 2006; MacLachlan, 2015; J. Taylor, 2008, 2012). Challenging conventions in choral rehearsal practices can take many forms. From a critical perspective, many forms of oppression through choral music can be observed, including the often-controversial decisions around concert attire and the automatic gender indicators contained within what is worn (Palkki, 2015, p. 27; Bergonzi, 2015, p. 226). But I suggest most importantly the language used in rehearsals and repertoire forms the foundation of safety within an LGBTI choir. The choice of appropriate and accessible repertoire is crucial. Higgins describes the goal of resisting and destabilising the closing of the circle, which is apt for a queer choir such as the youth chorus. It is important to signal a move beyond the appropriation of gendered language within lyrics (sopranos and altos singing a song that uses female pronouns, for instance), to a more
fluid use of gendered language. For songs that seek to be truly queer, mixing female and male pronouns throughout a choral work would remove a sense of binary, taking lyrics beyond categorisation according to gender and, in the case of MGLC Inc and its youth chorus, beyond its foundations in gay and lesbian identities. It would send an important signal to members and the audience, moving beyond identity declarations of same sex attraction to a true celebration of queerness – and resistance to the categorisation according to gender and/or sexuality.

**Voice parts.** The use of non-gendered language when referring to collective voice parts within a typical SATB choir—that is, referring to individual sections such as sopranos, tenors, altos, and basses—resists the common ascription of sopranos and altos as women, and tenors and basses of men. This signals an openness to gender fluidity and a rejection of the gender binary. In the school context, Palkki (2015) draws attention to the musical clef, describing treble clef and bass clef choirs as a deliberate effort to break from conventions that evoke gendered understandings of so-called SSAA and TTBB choirs. Careful attention to gender and pronouns is particularly important, Palkki argues:

Though it may seem like an insignificant detail, the choice to say, “When you’re singing this phrase, picture a person you think is really attractive” instead of, “When you’re singing this phrase, pretend you’re singing it to your beautiful girlfriend” can reveal to students that you (may) reject hegemonic and heteronormative assumptions. (p. 33)

Palkki goes on to say that: “Words and phrases that seem insignificant to a heterosexual male may make a positive impact on (or be devastating to) a transgender and/or gay male” (p. 33). Palkki makes three suggestions for leaders to model and encourage a spectrum of masculinities within choral music classrooms, through repertoire selection, the structure of choral music programs, and the careful use of
language in a way that remains open and that models inclusivity. In more recent times, Palkki’s work has explored transgender individuals in relation to classroom choral singing (Palkki, 2016). I look forward to reading forthcoming contributions.

**Working with transgender singers.** Music directors committed to fostering a socially inclusive environment face the question of how to enact Higgins’s notion of hospitality. While members interviewed for this study identified as transgender, Beale (2017) sets out the need for MDs need to actively facilitate this sense of safety within the musicking space. In vocal pedagogy and education settings, it seems there are only limited academic studies specifically exploring the transgender voice, such as works by Richard Adler, Kenneth Hirsch, and Sandy Mordaunt (2012), and even less on transgender choral music. Joshua Palkki (2016) and colleagues are pioneering scholarship in this specialised area, including a critique of masculinity, femininity, and gender in relation to choral singing (Palkki, 2015). Beale’s (2017) work breaks new ground in his exploration of the transgender musical voice and choral singing in adult community settings. Beale briefly discusses the needs of this cohort, and rightly calls for queer choir directors to be trained specifically in this area (Beale, 2017, p. 376). While some resources for choir practitioners are available (GALA Choruses, 2015), there is more to be done.

Choir leaders can play a key role in providing the space and support that enables the formation of a transgender singer’s musical identity, using the affordances of the choir’s musicking environment and artefacts. In doing so, they can support the social identities of these singers. My practice as youth chorus MD would have benefited from such training. While no transgender members of the choir put themselves forward for interviews for this study, I welcomed several youth chorus members during my tenure. I
was conscious that transgender singers require extra support, but at that time did not grasp the complexity of the issues faced by them (such as the impact of hormonal therapies on the voice, for example).

**Challenging conventions in choral voice part allocation.** With the goal of facilitating gender diversity, and recognising gender fluidity within a choir, several practical steps can challenge the internalised heteronormativity of a choir setting. Within the rehearsal, choir facilitators can ask for and use preferred pronouns for individual singers and include these in the introduction of individual members and on name tags, to assist others to recognise and counter internalised heteronormativity and embrace non-gender specific language in their everyday interactions within the choir. Introductions with preferred pronouns in public performances can also deepen awareness of audiences during performances.

Cor Flammae (2017), a queer choir based in Vancouver, Canada, offers a distinct perspective on traditional choral music. A choir of classically-trained singers, Cor Flammae explores a queer musical worldview through its choral singing. The choir’s website suggests a choir that challenges choral conventions by subverting the typical gender binaries in the performance dress of its singers, for instance. I suspect the choir may also challenge traditional positioning of singers according to their vocal range.

A step further would be to remove discrimination according to vocal range altogether and challenge the discourses of power that operate within the music itself. Foucault (1997, cited in Peraino, 2006) might describe such choral practices as technologies of power: practices that “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends” (p. 195). For selected pieces within a concert repertoire, it might
be possible to go beyond what has already been established in terms of queering of musical repertoire thought text, style, and performance format (MacLachlan, 2015), and answer Beale’s call for an LGBTI choral pedagogy (Beale, 2017, p. 377). By challenging long-standing compositional techniques, possibilities emerge to compose repertoire specifically for queer choir.

**Repertoire: (Re)claiming a queer choral compositional style?**  
Going further than conventional practices that determine the voice allocation of singers according to voice type (GALA Choruses, 2015), it might be possible to look more closely at choral practices that perpetuate conventions of gender identity and that may lead to gender dysphoria. In writing for queer choirs, composers might consider drawing upon elements common in early polyphonic music from the ninth century AD, a compositional technique that has often been criticised within Western composition styles, in part for its instability and difficulty to sing. The principle of *composite organum* in particular – the doubling of voices at the octave – might allow a composer for queer choirs to allocate parts by line number rather than register. A piece scored strictly for a choir of Sopranos, Altos, Tenors, and Basses (SATB), for instance, would be open to all singers across both the higher and lower registers that conventionally separate (female) Soprano and Alto singers from (male) Tenor and Bass singers respectively. Composing across these two registers suggests eight possible parts running in parallel octaves: akin to *two* SATB choirs singing in parallel with a mix of male and female timbre. This would be determined by a singer’s *preferred* register, with traditional choral parts de-linked from gender identity: S- S₁-A- A₁-T₁-T₁-B₁-B.

In twentieth century music composition, this aligns with an aleatoric compositional style, but one where choice rather than chance determines the allocation
of parts. Singers would choose or be allocated parts, and parallel octaves would be used to allow for differences in vocal range. This would free choral singing of its gendered voice part identities, and pre-empt any sense of vocal dysphoria experienced by members whose gender identity is different from their vocal identity as determined by their register. In other words, it would recognise that traditional choral music ascribes to vocal parts a gender identity that may be dysphoric. Such an approach might offer a new frontier and a chance to include truly queer repertoire within a choral library. Such music could be both queer in spirit and practice, rendering sexual identities and gender musically irrelevant, and musically celebrating and exploring gender diversity.

Sharing Lessons and Stories Beyond This Thesis

I am committed to sharing my thesis findings with youth chorus members and the queer community. As agreed in my ethics application, I shared a one-page summary of the findings with individual members interviewed in July 2017. For ease of accessibility for this generation of “digital natives” (White & Wyn, 2013, p. 193), the same results were provided in an online presentation posted to YouTube clip in August 2017, available to view at https://youtu.be/Me4aB61LCf8, and circulated to other members of MGLC Inc. In August 2017, I plan to present more detailed, practical findings of this research to MGLC Inc’s committee of management and in individual discussions with the current youth chorus and main chorus MDs. I aim to disseminate these scholarly findings more broadly, submitting discrete aspects of these findings to community music theory and practice journals internationally, to Australia’s choral music journal Sing Out, and to journals for LGBT Youth. I note the establishment of a fledgling social media site by Palkki that is devoted to “queering choir” (Palkki, 2017). It offers a platform for sharing research and practice ideas.
Musically, I plan to enact an important insight gained over the course of this thesis by composing a choral work specifically for a queer youth choir. In its compositional style, the work would allow for the free selection of parts irrespective of gender identity as discussed above. This compositional element offers promises a response to van Manen’s proposition (2016) that “phenomenology craves creativity” (p. 63). This exemplar, I hope, might begin to address what Beale (2017) describes as a badly needed “gender non-conforming choral pedagogy” (p. 376). Such pedagogy would benefit from both close attention to the unique qualities required of an LGBT pedagogy, but go beyond that, seeking to be both truly inclusive and activist, as Beale outlines (p. 377). I hope other choral composers might turn their attention to this specialised area and the potential to foster a more inclusive choral pedagogy, in both lyrical and musical terms.
Chapter 11: Closing Reflections

One challenge, then, for future research on the topic of music and wellbeing is to document the ethno-methods (mundane and often hidden practices) of how music is drawn into performative activity by which the future perfect of wellbeing (for any duration of time) is achieved. If this understanding of wellbeing through music in everyday life points once again to a quasi-magical conception of music’s powers, there is however a difference: this time, music’s magic can be seen to involve concrete, careful and caring human practices. These practices are in the deepest sense the things that render health and illness as aesthetic and ethical matters to be shared. (DeNora, 2013, p. 143)

Taking up DeNora’s challenge to capture the performative elements of everyday practices in music that foster wellbeing, this study of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus has explored the complex and at times conflicting ways in which members find wellbeing through their participation, and critically uncovers those elements – observed in the choir’s gender and sexual identity – that can challenge and undermine wellbeing. It is my contention that the youth chorus, a choir of SSAGD young people, constitutes an example of “concrete, careful and caring human practices” through choral singing, and with both aesthetic and ethical elements woven into its fabric.

Wellbeing is something to be cherished, as Havi Carel (2008) beautifully depicts in her phenomenology of illness. It is: “…the invisible context enabling us to pursue possibilities and engage in projects. It is the condition of possibility enabling us to follow through aims and goals, to act on our desires, to become who we are” (p. 53). This thesis is also an exploration of the ongoing personal wellbeing I have found in choral musicking as on my illness journey with cancer.
Looking Back

Guided by the data, I delayed my exploration of LGBT and queer theoretical perspectives in relation to this choir – a move that on reflection seems odd given the centrality of sexuality and gender to the study. Where a space to be queer was a crucial element to this experience, deeper understandings of members’ queerness and the relationship between their queer identities and the chorus were less prominent in the mix. My hesitance to bring a queer theoretical lens until late in the thesis writing may be reflective of its omission from the interview data. The interviews instead suggested the importance of sociological understandings as a place of safety, social and musical achievement, and for the exploration of identities, with a more limited exploration of sexuality and gender identities than I had anticipated. Accordingly, I first looked to sociological understandings of the choir and its role in the members’ musical and social lives. The resulting thesis misses a deeper engagement with queer theory, reflected with LGBTI, queer, and critical theories, in the lack of closer and more in-depth examination of gender subversion at camp, for example.

Without the intermission of my illness, this would have been an opportunity for me, enabled by the original constructivist grounded theory framework and a focus on addressing social exclusion, to more fully explore issues of gender and sexuality within the choir. Similarly, a more critical exploration would have allowed me to develop deeper understandings of how members interact with gender and sexual identities.

Reflecting on the Potential Costs of Gentle Activism

I see gentle activism practiced both by choir members in their membership and performing with the youth chorus. Yet in this study a gentle activism is also present in the interviewers’ care to establish a safe interviewing space for members to bring up
issues of gender and sexuality, without the requirement to generate deeper insights. This conceptual space afforded breadth and valuable insights into the social and musical worlds of the singers. However, in doing so the opportunity to delve deeper into member understandings of social exclusion as it relates to the gender and sexual identity was passed over. Like the choir members, the generous colleagues who undertook interviews on my behalf are shaped by their own backgrounds and social worlds, as heterosexual and cisgender individuals, within a society that eschews critical questioning of strangers within informal and community settings.

**Learning from My Brain Cancer Journey**

My disclosure of a cancer diagnosis – like my coming out journey – while initially a point of trauma and regret, has become another component of my personal and social identity. In a comparable way to Havi Carel and her struggles, noted at the beginning of this chapter, living with cancer has sharpened my view of the things that matter most in my life – relationships, family, a sense of musical vocation, and a desire to share in a way that plants in others the seeds for future curiosity, interest, passion, and activism, through music.

Suffering transforms, and in the months following surgery and having resigned from MGLC Inc, I keenly felt the sense of loss of the choir’s social and musical networks, and my role as a leader and mentor within it. I grieved for the joy of our weekly rehearsals: a vibrant community musicking setting that had nourished and sustained me since 2009 and supported my return to a “measure of health” following my first two surgeries. My health identity combines both ascription and construction that is akin to the physical manifestations of sex and sexual preference as something ascribed, while gender and sexuality are socially constructed and negotiated. The
integration of my health narrative into choir rehearsals and, indeed, into this thesis, represents a new negotiation of an identity that I did not choose: ascribed physically and negotiated socially. It is manifest in the physical and emotional challenges in creating this thesis. The analysis and writing process was hindered by my recovery from neurosurgery and impacted in a very practical sense on my ability to physically type, write, to concentrate and reflect for sustained periods of time. As my health improved since 2015, so too have my neurological capacities.

My life with cancer and my coming out journey have in common a process of “letting go” of identities past, of acceptance, and, eventually, of embracing new identities. I hear echoes of the preparation for a public disclosure of my sexuality in 2005 that broke from a pre-conceived, assumed (cisgender) heterosexual social identity of myself, and gradually embraced my gay male identity.

In its place, I found a measure of pride in survivorship, a motivation for health and wellbeing, for spiritual exploration, for adventure and a life without regret. I found a community of other young people living with brain cancer. Just as members of the youth chorus value the public performance of their identities, so too I have learned to embrace a public identity that was at first challenging and confronting: as a person living with cancer. I have experienced a sense of detachment or exclusion keenly felt I suspect by those with a life-threatening illness and captured in Carel’s vivid description of the social isolation as a falling out of step with the social lives of the healthy (2008, p. 50): a separateness from those living healthily within our communities, and an understanding that measures of health and wellbeing are fragile and exist in close company with ecologies of illness (DeNora, 2012).
Looking Forward: Representation and Changing Youth Chorus Identities

Neil Bartlett (cited in Brett et al., 2006) says of the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895, “The question was, and is, who speaks, and when, and for whom, and why” (p. 23).

Youth chorus members, alongside their fellow main chorus members, claim to represent the LGBTI community in Melbourne. Natalie explains their role in part as symbolic – in providing the image of, hopefully, “the sort of happy group of out people, you know, sort of like a walking talking ‘it gets better’” (¶127), referring to an online coming out project for young people.\(^{13}\) Developments since the completion of these ten interviews suggest the youth chorus has taken its claim to represent its queer generation seriously. It lobbied within MGLC Inc to rename the choir, shifting its public identity to better reflect its membership.

**shOUT: Renaming the youth chorus.** In 2015, the youth chorus changed its name to shOUT Youth Chorus, remaining the youth chorus of MGLC Inc (with the main chorus retaining MGLC as its name). This move, that I understand (and recall) was contentious within MGLC Inc, might again be viewed as an act of gentle activism. Youth chorus members argued for several years that changing to a more inclusive name would signal the choir as a place for all SSAGD and gender questioning young singers, alongside their heterosexual allies, to sing. It would afford a sense of safety for a cohort of young people to explore their own sexual and gender identities across the full spectrum of queer identities. A less explicit – and therefore more neutral – name would allow too an added layer of discretion for members still questioning their gender or sexual identity. In my experience, the value of discretion within this choir was

\(^{13}\) [http://www.itgetsbetter.org/](http://www.itgetsbetter.org/)
particularly important. As MD, I sought to enact this principle by exercising discretion about choir’s social media presence and in emphasising public performances as optional for members, something that came as a surprise to James.

The change of name deliberately sought to bring the youth choir’s public profile into line with the experiences and diversity that had been reflected within it for many years. It signalled a broader conceptual space, open to all those who identify as queer: particularly those on the margins of the LGBTI community, but also heterosexual members who identify with the choir’s queer cause. The name change is particularly important for a younger generation of LGBTI singers for whom gender is no longer perceived to be binary and who seek to identify as queer. Conceptually, this step challenged the primacy of the gay and lesbian majority, their history, the community music structures that had been carefully built, and perhaps too their own sense of the choir as a music asylum. I suspect this was made more problematic given it was driven by the young members of a choir that had been established with the goodwill and financial support of the main chorus.

It has challenged the hegemony of the choir’s lesbian and gay identity, their claims to represent the queer community, and made space for all identities within the choir – regardless of sexuality or gender identity. By contrast, members of the main chorus voted to retain their name, preserving the clear, bold, and political statement that “gay and lesbian” evokes in Australia, with a by-line that makes clear its openness to all SSAGD people. The main chorus decision reflects it seems a generation of singers who fought hard for the right to sing their “out and proud” as gays and lesbians.

There is a recognition by the ten youth chorus members interviewed of the need to strike a balance. On the one hand, members value the history of the struggle for
recognition of lesbian and gay rights and the ongoing struggle to secure these rights in law, social, and cultural convention. On the other, the acknowledge the importance for a new generation of queer people of those others within the queer community and the choir’s role as a voice for all members of Melbourne’s’ queer community, including those not identifying as lesbian women or gay men.

**Concluding Thoughts**

I suggest the challenge for the youth chorus lies in balancing its gentle activism and the sense of responsibility that might at times require bolder positions as singers and queer performers. As an organisation with the regular opportunity to perform publicly, the youth chorus might consider in what ways its performances can also educate about conventions of gender identity and raise awareness of heteronormativity that is present in Australian society. Such an approach would reflect the choir’s valuing of the important community music principle of social justice. It would also expose and challenge dominant paradigms relating to gender and sexuality in community choral music.

MGLC Inc and its musical leaders offer youth chorus members an opportunity to construct liveable musical and social worlds as SSAGD young people (Butler, 2004). The choir’s musical ecology, captured in the experience of members, reveals individuals wrestling with deeper challenges such as the need to conform to the structures of the choir; decisions about when to subvert and make visible what the heteronormative social world renders invisible; and decisions about when to fall back on, and accept, the safety of stable identities as LGBTI singers, and when to resist this categorisation and instead celebrate deviance, queerness, and the resistance of identity. There are challenges for the youth chorus in the decisions it makes, particularly around public
performances, how it defines musical quality, and the value placed upon its musical products.

Challenged and inspired by the stories of ten members, this thesis has presented a more nuanced picture of what it means to sing in the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus and suggested some of the wider dilemmas of inclusion, exclusion, and identity, for choirs that seek to be socially inclusive. The challenge for community choral leaders working with queer choirs is to act as role models and advocates for member’s queer identities, while balancing the responsibility to foster identity stability. Both roles can be reinforced or compromised through musicking in the youth chorus, which in turn can challenge or support the queer musical identities of individual members. The negotiation of this tension sits at the heart of the youth chorus, suggestive of a wider paradox in relation to gender identities:

If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility. (Butler, 2004, p. 3)

At the centre of the paradox of this youth chorus and its young queer singers sits both possibility and potential, and music enables both.
References


Ansdell, G., & DeNora, T. (2012). Musical flourishing: Community music therapy,


De Quadros, A. (2015). Rescuing choral music from the realm of the elite: Models for


Freer, P. K. (2007). Between research and practice: How choral music loses boys in the"


Hadley, S. (2013). Dominant narratives: Complicity and the need for vigilance in the creative arts therapies. The Arts in Psychotherapy, 40(4), 373-381. DOI:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2013.05.007


Ideologisierung des deutschen Männergesangs im "Nationalsozialismus"
[Between "a singing club" and "steely romanticism": The ideologisation of German male choirs during the Nazi period]. Stuttgart, Germany: Metzler.


Lorber, J. (1996). Beyond the binaries: Depolarizing the categories of sex, sexuality,


McKay, G., & Higham, B. (2012). Community music: History and current practice, its constructions of "community", digital turns and future soundings, an Arts and Humanities Research Council research review. *International Journal of Community Music, 5*(1), 91-103. DOI:10.1386/ijcm.5.1.91_1


of philosophy (Winter 2016 ed.).


what to do. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.


Wakeling, K. (2014). 'We're all on the path ourselves': The 'reflective practitioner' in participatory arts with older people. Journal of Arts & Communities, 6(2/3), 189-203. doi:10.1386/jaac.6.2.189_1


Whitehead-Pleaux, A., Donnenwerth, A. M., Robinson, B., Hardy, S., Oswanski, L. G.,


Appendices
Appendix A: Bracketing Interview (Self-Reflections)

Ben’s “Bracketing Interview” – 18 August 2015
(with thanks to Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1997)

My assumptions, expectations and hopes for the research:

- That choir does good.
- That members are typically better-off after coming to choir.
- To study the emergence of leadership and qualities of leadership as key issue, proving my own leadership qualities and shortcomings through my research and reflecting on my particular view of what “leadership” is. This was in retrospect a fairly narrow sense of leadership (generally and within choral leadership). My views of leadership on beginning this PhD did not consider: the wider impression I make as an “out” gay man leading a group such as this without fear or with my fears acknowledged openly and shared; indirect leadership and my influence over member attitudes, and; role-modelling as leadership.
- To uncover the negative impacts of this choir upon its members. This stems from the suicide of a young member in 2013 and the subsequent soul-searching and introspection we experienced as a choir.

NOTES on my background and influences:
I am cognisant of my background as a white, Christian male raised in a supportive family in a safe and relatively sheltered country community in the Barossa Valley, South Australia. Relative privilege of my upbringing and good fortune to be well and undertaking a PhD at an elite university. Sense of gratefulness of this. Desire for my PhD to improve lives and understanding, to shine light on those who wouldn’t normally receive such a focus, and in this way to sublimate the stereotypes that surround choral music, singing and PhDs in this area. Desire to explore power and privilege, deeper critical lens and look at existing literature (queer theory?)

My focus on community musicking and music rather than elite music is deliberate. In part, this is an acknowledgement that I lack skills and drive for perfection of an elite musician, but there is an even stronger drive within me for social justice: to bring music to those who have not had the good fortune of my circumstances and opportunities for study and personal development. I enact this in my research project and in all other aspects of my life (as far as possible) and am conscious that I have surrounded myself with music therapists - individuals whose drive is largely similar to mine.

Background of empirically-based analysis in policy and political science. Previous PhD commenced within a social constructivist (Political Science and International Relations) framework that didn’t allow for personal inclusions and narratives. Hence my first visit to Kat with goal of creating a “checklist” for choral conductors about leadership of community youth choirs working in social inclusion. Clearly problematic in terms of variability across groups. But following this first discussion I gradually owned up to my ontological presumptions and bias (toward firm truths in the world out there) and presumptions (the knowledge gained in the course of my experience as an MD might be
transferrable, at least as a set of derived principles, for choirs elsewhere). I learned over a period of months the difficulties in taking such an objectivist line to my research, and of the importance of subjective qualitative research that doesn’t hide behind objectivist methods. To say this in more abstract terms, many different varieties of flowers may blossom in the field of scientific inquiry and such a multitude of colours, shapes and sizes is something to be celebrated!

My tendency to seek reduction into neat and often over-simplistic packages, and frustration at complex and messy discussions. This perhaps links to previous employment in public service and need for concise policy analysis that lingered as my academic studies restarted.

Background as gay man who came out relatively late (age 25) and after a traumatic few years, therapy, sense of isolation and needing to separate from parents, confronting fears about consequences of coming out. Worked intensively over six-month period with counsellor to build resilience. Started with closest friends and parents, moved on to other friends. Almost without exception supportive responses from all, and where some difficult reactions they resolved themselves over time.

Background as man with brain cancer diagnosis (2012), several medical treatments and ongoing fears for health and regular check-ups. Knowledge of the poor survival rates for my tumour type and the drive to contribute across many communities while it remains possible to do so. This stance has led to (a) an integration of my passions and “day job” to a PhD on this topic; (b) a PhD topic that closely aligns with my value set - singing as a positive and empowering experience, singing as tool to build resilience, singing leadership as vocation for me. Yet the closeness of my PhD topic to issues relating to cancer and existential issues around life and death (and the work of MT colleagues in these areas), combined with regular presentations relating to neuroscience, resonate with my own personal narrative, experiences of neurological consequences of my diagnosis and treatments to date, and my deeper desire to find cure for an incurable disease.
Appendix B: Sample Personal/Practice Journal Entries

Reflections on Youth Chorus rehearsal (30 October 2013)

Two weeks to performance, so powerful to see everyone there on time, nervous and having worked so hard to learn the music. A sense of cohesion that the preparation for a public performance brings on. Hard work leading, and a sense for the first time in a while that I was being listened to, reflected musically in the style. A demanding 2hr rehearsal in total, and it was clear from last week that there was a stronger sense of solidarity. At the end of rehearsal, with everyone sitting around (some on floor, some on tables/chairs but all relaxed, I let a discussion on costuming play out where there were significant differences of opinion. It wasn't resolved and was interesting to watch as different people sought clarity while others jumped in with their strong personal preferences or with 'interference' type jokes and comments (to diffuse the situation). In the end, the rep sought a clear answer and it became clear that promises made in earlier rehearsals were not in keeping with new feeling for costume. I then tried to summarise where we were and asked the concert leader to summarise and then put a decision out by email that balanced personal preference and identity with 'professional' looking standard most members wanted given we were performing. After all this, nearing the end of rehearsal and with a sense that my “thank yous” and feedback had run their course I suspect, Y stood up and asked to speak.

Unsolicited, he talked about how he appreciated the amount of work everyone had put in, that they must be nervous with the performance coming up, and that he was thankful for all their work. He talked in the collective ('we're in this together') and when he finished speaking everyone applauded. With this 20 second statement, he’d managed to bring the group together again after a small disagreement, and focus on the project at hand and keep people motivated. It took the responsibility for this from my position. This was superb, it reinforced what I'd been trying to do from a different angle, and was unsolicited.

As Y finished and the applause died down, I said "I agree with everything Y just said". I feel in hindsight this detracted from the overall comments, and should have been left without further comment from me. I had (unintentionally) pulled what Y had done back toward the MD and traditional leadership models I was used to. Y is studying social work at uni and has a natural instinct for this type of thing. He is someone we would like to take on a 'nightingale' type pastoral support role within the group. Next time this happens I won't intervene but leave it within the group.

Youth Chorus Reflections of Same Love Concert
(14 November 2013)
Themes: Relationships; Family Relationships; Institutional Identity

B & L are girlfriends who met in the youth chorus this year. Sunday was a very important day for them. Both had been heavily involved in the planning and behind the scenes aspects of the concert. As I ran about preparing for musical aspects of the show, I noticed from the corner of my eye as one proudly introduced her girlfriend to her parents (it seems for the first time). It was a beautiful moment of vulnerability and pride, all the more unusual in the context of it being a
same-sex couple meeting parents in a room full of other same sex couples, individuals, families, and supporters.

By contrast, T, 19 years old, brought his parents to see him perform for the first time, but narrated to me after the show that he hadn't told them of the identity of the choir (as LGBTI). T's parents were very uncomfortable in the setting, he said, and left early on (3rd song in the show, out of 16 songs). He later told me his mother had been more upset about him not disclosing the type of choir he was singing in than the nature of the choir itself. It was an important lesson in trust between them I thought, and I later wrote to T that it was clear his mother loved him and wanted to share his life with him. This appeared (by his account) far more the issue than his sexuality.

As I went about my business during the day, I occasionally caught eyes with other parents in the room, who had arrived early to help or to watch the show. Some had looks of fear in their eyes, others had looks of pride and solidarity. All speculative of course, and based on my impressions, but a powerful reminder to me of the role this choir plays for its members and families, and that the coming out journey is just that, with people around a young LGBTI person as affected by the journey as the person themselves. In the room that day were supporters and individuals at all different stages of that journey.

Further Reflections on Concert, Massive Involvement (15 November 2013)

Watching one member of Massive as his performance practice improved over several workshops and after seeing Massive’s performance in the Recital Centre. His confidence grew to the point that he took a solo role in the performance with us, and seemed more at ease in the performance than in earlier workshops. I am unsure whether this was due to his familiarity with other members, and the effect of singing with an openly LGBTI audience/choir? There were so many parents, partners, siblings, and friends to fill the room with warmth, friendship and familiarity. The support of the crowd for the choir in this setting is crucial. Perhaps more striking was the support of the adults of MGLC working and volunteering to support the youth chorus members. This was important in providing a sense of safety and security among youth chorus members.

It was very rewarding to see one member, E, having such a good time after discussing with me the health impacts she feared from anxiety, and seeking my guarantee she could withdraw from the concert at any time of rehearsal and performance. She sat out of a piece claiming she hadn’t learned it, then afterwards came up to me with a smile on her face and asked if she could sing with the group for this piece in performance, because it was so much fun. My own anxiety around my health and fears of an episode during the performance, allayed by the thrill of leading the group and reassurances of several others in the room that I would be looked after if anything happened.

The family and community nature of the performance resonated with me. On arrival at 1pm, P’s family were hard at work with him setting up the room and decor, and he had it all organised. I was proud to have been able to hand over this element of the design and for it to have been done so well, complete with rose petals for the love lounge at the front of the stage. An enduring memory is of the children/siblings of some Massive members with shining eyes as they showed me green gemstones they’d collected from among the decor. Something for everyone!
### Appendix C: Sample Interview Transcripts with Annotations

**Interview with Paige Adams, 12 December 2014 (¶¶2-25)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Discussion/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer 1</strong></td>
<td>Okay, so: what we might start with is, um, can you think of a set of – oh, just... for Ben, we’re talking to [Paige], so, hi Ben!</td>
<td>Relaxed, friendly introduction from interviewer, very low key. Interviewer matches register for this younger member perfectly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>Hi Ben!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[...]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>Oh, no idea, there’s so many options [chuckling]. I don’t even know!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer 1</strong></td>
<td>That’s alright, you don’t HAVE to think of something now.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>I’ll try to think of something later maybe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer 1</strong></td>
<td>Yeah. If some...we’ll revisit at the end, but if something pops into your head as we’re going through [Paige chuckles], just stop me and we’ll, we’ll ah chuck it in there.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>Okay.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer 1</strong></td>
<td>Okay, oops (hanging sound). Alright, so... basically today, um, what I want to talk about is just ah, try to, get an understanding of, or for you to give me an understanding of the choir, um, ah, what it’s about, what it’s like to be a part of it, um, what it means to you, and um, yeah, just basically that sort of thing, so...um, yeah, so maybe if you could just start by telling me a little bit about the choir itself? I know a little bit from what Ben’s told me, but um, yeah...</td>
<td>Excellent signposting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>Um, so the youth choir is sort of a subsection of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus, and it’s a much smaller group, um, from 16-30. Um, but I believe it’s 19–28 or something at the moment. [chuckles]</td>
<td>Youth choir as “subsection”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Factual introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer 1</strong></td>
<td>Yeah right!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>Um, I really really love the choir because the people are so amazing. Um, and, I... even though it has changed quite a bit since it started. I um joined the choir in February 2012, um, and I’ve been a bit in and out for a number of reasons not to do with choir. [mm-hmm] Um, but I’ve met so many amazing people through choir and that’s the reason I stayed and I just... I, love the atmosphere and the concerts and singing with such as talented group of people and such a great conductor and it’s um, yeah it’s really great I love being part of, like, my community, in this way--</td>
<td>To emotional response to choir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognises change to choir since starting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasises and slows down on “so many amazing people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NB threading of sentences together – pacing unusual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paige

–because I’m not a part of any other LGBT groups. Um, and this was the first one I’d joined. I’d come out a couple of months previous, um, to joining, and, it was a really important part of me, um, finding myself and, meeting other people who’d been through the same sort of thing.

Interviewer 1

Yep.

Paige

So that was really important. Um, to me, and it really helped me to come out of my shell as well. Um, even though it took a little bit!–

Interviewer 1

Yeah?

Paige

Uh-huh [chuckles]! It was, it was really, really great. And I love the choir and I’m happy that I, have quite a few years left–

Interviewer 1

Yeah?

Paige

–um, I’ve had a few friends who’ve turned 30 and been…

Interviewer 1

Yeah, ok!

Paige

–sort of, not allowed to be a part of it anymore.–

Interviewer 1

Yeah.

Paige

–not really anyone’s fault. Um, but yeah. I’m – really excited with where it’s going because we’re growing and, um – and yeah it’s great [chuckles]…

Interview with James Anderson, 21 December 2014 (¶¶62-77)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Discussion/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 2</td>
<td>Where they, um gay and lesbian choirs or where they..</td>
<td>Humour making increasing appearances as he gets more comfortable in the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>No, um…No! Like I’ve never, I’ve never sung in a gay and lesbian choir before, um, before I, yeah, joined this one. Um, the youth choir was just the youth choir, um, and, um [chuckles] the organiser of the choir [inaudible] was probably some kind of gay and lesbian choruses [sic; breaks into deep laughter] [Both laugh].</td>
<td>Interviewer 2 responding with encouragement and deeper questioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 2</td>
<td>Yep, fair enough!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>You know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 2</td>
<td>Yep.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
James: Yep

Interviewer 2: So did it feel different joining one that was a gay and lesbian chorus?

James: Yeah definitely..

Interviewer 2: ...chorus?

James: Um. And it wasn’t that I was apprehensive but I was definitely, yeah I mean it definitely felt like something, was … different, I mean something, that I, hmm, not that I had to be careful in any way, but I just felt I had to be, just, I don’t know, just that something was different. Umm, and … but in a good way I guess. Um, and it’s [inaudible], like, I’m going back to [my home country] in June and, you know, I want to join the [local gay chorus] or whatever. It’s inspired me to do so.

Interviewer 2: Hmm [bird noises continue in foreground throughout interview]

James: Um, yeah.

Interviewer 2: So, I might be hard to articulate but can you have a go at trying to explain how it did feel different?

James: Yeah, um … so, um, I did my, um, I did history at uni. I did my dissertation on gay rights [in Australia] and um, and I have read a lot.. [background talking and bird noises continue] um, not all of it obviously but a lot about the movement in general from when it began and, you know, I’ve always been very interested in that part of my history, um, and [SMS ringtone], sorry!

Interviewer 2: That’s alright!

James: Um, when I joined I definitely felt like I was kind of part of it more, like part of the community more I guess, um, the queer community..

NB: Felt: just that something was different…but in good way.

Interviewer 2: Clever!

James: Pauses here as he collects his thoughts here and prepares response.

Qualifies

Accents MY history.

James: Almost sighs at this point. 

NB: Queer community as reason for joining (“definitely”)
Appendix D: Participant Plain Language Statement and Consent Form

Plain Language Statement
Addressing experiences of social exclusion through community choral singing

Researcher details
Name: Associate Professor Katrina McFerran (Kat, Ben's principal supervisor and the responsible researcher)
National Music Therapy Research Unit, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
Email: k.mcferran@unimelb.edu.au and University phone number: +61 3 8344 7382

Name: Mr Benjamin Leske (Ben, student researcher)
PhD Candidate, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
Email: bpleske@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

Name: Associate Professor Felicity Baker
National Music Therapy Research Unit, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (Ben's co-supervisor and co-researcher)
Email: felicity.baker@unimelb.edu.au and University phone number: +61 3 9035 3057

Independent Recruiter
Name: Ms Cherry Hense
PhD Candidate, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
Phone Number: 0411 707 354
Email: c.hense@student.unimelb.edu.au

Project details
This research project is part of a PhD research project at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music.

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Associate Professor Katrina McFerran, Associate Professor Felicity Baker and Mr Benjamin Leske of the National Music Therapy Research Unit, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, The University of Melbourne. This project will form part of Ben’s PhD thesis and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee. You were selected as a potential participant because of your involvement as a singing member or associate of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus. The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of young people who sing in community youth choirs in Melbourne. In particular, it seeks to explore how singing in a community youth choir may address experiences of social exclusion by choir members.

Ms Cherry Hense has been engaged by the researchers as an independent recruiter for the project. Cherry will visit a rehearsal to provide you with hard copies of this paperwork, discuss the project and answer any questions you may have. If you are interested in participating, she will return at a later date to collect your consent form.
What will I be asked to do?

There are two key ways in which you would be invited to contribute. The first part is standard for all participants and the second is optional.

Part 1 - Interviews

We will ask you to participate in a semi-structured interview not exceeding one hour, sometime between September and November 2014. You will be interviewed by a current or former research student or staff member of the National Music Therapy Research Unit. We may also invite you to participate in a further interview between November 2014 and January 2015. With your permission, the interview would be tape-recorded so that Ben can ensure that he makes an accurate record of what you say. He will also be taking notes during the interview.

At the beginning of this interview, your interviewer will discuss with you a preferred pseudonym (a ‘made up’ name in place of your real name) for the researchers to use when presenting their research in future.

Part 2 – A journal (optional)

You may also choose to keep and submit an oral, video or written journal for three months from the date of your interview (including that day). Keeping a journal (Part 2) gives you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences of singing within this community choir. This submission may be in written, oral or video form, or a combination of these, and is entirely optional.

While only the project researchers would view your original journal submissions, we may like to use excerpts from your journal submissions in our future public presentations of our research findings, such as in PowerPoint presentations, speeches, books, articles and other publicity. You can make it clear to us in the consent form if you consent or decline to our request to have your video or audio material shown in these public presentations.

Will my ongoing involvement in the choir be affected by participating in this research?

If you are a choir member or associate of the student researcher (Ben), please be assured that your involvement in this project will not affect your ongoing membership of the Youth Chorus in any way, nor any other choral group he may lead during this time. If you have contact with the responsible researcher (Kat) or co-researcher (Felicity) in musical or other settings, please be assured that this research project will not prejudice your interactions with them in any way. It is your choice to participate or not participate in the project. Your involvement in the project is completely voluntary and you are free to choose not to participate or to withdraw from this study at any point. Further, you are free to withdraw any of your contributions to the project at any time until the data has been collated and it is no longer possible to separate your contribution to the overall data.

How long is my contribution expected to take?

We estimate that the time commitment required of you would be up to three hours: one hour for the interview and about two hours over a period of weeks if you choose to complete a journal. As mentioned above, you may also be invited to participate in a second interview of about one hour between December 2014 and February 2015.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this research. The information you provide in this study will help us to better understand the experiences of young people like you who sing in community youth choirs in Melbourne. You will not benefit financially from your involvement in this research project. No member of the research team will receive a personal financial benefit from your involvement in this research project (other than their ordinary wages).

How will any potential risks be minimised?

The risks involved in this project are envisaged to be minimal. You will not be asked to do anything other than what you would normally do when being interviewed. Cherry Hense has been brought into this project to help you to decide, independent of the researchers, about whether or not you would like to participate. Your decision to participate (or not to participate) won’t affect in any way your ongoing membership of the choir.
It is possible that participation in this research may cause you to feel sad as you talk about your experiences. A list of counselling and other support services will be provided to all participants at their interview that you can contact if you feel the need to discuss any issues arising from the interview. You can also speak to your interviewer, the researchers, your choir leaders, or Cherry, who may refer you to other counselling or support services.

Will I be able to be identified as a participant in this project?
You were selected as a potential participant because of your involvement as a singing member or associate of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus. We may use information you provide in your interview and/or journal in relation to this choir, but we would refer to you by a pseudonym and would remove any contextual details that might reveal your identity. If you would prefer some comments to be made off the record, you could indicate this during the interview. We would protect your anonymity to the fullest possible extent within the limits of the law; your name and contact details would be kept in a password-protected computer file separate from any data you supply. You should note, however, that since the number of potential interviewees is small, it might still be possible for someone to identify you.

What about confidentiality?
The researchers will keep all audio recordings of interview material along with transcriptions of these interviews in password-protected files. Access to computer files is available via password only and by interviewers or named researchers only to protect the confidentiality of data that you provide. There are legal limits to data confidentiality. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions.

As discussed above, you may wish to provide us optional written, oral or video journal submissions in addition to your interview. These may be given to Ben or Cherry in hard copy and would be stored securely at all times. Ben will convert your audio, video or written submissions to soft (computer) format and upload these to a secure computer file server. Original (hard) copies will be destroyed securely.

Ben, Kat and Felicity will review your original submissions for their research, and may report your comments in their research using a pseudonym. Ben, Kat and Felicity may also use your video or oral journal reflections for future public presentations using a pseudonym if you choose to ‘opt in’. If not, your original submissions will be viewed only by the researchers.

What happens to my contributions after the project has finished?
Materials collected during this study will be retained for a minimum of five years after publication of the research in the student researcher’s dissertation in accordance with the University’s Code of Conduct for Research. Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, the researchers will provide you a summary of the findings by email. It is also possible that these results and any comments you make in your journals will be presented at academic conferences and public presentations or published in academic journals or books. The data will be kept securely for five years from the date of publication before being destroyed.

What if I have concerns?
If you have any questions or concerns, or would like further information about the research project, please contact the researchers or Cherry. Contact details are listed at the start of this Plain Language Statement. If you are concerned about the conduct of the project, please contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073 or fax: 9347 6739.

What happens next?
Thanks for considering this invitation to participate in our research project. If you do decide to participate, Cherry will provide you with a consent form. Please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it to Cherry. Whether or not you decide to participate, this Plain Language Statement is yours to keep.

HREC: 090001 ETHICS APPLICATION ID: 1441649.1 DATE: April 2014 PLS VERSION: 2
Consent Form

Addressing experiences of social exclusion through community choral singing

Researchers' names:
Associate Professor Katrina McFerran;
Associate Professor Felicity Baker;
Mr Benjamin Leske

National Music Therapy Research Unit, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep;

2. I agree that the researchers may use my contributions as described in the plain language statement;

3. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the student researcher;

4. I understand that my participation in this research project will involve:
   a. Being interviewed about community choral singing
   b. An option for me to submit written/aural/video journal reflections about community choral singing

I acknowledge that I have been informed that:

5. This project is for the purposes of research and the possible effects of participating in the research project have been explained to my satisfaction;

6. My involvement in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from this study at any point. Further, I am free to withdraw any of my contributions to the project at any time until the data has been collated and it is no longer possible to separate my contribution to the overall data;

7. While every precaution will be taken to protect my identity, the small numbers in this project may mean that I could be identified;

HREC: 090001 ETHICS APPLICATION ID: 1441649.1 DATE: April 2014
8. The confidentiality of any personal information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

9. Unless I give my consent, my interview transcripts and/or journal contributions to this project will only be viewed by the researchers listed above. Comments I make in my interview and journal submissions may appear under a pseudonym in the Student Researcher’s dissertation and future publications.

10. I may also wish to give my consent for the researchers to use excerpts from my audio and video journals when they present their research findings publicly.

11. Outcomes of this research may be published in other forms such as journal articles or conference papers;

12. I understand that the research will not directly benefit me.

Please tick:

I consent to my interview contribution to the project being audio-taped □ yes □ no

I consent to the use by the researchers of video and/or audio journal contributions that I provide to them for the purposes of publicly presenting their research findings (such as in a PowerPoint presentation, a book or article about the project). □ yes □ no

I wish to receive a short summary of the Student Researcher’s findings □ yes □ no

Name of participant:

Participant signature: ____________________________ Date: _______________________

HREC: 090001 ETHICS APPLICATION ID: 1441649.1 DATE: April 2014
Appendix E: Rationale for Changes to Ethics Application

(October 2014)

Rationale for changes to ethics application

Stage of project: Recruiter Cherry Hense visited the choir in late September 2014 to distribute key documents relating to the project. Consent forms have been received from fourteen members of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus wishing to participate in this research. In order to capture the data from participants within a reasonable timeframe after providing consent, the research team for this project would like to undertake interviews in coming weeks.

Unfortunately, due to an urgent health issue, the student researcher will be unable to conduct the interviewing as planned between October 2014 and January 2015. In his place, the research team proposes that seven colleagues from the National Music Therapy Research Unit have offered to conduct the interviews on his behalf. Lead researchers McFerran and Baker will oversee the interviews and ensure interviewers meet all requirements set out in the original ethics application for this project.

Recruitment of members of Massive Fam Hip Hop Choir has not been undertaken to date and it is proposed that interviews with members of this choir be postponed until the student researcher is able to conduct these.

Key changes:

- Seven researchers with interview experience (either PhD candidates or staff of NaMTRU) to conduct interviews with at least two members each.
- Contact details of participants will be shared with these seven researchers in order for them to arrange interviews.
- Interviews may be held at other suitable locations – either on campus at the University of Melbourne or close to the rehearsal venue for the choir.
- The research diary/journal of experiences would commence from the interview date for a period of three months. Research diaries would be returned to student researcher Leske at the conclusion of this time.
- All other aspects of the interview process would remain the same per the Plain Language Statement.

It is likely that the a different method of qualitative analysis will be needed. This will be determined after the first set of interviews are completed (a further ethics amendment may be required).
Appendix F: Interview Question Guide

**Background** [goals: rapport building, background info]

1. Name, age, preferred section to sing
2. Time in choir
3. Tell me more about your performances/rehearsals with the choir?
4. Tell me more about your educational background?
5. Tell me more about your singing/musical background?

**How did you come to join the choir?** [goals: better understanding influence of musical background, cultural, social, ‘coming out’, experiences of exclusion/inclusion]

Possible follow-up questions/cues:
1. Tell me a little more about how you came to join the choir
   a. How did you hear about the choir?
   b. Who influenced you to join?
   c. What made you decide to join the choir?
2. Tell me more about your first rehearsal/coming to choir the first time.
   a. Can you describe your feelings in the hours/days/weeks before joining?
   b. How did you feel as you went in?
   c. Were you welcomed, by whom and how?
   d. How did you feel afterwards?
   e. What made you decide to stay on?
3. Have you told many people about joining the choir?
   a. How did they react?
   b. How did you respond?
   c. How has their reaction changed over time?

**What does this choir mean to you?** [goals: understandings of connectness, social inclusion and leadership in relation to the choir and within the wider community; lessons from choir settings for everyday life]

Possible follow-up questions/cues:
1. Can you tell me more about your experiences with the choices of music and singing experiences (rehearsals, performances, activities) within this choir?
   a. What role do you think the choice of music has?
   b. What role do you think the rehearsals have?
   c. What role do you think the performances have?
2. How has the choir affected you?
   a. Tell me a little more about the experience?
   b. What role would you say the choir has for you in your life?
3. How do you think the choir might affect others in the group?
   a. What role do you think the choir might play for people who are not members (LGBTIQ/western suburbs community)?
   b. Some describe members of this choir as ‘leaders’ within the LGBTI/western suburbs community. Do you think they’re right? (why/why not?)
4. Can you tell me a little more about how the choir is led, and its describe for me a time/s where you’ve felt yourself taking the lead within the group?
5. How has your involvement in the choir influenced your relationships with friends and family outside choir, if at all?
6. When, if at all, have you felt excluded as a result of being part of this choir?
7. When, if at all, have you felt included as a result of being part of this choir?
   a. Can you describe for me what this felt like?
8. Tell me about your strengths that you discovered or developed through singing in the choir. [If appropriate] What do you most value about yourself now? What do others most value in you?
Why is singing in this choir important to you? [goals: experiences of a typical choir experiences, rehearsals and performances; discussions of the choir’s wider role within the community]

Possible follow-up questions/cues:
1. Can you describe for me an experience singing with the choir that stands out for you (it could be or good or bad reasons)?
   a. What happened? Who was involved? How did you feel at the time?
   b. Why have you chosen this particular experience?
2. Is there anything special/different about this choir?
3. How would you describe the choir to someone who knows nothing about it?
   Could you describe the most important lessons you learned about yourself/others in the community/others in choir through rehearsals and performances with the choir?
4. Who have been the most important persons for you within this group? Why?
5. Is there anything that occurred to you during this interview that you would like to mention?
6. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
Appendix G: Member Resources (Provided at Interview)

The Youth Chorus

where to debrief and to find out more info…

You might like to check out these organisations
if you’d prefer to speak to someone independent from MGLC

In-person:

Drummond St Services: http://www.ds.org.au/
Minus18: https://minus18.org.au/

Online:

It gets better (Australia): http://www.itgetsbetter.org.au/
Beyond Blue (Youth): http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/

Telephone support:

Beyond Blue (Youth): 1300 22 4636 and http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/
Appendix H: Ethics Approval Letters

To whom it may concern,

I write to confirm the support of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus Inc for your PhD research project exploring understandings of leadership identity within community choral singing. We note that one of the two choirs you would like to focus upon for your study is the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus. We are supportive of the project and would be happy to assist you in the recruitment of youth chorus members to interview, along with associates from MGLC’s broader membership and supporter base. We wish you all the best for the studies, and look forward to reading your findings.

Best regards,

Simon Fieldhouse
President, MGLC
To Whom It May Concern

Letter of Support for PHD – Addressing experiences of social exclusion through community choral singing

Cohealth via the Barkly Arts Program is pleased to support and partner with Benjamin Leake on the proposed PHD entitled Leadership and empowerment through community choral singing.

The PHD will seek to develop a theoretical understanding of how participation in a community choir addresses members’ experience of social exclusion. The Barkly Arts Massive choir members are willing to participate in qualitative interviews between September 2014 and February 2015.

The Barkly Arts Program and Massive Choir is keen to contribute to research and evidence base demonstrating the value of community choirs in addressing social inclusion for young people, and is hopeful that research such as this will support the ongoing contribution of community choirs into the future.

Sincerely

Jason Rostant
Director Advocacy and Partnerships
jason.rostant@cohealth.com.au
t: 03 9680 1152
RE: CONDITIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE for HREC 1441649 '...experience of social exclusion' (McFerran et al)

Jacky Angus [jsa@unimelb.edu.au]

Sent: Friday, May 16, 2014 1:08 PM
To: Benjamin Leske [b.leske@student.unimelb.edu.au]

Noted.

All the best

Jacky

Jacky S. Angus
Senior Human Research Ethics Officer (Humanities & Applied Sciences)
Office for Research Ethics & Integrity (OREI)
The University of Melbourne
780 Elizabeth Street, Parkville V3010 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 3 83442074 Fax: +61 3 93476739
jsa@unimelb.edu.au
http://www.research.unimelb.edu.au/humanethics/home
See also http://upclose.unimelb.edu.au/host/jacky-angus

From: Benjamin Leske [mailto:b.leske@student.unimelb.edu.au]
Sent: Thursday, 15 May 2014 10:55 PM
To: Jacky Angus
Cc: Katrina Skeews McFerran; Felicity Anne Baker; Vanda Arfi; Katy Greenland
Subject: Re: CONDITIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE for HREC 1441649 '...experience of social exclusion' (McFerran et al)

Dear Jacky,

Thank you very much for the good news! I have sent a further reminder to my contact at the Barkley Arts Centre. I will forward to you their endorsement letter by email as soon as it is received.

With best regards

Ben Leske (student researcher)

On Thu, May 15, 2014 at 5:59 AM, Jacky Angus <jsa@unimelb.edu.au> wrote:

Dear Researchers

I am pleased to inform you that you have obtained conditional ethics clearance from the Ethics Committee for the Humanities and Applied Sciences (HAPS). This clearance is subject to your provision of a copy of endorsement by the Barkley Arts Centre as specified in your application. This may be scanned and sent to me as an email. A formal letter confirming this 'conditional clearance' follows shortly. It will be addressed to Associate Professor Kat McFerran, cited as ‘responsible researcher’. The student/s should retain a copy of this formal letter for future reference.

Please note that your ethics clearance covers a total to five years. You will need to annually confirm the status of this project, via an Annual Report on Themis (a simple matter of ticking boxes on 3-4 screens). Annual reporting ensures that Themis doesn’t delete your record from the system. Your first Report is due in December this year (2014). Themis will generate an automatic reminder of this, before the due date.

N.B. future amendments you may wish to make with clear implications for ethics and integrity will need to be approved. This is a quick process (2-3 screens online). Once I receive a (hard) copy of this amendment, registered via Themis, downloaded and endorsed by your School ethics

https://owa.unimelb.edu.au/owa/?ace=lnmdt:IPMN0tedsl:c9gAAAAD60M%2cQ7bM9QrR1d8vZz5bDv9Ds2TbQo9HRbAEwsYBw7%AAAf7rAAA... 1/2
committee (HEAG), and providing the amendment is not problematic, **I can approve this immediately** on behalf of the HAPS, and let you know the result by email. This should mean there will be a minimum of delay to your work. My approval of your amendment is then ratified retrospectively by the committee. A letter confirming this is then sent to the responsible researcher.

Best wishes with the project.

**Jacky S. Angus**
Senior Human Research Ethics Officer (Humanities & Applied Sciences)  
Office for Research Ethics & Integrity (OREI)  
The University of Melbourne  
780 Elizabeth Street, Parkville V3018 AUSTRALIA  
Telephone: +61 3 83442074  Fax: +61 3 93476739  
jse@unimelb.edu.au  
http://www.research.unimelb.edu.au/humanethics/home  
See also http://upclose.unimelb.edu.au/host/jacky-angus
Appendix I: Speaking Notes for Recruiter

(October 2014)

Speaking notes for Ms Cherry Hense
– initial recruitment of members

[hand out PLS and Consent Form]

- Thanks for allowing me a few minutes to talk about a research project being conducted by Ben, Kat and Felicity at the University of Melbourne.
- This discussion an opportunity for you to find out about the project, the ways in which you may like to contribute, and to ask any questions about the project.
- This project is part of Ben’s PhD studies. Ben’s research topic is: “Addressing experiences of social exclusion through community choral singing.”
- In this study, Ben is interested in exploring the experiences of singers in community youth choirs in Melbourne, how singing in choirs may address the experiences of social exclusion for members. By social exclusion, we mean a sense of feeling detached or separated in some way (eg. from other people, groups, organizations, institutions, social relationships or social activities) here in Melbourne.
- Two choirs of focus for the researchers’ study: the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus and MassiveFam Hip Hop Choir.
- There are two ways you might like to contribute to this study – through an interview with Ben and also with an option to complete a video/audio/written diary over a three-month period of your experiences within the choir.
- You have a copy of a more detailed information sheet about the project that I will work through with you now
  [work through PLS systematically, explain consent form and process from here]

- Please take some time to consider whether you’d like to participate. If so, please complete consent form.
- I’ll [Cherry] return next week to collect consent forms from those interested.
Appendix J: Checklist for Interviewers

(October 2014)

Checklist for Interviewers of research participants

Thank you for agreeing to interview participants in this research project. In your interviews we ask that you foster a discussion about choir member experiences of participating in the choir and how it interfaces with their experiences of exclusion.

The people you will interview are members of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus and were recruited by Cherry Hense in September 2014. All have signed consent forms to participate. Please work through the following checklist when preparing to interview.

Please:

1. Conduct the interview in a suitable and safe location with OHS plans in place. Discuss and agree on the location in consultation with the participants.
2. Take the time to read the PLS carefully and address any questions you might have to the research team.
3. Talk through a copy of the consent form with participants carefully, noting that in some cases participants may have forgotten to tick boxes relating to the research. Return any consent forms that have changed (eg. Boxes ticked/changed) to Kat in hard copy.
4. Remind participants about the option for them to complete a diary (written, aural or video) and submit this in hard copy to Ben or Cherry three months after commencement. They may like to commence their diary after the interview finishes (reflecting on the interview experience perhaps?).
5. Refer to the sample interview questions when interviewing.
6. Remember to pass on to all participants you interview the resources sheet at the END of your interview.
7. To meet data storage requirements, please pass on your recording to Kat once your interview is finished and delete your copy from your recording device.

Research Project ID 1441649.2
TOPIC: Addressing experiences of social exclusion through community choral singing

Research team (per PLS)
Name: Associate Professor Katrina McFerran
National Music Therapy Research Unit, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
Email: k.mcferran@unimelb.edu.au and University phone number: +61 3 8344 7382

Name: Mr Benjamin Leske (Ben, student researcher)
PhD Candidate, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
Email: bplesk@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

Name: Associate Professor Felicity Baker
National Music Therapy Research Unit, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (Ben’s co-supervisor and co-researcher)
Email: felicity.baker@unimelb.edu.au and University phone number: +61 3 9035 3057

Independent Recruiter
Name: Ms Cherry Hense
PhD Candidate, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
Phone Number: 0411 707 354
Email: c.hense@student.unimelb.edu.au
Appendix K: Summary of Findings for Interview Participants

YouTube Clip: https://youtu.be/Me4aB61LCf8

Written summary of my findings

10 August, 2017

Hi there!

Thank you for your participation in my research project about the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus (Ethics ID 1441649.1). I want to thank you for sharing your stories so honestly and generously with me and the research team (including the interviewers). It’s clearly a place that has great meaning for you, a special place, and a nurturing place. As promised, I set out below what I found when exploring the nuances of this inspiring choir.

Safety & “assumed queer”

Fundamentally, the youth chorus is a place of safety. The foundation for this safety is an “assumed queer” place, where assumptions about a member’s sexuality and/or gender identity are not made or if so are correct. This fosters a deep sense of safety and security for a discreet time, every week. Safety is described in the choir’s physical spaces (rehearsal rooms, social events, camp, even on stage), and in more conceptual understandings (a place to be me; like family; a second home; and a special place). Safety is found in conforming to the choir’s structures and routines, both its management and the choir’s musical conventions. Choir is for some a place of safety from Melbourne’s judgemental LGBTI community.

Deep (clique-like) musical, social bonds: “The kind of family you want to be part of”

Members talk about the choir as a close-knit, familial group and describe the profound social impact on their lives. Joining the youth chorus wasn’t easy for everyone. Some members found it an immediately welcoming place, while others described it as a clique, both musically and socially. Close friendships and a sense of choir as a place of quality music making contributed to this sense, but members eventually found themselves within the choir’s close-knit social and musical community. This element contributes to the sense of safety and, paradoxically, the choir’s external profile as an inclusive place for young queer people.

Performing, Challenging, Singing Out, Coming Out!

Choir is a special place of which members are proud. I explored the ways in which members performed many different identities from the platform of safety that the choir

---

14 Queer here means same sex attracted, gender questioning, and of diverse gender. I use it both as an umbrella description (e.g. a cisgender lesbian woman or gay man) and an adjective (reflecting an attitude that challenges stable categories of gender and sexuality).
provides. I suggested the choir is a place of gentle activism.

- It’s a place to perform, not just on stage as choral singers, but to explore and test out who they are as young queer people. Socially, it is a place to make friends and explore, test out, and affirm, social identities.
- Musically, performing is a chance to be seen with other queer people, to come out to others and deepen relationships with family and friends in the audience, to sing OUT as activists, to protest, to celebrate, and to perform as role models for other young queer people. It is a place to accomplish musically, to take responsibility for a performance, and sing different, challenging repertoire, to perform as a soloist. The musical and social aspects of performing cross over at times: performing in a concert might be meaningful for family and friends in both their musical achievement and as a young queer person. Choir repertoire choices may also directly challenge how comfortable members are with their sexual and/or gender identity queer in different settings, such as at work. At the centre of all this though is music – the chance to sing in the company of others, to harmonise, to sing really softly!
- Members valued different generations within the organisation (main chorus, youth chorus), as role models, for the diverse cross-section of members and for the sense of hope for the future represented in older members’ life stories. Some even claimed it as part of “my history” as a queer person. Differences between generations were mentioned by several members, particularly in relation to the youth chorus’s awareness of gender diversity.

**Tensions and other findings**

I explored some tensions that I observed from interviews, particularly:

- between the youth chorus’s role in nurturing stable identities within the group (as young LGBTI people), yet member’s focus on challenging these stable identities within the organisation (i.e. with main chorus) and outside the choir, as young people with a queer worldview.
- Between different generations within the choir (LGBTI, queer)
- Between conforming and resisting the conventions of the youth chorus
- A musical tension between supporting members musically during rehearsals (musically inclusive) and the importance of quality performances, with members describing themselves as role models for other young queer people.

I explored the role of choral leaders as “musical curators” in balancing these tensions, and suggested some practical things to support a “queer-orientated choral pedagogy” (i.e. queer choir teaching).

So, there it is! thanks again for lending your voice to my project, and wishing you and shOUT youth chorus every success in future.

With warm regards

Ben Leske (preferred pronouns: he/him/his)
# Appendix L: Sample of Memos: Nicole’s Interview (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Memo text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Memo 40: Reflecting on Nicole's experience | Strong sense of Nicole's energy and enthusiasm for both the social/singing aspects of the choir, and also the social engagement and activist platform/function it has.  
Choir as family  
Choir as safe place in absence of wider, safer community  
Choir as challenging Nicole's normal musical repertoire  
Choir as providing an outlet for Nicole to challenge the ideas of people around her about who she is.  
Choir as confronting Nicole's level of "outness" |
| music, creativity, belonging | It's interesting that belonging is linked here by Nicole to singing and dancing, as if creative activities are linked (or more closely aligned) with sense of belonging.  
Related Code: tapping into other part of me (singing, dancing, belonging) |
| prioritising "outness" | the idea of layers of being "out" in terms of sexuality/gender identity, and needing to balance philosophical approach/theory with practical application and consequences for everyday life.  
Related Code: prioritising "outness" |
| Memo 44: Nicole - sexual identity, choir, judgement | Reflecting on the interview with Nicole, I am struck by the role of choir in the mix when approaching the interview for what it says about sexual identity. Nicole talks in her interview about moments of being affirmed on the one hand, being judged on the other, and sites in her life where there is an absence of judgement between these two extremes. Choir is a vexed spot for Nicole. It is a place where on one level she celebrates the fact that she is not judged. Yet on the other hand it is constantly challenging her own experience as a married bisexual woman. Is she "out" enough? She is not following the Harvey Milk example of coming out to everyone and at times she is consciously hiding her true self. She laments the absence of equality across society (marriage equality is a good example, and she talks about feeling judged outside choir by wider society) and yet within choir she feels a sense of being judged as "lucky" for her marriage and bisexuality. So, for Nicole, the choir is a place of judgement (her bisexuality and contributing to a sense of pressure on her to step further out of the closet); a place with an absence of judgement (in terms of her rehearsal and performance experience and descriptions of the excitement of the safe space it provides) and a place of affirmation of her sexuality. This affirmation seems both outward (performing for family and friends publicly, public advocacy role of choir, etc) and inward (the safe space notion). Link in sense of responsibility to her community to be more open - guilt on other side? |
| INTERVIEW 4 - Nicole - Interview style | Note regarding interview style: more directed questioning, almost leading in approach but useful in drawing out insights not otherwise easily obtained. Interviewer clearly a very seasoned interviewer! Nicole clearly a more mature member of YC - going for different reasons, different view of the world. |
| NICOLE: The idea of strategy and sexual identity? | Write more on this - the idea that "if you want to get through life and you want things to happen you need to be clever about how you approach it". |
Appendix M: Individual Interview Coding

CHLOE

LBGT - singing and coming out
  needing to “gauge people, constantly”
  supported by family and friends
  recognising others' difficult journeys
  choir as means to disclose sexual/gender identity
  conservatism, religion
  difficulty disclosing
  sharing others' stories of family difficulties
  struggling with their sexuality

LGBT - a queer choir
  LGBTIQ community lacking role models
  being happy young queer people
  a whole generation in choir
  main chorus role modelling
  being positive role models
  representing our community
  people see us in a positive light
  shared experience of being queer
  shared experiences as young queer people

MUSIC - performing
  sharing knowledge of other family experiences of concerts
  building confidence through solos
  receiving positive feedback for solos
  overcoming shyness
  choir supporting solo singers
  solo singing opportunities
  enjoyment of performing for wider audience
  performance rush and experiences

MUSIC - repertoire
  finding happiness in repertoire choices
  finding purpose in repertoire choices
  feeling empowered to suggest repertoire
  empowered through repertoire performed

MUSIC - the choral leader
  role of accompanist
  bring positive energy to room

MUSIC - the YC singing experience
  choir as musical outlet
  personally empowering
  a teaching and learning experience
  uplifting singing in community
  crazy outfits but beautiful singing
  perceiving good reputation
  experiencing emotions through singing
  a special connection with others
  choir a as big release
  site to improve musicianship and singing abilities
  love of singing
  singing quietly
  knowing musical part in choir
perceived broadly as quality choir
choir "a rare blend of voices"
unique voices yet blending well
sharing singing and blending voices
place to be free to dance, sing, look stupid
shared experience
OTHER - Chloe's interview style
earnest, striving to please, answer questions fully
SOCIAL - Coming to choir
choir "was always a big thing for me"
being courageous in joining choir
youth chorus as special, tight knit
SOCIAL - the general MGLC choir experience
choir place of past discussions and future suggestions
others finding their community
exploring and enjoying well-crafted choral arrangements
SOCIAL - the YC Social Experience
my new social group
longstanding friendships within choir
finding "my people" within the choir
feeling free to socialise widely within choir
WELLBEING - choir as supportive environment
optimism
supporting other members
free to make mistakes
creating a safe environment
looking for social environment
choir as very special place
WELLBEING - singing as beneficial for mental health
choir helping others' mental health
choir helping me as a person
getting a rush from singing
singing as best part of week

DAISY

choir as a queer community
assumed gay
not having to worry about coming out to everyone
queer community supportive of each other
getting involved in queer community
belonging to community
sense of community
If open to everyone, less unique community
choir performances
joined MC to perform all songs
achieving musically
performance opportunities
audience secondary to personal experience
performing for important people in her life
choir experiences
recruiting others to choir
place to find community in Melbourne
sharing sense of achievement with friends
sharing common interests
intimidated, fearful of new choir
finding safety in welcoming youth chorus
a really fun experience
benefits beyond choir
reconnecting with family
having something to invite dad to
re-establishing sense of self, pride
building social networks through choir
confidence to go back to school
confidence to socialise more
coming out
sharing common stories & experiences
mental health
feeling lonely
experiencing social isolation in Melbourne
social anxiety
feeling intimidated by larger group, older members
choir first reengagement with community
social isolation
mental health issues
leadership experiences
doubting contribution of other MDs
MD enthusiasm for choir
MD contributing to choir enjoyment
MD's knowledge of health condition reassuring
motivations for joining
need to seek out a community
recognising different communities around her
past experiences of community (upbringing)
finding community in choir
choir to meet new people
"I can do this" welcoming, confidence boost
interview style
introducing herself at end of interview
important things to say but struggle to articulate
keen to have her say

DYLAN

PERSONAL TRAITS
professional, knowledgeable in approach to interview
self-reflective
in tune with body
process and description focussed

QUOTES

BACKGROUND TO JOINING
university educated
professional shower singer
identifies as “singing wherever I can be”
misfit in singing lessons - suited younger people
missing age-appropriate musical styles
no HS Choir as did not know others singing
previous choir experience
scared off by musical style of other choir
singing lessons not challenging
singing background
singing lessons contrast to choir experiences

JOINING CHOIR
keeping in touch with youth chorus
incentive of paying only one membership fee, 2 choirs
feeling welcomed
choir more challenging
finding the youth chorus online
having an individual connection to smooth over joining choir
nervous about first rehearsal - sipping water
overwhelmed by friendliness
seeking suitable musical outlet
1st rehearsal welcoming, informative, organised
researched online prior to joining
choosing choir for LGBTIQ social element
diverse mix of ages
being a bit closer to the (LGBTIQ) community

WHAT CHOIR MEANS
moments of disconnection given staff changes
aware of flux in recent years
noticing committee structures and transparency
openness of committee & choir goals
joking about overstating choir benefits
exuberance telling others of choir experience
experiencing pushback for negative attitudes to comments
belief in importance of his singing contribution to choir
sense of fairness
making a commitment to choir
everyone taking on little leadership roles
unsolicited support for others, nurturing, guiding
having the right energy to attract positive people
warm and friendly environment
choir as "like therapy"
motivating you to make it happen for yourself
describing combination of motivation and commitment
professional but with a fun element
sense of pride
participation considered important in solo allocation
variety of musical skill levels catered for
being part of the family from week 1
entertaining, enjoyable
depending on, helping others
no divas, competition
connected multiple divergent strands of life
no ego
"singing changed my life"
withdrawals when not there
connecting to repertoire outside rehearsal
it's become part of who I am
looking back
describing life before choir
cult-like environment
rituals of choir

MUSICAL
expanded love of music/musical tastes
choir as democratic
feeling empowered to speak up in choir
linking musical effort and musical professionalism
acknowledging paid staff efforts
importance of rehearsal tracks
not feeling regret for mistakes
free to make mistakes, supported to fix
absence of judgement and criticism in rehearsals
enjoying different repertoire in main chorus repertoire
performing & concerts
  maximising time on stage through YC MC
  physical effects of performing
  feeling more in control, refined
  changes with concert experience
  experiencing recognition as a celebrity
  physical sensations of performing
understanding distinct times for musical, social
musical outlet
EXTRA MUSICAL BENEFITS
  future leadership opportunities
  deepening understanding of choir connections to life
  changing my mindset on everything
  improving other areas of life
nervousness
  choir as powerful self-development tool
  empowering at work
assertiveness, empowered to speak up
  suggesting ideas for measuring choir impact
expecting more from life outside choir
  improving workplace
  learning “to love what I do”
losing weight because feeling better about self
choir saving lives
LGBTIQ IDENTITY
  little intro opportunities for singers
  sharing knowledge of others’ experiences
social inclusion of choir invaluable
  stories of depression, suicide
  not knowing how to be gay in real life outside singing
  easier now to be gay than before
that moment of proud clarity
telling others about choir
being asked at work more about gay community
having a queer performance outlet
personal importance of family’s embrace of sexuality
acceptance from family vs embrace
musical collaborations to promote LGBTIQ causes
feeling connected to the LGBTIQ community
  not only gay identity
empowered to promote choir concerts at work
REASONS FOR STAYING
  enjoys structured, purposeful environment
  learning from choir because of its structure
  professionalism of organisation
AROUND REHEARSALS
  youth chorus rep as connection between choirs
familiar with committee mgt structures
learning new skills
pre-programmed/autopilot re choir
helping others, helping the choir
having time to socialise outside sections during tea break
appreciating kindness of strangers

366
member kind gestures without expecting anything
LGBTIQ identity secondary to singing
making friends and acquaintances
diverse worlds colliding through joint interest in choir
the social element
youth chorus social thing after rehearsal

HERMIONE

DESCRIBING CHOIR
being involved in communities
overall good balance of musical-ness
striving to be musically excellent while still having fun
being a welcoming space
Reasons for quality of choir community
leaders facilitating inclusive, happy place
curating music
allowing people to express themselves
license to be creative
co-contributing music
member openness to forming community
ultimately up to individuals and leaders

PERFORMING
needing goals
balancing accessible to people and a good product
Explaining performance opportunities
finding performance opportunities from within membership
expanding audience base
performing for community events
insularity: have own concerts
not anticipating funny aspect of performing
audience gets that we have fun together
surprised by how much people like our singing
impressed by longevity of concerts
reaching "a level of performance"
describing performances
pride in what is created
sense of achievement
collaborating with others
having fun
unsure if reaching wider community
having shared part in making something
bonding
feeling proud
providing support
sometimes distracted by musical excellence
recognising importance of socialising in choir
difficulty building outside friendships from choir friendships

MAIN CHORUS
mentoring without parental roles/obligations
mentorship of older members
long standing social traditions
loves them dearly
describing the sections and reputations
enjoying meeting new people
linking part to meeting others
by and large kind people
age, demographic differences
explaining her young age
large size
JOINING CHOIR
no clear expectations
choir singing background
understanding concerns of new members
Experiencing a clique within choir
  feeling more an acquaintance than friend
  feeling on outside on joining
  feeling hate for cliques within choir
existing members happy just talking with each other
having to make the effort
voice checks for new members
appeal of gay choir
finding choir online
not necessarily seeking queer choir
YOUTH CHORUS
seeing youth chorus as role models
giving something to other people
musical excellence a way of managing turnover
musical excellence THE focus during rehearsals
musical excellence more than just technical perfection
fluid membership
providing a sense of purpose
  choir helps get through boring work situation
finding support from other members
keen to recruit members
social place
  sharing plans, fears
  finding housemate
  a place to make friends
enjoying hearing others' voices
finding friends after changes of choir membership
youth chorus for everyone
easier because more inclusive
making sure youth chorus not forgotten
enjoying current mix of members
describing challenges integrating new people into group
desiring a group able to expand
we're all quite musically inclined.
describing Ben as good model
a choir of middle class people
having resources, time, encouraged to do music as kids
facts
DYNAMICS BETWEEN YOUTH MAIN
comparing attitudes main youth school
explaining differences in choir knowledge about queer issues
exaggerating?
funny choir dynamics
BELIEFS ABOUT SINGING & CHOIR
for others, for selves
many community choirs primarily social
comparing choirs
noticing improvement
a learning experience
finding more space in head to deal with things
cathartic
regulates breathing
relaxing
it's a whole experience thing
comparing distinctive voices
finding satisfaction singing
not knowing enough to judge herself
contrasting with singing as always "a fun thing"
finding happiness singing and performing
describing others' musical backgrounds
having musical backgrounds or music interest
relaxing into the singing
choir helps sad people to feel better

BELIEFS ABOUT MUSIC
social "glue" in conversation, for friendships
a refuge for the socially awkward

GENERAL MUSIC BACKGROUND
not wanting to be "just average"
revealing her perfectionism as obstructing enjoyment of music
describing musical background, omitting tertiary study
describing fraught experiences of instrumental music
disclosing university level music studies
music as a tribe activity

HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES
less pressure to find conversation topics
sometimes a difficult experience
music as a common social interest

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS
sees value in positivity
having trouble being positive
a perfectionist
apologising for talking
able to understand people
sense of humour
feeling life lacks purpose
comparing self to others
feeling inadequate
not feeling good about self
equating craziness with seeking perfection
loving others in choir
feeling bored at work

BEING QUEER
able to see a future as a queer person
acknowledging, enjoying "insular little queer bubble"
choir just "easy easy" compared to "mainstream society"
finding gay environments easier
recognising difference between intolerance & lack of awareness
rare to find familiarity outside queer groups
have people who already familiar about your gender/sexuality
excusing older members for lack of queer knowledge
young people on same wavelength

youth chorus more educated in queer politics

BEING A LEADER
IN INTERVIEW
safeguarding others' privacy
directing conversation
revealing her youth chorus leadership role
enjoying the chore because "starved for stimulus"
describing committee membership as a chore
explaining volunteering opps for members
explaining voting procedure
explaining voice parts

IN CHOIR

works from goal of making everyone happy
thinking about leadership
understanding fundraising goals
frustrated by lack of notice of comings/goings
finding purpose helping others
being there for anybody who needs me
revealing her learning of helpful things for new members
anointing youth chorus committee positions
making decisions on committee on behalf of youth chorus
describing impact on young people
trying to educate main chorus members
taking responsibility for concert prep

INTERVIEW STYLE

honesty

QUOTATIONS

JAMES

ACTIVISM

proudly sharing knowledge
sense of injustice at lack of support
choir role in challenging societal norms
finding passion and motivation in queer activism
fighting for my rights

CHOIR SAFETY

lacking appreciation of challenges others face?
understanding choir as place to come out
understanding the choir as safe space
surprised decision to perform left to members
an hour to be yourself per week

COMMUNITY

a queer choir community
transcends the singing
"just singing" choirs vs membership of caring community
not used to choir as supporting place
supporting, looking after each other
a queer community that supports its members
wanting to support young people

INTERGENERATIONAL

appreciating life experience of older members
feeling part of queer community, history
tension and antagonism between choral groups
singing in both, no issues
sensing difference between both
main chorus: old, not understanding young people
youth chorus: young hooligans
youth chorus a "great bonus"
respecting older people who "lived through it"

JOINING
not recalling specifics of finding way into community
taking time to find way into community
appeal of joining LGBT Choir
finding self within group after period of time
feeling like an outsider
new to Melbourne after travelling
choir part of settling in

LGBTI IDENTITY

no coming out issues myself
music supports our queer identity
linking music to queer identity
queer identity is my identity
active in queer history

MUSICAL BACKGROUND

previous choir experiences
sense of levels
I've always sung in choirs
enjoyment of singing

PERFORMING

performances
performing as tool to facilitate support

SOCIAL

forming intense friendships

SPECIAL

surprised choir such an amazing thing
sensing difference of an LGBT setting (less inhibition)
youth chorus own concert 2016
importance of youth chorus to its members

testing as youth chorus testing experience

*MISC

interview technique
anticipating question
self-awareness
acknowledging limits to knowledge

JAZZ

CHOIR

BENEFITS

organisational achievements
social confidence
project and leadership skills
improved singing skills
confidence singing

MUSICAL

comparing other choirs

SINGING IDENTITY

being tested
testing singing skills
perceiving challenges to his identity
proud of singing skills
sharing news about choir
gaining gratification on FB
standing out
always an outsider
karaoke background
a soloist at heart
clear on what he can deliver
describing skills in performey, dancey style
prefers singing own thing
social connection not there
not seeking grandeur from singing
likes to sing loud
standing out within choir with solo
perceives own talent, joined choir to improve
having courage to stand up and do it
judging others' skill levels
proving himself to musical and org leaders
used to balance of quality (Good and Bad)
fitting in
self-awareness
conforming important, need to turn down style
working within his own voice limitations
losing self in song, forgetting other details
tuning in to other singers
Understandings of choir
choir improving singing skills
repertoire
Challenged by repertoire
enjoys powerful song
wonderful performance, fun to watch
christmas carols
inspired by repertoire choices re marriage

SOCIAL CHOIR
inclusion & exclusion
cliques inevitable for human bonding
inevitable exclusion and cliques
no infighting
feelings of home and belonging
contributing back to choir
leadership opportunities
motivator to leave house
sensing age gap in YC
sometimes feeling excluded
used to being excluded
no judgement, no pretence
enjoys singing with everybody
feeling supported, supporting others
practical support for others
(expecting to be rewarded)
chance to meet people, make friends
making friends within YC and MC
ease of general conversations
sense of belonging from beginning
not feeling desire to leave
a welcoming place
common interests outway experiences of exclusion
higher skill level than local bar
perceiving others more skilled, practiced
lack of balance in choir - perceives only good singers
level of community spirit
diverse skills pool
social place
a wonderful social outlet
acknowledging unique voices in choir
experiences within choir
anticipating social obstacles to get past fears about social contact mostly unfounded

JOINING REASONS
- describing choir
- common social starting point
- coming to choir
- audition process
- audits and auditions
  - cautious about joining choir
  - enjoying process of auditions regardless of result
  - perceiving greater hurdles to achieving judging others
  - audition - congratulatory environment
  - perceiving solo auditions as competitions
  - competition in the air
  - shattered that no one heard my audition
  - congratulating others "just what you do"
  - perceiving social isolation
  - sleeping on problem
  - misinterpreted reason for no audition audience
- needing to be needed
- sense of connection between everybody
- sense of fun in performance
- atmosphere of inclusion

PERFORMING
- spine tingles, arches (cat?)
- performing highlights
- accepting of feedback
- normality of choral singing
- driven by developing a show
- experiencing happiness
- absence of desire to "get out of here"
- feeling "right back at home"
- feeling lifted
- relying on policies for singing
- a whole other league of singers
- acknowledges support for his performances
- importance of mum watching performances
- other friends watching performances
- impressed by celebrity attendance
- InnerDiva Concert
  - singing backup for soloists
  - expectation of familiar faces in audience
  - disappointment at no-shows
  - disbelief at no-shows
  - acknowledging bad timing of concerts for friends
  - buoyed by support of key choir members
  - difficulty performing without familiar audience present
- promoting performances

LGBTIQ community
- challenging stereotypes
- choir can be flamboyant
- perceptions of gay community
  - feeling judged by friend
  - hypocrisy
  - feeling judged by gay community
- difficulty reconciling sexuality with institutional religion

SOCIAL WORLDVIEW
- clear expectations around social etiquettes
believes in own maturity
different generational thinking space
fascinated by human experience
validated by karaoke friends
bored by everyday conversation
strong views about own intelligence
understanding of social etiquette
seeking direct answers to direct questions
difficulty in social conversational settings

MISC
interview style
  willing to share openly with interviewer
  confirming recollections and certainty
personal issues
religion
LEADERSHIP
  impressed by choir leadership
  impressed by leadership
  attitudes of others important
  noticing differences in leadership styles
  leadership as human nature
  some leaders, some not
  leadership levels

family
QUOTES
  connecting life events with choir memories
  school experiences

MALACHI

WHAT CHOIR MEANS TO M
  musical safety
  feeling safe
  choir identity as sexuality-based
    stumbling across choir (serendipity?)
    "such a good experience"
    a place to stand up and speak out
    part of bigger community movement
COMING TO CHOIR
  joining choir
  long-standing singing background
  needing choir/to sing with other people
JOURNEY OF SELF
  apologising for self
  grappling with understandings of God
  sexuality as proportion of self
  finding self
  honesty not being welcomed / has consequences
  sexuality - just one part of who I am
  working out it's okay to be gay
  sexual identity enables self
  not wanting to make scene
  Sensing musical ability
  challenging idea of sexual identity as "fixable"
  experiencing romantic relationships
coming out journey
instilling personal pride in my heart and soul
celebrating self
celebrating different aspects of self
accepting self

CHOIR AND SELF
vehicle for proclaiming self
inspiring others
recognises differences between members
"saved" through choir
choir fosters pride and self-worth
choir fostering self-confidence
exploring what home means through choir
choir as place to "love and be loved"
joy through singing and fitting in
choir saving me from "going backwards"
seeking place to be myself without judgement
choir - feeling of "fitting in"
relief at having place to be true self
choir accepting me (not only b/c gay)
choir - facilitating way "to actually start being me"
choir - instilling pride
choir as place of disclosure, true self
choir - accepting self as is
uncompromising self, strengthened by choir exp.
choir - expressing yourself in group setting without judgement
choir - entering an "uplifting and welcoming" place

RELIGION
Christian ideals and judgements
religion and sexual identity
religion - God as judging god
religion God as loving god

QUEER NORMALITY AND SELF
choir where sexual identity not challenged
gender - ideal of being perfect man
experiencing beauty in acceptance as "normality"
choir of "normal, everyday people"
experiencing difference in the way I can be
choir and normal relationships

BEING IN CHOIR
taking responsibility in choir
a place to sing and be creative
standing up for sexuality
learning to celebrate sexuality
surprised by impact of choir on life
experiencing "everyday" same-sex relationships
choir - regularity

ARCHIVED CODES
meanings of home
becoming home
choir - way to express creativity
singing with people "same as us"
choir as safe environment
choir - safe place to learn to sing (together)
choir - feeling safe in larger group
choir - feel safe to make mistakes without sanction
choir - safe place to work out issues
choir - young people all looking for same thing
choir - members akin to family roles (brother, mother)
anticipating departure from the choir in near future
experiencing choir as a beautiful place
making a difference for others
changing self (to fit in)

FAMILY - CHOIR
- sharing common journeys
- choir as place of openness
- choir as home
- choir members as second family/as home
- choir - place to sing, create community, create family
- choir - close friendships
- choir - filling in for absent family closeness

FAMILY experiences - WA
- being accepted by biological family
CLOSE FRIENDS WA
- apologising for sexual identity
- finding acceptance of sexuality

Default home as WA
- self-loathing in past
- not feeling at home
- sexual identity as baggage
- questioning if sexual identity “fixable”
- trying to find a place to belong
- sense of home - negative/old self
- optimism for future - family, relationships
- family - falling silent when talking about choir
- family - lack of response to choir
- family - desire to share experiences
- postponing disclosure of choir membership
- family - not recognising importance of choir
- experiencing a “rift” with WA family

MISC
- taking leadership during interview
- future choir thoughts & regrets
- sharing his experience through interview

NATALIE

Explaining and teaching
- explaining meanings of choir
- explaining how choir works

Friendships
- post-school lacking structured friendships of school
- feeling more loved amongst big group of friends
- sensing difference of choir as group friendship experience
- not understanding difficulty finding close friendships
- place of guaranteed friend time
- friendships so close you can sit on the floor
- friendships across different ages
- finding confidence
- enjoys intense time spent together with choir members
- choir highlights friendship bonding AND musical moments

Expanding social networks yet drawing in old school friends
- listing of friendships through choir (showcasing)
- choir as place to reconnect with school friends
challenges N's usual social activities

Interview style
sense of uniqueness
- noted annoyance at same name in group (ie not distinct)
bold statements
listing of details important
lucid moment in monologue
seeking attention

Coming Out Journey
finding courage in France
- My Life-changing experience
  becoming comfortable with sexuality
sensing little else available
lacking close friendships
interviewer summarises exp.
difficulty making friendships at uni
feeling afraid to seek out queer organisations
questioning my sexuality
feeling lost, unhappy, stuck in place where don't fit in
the timing of joining choir

Choir experiences
  camp
  - camp as recruitment tool
  - camp surpassing expectations
  - looking forward to camp because social
  - camp bringing people closer together
  - deepening relationships at camp
  - brave people new to choir attending camp
  - camp as place that brings people 'in the group'
  - adult experiences vs kid experiences of camp
  - importance of timing of camp (later in year)
replacing France
  - choir providing gap left by France exp
  - overseas travel as "my life changing experience"
  - shared desperation of France exchange experience
  - courage in another country
  - isolation from friendship networks means bunching together
new and old blending together
recognises differences in openness of parent relationships
experiences of leadership
choir bringing joy
sense of "wanting to chip in"
sense of equalness in spite of assigned leader roles
place to just enjoy myself
performing
  - self organisation of concert
  - having concert goal important
  - excitement re future concert
  - patience re own concert (last yr v this yr)
Youth chorus main chorus
  - most enjoyment from own concert experiences
  - experiencing adult choir
  - identifying as a separate group
  - excited to be continuing MC traditions
  - feeling 'tacked on' to MC concerts
  - feeling like our own beast
outreach and activism experiences
  - vision of out happy choir role on campuses
  - how N views choir community performance received
experiencing choir community performance
name of choir as vehicle for those in need to notice choir
community performances - vision vs constraints
choir outlet for community performances
choir perceptions from observers - out, happy people singing
choir's evangelising role?
choir community outreach mission vision
social experiences (place of finding close friendships)
importance of "all the bits"
a caring place
  sense of rallying together in crisis
  choir "mobilises" to support you
  enjoyment in details of plan B
caring for choir
enjoyment of time to talk over food post-rehearsal
choir as small and familiar world
choir as coming out tool
choir as main social outlet, main musical outlet
choir as constant scheduled automatic social time
need to be in choir
musical experiences
  we probably make music better together as friends
  sensing luck in having regular social singing gathering
  combination of singing and socialising important
  harmonies as drugs
  assured by music, leadership in spite intimidating environment
  collaboration for concert
  leadership musical and social
  links joy to sense of closeness and to music
  personal reward of singing in choir
  singing beautiful music and great harmonies
  singing together, musical excellence, hard work
  social musical outlets key to staying sane!
taking on choir identity
choir as place where connections begin
appearing comfortable with each other
having common queer coming out experiences
easy to relate even if just met.
egalitarian, community of singers on equal footing
regularity of choir
offering an intense experience (close family) that people want
perceiving closeness, excitement
proud in sharing choir responsibilities
seeing project through beginning to end
sharing common stories across generations
miscellaneous
abstracting based on personal experiences
experiencing choir as a new member
then it was just...great
feeling intimidated by small group
'scooping up' new members if interested in staying
drawing in other friends to choir
drawing in new members
great experiences (singing) blend together
forgetting bit between comfortable and not comfortable
finding herself a part of group
reasons for joining choir
recognising a familiar face within choir
remembering first impression of choir

378
joking eg of role of choir for young people
only brief recollections of being new
choir presence and absence
describes absence of choir-like experience in real world
choir “bringing the joy”
absence of choir singing as motivation
noticing absence of choir
life without choir ‘unimaginable’
comparing, competing
sensing difference in choir types
judgement of cool vs uncool choirs
desiring more autonomy yet acknowledging need to retain MC link
comparing friendships (choir, school, others)
appearing good looking
assessing choir experiences
analytic approach to choirs - compare and contrast
a concert that was just ours
distinguishing youth chorus main chorus
comparing choir experiences, standard-setting
distinguishing herself for AGC involvement
viewing difference between adult & children's choirs
defending sense of separateness YC with reality MC
comparing her experience to local students
open to other choirs, seeking variety (and challenge?)
perceives hierarchies as difference Prof/Am choirs
perceiving age differences and appeal of choir
perceiving similarity between adult & children's choirs
sense of achievement & satisfaction in school & choir music
wanting to showcase YC talent
Natalie's choir identity
joining choir as best life decision
enjoyment of larger group
enjoying organising of concert
choirs as "my thing”
centrality of choir in life
QUEER EXPERIENCE
having a non-queer history
fear of coming out situations
exhaustion of assumed straight
surpassing her own expectations
stretching beyond comfort zone (para-musical concert org)
assumed queer space
a transformative experience of queer normality
sexuality and stigma
set up picture of unhappiness due to sexual orientation
sensing weight of expection - assumed straight
assumed queer environment
speedy formation of group
Sensing separateness
the regularity of choir
Reflecting on interview experience
perceiving spoken enough about choir?
NB tense use, reflexive wording
comment re talking for whole hour
self-reflection acknowledged!
self-reflexive comment on talking about experiences
self-reflexivity, rhetorical questions
miscellaneous
NB less confident, more hesitant commentary here
NICOLE

CHOIR SITES
- performance
- rehearsals
- camp

COMING OUT
- Identity shift
- feeling socially isolated
- telling my story
- a shared experience regardless of generation

MOTIVATIONS
- a love of music
- contributing to something bigger
- Social Change
  - awareness raising, educating, explaining
  - drive to change perceptions of LGBT people

ATTITUDES
- speaking out & courageous
- conforming

EXPERIENCES
- Being Musical
  - transformative experiences
  - repertoire
  - Musical Accomplishment
    - confronting fears
    - achievement, success
    - taking responsibility
    - being tested
  - Musical belonging
    - musical identity

- Being Social
  - a consistent, regular social place
  - a place of friendships: social & enjoyable
  - safe & supportive, welcoming
  - a place to belong, feel accepted, “fit in”
  - an LGBTIQ meeting place
  - feeling intimidated, excluded
  - A place of judgement and sanctuary re LGBTIQ identity
    - feeling judged
      - judged by outside world
      - judged within LGBT community
      - judged within choir
  - absence of judgement
    - affirmed, empowered

- A place to be busy; always working towards something

Leading and Leadership
- leaders and followers
- Role of formalised leaders
- taking responsibility in choir

MISCELLANEOUS
- The interview experience
- The Coding Process
- talking about choir

380
Distinguishing features of YC  
experiencing other choirs  
YC as Distinctive Choir

family
reasons for joining choir

PAIGE

MISCELLANEOUS
Concerts and Performance
wider, non-LGBTIQ community
Overseas Travel and links
Camp
acknowledges behind the scenes leadership of committee
cogniscant of extra committee work
communicating with Ben/listener
blurring boundaries of "community"

ARRIVING, LEAVING CHOIR
seeking choir 1st, LGBT community 2nd
choir breaks, noticeable absence
becoming aware of choir dynamics, politics
finding the right choir
deciding to keep going back
an extracurricular activity
Excitement about choir future
anticipation of no longer singing in choir

MUSICAL
performing for people willing to listen
being vulnerable when singing
bonding through singing
wanting to try group singing; a new challenge
history of singing
joining a choir vs solo singing
performance anxiety
external pressure (mum) vs "my own initiative"
learning new skills in choir singing & blending
supported by musical community
group singing has more purpose
comparing choirs
perceived to be good quality musically
more social than other choirs
smaller choir harder musically, easier socially
small vs large choir differences

PERSONAL STORY

cynical
valuing authentic self
sharing personal goals/vocation
Judging self
Struggling for a pseudonym
dressing up for my same sex formal
high on my priority list
doing something with my sexuality

WHAT CHOIR MEANS FOR SELF

a special feeling
choir for self support
sharing ourselves through singing
CHOIR ABSENCE ANXIETY

COMING OUT
Choir as entry point to LGBTIQ Community
finding myself
having "the right" to join queer community
finding others "who'd been through the same sort of thing"
coming out of my shell
challenging assumptions about me
relief and excitement of place where assumptions fit
free to be myself
seeking empathy over sympathy

UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHOIR
regularity of choir valued
a shared experience of being different
mismatch between choir name and membership/aspiration
choir outreach purpose
going out to schools & school settings
important that it exists and that we show people it exists
highlights minority community
choir for audience
performing as "awesome and happy!" singers
performing for our community
a social place
singing and socialising
a really interesting way to make friends
meaning for other members
choir for other members; holds up others
collective/shared responsibility
being "part of something"
choir as altruistic; giving back to other members through choir
youth chorus/main chorus interaction
rehearsals
describing barriers to main chorus membership
choir sometimes clique-ee
describing choir conflicts

AN ACCEPTING HAPPY PLACE
an open social network (inclusive)
socialising, building close friendships
looking forward to choir regardless of repertoire
a safe space for minorities, discriminated
being part of "my" community through choir
assumptions reversed or not made
safe to talk about things (not normally talked about)
choir as "amazing" & as a community
often highlight of my week
viewing choir as "really great"
inclusivity of choir experience varies
an accepting place
whole group closer vs small groups close
willingness to befriend everyone
youth chorus representative role
choir open to all without formal audition
but sensing luck in having talented singers in choir
experiencing changes in choir
explaining away change
explaining the choir
Author/s:
Leske, Benjamin Patrick

Title:
Performing difference: exploring the social world of the Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Youth Chorus

Date:
2017

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/194521

File Description:
Thesis and appendices

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.