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**Working Title:**
Gender and the Sounding of Self: becoming in trans* singing

**Abstract:**
My doctoral research project in sociology aims to investigate the entanglement of voice, gender, and self by studying the way singing is experienced by trans* and non-binary singers. ‘Voice’ becomes more intricate when we conceive of it not simply as discursive and representational, but instead tether it back to the embodied speaker or singer interacting with other likewise embodied and situated others. The voice plays a central role in gendered being in and of the world; it is gendered and gendering. Our voices do not already exist as objects; rather, we enact our voices by engaging our bodies. Furthermore, our voices have directionality; they are ‘material relationality’ between vocalizing and listening bodies. I conceptualize ‘vocality’ as a phenomenon that encompasses yet is irreducible to the following (non-exhaustive) intra-acting aspects of the vocal: physical, physiological, biological, representational, constructed, performative, embodied, and lived.

Focusing particularly on the embodied and lived aspects of vocality, I take up a phenomenological-materialist approach towards investigating (the enactment of agency of) trans* vocality. Voices are emergent, sounding from material bodies. I propose that if to use one’s voice is to actively be in and of the world, then to sing is to give resonance to this being. Trans* choruses facilitate spaces for trans* voices to become and be in the auditory realm. Singing is a process that is at the same time individual and social, and by turning to trans* and non-binary singers to articulate critical knowledge from embodied positions, it is possible to continue to challenge the sex imperative and learn more about societal and self-conceptualizations of gender. Taking singing to be a process that immerses subjects in ‘sensuous knowledge’, their sensorial and affective experiences in singing might be linked to their (potential) bodily (dis)comfort and (dis)empowerment and gendered self-understandings. The phenomenological-materialist conceptualization of trans* vocality provides an intriguing way of thinking and investigating trans* subjectivities in a non-essentializing way, one that can take into account corporeality.

With an ethnographic methodological approach including in-depth narrative interviews, participant observation, and experiential interviews, the results of this study are useful not only for sociology and trans*/gender and queer studies, but also for musicology, vocology, and speech-language pathology – to better understand the experiences of singers who embody trans* vocality in its various forms. In centering trans* people’s narratives and sense-making of their experiences of their embodied, lived situations, it aims to contribute qualitatively to the budding field of trans* vocal studies: to further develop queer ethno/musicological concepts and approaches, to critically challenge how medically based studies of trans* voices often reproduce the gender binary and sex-determinism, and finally, to contribute to larger discussions within gender studies – about the role of materiality, narratives of the body, the constitution of gendered subjectivities, agency and politicism, and persistence and change in the gender order.