

Falling Out of Step: Belonging, Grit and Drum Corps International's Moment of Reckoning

by

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Dedication

To my family.

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Abstract

The emergence of the #MeToo movement in 2017 publicly unveiled decades of abuse within many organizations and industries. Drum Corps International (DCI), an administrative organization for drum & bugle corps (drum corps or corps) competitions in North America, was no exception. The independent corps that compete in DCI were forced to acknowledge the consequences of an insular culture and its (mis)handling of a variety of allegations. Rumors that had previously circulated within whisper networks were thrust into the public eye, ushering in a moment of reckoning for the entire drum corps community. This dissertation interrogates the drum corps community's social practices and norms, including their origins and preservation, to articulate factors that facilitate misconduct and promote silence and inform efforts to rehabilitate this musical tradition.

Branded "Marching Music's Major League," DCI brings together more than 60 drum corps each summer for a 90-day season of competitions across the contiguous United States, culminating with the World Championships in early August. Each corps consists of no more than 154 members (aged 16 to 21), as well as instructors, volunteers, and administrative and support staff. Between performances, individual corps rehearse upwards of 12 hours a day to perfect their field show, an eleven-minute production consisting of thematically unified music and movement. I assert that these rehearsal and performance contexts produce insular community that is poorly equipped to prevent or address issues of misconduct, violence, and abuse. Together with reverence for extreme precision, conformity, loyalty, unity, grit, and stoicism, these factors

normalize harm and promote silence in the face of abuse.

This dissertation contributes to ongoing conversations in academic and non-academic circles about systemic abuse in DCI with the expressed aim of eliminating culturally based issues that threaten the activity's future. Building on the work of theorists including Natalya Alonso, Jennifer Berdahl, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Peter Glick, I articulate the historical role of hegemonic social identities on the formation of distinct cultural values. Using ethnographic research, previously uncited materials from archival and private collections, as well as autoethnographic insights, I demonstrate how these values can obscure ethical and legal boundaries. Structured to mimic the experiential trajectory that results in the normalization of abuse and misconduct in DCI, this dissertation provides a glimpse into a musical culture that receives scant ethnomusicological or musicological attention (Cole 2009, Maher 2011, Odello 2020, George 2022).

“Chapter 1: Belonging in DCI” expounds upon the role of belonging, the mechanisms by which it is achieved, and the factors that inculcate feelings of connection and kinship among corpsmates. In “Chapter 2: Welcome to Drum Corps?” I then demonstrate how belonging and conformity work alongside glorified ideas of resilience and grit to reframe problematic conduct and questionable living conditions as inherent to the drum corps experience. These expectations provide context for “Chapter 3: Keeping it In-House,” wherein I examine hazing and member-on-member misconduct. Finally, in “Chapter 4: Where There's Smoke, There's Fire,” I turn to staff and administrator-based misconduct or mismanagement, exploring how corrupted cultural values are (un)intentionally exploited by trusted adults. Within this context, I argue that rumors and a culture of silence perpetuate violence. Overall, I contend that the issues of belonging, power, and violence in DCI reflect parallel similar issues in the performing arts.

Introduction

“It’s not marching band” is a phrase commonly uttered by members of the drum & bugle corps community in North America. Drum & bugle corps (henceforth referred to as drum corps or corps) are marching bands. Ensemble members don uniforms and perform music while marching on a football field. Community members, however, distinguish drum corps from marching bands primarily by instrumentation and institutional affiliation.¹ That is, marching bands typically are understood as including woodwinds, brass, battery, a stationary percussion section (front ensemble or pit), and color guard, but drum corps prohibit woodwinds. Furthermore, while marching bands in the US are typically affiliated with a school, university, or other community-based organization, drum corps generally exist as independent nonprofit organizations.

More than a matter of taxonomy, community members draw this distinction to convey their understanding of drum corps as being a unique subculture. The concept of drum & bugle corps carries a particular weight and significance to those of us within the community, rendering “marching bands” a wholly inadequate descriptor. For members of the drum corps community, drum corps constitutes a shared subculture that is significantly different from athletic bands common in high schools and universities. It intimates feelings that insiders truly know what it is like to have marched drum corps.

¹ An example of discourse around this distinction can be found here: kusankusho, “Calling It What It Is,” Drum Corps Planet Forums, February 8, 2008, <https://www.drumcorpsplanet.com/forums/index.php?/topic/109505-calling-it-what-it-is/>.

This dissertation interrogates the sources and implications of drum & bugle corps as a distinct cultural entity. As a subculture, drum corps includes many positive elements that lead alumni to retain a lifelong connection to the activity. Lurking beyond these beneficial aspects, however, are much more harmful attributes. Motivated by the deluge of allegations that have surfaced following the emergence of the #MeToo movement in 2017, I use my unique position as a community member to answer the question: what about this activity empowers abusers? Moreover, how might we work to eliminate the culture of silence around abuse?

Although drum & bugle corps in the United States can be traced back centuries to the many buglers, fifers, and other ensembles associated with military units, drum corps as it exists today remains rooted in the popular leisure activity that came to prominence in the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps a consequence of the post-World War II baby boom, the activity experienced the greatest growth in the 1960s and 1970s, with schools, community organizations, and veterans' organizations creating their own corps.² With membership defined by the geographic location in which each corps was based, members overwhelmingly shared identities in terms of culture, race, location, and religion, among other markers. The commonalities among members in this era undoubtedly influenced expectations regarding homogeneity of conduct. During this time, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and American Legion (AL) lodges across the country sponsored competitive drum corps as an activity for youth and adults. As competition became increasingly valorized, the winningest corps ultimately came to define the standards by which others would be judged.

² At its peak, there were an estimated 13,000 corps in North America. The informal nature of these organizations and the historical lack of scholarly attention makes it difficult (at the time of writing) to provide anything beyond an estimate.

Responding to the growing number of drum & bugle corps not affiliated with the VFW or AL, Drum Corps International (DCI) was formed in 1971 to provide a competitive platform that was more financially viable to corps without VFW or AL funding.³ DCI created its own adjudication standards that were distinct from those of other competitive circuits. Still, their criteria were heavily informed by those of the VFW and AL. Thus, competitive success for DCI was ultimately defined by the sociopolitical contexts of the 1950s and 1960s, wherein predominantly white corps and all-male corps set the standards.⁴ The year 1972 saw the first DCI World Championship, in which corps that had participated in a certain number of DCI-sanctioned events could participate. By the mid-1990s, DCI would come to dominate the North American drum corps scene.

The activity has changed drastically in the 50 years since DCI's first championships. Where other competitive circuits helped smaller, less financially stable corps find a competitive outlet, DCI's expansion ultimately led to a national touring model that necessitated significantly more resources. As such, the tens of thousands of corps during the activity's heyday have since declined to fewer than 100.⁵ Throughout DCI's existence, this slow contraction has led to the intensified codification of shared cultural values among the remaining corps.

³ Steve Vickers, *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Madison, WI: Sights & Sounds, 2003).

⁴ Thousands of corps cropped up across the US, many of which were segregated by gender.

⁵ Identity-based corps serving non-male and non-white populations, such as all-female or all-black corps, hold a place of prominence among those who did not survive DCI's expansion. There remains one predominantly Asian/Asian-American corps, the Mandarins (Sacramento, CA). As of 2022, one all-male corps competes in DCI, the Cavaliers (Rosemont, IL). For more information on all-girl corps or all-black corps, see: Jill M. Sullivan, *Women's Bands in America: Performing Music and Gender* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Jill M. Sullivan and Danelle D. Keck, "The Hormel Girls," *American Music* 25, no. 3 (2007): 282–311;

In this dissertation, I aim to provide insight into how the drum corps community might curb abuse and misconduct within present-day DCI. As such, I focus primarily on issues within DCI since the early 1990s, as that is when many community members currently engaged in the activity first became involved. Narrowing the time frame of my analysis to the past thirty years allows me to provide a more meaningful context onto which I can map my interviewees' stories and opinions. Moreover, establishing this scope allows me to apply my insider knowledge more effectively. Finally, because my goal is to provide insight into how the drum corps community might curb abuse and misconduct within DCI in the present day, it is important to understand the culture and contexts that shape the experiences of today's members. Most active staff and influential individuals within present-day DCI are acting in accordance with the expectations they learned as members during the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. Although pursuing the pedagogical lineage of DCI beyond the active generations could provide further insights into the issues at hand, any attempts to trace and account for the experiences of previous generations are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

1.1. Drum Corps Culture

Individual corps have unique cultural nuances by design and each competitive year presents its own challenges, yet the mechanics of a DCI season are quite similar. Because this dissertation focuses primarily on events that have occurred between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s, I have chosen to describe the mechanics of DCI in a way that accounts for the typical

“Sankofa,” Facebook, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Sankofa-1848516052101230>.

experiences of members during this time.⁶ This approach allows me to speak to the hegemonic understanding of DCI cultural values that have been informed by the consistency established by the DC touring model.

A drum corps competitive season revolves around preparing for the Drum Corps International World Championships in early August. To participate in the Championships or any other DCI-sponsored competition, corps must adhere to the bylaws and regulations laid forth by DCI. DCI mandates that each corps can contract no more than 154 performing members, though they may also contract members as alternates who do not hold an assigned position at the outset but can assume the role of a contracted member in instances of injury or illness. Contracts are a formal agreement between the corps and member that guarantees the member a performing position that is contingent upon the member's adherence to the corps' rules and regulations. The exact details of contracts vary from corps to corps.

Members earn contracted positions by auditioning during the off-season—typically November through April—at weekend-long audition and rehearsal camps. To be contracted, members cannot turn 22 years old before June 1 of the current season. This age limit generally aligns with expectations around completing a bachelor's degree. A member who is too old to march is considered “aged out” of the activity, with their last season of eligibility being referred to as their age-out season. Among members, those who are marching their last season are referred to as age outs, with the specific title of “rook out” being given to first-year members who are also age outs. The lower age limit is determined by individual corps, with most requiring marching members to be 16 years old by May 1st. Because the typical American

⁶ COVID-19 has significantly changed the touring model. As of February 2022, the tour has been shortened and additional procedures are in place to minimize health risks.

student learns how to perform as part of a marching band while participating in a high school athletic band, prospective members who do not have this experience are at a disadvantage during the audition process.

Individual corps are independent, non-profit organizations that do not hold any affiliation with an educational institution.⁷ Corps are most frequently tied to a location by virtue of the location of their headquarters offices. Through the mid-1990s, prospective members chose a corps to audition for based primarily on the location of the corps' headquarters. It is now the norm, however, for prospective members to choose a corps based on competitive success and the corps' culture, as well as their likelihood of securing a contracted position in the ensemble. As such, members commonly travel upwards of 300 miles by car, plane, train, or bus, to attend auditions and rehearsal camps.

Most corps that compete in DCI's world championships are based in the United States, though members hail from around the world.⁸ DCI corps spend about 75 days touring the United States, using charter buses to travel from competition to competition, traversing upwards of 30,000 miles throughout a summer. Being the only space that members can claim as their own for the entirety of the tour, these buses become members' "homes." In nearly every corps, members are divided among the buses with a capacity of around 60 of the corps' maximum of 154 members.⁹

⁷ Golden Empire of Bakersfield, California is an exception to this. This corps is affiliated with Bakersfield College. They are the only corps that held this type of institutional affiliation at the time of writing this dissertation.

⁸ Countries that are most prominently represented are: Japan, the Netherlands, and the UK.

⁹ This figure has since changed and will likely continue to change in the coming years.

To make rehearsing possible despite the time spent traveling, corps primarily travel between locations overnight. A typical day consists of four to eight hours of rehearsal that is followed by a competition. Most competitions conclude after 10 pm, meaning that a corps usually departs just before midnight.¹⁰ Members typically attempt to sleep on the bus until they arrive at a housing site. Depending on the distance between competitions, overnight travel time may be upwards of eight hours. As a result, the corps may finally lay down to sleep in the early hours of the morning.

A legacy of the institutional affiliation afforded by VFWs and ALs, corps minimize housing costs by renting out high schools and other public buildings. Members typically sleep in gymnasiums or other large, open spaces. Whether on an air mattress, camping sleeping pad, or just a sleeping bag, members are typically thankful to have a stationary place of rest. The corps also makes use of other facilities within their housing site, using communal locker rooms for showering and football stadiums and empty fields for rehearsing.

Corps are self-sustaining insofar as they travel with their own set of instruments, props, and other equipment, as well as a commercial kitchen housed in a semi-truck trailer. Volunteers prepare food for corps members, staff, administrators, and anyone else traveling with the corps. The number of individuals who are fed 4 meals a day can be upwards of 225. Members are responsible for daily operational tasks, such as (un)packing the food truck or cleaning the housing site prior to the corps' departure. This system renders much of the basic operational labor necessary for getting a corps down the road entirely free.

¹⁰ It can take several hours for a corps to unpack and repack instruments, props, and other equipment.

Members' operational labor does come with a price, however. The cost to participate in a summer of a DCI corps, as of 2022, averages \$6,000.¹¹ This is a far cry from the sub-\$1,000 fees of the 1990s and 1980s. Much of this financial expansion has occurred during the 2010s. The fees I paid, for example, ranged from \$1,600 in 2006 to \$3,000 in 2011. Corps of 2022 are multi-million-dollar operations, though they maintain nonprofit status and are frequently on the brink of financial insolvency. A large portion of a corps' budget goes to operational costs, such as uniforms and transportation, which have grown exponentially since the 2000s when corps began to replace uniforms more frequently and began to contract out charter buses rather than maintaining their own fleet. The growing financial burden of marching has rendered the activity even more exclusive and homogeneous.

Each drum corps is comprised of three sections: the color guard, percussion, and brass. The brass section, or horn line, consists of instrumentalists playing trumpet, mellophone,¹² baritone, euphonium, tuba, and occasionally trombone.¹³ Percussion sections within DCI corps are divided into two sub-sections: the battery and the front ensemble. The battery marches and plays snare drums, tenor/quad drums, and bass drums. Conversely, the front ensemble, or pit, typically remains stationary. They play marimbas, vibraphones, xylophones, and another auxiliary percussion. Color guard members often hold a variety of roles. While the brass and

¹¹ "Research Reports," MAASIN, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.maasin.net/research-reports>.

¹² The mellophone serves as a replacement for the French Horn.

¹³ The trombone is a relatively recent addition to DCI. Prior to 2013, corps were only allowed to utilize valved instruments. The horn line of 2022 plays on instruments tuned to B-flat (or F for the mellophones). Prior to 2003, corps performed with bugles in the key of G. Earlier corps utilized bugles with, or without, rotary valves. The history of instrumentation within drum corps can be found in: Steve Vickers, *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Madison, WI: Sights & Sounds, 2003).

battery typically march, the color guard members' primary vocabulary of movement is dance-based. They may spin flags, rifles, or sabers, adding a visual component to the corps' musical performance.¹⁴

Corps perform field shows, typically referred to simply as a show; these are the "product" that is judged. A show is a somewhat malleable repertoire of music and movement that a given corps will rehearse exclusively.¹⁵ That is, no two corps will perform the exact arrangement of music and movement during a given year. The goal of a show is to effectively convey to the audience a particular interpretation of the music and movement, known as a show concept, within the allotted time (around 11 minutes). Show concepts can tell a story, like that of Faust, or communicate a more abstract idea, such as the "eureka!" moment of having an idea.

A corps' show has, on average, three to four distinct movements that have been arranged by the corps' music arranger. Each movement may be comprised of one or more pre-existing compositions.¹⁶ For example, in 2019 the Blue Devils' show was entitled "Ghostlight." The show concept was centered around a ghost light, the electric light that stands on a theatre stage, remaining on even when the theatre is unoccupied. Their musical selections included:

Discombobulate by Hans Zimmer

"Don't Think" by Slamb

¹⁴ In their earliest years, the color guard functioned to guard the colors quite literally, or the corps' national flag. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the purpose of the color guard shifted more towards helping convey the theme of a show. By the turn of the century, the typically feminine color guard is often clad in more unique and feminine uniforms that reflect or contributes to their show's concept.

¹⁵ It could be argued that a field show is its own genre of musical performance, like the concept of musical theater.

¹⁶ Arrangers occasionally compose original music for a portion of the show or even the entire show.

“Rhythm Song” by Paul Smadbeck

“Cycle Song” by Imogen Heap

A True Passion & Stroke of Genius by Lorne Balfe

Symphony No. 3 by Aram Khachaturian

Ghostlight by David Glyde

“Circus” by Lukasz Sebastian Gottwald (aka Dr. Luke), Claude Kelly, and Benjamin Joseph Levin (aka Benny Blanco).

This bricolage of music was arranged for the horn line by John Meehan, the front ensemble by Brian Dinkel, the battery by Scott Johnson, and the sound design by Fred Smith.¹⁷ Music Director and arranger Dave Glyde oversaw the arrangement process, ensuring that the show concept would be communicated clearly and have an emotional impact on the audience.

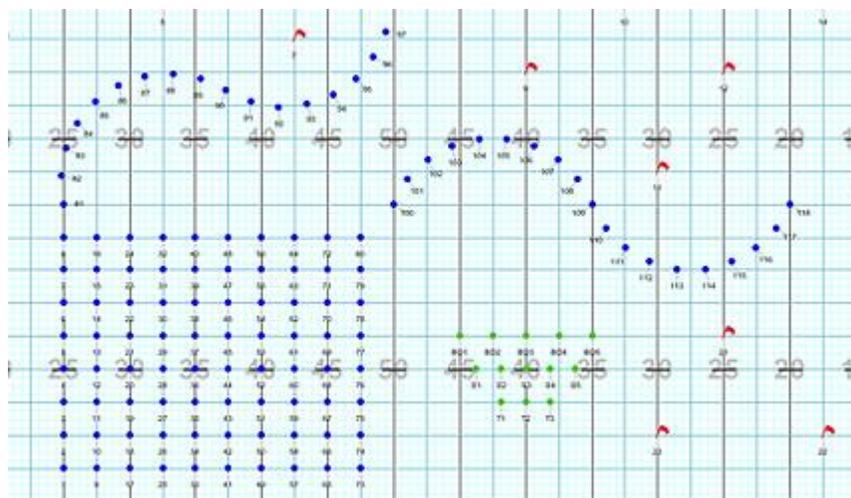
DCI corps also have shared aural aesthetic values that result from the arrangement of music, instrumentation, and challenges inherent in performing on a football field. Though DCI corps draw musical source material from the canon of European classical art music, they perform in a distinct style. The arrangements typically are distilled representations of the original score that prioritize the presentation of melodies rather than their development. Arrangers alter the tempo to build excitement, often increasing it by twenty or more beats per minute and exaggerating dynamics to their fullest. Together with the ever-present battery and front ensemble, these truncated arrangements have resulted in a significantly altered understanding of canonic works.¹⁸ Instrumentation serves to further define the sonic expectations for a DCI corps. Brass instruments are the primary source of harmonies and melodies. Volume, sudden dynamic

¹⁷ The role of a sound designer is a relatively new addition that reflects the increased use of electronic music and mic-ing of acoustic instruments.

¹⁸ This is an area in desperate need of further research.

changes, uniformity of technique, and technical skill are all hallmark features of the “drum corps sound.” Each performer is expected to approach a phrase of music the same as everyone else. Thus, the drum corps sound places strong value on the beginnings and endings of notes and phrases—across the horn line, battery, and pit—in a way that is perhaps like what one would have heard in 18th Century, Mannheim. The “wall of sound” that results from this extreme attention to detail is both a defining feature of DCI and a means by which the imagined or recorded properties of the original score are fundamentally altered.

The on-field formations that the color guard, battery, and brass create to aid in the communication of the show concept to the audience. The placement and arrangement of members on the field, and how they get from one formation to another, is called drill. Each formation is called a drill set or set. A typical corps show will have anywhere from 60 to over 100 sets, with the division of movement corresponding to counts of music.



Example 1. A drill chart.¹⁹

¹⁹ Image shared with permission from Mike Wells Design. Michael Wells, created 2014, accessed 10 March 2022, www.mikewellsdesign.com.

Members learn their drill set by set, using a coordinate system to identify their individual position on the field via individual coordinate sheets (below) or whole-corps drill charts (above).

Performer: (unnamed) s N2 ID:75			Russell County 2014
Set	Move	Side 1-Side 2	Back-Front
#68	0	Side 2: 2.5 stps outside 45 yd In	7.75 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#69	16	Side 1: 2.0 stps outside of 50 yd In	12.0 stps in frnt of Back hash (HS)
#70	16	Side 1: On 40 yd In	10.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#71	32	Side 1: 2.0 stps inside 40 yd In	10.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#72	16	Side 1: 3.0 stps inside 45 yd In	14.0 stps in frnt of Back hash (HS)
#72A	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps outside of 50 yd In	12.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#73	8	Side 2: 1.0 stp outside 45 yd In	10.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#73A	8	Side 2: 3.5 stps outside 45 yd In	6.5 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#74	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps inside 40 yd In	3.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#75	8	Side 2: On 40 yd In	6.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#76	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps inside 40 yd In	6.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#77	16	Side 2: 3.5 stps inside 40 yd In	1.75 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#78	8	Side 2: 3.0 stps outside 45 yd In	on Front hash (HS)
#79	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps inside 40 yd In	4.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#80	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps inside 45 yd In	7.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#81	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps outside 45 yd In	9.5 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#82	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps inside 40 yd In	12.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#82A	16	Side 2: 2.0 stps inside 45 yd In	12.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#83	24	Side 2: 2.0 stps outside of 50 yd In	6.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#83A	4	Side 2: 2.0 stps outside of 50 yd In	6.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#84	4	Side 2: 2.0 stps outside of 50 yd In	6.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#85	8	Side 2: 2.0 stps outside of 50 yd In	6.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#85A	4	Side 2: 3.5 stps inside 45 yd In	3.0 stps behind Front hash (HS)
#86	4	Side 2: 1.0 stp inside 45 yd In	on Front hash (HS)
#87	20	Side 2: 1.25 stps outside 40 yd In	3.0 stps in frnt of Front hash (HS)

Example 2. A member's coordinates for one movement of their show²⁰

Much like arrangers, drill writers design drill unique to each show concept to convey the corps' show effectively to judges and audience members. The drill writer considers the musical arrangement when determining the shape of a formation (or form) and how many counts are in between each shape. That is, the visual formations reflect the phrasing structure of the music.

Brass and battery members have additional visual responsibilities beyond knowing their point on the field. Elements of dance have been increasingly incorporated into shows, demanding that members know and understand their choreography in addition to music and location on the

²⁰ Image courtesy of Mike Wells Design.

field. Without any musical responsibilities, the color guard can focus primarily on the visuals. They are assigned drill as well, but their choreography often involves dancing from one set to another. While moving, color guard members spin and toss flags, sabers, rifles, and other props. This equipment visibly reflects drum corps' militaristic legacy, wherein the function of a color guard was to present and protect the military unit's flags. A corps may have a dedicated choreographer, as well as instructors who provide equipment-specific choreography. In addition to the increased use of choreography within the horn line and battery, the pit takes on elements of visual performance as well.



Example 3. Photo of a keyboard player²¹

The effectiveness of the pit's visual contributions was particularly evident when a video of a synthesizer player from the Boston Crusaders went viral in 2016.²² An audience member captured a series of short videos of the performer's extreme facial expressions. These videos

²¹ "Passionate Boston Crusaders Keyboard Player Goes Viral," *Boston Crusaders* (blog), July 15, 2016, <https://bostoncrusaders.org/2016/07/keyboard-player-goes-viral/>.

²² *Ibid.*.

gained significant popularity on the internet, providing the outside world with a peek into drum corps performance expectations.

The drum corps show of the 2020s exhibits elements of Broadway-style theatrics.²³ Many corps make use of custom props that provide additional opportunities for visual effects throughout the show. These props range from homemade theatre sets to customized ramps, stages, trusses, and an endless range of physical items placed on the field. Taken together, these visual and musical elements are often successful at communicating the show concept to the audience.

1.2. Everyday Life

DCI corps organize their season around DCI-facilitated competitions. Before the disruptions caused by COVID-19, the competitive season typically began in mid-June. The 2022 season, however, is currently projected to begin in July. Competitions occur most nights during the summer in a variety of locations. On a given night there may be a competition in Ohio and California, allowing corps to engage in manageable tour schedules.

Beginning in late July, corps will come together for regional competitions on Saturdays, and occasionally Fridays. These regional competitions allow the corps to be judged under similar circumstances, thus rendering the scores they earn more comparable. The season culminates with the World Championships during the second week of August. These have been held in Indiana since 2008. These final competitions crown World Champions for Open and World Class corps. Open Class corps are typically smaller, and the average age of their members is typically lower

²³ This is owed in large part to the commercial success of Blast!, which won the 2001 Tony Awards for Special Theatrical Event and Choreography.

than that of World Class corps.²⁴ Each class has a quarter-, semi-, and finals competition. Members typically refer to the six individual competitions over four days as Finals. Not only are Finals the last opportunity for a corps to perform their show, but they assign rankings to each corps that will impact the subsequent season. Corps that place higher, or higher than expected, tend to earn more financial revenue and attract more auditionees.

Although competition is central to corps' performance goals, it is but one way they perform for audiences. Before and after each competition presents several performance opportunities, formally and informally. Likewise, the educational aims of many corps yield opportunities for clinics and masterclasses. Finally, corps participate in parades, performing for large audiences comprised of many people who would not normally seek out a drum corps performance. Despite the heterogeneity of types of performances, each of these presents the opportunity for conformity to be a major factor in audience response and staff perception.

Formal judging of a corps' show is but one component of a corps' performance during a competition. Prior to stepping on the field for competition, each section of the corps warms up, often in full view of the soon-to-be audience members. When these mundane aspects of corps life are exposed to the public eye, they become an opportunity for a corps to set up an audience's expectations for their competitive performance.

“The lot” is a descriptor used to articulate a corps' performance during their pre-show warm-up. Because every competition takes place in a sports stadium, corps make use of the area around the stadium for their warm-ups. Many times, this results in each section warming up at a different location in a parking lot—hence the name “the lot.” Before a competition, and

²⁴ There are many controversies around the division of corps into these two categories. The touring requirements for participation in World Class competitions necessitate larger budgets.

sometimes during the competition, audience members will watch a corps' sections warm-up in the lot, rendering this mundane and often tedious process a performance in itself.

The lot offers staff and members the opportunity to prepare for the show. Stretches, breathing exercises, and section-specific warm-up activities are all conducted under the watchful eye of audience members. The warm-up components that contain portions of their competitive show receive the most attention from audience members. The small audience that gathers when a horn line begins to practice a segment from a show can thus serve as an exercise in adrenaline and nerve control for members. Additionally, the lot is an important opportunity for corps to establish or alter a competitive reputation that will quickly spread around the drum corps community. The lot becomes important, then, as a rehearsal site wherein a corps' degree of uniformity is judged by audience members.

Members demonstrate knowledge of being constantly on display throughout the warm-up process. Much like sports, pre-show rituals develop throughout the summer among members. Examples of these include a sub-section reciting the lyrics of a song, simultaneously shouting an inside joke, and the whole section making a funny noise every time they do a specific stretch. These rituals end up being just as much for the members as for audiences. For corps that tend to gather larger audiences in the lot, audience members may come to anticipate the inclusion of a particular warm-up exercise or musical segment.

These performance contexts point towards a distinct set of cultural values held across the drum corps community. Most notably, the shared understanding of everything—from warming up to rehearsals to competitions—as a performance opportunity wherein the corps' identity is on full display reflects the extent to which individual members are viewed as representatives of the corps. Lacking a distinct identity, each member is instead one component of the whole corps.

The subjugation of the individual to the concept of the corps and the community enhances feelings of belonging. The inherent and unbreakable connection of the individual to the community is a hallmark feature of drum corps culture. As it will become clear throughout this dissertation, this facilitates an insular culture that has both benefits and inherent dangers or possibilities for misuse.

The notion of family is prevalent in conversations around the individual's relationship to their corps. In Chapter 1, I will attend to these feelings of kinship within individual corps and across the drum corps community as a whole. I define kinship as emotional bonds that feel, to the individual, entirely permanent and unbreakable. Kinship and belonging among drum corps members influence community feelings of emotional closeness and personal obligations to one another that extend beyond the season or corps. Lacking a tangible connection to a particular place, community members define their relationships through the understanding that only they know what it is like to have marched.

1.3. An Insular Culture

Members often avoid sharing knowledge of specific rituals, practices, and customs with outsiders to evade inquiry and cultivate a sense of exclusivity and elitism. This same desire to shield drum corps practices from non-participants can have a far more devastating effect than simply avoiding questions about idiosyncratic practices. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, abuse, sexual assault, and other negative experiences within DCI have come to light on the national stage.²⁵ The accusations lodged against famed corps director George Hopkins, for

²⁵ Tricia Nadolny, "The Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps: A History of Alleged Sexual Abuse," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 5, 2018, <http://www.philly.com/philly/news/cadets-drum-bugle-corps-george-hopkins-sexual-abuse-harrassment-allentown-pennsylvania.html>.

example, spurred a deluge of complaints and whistleblowing, the majority of which were tied to misconduct on the part of staff members.²⁶ Hopkins' abusive tendencies were well-known among corps members but his sexual assaults had not been as widely acknowledged. Since the revelations in 2018, the drum corps community has been forced to reckon with decades of abuse of various varieties.²⁷ We have been seeking ways to reconcile our continued love for drum corps with the harm that it has caused so many.

This issue has been particularly difficult because DCI members are taught to understand the activity as a meritocracy. Corps members commonly articulate that the more talented and hardworking a member, the better an experience they will have and as a result, the more they will feel like they belong in the corps. According to this line of thinking, the converse is also true: members who struggle to perform at an acceptable level will not have as enjoyable of an experience. Yet, this is merely a superficial understanding. In this chapter, I will explore how a member's social identities can come to affect how their talent and work are perceived by others. Furthermore, the interviews I conducted reveal how the deeply ingrained need for acceptance and belonging can empower abusers and silence survivors.

The fierce allegiance to our community has rendered inquiries into any DCI issues that can be viewed negatively by outsiders nearly impossible. Without insider knowledge of how actions are perceived within the context of drum corps, outsiders are presumed to make negative value judgments. Indeed, mundane aspects of life on tour, particularly around the loss of personal space and individual autonomy, can easily be construed negatively. For example,

²⁶ Anonymous, "@DCIFuckery," 2020, <https://twitter.com/dcifuckery>.

²⁷ Even so, there was still a desire among some in the activity to keep things "in house" after the emergence of the #MeToo movement. Chapters 3 and 4 delve more deeply into this issue.

activities such as communal showering risk being judged based on American puritanical values that imply an inherent sexualization of the body. Yet for members of the community, these everyday activities are understood as nonsexual actions necessary to the smooth operation of the corps.

The tensions between drum corps and general North American (settler-colonizer) cultural values are a primary motivation for continued cultural insularity. That is if the most basic daily practices within a corps are seen as problematic, how might we be judged on actions and choices that do not have ubiquitous acceptance within the community? Retaining a strict division between insiders and outsiders has historically allowed community members to avoid judgment. Throughout this dissertation, I highlight the tensions among community members as we attempt to address issues of misconduct and abuse.

A common framing for reform attempts within the community is the desire to improve performance outcomes. Recognizing that motivating members out of fear yields poor results, some instructors like James (white, male) describe their desire to change the culture from within in this manner:²⁸

We're expecting instructors to come in who are more professional and mature and refined. And it's not just the old guys that all they do is yell all the time. And if you're wrong, I'm going to beat you physically or emotionally, whatever that name is.²⁹ There's a better way to do it, and we're not going to achieve the level of production that you see out of the top three in any given year if we're wasting time on things that aren't getting us towards, that end result.³⁰

²⁸ All interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms. Names are only reused when relevant and necessary. Please note that these names are largely from white American culture. Every effort has been made to assign a culturally appropriate name when possible.

²⁹ “whatever the name is,” reflects the interviewee’s difficulty in finding a way to accurately describe the punishments he was discussing.

³⁰ Anonymous Interviews, interview by Alyssa Wells, n.d.

The outcome-focused perspective that James shared still indicates that they do not feel outside intervention is necessary. Yet, as others articulated, the addition of outsider perspectives can be a crucial tool in identifying problematic events and cultural practices. Robert (white, male) invoked the death of Rodney King at the hands of Los Angeles police in 1991 as a point of comparison to illustrate the necessity of reevaluating drum corps culture:

did you ever see the OJ made in America? So, one of the things that they talk about is Rodney King being beaten by the police in Los Angeles. The reporter that they were interviewing in the documentary, he was like, there were however many cops were at the scene who all watched this poor guy just getting beat within an inch of his life. And then like everybody went home they all filled out the reports and nobody indicated that anything wrong happened. He's like, that's just the indication that there's a problem with the culture in policing, right? Like, that's the same kind of stuff with DCI.³¹

Robert's point underscores the importance of reassessing every cultural norm. Many within the drum corps community likely harbor similar opinions to James, however, the power structures and social hierarchies that have defined and produced our cultural values are easily rendered invisible to those most entrenched within the community. Throughout this dissertation, I highlight instances of misconduct to render them visible to our community, with the hope that these will inspire more critical conversations about our cultural values.

1.4. Methods

This dissertation examines issues of abuse and misconduct in DCI through ethnographic and phenomenological methods. Together, the two approaches make it possible to articulate the cultural values within DCI from the perspective of community members, while highlighting the potential negative ramifications of these values. The phenomenological approach works to articulate, for the first time in any systematic or comprehensive way, the social-cultural values of

³¹ Anonymous Interviews.

the DCI community while fully acknowledging my personal positioning and the inescapable bias I carry because of nearly twenty years' involvement in the marching art. The added layer of ethnographic analytical methods makes it possible for me to articulate the underlying sociological mechanisms that appear to me to support this negative influence or hold the potential to be exploited. I rely heavily upon self-reported experiences I collected via surveys, as well as my interviews with over 80 community members. As a result, this dissertation is also as much an oral history as it is an analysis of the oral history.

I solicited participation in my ethnographic research by leveraging my connections to the drum corps community.³² Using primarily social media, I recruited potential interlocutors to complete an initial interest survey on the Qualtrics platform that offered them the opportunity to participate via a more detailed survey or through a one-on-one conversation with me (Appendix A. Survey 1 – Ethnography of DCI Participants). While recruiting, I intentionally sought out diverse opinions with the hope of representing as much of the drum corps community as possible. I shared the interest survey in special affinity Facebook groups, dedicated to bringing together members of the drum corps community who share similar experiences, such as being black or African American and marching DCI, or having conservative political opinions.

The initial interest survey provided me with contact information. I then followed up with those who indicated they would be most interested in sharing their stories via a survey, providing them with the survey link (Appendix B). Survey takers were not required to submit answers to all questions and could opt out at any point. The questions were nearly all open-ended responses, except for one that was a Likert scale about corps' strictness.

³² My interviews and surveys were exempt from needing IRB approval as I was conducting ethnographic research in the form of collecting oral histories.

219 people responded to this interview survey and 153 of those responses contained meaningful data. For those who preferred to speak with me via a phone or video call, I then sent out two additional surveys intended to aid with scheduling (Appendix C and Appendix D) that also contained questions to gather basic demographic data. I conducted one-on-one interviews with 95 individuals.³³ To organize the interview content, I recorded and transcribed each conversation. Using the qualitative data analysis program NVivo, I entered each conversation as an individual case. I also created individual cases for each respondent to the interview survey. From there, I coded the responses according to larger topics I identified, such as “belonging” or “rookie culture,” and then coded the sentiment of each statement.

I gave special consideration to the privacy and safety of my interlocutors, as well as the secrecy of traditions, rites, and other guarded knowledge.³⁴ All recordings, transcripts, and survey response downloads are stored on a dedicated encrypted hard drive. I immediately anonymized all names in every written document, assigning each respondent or interviewee a unique pseudonym. These documents and files will remain anonymous and undistributed. Only what is in this dissertation will be shared with the public.

The demographic data was self-reported. Both surveys provided respondents a pre-defined set of answers, as well as the opportunity to enter a custom response. The demographic breakdown of both interviewees and survey-takers that follows retains self-reported descriptions whenever possible. As a result, I grouped demographic data to count the number of responses but listed all identifiers that are represented within the count. The data is as follows:

³³ Because the interview survey was anonymous, I am unable to determine if any of the one-on-one interviewees also completed the interview survey.

³⁴ The need for this was made particularly evident when a whistleblower was harassed publicly following her release of complaints. See Chapter 4 Section 4.6 for more information.

Table 1. Distribution of reported gender³⁵

Gender	Count
Male	113
Female	75
Non-Binary	3

Table 2. Distribution of self-reported race and/or ethnicity

Race and/or Ethnicity	Count
white, Caucasian, and/or Western European	178
Asian-American, Asian, and/or Pacific Islander	11
Black or African American	10
Native American and/or Indigenous	7
Latin(o/a/x) or Hispanic	6
Mixed	5

Table 3. Distribution of decades marched³⁶

Decade Marched	Count
1960s	16
1970s	32
1980s	51
1990s	63
2000s	22
2010s	34

³⁵ These surveys reflect self-reported gender only. No questions sought information about an individual's assigned gender at birth, or their sex.

³⁶ Interlocutors who marched multiple decades are counted for each decade they marched.

2020s	6
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Table 4. Distribution of responses to scheduling survey based on section

Section	Count
Brass	105
Battery	30
Admin or staff	2
Color guard	37
Front Ensemble	12
Drum Major/Conductor	4
Other/Not reported	1

Although the interview survey and one-on-one interviews have provided a significant amount of data, little of it is of relevance to this dissertation. My interlocutors' responses to open-ended questions are far more pertinent. Additionally, my methods of surveying and obtaining quantifiable data were not as rigorous as to render that data meaningful to any statistical analyses. As I mentioned earlier, it is possible that some of the individuals I interviewed one-on-one also completed the interview survey. Any cross-referencing of the two would be difficult, if not impossible because the interview survey does not contain exact names, dates, or contact information.

My interlocutors, from both interview methods, represented a large swath of the drum corps community. I cannot be certain to what degree the demographic breakdowns mirror that of DCI overall because they do not make that information available. This is particularly significant when considering the weight of each opinion and story within this dissertation. There was likely significant selection bias on the part of my interlocutors, as evidenced by the sentiment of each statement. This makes it difficult to determine whether the individuals who responded are more

concerned with the safety and wellness of members than the community at large. Further studies should take these methodological observations and problems into account.

1.5. Challenges and Considerations

The identification and interpretation of what problems exist within DCI culture and what needs to be done about them varied greatly in my data. Yet, community members who responded all held a vested interest in remedying issues of sexual assault and abuse without causing additional harm to the activity. Balancing the desire to improve with the desire to handle everything within the community was among the most difficult challenges I faced in this research.

The insularity and small size of the community have made it necessary for me to take significant measures to protect both myself and my interlocutors. In Chapter 1, I describe the value of belonging; for many, speaking to me about issues of concern they perceived within DCI threatened to sever their feelings of belonging because it meant reframing their experiences in a potentially harmful light. My own personal relationships and the careers of those for whom I care most deeply also have the potential to be harmed by any perceived mishandling of information on my part as researcher, interpreter, and writer. Reputation and personal connections are paramount for attaining and retaining jobs. Opinions that appear to disparage the activity—regardless of their validity—can mark an individual as a traitor or social pariah. The positive experiences, life lessons, and lifelong friendships I gained from participating in DCI motivated me to consider my framing of any potentially problematic situation. It is for these reasons that I have attempted to convey the passion and investment in the community that even some of the most vocal critics hold.

I have taken significant steps to ensure the anonymity of my interlocutors. Unless an individual was comfortable with being identified by name, I assigned every person quoted at least one pseudonym. These pseudonyms were taken from various lists of popular names within the United States, as such, they skew heavily towards names from white American culture. I also alter pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of those who could be identified because I have quoted them multiple times. In instances where an event or individual could be easily discerned by roles, titles, or positions of power, I have also removed this identifying information. Unless an event or corps has been publicly named, typically in journalism or on social media, I refrain from identifying the organizations. When referencing or quoting an individual, I have included their self-reported race and/or ethnic heritage as well as their gender identity. Information beyond this, such as the number of years or time frame during which someone marched, will also be included when possible. I provide this demographic information via parenthetical descriptors that follow this format: (Race and/or ethnicity, gender, decade(s) marched, section). This practice is similarly present in sociological literature, such as Matthew Hughey's studies of white nationalist and white antiracist groups.³⁷

Above all, I sought to provide constructive ideas rather than destructive criticism. The immense privilege I hold as a white, middle-class, highly educated person makes it easy to frame or analyze my interlocutor's stories in a way that detracts from the positive experiences and memories they hold or insists upon an interpretation that is vastly different from the opinions held by the person whose experiences I am discussing. It would be unethical and harmful for me to analyze their stories in a way that reveals underlying trauma. Thus, in these instances, I

³⁷ Matthew W. Hughey, "Backstage Discourse and the Reproduction of White Masculinities," *The Sociological Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2011): 132–53.

instead seek to frame them in a way that contributes to the overall understanding of how potentially problematic events and behaviors can be woven into drum corps culture. Moreover, very few of those with whom I spoke felt as if the negative aspects they communicated to me warrant negative generalizations about the activity. While there are an incalculable number of ways that drum corps and the drum corps community has irreparably harmed many, this knowledge must also be complemented with the recognition of positive experiences. Creating space for both types of experiences—and everything in between—to exist simultaneously with equal if contradictory degrees of validity is wholly necessary for addressing issues of abuse and misconduct within DCI.

Consideration for the positioning of each anecdote I invoke in this dissertation is of utmost importance. Yet, I seek to provide analytical depth to these experiences. This is rendered particularly challenging by the lack of extant literature on drum and bugle corps after which I could model my discourses. Indeed, research on drum and bugle corps within musicology and ethnomusicology has only recently begun to find a place in our fields. I embark on an exploration of members' experiences that is among the first musicological and ethnomusicological scholarship on DCI.

Over the past twenty years, DCI alumni have increasingly pursued careers in music education or performance, with music educators contributing the greatest amount of scholarship. Among those of us in musicology, music theory, and ethnomusicology, only a handful have made any marching pageantry art the subject of our research.³⁸ Dissertations comprise the bulk

³⁸ Among those whose research has focused on Drum Corps International and discussions of the marching arts that are adjacent to DCI are the following: Dennis E. Cole, "What Is a Drum and Bugle Corps? Reinterpreting Traditions Inside the Musical Community" (PhD diss., Kent State University, 2009); Dennis E. Cole, *Competitive Drum Corps in the United States: An*

of this body of literature, as there is only one article and no books on the topic. This fact demonstrates the institutional hesitancy that perpetuates notions of DCI and the musical activities of North American drum corps as being a subject unworthy of study. Denise Odello's 2016 and 2020 articles are indeed the only current (non-dissertation or thesis) academic works on DCI specifically within musicology and ethnomusicology.

Musicologists and ethnomusicologists who have focused on DCI, regardless of publication medium, have been faced with the monumental task of providing the first glimpses into a musical world. Dennis Cole articulated the drum corps community's social values in his 2009 dissertation, emphasizing the role of DCI in the altering of musical and community values.³⁹ In her 2011 master's thesis, Erin Maher uses the contemporary issue of amplification as means of exploring the tensions between tradition and innovation in the community. Finally, Jamil George's forthcoming dissertation (expected 2022) provides the first academic glimpse into all-Black drum and bugle corps; though many of these groups did not go on to participate in DCI, the role of this governing body figures prominently throughout.

Without an established field of scholarly work on DCI from which I can draw, this dissertation instead relies on in-depth work from other areas. Borrowing from research on

Ethnographic Field Study (Madison, WI: Sights & Sounds, 2011); Denise Odello, "Canons and Consequences: Musicology and the Wind Band," *Journal of Band Research; Troy* 49, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 71–83; Denise Odello, "Performing Tradition: History, Expression, and Meaning in Drum Corps Shows," *Popular Music and Society* 39, no. 2 (March 14, 2016): 241–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2015.1065623>; Denise Odello, "Ritualized Performance and Community Identity: A Historical Examination of Drum Corps Competition in the United States," *International Journal of Community Music* 13, no. 1 (May 2020): 65–79, https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm_00010_1; Erin K. Maher, "The Amplification Controversy in Drum Corps International: Technological Change and the Meaning of Tradition" (MA Thesis, Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011).

³⁹ Cole, "What Is a Drum and Bugle Corps?"

identity, difference, and power, I create a foundation of understanding through which I can assess cultural norms. At the same time, the prominent role of phenomenological descriptions necessitates constant consideration for how my interlocutors interpret a given event or subject. The careful balance I strike allows for multiple interpretations—whether they are subjective or strive for objectivity—to exist simultaneously, providing further depth and nuance.

1.6. Theoretical Grounding

This dissertation seeks to bring the subjective experiences of community members—myself included—into dialog with one another, and to subject them to analytical frames and tools to better understand their sociological dynamics. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s contention that “...the identity of all analysts affects what they see and study and poses general limits on their ability to understand the world”⁴⁰ has heavily informed my approach. By creating space for multiple interpretations of events and norms, I seek to identify recognized facts and painful truths. My position as a white, cisgender- and heteronormative-passing individual who inhabits the privileged, middle-class cultural spaces within the United States is both the impetus for this project and a major barrier to achieving the goals I have set forth. That is, while my experiences as a female member of the horn line have made issues of gender-based discrimination painfully evident, I am limited in my ability to recognize and articulate many difference-based experiences.

Owed partly to the dominance of white and masculine individuals within the community, the cultural understanding of DCI that has come to be canonized primarily reflects these identities. To make hegemonic structures visible, I seek to make obvious the racial grammar that

⁴⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “More than Prejudice: Restatement, Reflections, and New Directions in Critical Race Theory,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 86.

underpins systemic problems within DCI.⁴¹ Yet, even this endeavor is hampered by the structures of whiteness and white Supremacy from which I benefit and in which I continue to participate, if with increasing introspection. It is thus my hope that the experiences recounted in this dissertation might help open a discursive space about race, as well as gender, in DCI.⁴²

Bonilla-Silva's examination of race and "post-racial" society maps quite directly onto my assessment of DCI in this dissertation. Taking as a starting point his statement that "if the core of the phenomenon coded as 'racism' is prejudice, then education and time should have cured this disease long ago,"⁴³ I attempt to articulate the systemic factors that influence the culture of DCI. While many maintain that drum corps is the ultimate meritocracy, the testimonies within this dissertation demonstrate that this cultural presumption is false. Were issues of belonging and race wholly independent, the activity would look very different, and perhaps this dissertation would not be necessary. Throughout the dissertation, I seek to synthesize the multiple disparate experiences of race by white community members, particularly in instances wherein the informant was acutely aware of racialized differences within their corps.⁴⁴

Continuing the subject of race, Jenny LaFleur's articulation of the relationship between race and mobility is visible throughout this dissertation. Those who are racialized within DCI, and American society writ large, do not enjoy the mobility afforded to their corpsmates who are

⁴¹ Bonilla-Silva, 83.

⁴² Bonilla-Silva, 83.

⁴³ Bonilla-Silva, 74.

⁴⁴ "Failure to synthesize how seemingly disparate white identity formations are constituted by, and help to reinforce, strategies of social control and domination threatens to rob the study of white identity of critical, conceptual and explanatory purchase" Matthew W. Hughey, "The (Dis)Similarities of white Racial Identities: The Conceptual Framework of 'Hegemonic whiteness'," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 8 (September 2010): 1290.

more easily able to transverse the boundary from outsider to insider. In my examination of belonging, I describe how the specter of belonging is inherently unattainable for those outside of the hegemonic group. The notion of meritocracy, I contend, is a consolatory attempt for a culture based on white privilege and masculinity to normalize that privilege. As articulated by Loren Kajikawa, these practices seem to validate the position that “it is the right of white people (or others who have acquired a stake in their privilege) to do as they please without any acknowledgment of the racist practices that contributed to the resources they enjoy.”⁴⁵ I intend to reveal the systemic inequities perpetuated by uncritically upholding meritocracy.

Issues of gender identity and expression figure prominently in this dissertation. After all, my experiences as one of the few women in my section was a primary motivator in pursuing this research. In instances where I analyze stories from my interlocutors, I draw from feminist scholarship. Where analysis is not my primary focus, I aim to position the anecdotes about the gendered frames that envelop our society.

Theories of hegemonic masculinity underpin many of my arguments. Historian Gail Bederman’s assessment of gender and race in the US around the turn of the 20th century provides a foundation for much of my work.

⁴⁵ Loren Kajikawa, “The Possessive Investment in Classical Music: Confronting Legacies of White Supremacy in U.S. Schools and Departments,” in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Williams Krenshaw (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 155–74.

Manhood or masculinity is the cultural process whereby concrete individuals are constituted as members of a preexisting social category—as men. The ideological process of gender—whether manhood or womanhood—works through a complex political technology, composed of a variety of institutions, ideas, and daily practices. Combined, these processes produce a set of truths about who an individual is and what he or she can do, based upon his or her body. Individuals are positioned through that process of gender, whether they choose to or not. [...] Individuals have no choice but to act upon these meanings—to accept or reject them, adopt or adapt them—to be able to live their lives in human society.⁴⁶

The stories I share in this dissertation often reflect the lack of agency around gender expression that Bederman describes. Though focused on a different period and context, Bederman’s theoretical approach compliments my arguments about meritocracy. In my analysis, I seek to identify the “ideological process of gender” as it exists with DCI. Reflecting on the experiences of my interlocutors allows me to identify this key component of drum corps culture.

Moreover, Bederman’s discourse around hardship and “savage” conduct inform my interpretation of hazing-related activities, as well as instances wherein an abuser did not face repercussions as a result of his status. While describing the purported need for boys to avoid emasculation that arises from comfortable conditions and emotional vulnerability, Bederman argues that, within this context, “civilized boys could avoid this horrifying emasculation by being exposed to judicious amounts of savagery.⁴⁷” The notion of hardship, “savagery,” and physical challenge as being necessary methods by which feminization could be countered provides a point of entry into the question of why some of my interviewees found pride in stories that might be otherwise interpreted as harmful. The inextricable forces of masculinity and race in the US that Bederman identifies are readily evident across this dissertation.

⁴⁶ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

⁴⁷ Bederman, 98.

My discussions of belonging and the attributes that affect an individual's ability to feel connected with their corpsmates build on scholarship that addresses the performance of identities. Specifically, I interrogate how non-males in a corps come to assume aspects of masculine identities for the purposes both of performance and acceptance. Kinesiologists Jennifer Waldron and Christopher Kowalski have attended to this issue within the context of sports. In a 2009 article, Waldron and Kowalski share their observations that “both female and male athletes who overconform to the sport ethic by participating in hazing and remaining silent, solidify their identity as a member of the team, while athletes who refuse to haze or break the code of silence are considered weak, unworthy, and even ostracized from the team.”⁴⁸ Viewing my research through the lens of theirs provides insights into how and why people of all genders come to participate and perpetuate harmful gendered actions.

Further reflecting on the lack of scholarship on gendered expectations among performers in the marching arts, I have also drawn from sociological studies of the workplace. Specifically, co-authors Peter Glick, Jennifer Berdahl, and Natalya Alonso, along with a subsequent response by co-authors Kenneth Matos, Olivia O'Neill, and Xue Lei articulate toxic cultures with negative organizational dynamics, dominative coworker behaviors, negative individual work attitudes, and poor personal well-being as “masculinity contest culture.”⁴⁹ Their findings indicate that these cultural features harm all within an organization. This theoretical approach provides

⁴⁸ Jennifer J. Waldron and Christopher L. Kowalski, “Crossing the Line,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 2009, 80, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 298.

⁴⁹ Peter Glick, Jennifer L. Berdahl, and Natalya M. Alonso, “Development and Validation of the Masculinity Contest Culture Scale,” *Journal of Social Issues* 74, no. 3 (2018): 449–76; Kenneth Matos, Olivia (Mandy) O'Neill, and Xue Lei, “Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture: How ‘Win or Die’ Cultures Breed Abusive Leadership,” *Journal of Social Issues* 74, no. 3 (2018): 500–528.

insights into the extent of harm perpetuated by masculinity contest culture within DCI, as well as why so many in the community feel as if they have a personal stake in each incident of abuse or misconduct that comes to light.

Questions of power figure heavily into many of my discussions, beyond their application to gender and race. Naturally, Michel Foucault's work on power assumes a place of prominence throughout. Foucault's articulation of the self and its relationship to institutions is especially important, specifically the notion that the self is socially conditioned in part by institutions. Understanding the ways institutions impose upon our interior personality and external reality allows me to identify the mechanisms within drum corps culture that shape the individual.

Foucault's invocation of army barracks in his discussions of education, punishment, and discipline, for example, lends this theoretical understanding to the application within the context of drum corps. Disciplinary institutions regulate the organization of time, space, and people's activities and behaviors. As it will become immediately clear in Chapter 1, power can indeed be achieved through a high level of discipline. The (perceived) lack of agency that arises from total surveillance and extreme disciplinary measures perpetuates the culture of silence around abuse.

Still, the limitations of Foucault's work lie in the lack of agency he extends to individuals, excluding any opportunity for the independence of the subject. Feminist scholar Monique Deveaux articulates the problem of Foucault's theories as existing within his lack of acknowledgment of "the subject's understanding of her conditions of oppression." Deveaux contends that this is "foreclose discussions of agency and empowerment."⁵⁰ With this in mind, I seek to illuminate the conditions of oppression that have prevented survivors of abuse in DCI

⁵⁰ Monique Deveaux, "Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault," *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994): 241.

from coming forward. Furthermore, the trajectory of this dissertation highlights instances wherein individuals have become aware of their situation with increasing frequency.

Pierre Bourdieu's discourses on the ways that institutions produce and reproduce hierarchies and how hierarchical disposition allows for what Steven Seidman and Jeffrey C. Alexander deem a middle ground.⁵¹ That is, by figuring in the capacity of the individual to assert their own agency in minor ways, it is possible to identify instances of resistance. Investigating these lends insight into what actions might yield the most significant outcomes.

My juxtaposition of analytical ethnography with phenomenological examination both reflects the current state of this field of research and demonstrates multiple cultural worlds community members and I inhabit. Closed off to the outside world, the drum corps community has formed its own distinct set of cultural values and norms that, when brought to contrast with that of outside society, can take on the appearance of willful ignorance. Balancing ethnography without phenomenology allows me to communicate cultural values without judgment. For example, I did not present contrary interpretations to interviewees who sought to defend initiation rituals that are often viewed as hazing, and I do not seek to correct such opinions in this dissertation. This, in turn, demonstrates how issues of misconduct and abuse are simultaneously deeply ingrained and completely invisible for many community members.

1.7. Organization

This dissertation is structured to impart to the reader the social and emotional progression that leads from a desire to belong to potential abuse. By mirroring this trajectory, I aim to strip presuppositions and assumptions from the reader's experience. The sheer personal weight that

⁵¹ Steven Seidman and Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The New Social Theory Reader: Contemporary Debates* (London: Routledge, 2001), 7.

the activity holds in the lives of many community members necessitates this delicate approach. While to many, it's "just band," the personal and collective experiences of community members demonstrate that it is far more significant than such glib statements imply. Moreover, in lending the reader insights into the journey from outsider to insider, the problems inherent in engaging outsiders in conversations about our cultural values reflect the vulnerability espoused by my interlocutors.

Chapter 1 introduces the significance of the DCI community to its members. I begin by emphasizing the importance of belonging within the community, which I contend is one of the ultimate goals of a member. Then, I turn to how this emphasis on conformity influences individual members' ability to belong. I examine instances where members have experienced micro-definition of everyday actions and explore the consequences of these efforts. I then turn to issues of unavoidable difference. I argue that while DCI is purportedly the ultimate meritocracy, an individual's identities may prohibit them from ever achieving feelings of belonging.

In Chapter 2, I explore how the line between being challenged and being abused in DCI is often blurred. First, I describe the importance of grit and determination to drum corps culture. I focus on physical punishment, in particular, demonstrating through my interlocutor's stories how disciplinary acts can transgress into harmful territory. Moving on to injuries and general neglect, I demonstrate how grit comes to be conflated with enduring problematic conditions. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how ideas around grit have changed over the past two decades.

Chapter 3 attends to issues of misconduct among members. Again, attempting to define the line where abuse begins, I explore initiations and rituals within a variety of corps. I begin by articulating the positive impact rituals and initiations may have on a member's ability to achieve feelings of belonging. I contend that hazing rituals, however, are distinct from their harmless

counterparts, providing examples of hazing and problematic initiations to serve as a point of contrast. Then, I move on to instances of member-on-member bullying. Focusing on masculine competition culture, I underscore how proving one's masculinity can be an essential component to achieving acceptance. Next, my interlocutor's stories communicate instances of sexual and physical misconduct, which I explore in relation to general cultural factors within DCI. I conclude this chapter with an overview of intervention methods that have appeared since 2010.

The final body chapter, Chapter 4 focuses on the most problematic abuses of power: staff and administrator's abuse of members. I contend that the events contained within this chapter are made possible by the culmination of factors I describe in chapters 1 through 3. I explore highly publicized instances of abuse as well as rumored allegations, arguing that the degree to which institutional power and social hierarchies are ingrained facilitate abuse. I close this chapter out with a case study of abuse allegations that arose while writing this dissertation.

Finally, in my Conclusion, I suggest avenues of further conversation for the drum corps community. Acknowledging the deep personal feelings of involvement that many community members possess, I contend that wider awareness and conversations are necessary to enact change. That is, despite the harm and trauma that is conveyed within, I argue that drum corps is capable and worthy of saving.

Chapter 1. Belonging in DCI

It would be an understatement to say that members of the drum corps community feel a strong sense of belonging with one another. In fact, belonging is the means to competitive success in American drum corps. Yet, focusing on belonging leads to the subsumption of the individual to the corps that results from achieving feelings of belonging comes with risks. In asking my interviewees about what drum corps means to them and how it has affected their lives, the vast majority described it as a life-changing experience that gave them some of the closest friendships, then and still today. They articulated feelings of kinship with everyone who has ever marched a corps that participates in DCI, an instant connection with people whom they have never met facilitated by the shared understanding of *what it is like*. Indeed, the activity creates a distinctive set of experiences among participants that is seemingly detached from the non-drum corps “real world.” This detachment only serves to heighten the sense that those who did not participate could never truly understand the fierce allegiance one feels to their corps and corpsmates, much less comprehend its activities, rituals, and customs.

The fierce protection of insider knowledge from the prying eyes of outsiders has left scholars without a clear understanding of “drum corps culture”—or perhaps it is simply musicology’s tendency to overlook wind ensembles and bands more generally, and marching bands in particular.¹ Ultimately, drum corps history has been chronicled and protected by

¹ Odello, “Canons and Consequences.”

historians without academic pedigrees.² The history and study of DCI has subsequently been curated solely by insiders, myself being no exception. Yet my role as an academic allows me to take a step towards filling the gaps between insiders and outsiders, academic studies and non-academic studies.

I argue that an assessment of drum corps culture is crucial to tackling issues of abuse and misconduct. Thus, in this chapter, I seek to describe the factors that influence whether or not a member can achieve a sense of belonging, as well as the aspects of the activity that inspire the desire to belong within a corps. To do so, I define conformity as the most important value within drum corps culture. First, I use ideas from scholarship on organizational studies to articulate how drum corps has created its own cultural norms and values.³ I underscore the immense importance placed upon conformity, which is essential to competitive success, and its manifestations in nearly every aspect of the drum corps experience.

Conformity, I contend, is an essential component in a member's ability to feel a sense of belonging. It is a core concept, affecting nearly every aspect of drum corps life. I define conformity as visual and audible similarities between members, primarily in performance contexts, that contribute to the sense that everyone is moving and playing the exact same way. I then turn my focus to how conformity affects a member's ability to belong. In centering my

² Vickers, *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*, 2003; Vickers; Mary Lindsey, "The Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps (Youth Education in the Arts)," *Furman Engaged!*, April 10, 2018, <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furmanengaged/2018/all/340>.

³ Gary Alan Fine, "Group Cultures and Subcultures," in *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018); Gary Alan Fine, *Tiny Publics: A Theory of Group Action and Culture* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012); Gary Alan Fine and Lori Holyfield, "Secrecy, Trust, and Dangerous Leisure: Generating Group Cohesion in Voluntary Organizations," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1996): 22–38; Glick, Berdahl, and Alonso, "Development and Validation of the Masculinity Contest Culture Scale"; Matos, O'Neill, and Lei, "Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture."

informants' experiences, I describe how attaining a sense of belonging to the drum corps community is positioned as one of the primary goals for newcomers. I articulate the immense importance and influence drum corps has on participants' lives, arguing that it cannot be overstated how strongly the activity is to community formation and continuation—especially for those who continue to engage after they are too old to participate. Then, I turn to instances of exclusion, further revealing the values of drum corps culture. Finally, critique the notion of meritocracy within the activity, contending that the assessment of performance ability by other members and staff is not based on achievement alone, but is influenced, even distorted, by a member's social identities.

Throughout this chapter, I seek to communicate the intensity with which community members attach themselves to the activity, and by extension to other members of the community. I then analyze the experiences of my interviewees and their reflections on their time marching.⁴ I contend that the dichotomy between insider and outsider status is continually reinforced by members' efforts to seek out experiences that affirm their sense of belonging.

1.1. The Drum Corps World

The experience of marching a season of DCI has a lifelong impact. When asked about the continued influence of the activity on their life, nearly every alum interviewed referred to the positive life lessons they learned and the lifelong friends they gained. An individual's knowledge that others have cultivated similar shared values facilitates instantaneous bonds. The tightly knit bonds that form through participation in drum corps take on an almost ineffable quality for members.

⁴ Anonymous Interviews; Anonymous Survey Submission, interview by Alyssa Wells, n.d.

Powerful feelings of connectedness reinforce and are reinforced by, shared ideas about drum corps as a unique culture, with its own values and norms. For example, corps members and staff prohibit non-members from entering member sleeping areas. This serves a twofold purpose of eliminating opportunities for outsiders' theft of members' belongings while also allowing members to a sense of having a space of their own—even if the physical location of the space changes daily. As Chapter 2 will explore, the idea of grit is also highly valued within drum corps culture. Members pride themselves in overcoming physical and mental challenges.

A single corps comprises what sociologist Gary Alan Fine describes as a “small group.” According to Fine, small groups are “characterized by interpersonal collaboration, collective focus, ongoing interaction, and a shared history.”⁵ They state that small groups share the following organizational characteristics:⁶

- Shared participation
- Continuing presence of a set of participants
- Immediacy of interaction
- Routinized interaction
- Meaning is essential to group identity

The above elements are readily evident in a corps, who are confined to a shared, albeit mobile, social space that produces routinized and immediate interactions among a continually present group of participants working towards a common goal. The group culture that results from associations facilitated within a single corps has identifiable patterns of social relations that produce strong feelings of connectedness among members and shared meaning.

⁵ Fine, “Group Cultures and Subcultures.”

⁶ Fine.

Armed with a firm understanding of their group identity, the members must negotiate their personal and perceived group identities within their corps. The ongoing pattern of interactions between corps ultimately produces a shared understanding of *what it is like* to be a corps member. With the potential for interactions with outside non-corps groups limited almost entirely to those affiliated with DCI, cultural meanings and norms are continually established, negotiated, and altered within corps and among corps. Lacking a durable connection to a single place or space throughout the season, the conception of a local sense of belonging is transferred to an imagined place inhabited solely by a single corps and defined by the touring schedule's ability to dictate physical surroundings. Ultimately, the closed nature of these interactions produces the notion that drum corps, as an activity in itself, is a distinct cultural entity that operates with little interface to the non-drum corps world.

1.1.1. Life Lessons and Belonging

The individuals I interviewed throughout this project had varied interpretations of their experiences while marching. From the extremely positive to the extremely negative, no two interviewees had exactly the same understanding of their emotional recollections. When it came to life lessons, however, many similarities were evident. Common themes such as grit, determination, and overcoming challenges dominated the discourse around life lessons. A sense of reverence for the positive life-long consequences is shared among DCI among alumni, adding to the collective feeling that only those who have marched truly know or can know what it is like.

For the reader of this dissertation who resides outside of the community, a helpful point of comparison regarding the qualities of life lessons learned is that of the graduate school

experience. Indeed, among community members who pursued graduate degrees, statements like the following were common. A PhD-holder (white, male, 2000s, brass) articulated it as such:

It really made me feel like I can kind of do anything. Like I can get through anything. I remember pushing myself to a place where I really felt like emotionally and physically and mentally, there's just nothing left. Like just keep going. And so, especially through grad school, that was helpful at times kind of like the, the really long-term endurance of something that might be uncomfortable or really difficult. ... There are some similar patterns. I think like it can be very hierarchical and there's a power differential that can be harnessed in harmful ways.⁷

Their description of the parallels between the power structures of drum corps and graduate school emphasizes the problems at the core of any intensely emotional, and physical, experience. That is, the intensity of emotions invoked through the course of a normal day in these environments obscure the power hierarchies that facilitate abuse.

The bonds that result from working towards becoming part of something larger than the individual create many opportunities for the individual to alter their understanding of themselves. That is, being asked to reconsider how your actions affect others creates an environment amenable to imparting many life lessons. In this next section, I will explore how members experience feelings of belonging, as well as how race and gender affect a member's ability to attain this sense of belonging.

1.2. Experiencing Belonging

Before embarking on a discussion of factors that affect belonging, it is necessary to establish what the results of these feelings are. Doing so will highlight the intensity with which members relate to their corps and corps mates. The stories of closeness and descriptions of life lessons that follow also lend insight to the hesitancy to speak out against abuse because of an

⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

underlying fear that doing so will harm the activity or risk losing an individual's connection to it. The experience of a single season creates an environment wherein members come to collectively experience difficult situations, as was the case for Mary (white and Latina, female):

Cause we all know like there's days where we want to die and we wonder why, why are we doing this? But then you get to the show, then you have a good run through and you realize, okay, like this is pretty cool. It was worth it. And it kind of just, it makes you appreciate the little things.⁸

When speaking of these situations, interviewees such as Mary described their experiences in a way that presumes a universal interpretation by all corps members. That is, the closeness that facilitates the shared sense of belonging also implies that individual corps members' experiences are nearly indistinguishable from the whole.

I asked participants whether they learned any life lessons in both one-on-one interviews and within the survey. I intended this question to provide my interviewees with the opportunity to reflect fondly on their experiences. From my perspective, merely saying that drum corps means a lot to members of the drum corps community would be an understatement. The following section will attempt to explain the extent to which many members come to feel an unbreakable connection with their corps, corps mates, and the activity more generally.

For many, the experience of marching served as a pivotal moment in their lives. In response to my question, the interviewees often described a recognition of how their actions affect others. The word cloud below reflects the frequency of specific words and themes most often mentioned with regard to the interview subject's response life lessons.

⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

Empathy- during tour you face daily adversities from small (I can't find my towel) to large (our bus caught on fire). I learned that every person encounters every adversity in different ways based on their life experience, their collective needs, and their momentary needs. There were moments when everyone was tense for an obvious reason or moments where my best friend was acting like she could tear me apart for something I didn't understand but had an impact on her. Stand back, take a breath, and approach with compassion & empathy in all situations.¹⁰

The ability to recognize others' needs ultimately marked a profound change in that person's life.

Many alumni articulated the large role DCI played in not only making them more empathetic but also changing attitudes regarding an individual's relationship to others. Seth (white, male, 1980s, brass) articulated the impact of DCI on his social and political outlooks, saying that "I firmly believe that Drum Corps had very much to do with who I am today. Diversity, tolerance, acceptance of people from all walks of life. I come from an extremely conservative family and yet I consider myself to be a hard-core libertarian. Had it not been for Drum Corps I likely would have different views." Others, such as Naomi (Black, female, 1980s, brass) described similar experiences, articulating how it differed from their non-drum corps lives:

I believe drum corps gave me an idea of how other people lived ... Drum corps exposed me to homosexuality - I got to see how beautiful, smart, wonderful and precious all people (gay or straight) are. In drum corps I also saw some teenage girls be sexually abused. I didn't know it at the time, but I knew that somethings were happening that made me uncomfortable. This affected how I watched the environments my children were exposed to.

Self-regulation and accountability are prominent themes in answers that mentioned acting upon something, taking action, and actively contributing towards something. All require the ability to change and communicate. These responses were aptly summed up by a survey entry that stated "Discipline, Dedication, Commitment--pursue the things that are hardest in life and seek to be

¹⁰ Anonymous Survey Submission.

the best person you can be in pursuit of those things.”¹¹ The behaviors that allow someone to feel that they exhibit discipline were frequently mentioned, particularly as they related to being organized and communicate effectively. Likewise, in his interview, Seth went on to say that:

Beyond the social aspects of how it shaped my life drum corps provided me with a very solid foundation of skills that you need to be successful in life. Things such as work ethic, leadership, pride, problem-solving, competition, ownership, and how to deal with adversity such as losing. These are all skills that are widely missing in today's society.

Taken from a purely positive perspective, these life lessons reflect a collective understanding that the drum corps experience inherently involves challenges to participants’ comfort, particularly as it relates to physical ease and safety. Pushing oneself beyond what is comfortable thus is an integral component of drum corps. Yet the community’s prioritizing of discomfort and framing of it as required for success and growth can obscure the distinction between what is merely uncomfortable and what is truly problematic.¹²

1.3. Closeness, Intimacy, and Family-Like Bonds

A major factor that influences feelings of belonging among members is born from the forced intimacy that comes as part of a season of drum corps. From the time that spring training begins in mid-May through finals competition in mid-August, members spend nearly every moment together. The schedules outlined below demonstrate the typical rehearsal day and show day.

¹¹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

¹² “My friendships with them are probably more automatic and trustworthy because I had to count on them all season, and we get things about each other. That bond of being with someone 24/7 for months makes a large impact.” Anonymous Survey Submission.

Table 5. Typical daily schedules

Rehearsal Day		Show Day	
3:00 am	Arrive at housing site/sleep	7:00 am	Wake up/breakfast
7:00 am	Wake up/unload/breakfast	8:00 am	Rehearsal
8:00 am	Rehearsal	11:00 am	Lunch
12:00 pm	Lunch	11:45 am	Rehearsal
1:00 pm	Rehearsal	3:00 pm	Eat/pack/clean
5:00 pm	Dinner	4:30 pm	Depart for show
6:00 pm	Rehearsal	5:30 pm	Arrive at show site/unload
10:00 pm	Snack	6:15 pm	Warm-up
11:30 pm	Lights out	8:15 pm	Perform
		8:40 pm	Meetings
		9:00 pm	Change/pack/eat/relax
		11:30 pm	Depart for next housing site

As the above schedules reveal, members have very little unstructured time in their average day. Although they receive 45-minute to hour-long meal breaks, the time spent walking to and from the rehearsal field and standing in line for food leaves them with little free time away from other members. Statements like “Our friendship is unique because we shared such a momentous time of our lives. We spent 10 weeks together on the road in the most intimate circumstances]”¹³ or “that bond of being with someone 24/7 for months makes a large impact.”¹⁴ acknowledge the role that proximity to one another plays in feelings of kinship.

The intimacy corps members feel largely stems from the basic attributes of DCI. One of the most prominent factors that provide distinction between drum corps and competitive marching band is the total isolation that forms between the ensemble and the “outside world.”¹⁵ The shortest time commitment that corps members deal with is the 48 hours spent during off-season rehearsal weekends, which occur once a month from November through April. Even then, during rehearsal (and audition) camps weekends corps members typically are housed in a school. This is dissimilar from more traditional week-long marching band camps in so far as those members either return home every evening or to a dorm room. When housed in a school, corps members sleep on the floor in gymnasiums, libraries, classrooms, or just about anywhere else there is space. This results in upwards of 600 people sleeping next to one another on audition weekends for the most competitive corps. During these rehearsal weekends, members use communal locker rooms for showers and eat from a commercial kitchen.¹⁶ The total lack of personal space that results from these camps serves as a crash course in drum corps life.

Spring training is analogous to a marching band camp in a lot of ways.¹⁷ It is a time for the corps to learn the season’s show and develop the sense of teamwork that becomes so essential to competitive success. Yet, in contrast to marching band camps, which typically last only one week, spring training typically lasts for three to five weeks. Upon the conclusion of

¹³ Anonymous Survey Submission.

¹⁴ Anonymous Survey Submission.

¹⁵ In the case of competitive marching bands, band members are typically away from their primary place of residence for no more than 2 weeks.

¹⁶ This kitchen is typically either in the school or a food truck.

¹⁷ Brett G. Stouidt, “‘You’re Either In or You’re Out’: School Violence, Peer Discipline, and the (Re)Production of Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Men and Masculinities* 8, no. 3 (2006): 273–87.

spring training, a corps embarks on a sixty-day national tour. The charter buses that transport members and staff from competition to competition become the only constant space that can be called home. Far surpassing even the confines of the smallest of studio apartments, the single bus seat that most members occupy heightens the total lack of privacy.

Issues of conformity and unity on the field come to bear on the interdependency of members. Members must constantly strive towards becoming an indistinguishable part of the corps within its performance contexts. What results are alterations to the conception of self, wherein a member becomes unable to detach themselves from the larger whole.

The tour typically encompasses upwards of 30,000 miles, necessitating a great number of negotiations, compromises, and mutual agreements among members so that basic needs are met. To cover this great distance, travel between competition sites occurs overnight.¹⁸ As a result, the bus is rendered a tightly packed bedroom for the majority of nights on tour. The ever-pressing need for sleep motivates members to negotiate with one another over things like getting to sleep on the floor or hanging hammocks in the aisle. Furthermore, because they spend so much time on the bus, members establish additional rules such as prohibiting the use of the bus's bathroom—the odor being especially problematic for those seated near the bathroom—or requiring that the doors to overhead storage bays remain closed whenever the bus is in motion—items shifting during travel can easily become projectiles. These negotiations force members to recognize their own needs, as well as the needs of others.

Many of these negotiations are settled through the social hierarchy of members on a given bus. The corps' most senior vets are given priority, particularly when only one person will

¹⁸ In addition to routes that require upwards of nine hours of travel, breakdowns and getting lost can leave members waking up on the bus after the sun rises.

benefit from the outcome. Selecting one's seat is an example of this. Although the preference differs from corps to corps, vets typically choose seats at either the front or back of the bus, with the distance from the preferable end often reflecting other members' place in the social hierarchy. Likewise, resolving the problem of space needed to change out of uniform after a performance often defaults to seniority. In this case, the lack of space makes it nearly impossible for seat partners to change out of their sweaty uniforms after a show at the same time, so they change one at a time.

The ever-present need to negotiate throughout the process of having needs met facilitates the development of intense bonds among members. There is hardly a decision that a member can make during the competitive season wherein they do not need to consider how their choice affects others. The ever-present factor of others' needs minimizes the role of personal preference in everyday decision-making. Thus, nearly every action reinforces the notion that the individual is inextricably linked to their corps mates, solidifying notions of kinship and familial bonds for members.

Many members choose to articulate the experience as creating for them a sense of family. Indeed, the resulting social dynamics that develop throughout a season have parallels in the more typical notion of "family." The survey I conducted, as well as my one-on-one interviews, were rife with accounts of how intensely members come to connect with one another. Examples of this include:

Response 1 (white, female, 1970s, color guard): My drum corps family meant the world to me. I lived and breathed the corps. I would be too sick to go to school but would never miss a rehearsal. I felt like we were a team working towards perfection while growing into adulthood together.

Response 2 (white, female, 1990s, color guard): My overall favorite memory though is the incredible friendships built in those years. Many of them are still strong and connected after more than 50 years.

Response 3 (white, male, 1980s, battery): It was my family, because home life sucked.

Response 4 (white, female, 1980s, battery): I would do anything for them. I've housed one when he lost his job, I've written peer referrals, attended weddings, and listened openly as some of the guys opened up about financial or relationship hardships. Many of them are like family.¹⁹

Each respondent described how their corpsmates, or the larger community, fulfilled a belonging-related need. Response 1 intimates their experience in a way that mirrors sibling relationships.

For the second informant (Response 2), the bonds truly have lasted a lifetime. Responses 3 and 4 both demonstrate how a community member's "drum corps family" can stand-in for more traditional notions of American familial relations.

The challenges and hardships that are inherent in any drum corps season further solidify feelings of kinship. For some, the daily challenges resulting from rehearsal are a contributing factor, as one interviewee articulated by saying "We were all working for the same goal, we were all sweating every single day together, we were all in pain together, we were all fighting together. Going through a challenging experience with a large group of people brings a sense of belonging."²⁰ Statements that refer to the collective overcoming of any difficulties appeared with great frequency in the survey and interviews.

1.3.1. After the Season is Over: Memories and Humor

Members continue to solidify their sense of belonging to their corps through positive memorable experiences. In both the survey and one-on-one interviews, I inquired about their most memorable moments. Reminders of being together 24/7—as reflected in the responses in

¹⁹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

²⁰ Another example is: "My drum corps buddies are true friends because we went through things together." Anonymous Survey Submission.

the previous section—were among the most frequent. Memories surrounding personal or group achievements held the secondary place of prominence. Examples of these include:

Response 1 (white, male, 1980s, battery): Winning drums at DCI world championships in 1990.

Response 2 (white, female, 1980s, brass): That feeling after that first show. All those months and months of hard work finally are here. The crowd roars for you, they stand and cheer. It's this euphoric feeling I used to get it every year! There is no other feeling like that!"

Response 3 (white, female, 1980s, battery): I will never forget what it was like to play super clean rolls²¹ in the snare line of the Spartans. There were six of us, so the feeling was intense, probably much like the unity a great rowing team experiences.

Response 4 (white, male, 1980s, brass): My Rookie Year with the Scouts. 1985 Finals Camp Randal Stadium in Madison.... Walking out of the tunnel having 30,000 people stand up cheer, scream just for walking on to the field....IT NEVER STOPPED... we couldn't hear our drum major... our opening sequence was really not clean LOL but we recovered within a few seconds... scared, exited, heart pumping.. you just can't explain that feeling... 35 years later I still have goose bumps and tears of joy running down my face as I type this.²²

These memories demonstrate not only the long-lasting impact that DCI has had on alumni but also the degree to which the definition of “accomplishments” varies. From Championships to more isolated moments wherein a passage is played well, to accolades that reflect group success, these memorable moments all reflect the connection an individual comes to feel by way of being a member of their corps.

Humorous moments tend to be remembered fondly as well. Opportunities for levity are valued greatly because of the infrequency with which they occur, as well as the contrast they bring to the seriousness and struggles of daily life in the corps. Interviewees who recounted

²¹ “clean rolls” refers to the complete uniformity of a roll played by multiple snare players.

²² Response 4 is quoted directly from a written response. Anonymous Interviews.

funny moments as being the most memorable shared stories like this about housing sites.

Natalia's (Female, 1960s, battery) memory was as follows:

When we were sleeping, someone (around midnight) started to let the air out of their air mattress. They stood up and said "damn it", and went to the wall to proceed to fill up their air mattress. This person, who happened to be the only age out, had a dream that the drum majors came in and said it was time to move to the next housing site. So when he casually woke up from the dream he thought it was real and let the air out of his mattress. Funniest moment maybe ever.²³

Or they recounted memories of the bus:

Response 1 (white, female, 1980s, brass): We had "No pants 1/2 Hour" where we danced in our underwear to a bunch of marches. It was very silly and not sexual in ANY way. Just stupid and funny.

Response 2 (white, male, 1980s, brass): In 1986, we had Bus 3 Porn Theater, which involved two stuffed animals reenacting the Forums section of Penthouse Magazine. It was absolutely hilarious and fun to be a part of.

Response 3 (white, female, brass): I personally loved playing games on the bus. We played 'never have I ever' with light switches and 'meet the bus' stories were always hilarious to hear about later.²⁴

Overall, these memories of belonging highlight how members learn to interact with one another, support one another, and blow off steam.

1.3.2. After the Season is Over: Alumni

The sum of experiences and memories created for alumni the feeling that only they could ever know what it is like to have marched. The bus-related antics described above reflect how behaviors that might be seen as deviant by outsiders come to be defining moments for members. The integrity and power of these bonds benefit alumni well after they "age-out" of the activity at

²³ Anonymous Survey Submission.

²⁴ Anonymous Survey Submission.

21. Many like Reid (Native American, male, 1990s, brass) even found their spouse or partner through drum corps. In their survey answer, Reid articulated the extent of these bonds while describing the value of his relationship. Even in the most difficult times, Reid's drum corps family helped him, as he described while writing "my first wife was from DCI, and we have two children together. She passed last year from a brain tumor at 39 years old. Having mutual friends over the years has been a support system during this time."²⁵

As in Reid's case, the emotional bonds from a single season can last a lifetime. It is in this sense that bonds within the community transcend temporal boundaries. Briant (white, male, 1980s, brass) explained how the feelings of connectedness do not dissipate over time, writing that "I have many friends, most of whom are far distances away. In the past few years, I've been blessed to have gotten together for the first time since we marched. It was as if we had never missed a moment and the memories flowed like water and we laughed so hard we were nearly crying."²⁶ Bryan (white, male, 1980s, brass) echoed Reid and Briant's experiences: "The phrase, "you'll make friends who last a lifetime," is not simply a bunch of words; it is a beautiful reality that I can't imagine happening if I hadn't marched."²⁷ The immediacy of the emotional bonds among corpsmates ultimately creates a community of deep, mutually-held feelings of respect and connectedness.²⁸

These bonds extend beyond connections with corps mates. People who didn't march together still feel a sense of kinship, particularly in the understanding that unless you have

²⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

²⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

²⁷ Anonymous Survey Submission.

²⁸ Anonymous Survey Submission.

participated, you cannot grasp the meaning of these bonds. These sentiments were recounted in several responses:

Response (white, female, 1990s, front ensemble): My friends who didn't march corps know I marched but they don't really understand it. To them, it's just something I did back in the day. Oddly, I meet more drum corps fans at my little church than anywhere else. And there's always a different kind of bond with these people. It's weird. It's like we're in on a little-known secret. I love my non-drum corps friends but they think it's "cute". My husband teases me about loving the corps more than him. They see my excitement and they know when a corps activity is coming up because they see my sparkle, but they don't understand it. It's just a marching band to them. There's an understanding that corps people have that those who never marched can't understand. Even meeting people from other corps is different. When I had a hip replaced almost 2 years ago, one of the nurses mentioned my Troopers shirt I was wearing. She had marched Colts. Well, we just chatted away like long lost friends while I took my first steps. The others were amazed at my walking and at the excitement in our conversation. It was awesome."²⁹

Response (white, male, 1980s, brass): Even people I didn't march with...if I know they did drum corps, we have a common bond and a shared experience. I know they are capable of working with a group to accomplish something incredible. So what else could they do?"

Response (white, female, 2000s, guard): You can talk in analogy all you want [...] someone says they marched drum corps and you are immediately like "I know you."³⁰

Response (white, male, 1980s, brass): The friendships are enduring, deep have a sort of "those who were there know the price that was paid". Somebody once said that when describing drum corps to the non-member, no words are enough. To those who marched, no words are necessary.

Spanning decades and encompassing many countries, a global drum corps community is formed based on truly knowing what it is like.

I experienced the power of these connections while researching the idea of a global community among drum corps participants in the Netherlands and Japan. Though the entirety of this research is beyond the scope of this dissertation, my experiences conducting this

²⁹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

³⁰ Anonymous Interviews.

ethnographic research are relevant. I established initial connections with Jubal (Dordrecht, NL) and Tokushima Indigoes (Tokushima, JP) via former corpsmates with whom I had marched DCI. I observed the power and extent of these connections in instances wherein my interlocutors invited me into members-only spaces. Though I had marched with my interlocutors, the majority of members were unaware of this connection or the extent of my involvement in DCI. Both the Indigoes and Jubal members were initially skeptical of my presence, unsure of whether or not I had a right to be present in their rehearsal and living spaces. Upon learning from my interlocutors that I had marched DCI, however, they immediately granted me access.³¹ Recognizing my status as an activity insider, members subsequently invited me to participate in rehearsal (either instructing or participating in group activities like stretching and conditioning) or in conversations and games otherwise shielded from the public eye. The swiftness with which I was warmly welcomed as an insider—beyond the corps' general hospitality—reflects the

1.3.3. Cultural Values

Despite variations in the culture of an individual corps, my interviewees described with great frequency the importance of belonging. Indeed, coming to feel as if you have a home among your corpsmates is the ultimate goal for many participants. So much so, that some described their search for belonging as motivating them to audition for different corps. After completing multiple seasons at different corps, Amy (white, female, brass), for example, wrote that they were “nervous that I won't find the corps I actually belong with before my time is up.”³²

³¹ The number of years marched, my instrument, and the corps all come to bear on the nature and amount of social capital (Bourdieu) a community member carries in these situations. This is an area in need of additional published research. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

³² Anonymous Survey Submission.

As this chapter will go to show, competitive success is a tangible goal that is valued by many corps, but the desire to become a part of something larger than yourself is valued by all.

The community's shared values regarding social hierarchies further support feelings of community. Similarities in the way that members accrue social capital make it possible for an individual's social standing within their individual corps to transfer to the drum corps community as a whole. Hugh's (white, male, 2010s, brass) recollection of his third year marching DCI—but the first year at his particular corps—demonstrates how these social hierarchies transcend barriers between individual corps:

They try to strictly enforce the rookie nothing rule: "If you're a rookie, shut up. If you're a second year, you're in nothing, you have no rights to say anything at all." Which worked okay. Except for the part where there were no vets or the vets who ended up kind of assume this leadership role, at least in my section were second years themselves. And they were not leaders, which led to most of us who had marched in other places going we're just not listening to you because what you're saying makes sense.³³

Hugh thus occupied a distinct space, along with several others in his section. Although they were only rookies at their corps, the ability of social capital to transfer from corps to corps put them in an atypical position. This situation was further complicated by the poor leadership abilities of second years for his corps, revealing the limited extent to which meritocracy comes to bear on an individual's social status.

1.4. Conformity and DCI's Cultural Values

What then, are the cultural values of drum corps culture, either for a single corps or DCI as a whole? Furthermore, how are they defined? Each corps holds distinct expectations for values that are commonly held across DCI. Conformity, discipline, grit, and fraternity are pivotal to each corps, but the degree to which they are valued and how they are achieved varies from one

³³ Anonymous Interviews.

corps to another. As a consequence, this affects members' experiences. For example, corps that have more strict rules of conduct and a rigid social hierarchy tend to exhibit norms of masculinity contest culture, wherein it is easy to conflate the performance of masculine traits with a successfully executed performance.³⁴ This atmosphere creates a distinct experience and set of expectations in comparison to corps that are more relaxed, though both cultures have a demonstrated history of competitive success in DCI.³⁵

A member's ability to conform to expectations for performance, and consequently feel as if they belong, is ultimately affected by the performance standards created and upheld by individual corps and DCI overall. DCI's aesthetic values are particularly clear when compared to HBCU marching bands. Robert H. Clark has articulated in his study of marching bands at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the "drum corps style" of marching is easily distinguishable from the "HBCU style." HBCU style bands—or simply style bands—marching styles, choreographic elements, and musical contents all demonstrate an unmistakable connection to African American cultural traditions. For example, drum corps style bands—including drum corps themselves—move in a manner that emphasizes symmetry. Conversely, HBCU style bands' choreography and marching style make use of frequent asymmetry.³⁶

³⁴ Glick, Berdahl, and Alonso, "Development and Validation of the Masculinity Contest Culture Scale."

³⁵ For more on the cultural differences between two of the most winningest corps, see: Janie Leigh Vance, "Findings From the Field: A Pedagogical and Cultural Study of the North American Drum and Bugle Corps Experience" (Dissertation, New York, NY, Columbia University, 2014).

³⁶ AA Vernacular movements and symmetry footnotes needed here. Robert H. Clark, "A Narrative History of African American Marching Band: Toward A Historicultural Understanding," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 41, no. 1 (October 1, 2019): 5–32.

Similarly, DCI corps' musical selection often appeals to majority-white audiences by performing canonical works from European art music while HBCU style bands are more likely to perform popular music.

Although DCI is undoubtedly influenced by white American culture, it lacks a durable connection to a specific place. Absent this geographically dependent cultural reference point, the task of defining drum corps culture is instead reliant upon racial and gendered norms. Sociologist Jennifer LaFleur's articulation of race as "a global practice of domination that cannot occur without a durable connection to territory,"³⁷ invites inquiry as to what territory a drum corps occupies. DCI corps are located across the continental United States and their constituent members often hail from locations across the US, Europe, and Asia. Despite this lack of preexisting territorial connections, members find themselves subject to the same rules, ideologies, and social norms. I posit that the shared governance under DCI competition rules and the relative homogeneity of experiences across corps has led to the construction of an imagined place to which all in the drum corps community are tied.

The durable connection between forces of domination and the territory which it occupies lies in DCI's aesthetic standards and how they influence judging. DCI's aesthetic standards set the activity apart from other marching and pageantry arts. These dominating forces penetrate just about every aspect of drum corps. Just as survey respondents and interviewees were less likely to indicate they experienced or observed anyone being treated differently because of their race or gender, these experiences also reflect the degree to which meritocracy has obscured how identities come to affect feelings of belonging. Attending to them avoids what Sherrow Pinder

³⁷ Jennifer LaFleur, "The Race That Space Makes: The Power of Place in the Colonial Formation of Social Categorizations," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, September 27, 2020.

warns of in writing that “failure to synthesize how seemingly disparate white identity formations are constituted by and help to reinforce, strategies of social control and domination threatens to rob the study of white identity of critical, conceptual and explanatory purchase.”³⁸

To understand how the sense of belonging attains such significance for members of the drum corps community, it is necessary to articulate the degree to which conformity is incentivized. Indeed, the social capital that a member gains throughout a season and brings with them upon their return the following season largely reflects the ability of vets to more easily conform to their corps’ social and performance standards.

Conformity is an essential component of competitive success that extends beyond the field to define nearly every aspect of life. During competitions, judging prioritizes visual and sonic conformity, rewarding those who exhibit the most precision with higher scores. In an effort to achieve competitive success, rehearsals demand that all members comply with their corps’ norms for conduct; for some corps, this can be a totalizing experience that seeks to account for nearly every conceivable action. Outside of rehearsals, members must adhere to rules and guidelines intended to make touring easier and more efficient. In all, these create a constant pressure to conduct yourself and live in a way that is makes you indistinguishable from your corpsmates. As I will show in the second half of this chapter, this pressure renders achieving a sense of belonging an outcome of conformity.

1.4.1. Judging and Conformity

Conformity imparts the constant feeling as if one is part of something larger. It comes as no surprise, then, that conformity has been an essential part of competitive drum and bugle corps

³⁸ Hughey, “The (Dis)Similarities of White Racial Identities.”

since their inception. Though ways in which a corps' performance is judged and scored have changed significantly since the creation of Drum Corps International, expectations for conformity have persisted. Thus, while the level of conformity expected from corps has been significantly raised in the past two decades—alongside the difficulty of performance content—the expectation that a corps' ultimate goal of a cohesive performance has remained paramount.

Distilled into its most essential form, assessing conformity is the priority of every judge, regardless of their specific role. Historically, judges assigned corps scores based on the number of mistakes they observed. Today, judging is more similar to Olympic Gymnastics, where the difficulty of the performance determines how many points are possible and the execution of the performance is then judged based upon the difficulty level. Despite these different approaches to determining how points are earned, the individual member's ability to conform has a profound effect on judges' scoring of the ensemble.

DCI inherited its judging system from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion competitive circuits. Each judge is responsible for assessing a single caption, from a particular perspective. Each caption typically reflects one aspect of a corps' performance, such as the brass section's musical performance. Many captions require the performance to be evaluated from field- and press-box-level. In addition to judges for section-specific captions, there are judges for the General Effect (GE) caption. The goal of a GE judge is to assess how clear the show's theme is from the audience's perspective, attending to the overall corps' performance by evaluating things such as show design, how cohesive transitions are, the effectiveness of props

and uniforms, and musical performance.³⁹ While much of GE focuses on show design, the members' ability to execute particular aspects of the show is also taken into consideration.

Judging is not upheld equally between corps, however. Alumni of all-black corps readily recognize how having a mostly, if not all, white judging panel likely influenced their corps' competitive outcomes. This was made evident in Bobby's (African American, male, 1980s, battery) example, where he wrote that "Yes. During the 80s prejudice and implicit bias did occur, particularly in judging. Both corps performance and individual solo competition. It was also not a "politically correct" era for ethnic and racial sensitivity."⁴⁰ It thus comes as no surprise that a community of alumni from all-black corps have created their own ways of recognizing the achievements that were overlooked in DCI. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, these alumni regularly share stories of great musicians, performances that stand out, and the history of all-black corps. This informal, digital, oral-history project serves both to celebrate accomplishments and remember those whose histories were overlooked by the larger, predominantly white DCI community. In the case of all-black drum corps, these aesthetic expectations had strong implications for a corps' capacity for competitive success. The ways that

³⁹ Two of the most notable changes to the traditional uniform mark a shift away from the activity's militaristic roots but remain true to ideas of masculinity that are foundational within the corps proper. Removing shakos, helmets, and hats of all sorts allowed for the individual facial features of members to be seen, allowing members of the corps proper to become actors in the show rather than mere visual accompaniment. Changing uniforms to reflect the show's theme is also a departure from industry standards. Despite these changes that allow members to be seen as individuals rather than toy soldiers, the sense of conformity remains. Members of the corps proper still appear to adhere to grooming and costuming expectations that are highly defined. For example, while the 2016 Bluecoats corps proper wore suit jackets with varying patterns and no helmet, they had defined expectations regarding appearances like tucking in undershirts, well-fitting pants hemmed to a specific standard, and maintaining an overall impression of discipline and refinement. The standard to which the members are held remains masculine in nature.

⁴⁰ Anonymous Survey Submission.

these expectations manifest as, and in conjunction with, biased and racist receptions among judges and community members are readily apparent in Sankofa, a Facebook group dedicated to telling the stories of Black (or African American) drum corps alumni.⁴¹ As I will briefly discuss in Chapter 1, the dual roles of whiteness and masculinity in defining aesthetic expectations provide insights into the dwindling presence of all-girl or all-black corps.⁴²

1.4.2. Judging and the Individual

While the methods by which a corps' performance is adjudicated have changed over time, the minimization of difference among members has remained paramount. A judges' keen eye will pick up slight differences in the height of the snare line's sticks or the number of rotations completed following a color guard member's tossing of a rifle.⁴³ The original judging system employed within DCI was deduction-based. This means that each corps started with the highest possible score and points were then deducted from there. To communicate their evaluation to the corps—and audiences—judges tracked the mistakes they observed on forms. Known as “ticks,” judges would make note of each error.⁴⁴ Though the system has since

⁴¹ “Sankofa.”

⁴² This is an area for additional research.

⁴³ The judging system ultimately provides corps with outside guidance about what portions of the performance need to be the most refined—or changed altogether. Caption heads and staff members alike provide only one perspective; judges may pick up on mistakes or inconsistencies that have gone unnoticed in rehearsals. Critique allows caption heads and designers to doubly recognize when the members' failure to perform a given portion of the show well is the result of a design flaw. Particularly in the early season, members of the design team might alter music, drill, choreography, etc. to facilitate members' achievement. Thus, nearly every aspect of the judging process—from assigning scores to making revisions—centers on the corps' ability to minimize differences and achieve conformity.

⁴⁴ For example, 1964 Drum Corps News Directory stipulated that: “the chief thing that the field M&M [marching and maneuvering] judge looks for is UNIFORMITY. In fact, this is the main

changed, the idea of ticks persists. Calling someone “a tick,” or observing that someone “ticked,” are common ways to articulate an individual member’s inability to conform. Thus, ticking or making mistakes comes to bear on the social capital a member can accrue throughout a season. Much like Hugh’s experience with second years at the corps to which he was a rookie, those who do not perform well or make frequent mistakes have significant difficulties obtaining the social capital necessary to feel as if they belong.

In addition to affecting the potential outcomes of a corps, whiteness and masculinity also implicitly influences members’ experiences.⁴⁵ The standards to which members are held are inherently defined by—and reproduce—whiteness and masculinity. Several interviewees who do not identify as white mentioned the frequency with which their race was brought up. One alumna, for example, responded that “people from historically white areas would point [my race] out. It’s unusual for Asian women to be in the low brass section so it did make me feel alone at times.”⁴⁶ Despite her position in her corps’ meritocratic hierarchy, receiving comments about her racial and ethnic heritage when her white corpsmates did not serve as a barrier to feeling as if she belonged.

In an activity where the ultimate goal is uniformity in the presentation of a corps’ image and performance, it follows logically that physical markers of difference are incongruent with the

factor to consider in all captions. Each error results in one “tick” or one-tenth of a point off. [...] Other errors, which are self-explanatory, include anticipation, hesitation, false starts and stops, heels not together at halts, heads turning, eyes on the ground, talking in ranks, and chewing gum.” “Drum Corps News Directory,” 1964, 34.

⁴⁵ According to Bederman, masculinity (or manliness) became inextricably linked to whiteness in American society around the end of the nineteenth century. Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*.

⁴⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

ensemble's goals. Uniforms contribute to this erasure of bodily uniqueness. Although uniform inspections from an independent judge no longer occur, members and staff often conduct inspections of their own by insisting all members wear a part of their uniform a specific way or groom themselves similarly. These most-public facing markers of uniformity and conformity are often integral to pre-show preparation.

Historically, drum corps has promoted visually hegemonic masculinity with grooming requirements and uniforms that bear resemblance to those of the armed forces, especially among the corps proper (horn line and percussion).⁴⁷ Many corps enforce demand that members are often encouraged to style their hair similarly. For those with short hair (primarily males in the corps), rules such as having one's hair cut to not touch the ears or extend over the uniform's collar are common.⁴⁸ The need to shave facial hair varies from corps to corps and reflects the

⁴⁷ Even in instances where the corps proper does not wear uniforms that create for the audience symbolic associations between the activity and the military, conformity of appearance while in uniform is often prioritized. As show design became more holistic—moving from simple repertoire selections to Broadway-like Gesamtkunstwerke—it became common for the corps proper to wear stylized uniforms that reflect the year's show. Adding accouterments to uniforms that reflect the corps' show that year was a decades-old practice

⁴⁸ These requirements used to be enforced more heavily through uniform inspections during competitions. Each corps member would be evaluated by a judge. Through the mid-1970s, physical inspection was an essential component of scoring. [The various competitive circuits eliminated this rule at different times. Some AFL-corps alumni reported taking part in inspections as late as 1974.] The purpose of the inspection, as articulated to Inspection Officers was to: "Inspection is for the purpose of determining the general appearance of an outfit. [...] Inspection places responsibility of the individual to personally uphold his share of the unit." In these rules, much attention is given to consistency in appearance as it relates to corps' uniforms, cleanliness of instruments, and proper display of flags. The inspection section of the 1966 rulebook goes so far as to describe the ideal presentation of an Inspection Officer as well: "The Inspection Judge should himself be a model of neatness. Haircut, uniform clean and pressed, shoes shined, and accoutrements perfected in every detail. [...] Inspection should be done at the position of attention in all cases. The inspector should also conduct himself in a military manner. Don't forget to salute the National Colors before inspecting them. Should the Inspection Officer find any aberrations from the expected standard of appearance, they may deduct points from a corps' overall score. Despite not making their way into DCI's rulebook as an explicit category or

corps' culture and/or the show they are performing that summer.⁴⁹ Members with longer hair (typically the women) are most often encouraged to slick back their hair into a tight bun, with nary a hair astray.⁵⁰ The impetus for such rules is to eliminate possibilities for members of the corps proper⁵¹ to be distinguished from one another—and this is more often than not a successful tactic. However, these requirements lead to differences in how individuals understand their relationship to others in their section.⁵²

The degree to which a given corps might pose belonging and the benefits of community membership as a marker of exclusiveness is largely determined by the role of conformity in the ensemble. The activity's emphasis on meritocracy is inseparable from conformity. To achieve a given status, one must earn it but to earn it, one must be able to conform and continually work

component of the contest proceedings, these AFL and AL rules reflect the standards of uniformity in appearance that continue influence the expectations of DCI corps', fans', judges', and fans' expectations. American Legion National Contests Supervisory Committee, "Regulations for Judges and Clerks," 1966, 15, Marching Pageantry Arts Museum.

⁴⁹ During my age-out season, I witnessed a change in this policy. My corps traditionally promoted a clean-shaven and tidy aesthetic that rejects earrings. The show's theme ("Rach-Star"), however, necessitated a more scruffy and aggressive aesthetic. As a result, members were encouraged to grow facial hair, wear large earrings, and dye their hair in unnatural colors. The following year, my corps returned to the clean-shaven aesthetic.

⁵⁰ This again is influenced by the personality and culture of the corps.

⁵¹ Everyone except for the color guard.

⁵²As the color guard's function shifted towards enhancing the entertainment value of the music performed, elements of dance became more frequently included. Throughout my two-day visit to the Marching Pageantry Arts Museum in Upper Darby, PA, I witnessed my collaborator, Bill, telling the story of the first time he was asked to shake his butt as part of his color guard choreography. Not afraid of a challenge, Bill would laugh as he described not knowing how to shake his butt but being eager to learn. The punchline of this story involves Bill switching spots with another color guard members so that he could stand behind her during that choreographic moment. This switch would not only afford Bill the opportunity to have a visual reminder of the choreography, but also took the pressure off him to be the color guard member closest to the crowd.

towards conformity. As a result, any failure to conform is rendered a marker of meritocratic failing for the individual, and this can preclude a member from achieving feelings of belonging.

The standards to which a member is asked to conform are highly malleable, even in sections like the color guard, wherein total and exacting conformity of appearance, performance, and conduct is limited. For example, before the 1980s, color guards also performed masculinity by showcasing precision and strength. Color guard members of the 1990s and beyond are expected to maintain similar conformity of appearance, regardless of the homogeneity or heterogeneity of their uniforms. The way they stylize their hair and makeup is defined in a way that reflects the show concept. Thus, although they may wear a diverse collection of costumes, their appearance remains consistent from show to show. These strictly defined expectations regarding appearance reinforce ideas of conformity among members. As I detailed in the introduction, the standards of conformity, however, have historically been influenced by whiteness and masculinity.

1.4.3. "Defining" Life

Throughout a single season, members of many corps come to find nearly every action they take to be done with their corps' expectations in mind. From how the height of snare drummers' sticks while playing paradiddle exercises, to how horn line members line up their one-gallon, red Coleman water jugs—in front of their backpack, handles facing forward, with a black hand towel carefully placed on the other side of the backpack so that their horns do not touch the ground when set down in line—every aspect of life can be made uniform across sections and the corps. The efforts to do things uniformly and in a consistent manner is often described as giving “definition,” wherein an individual with authority declares how something must be done. Though unintentional, efforts to define in drum corps align with sociologist Erving

Goffman's concept of how an individual can project a definition of a situation through unspoken actions to communicate a "veneer of consensus" that is "facilitated by each participant concealing his wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service."⁵³ What results, according to Goffman, is a "working consensus." Within this dissertation, I mean "definition" to reflect a working consensus that has been strongly influenced by the most powerful individuals within a corps.

The ways that an individual members' efforts to adhere to the standards defined by others reflect what Goffman articulates as a front.⁵⁴ Much like sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of "performance" as Expectations for conformity set forth through "defining" represents a situation wherein unspoken societal expectations for the performance of self are explicitly articulated. The member then is expected to alter their performance of music, movement, and self to align with expectations.⁵⁵

The term "definition" stems from efforts to give members clear guidelines about how something might be performed. In some corps, this definition comes implicitly through the act of rehearsing together; in these groups, members are encouraged to be aware of how their performance matches that of others. In other groups, consistency in music and movement is

⁵³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 9.

⁵⁴ Goffman, 22.

⁵⁵ In their article, ethnomusicologist Naomi Griffin describes these expectations through the lens of Wesely's (2003) articulation of conformity as and permanent ways individuals can alter their body. This concept creates space for an individual to assert agency performative agency over their body. Naomi Griffin, "Gendered Performance Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 2 (January 3, 2013): 69; Jennifer K. Wesely, "Exotic Dancing and the Negotiation of Identity: The Multiple Uses of Body Technologies," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 32, no. 6 (December 1, 2003): 643–69.

achieved through exacting descriptions that give members a defined set of expectations. For example, a horn line might be handed sheet music that has four quarter notes without any written articulations. Throughout the summer, the articulation of each of the four quarter notes—alongside dynamics—will be defined.

Outside of rehearsal, members are continually engaged in activities and tasks relevant to just getting the corps down the road. These are tasks that also come to be defined. Although every corps, every season, has a different tour with different members, some tasks remain constant. Members are expected to care for their equipment in a specified manner before shows. Battery members tape their sticks and guard members tape flag poles, sabers, and rifles. Horn line members polish their horns. All members must bring their luggage to the bus by a specific time so that the bus loading crew can do their job of loading the bus in a particular way to ensure all luggage fits. These mundane tasks largely function to ensure the corps can operate smoothly. Yet they also add to an overall sense of conformity and unity among members. The discipline required to complete the metaphorical checklist is facilitated by the definition of each activity. That is, clearly defining expectations, goals, and roles of each individual serves a dual purpose of ensuring the continued mobility of the corps while also working to reinforce the idea that every individual is a part of something larger than themselves. Defining as much as possible both on- and off-the-field effectively ritualizes the most mundane aspects of life on tour.

On a typical day, a member interacts primarily with their instructional staff. The instructional staff is the source of nearly all performance-related definition efforts whose internal social hierarchy demands varying degrees of authority. They provide corrections to individual members, entire sub-sections (i.e., the horn line's trumpet section or the color guard's rifle section), larger group sections, and occasionally the entire corps. Much like the hierarchies

among members, instructional staff members wield various levels of power dependent upon their skill, experience, and specific role. Techs (short for technicians) are responsible for instructing specific sub-sections with the occasional opportunity to lead an entire section. The battery and front ensemble have only one set of techs, as the musical responsibilities of each member require more attention. In most corps, the battery techs also address visual responsibilities—though some corps have techs dedicated to instruction in this area. The horn line has two sets of techs, one for visual and one for music, whose stick to their corresponding area of instruction.⁵⁶ The number of color guard techs varies throughout the season, with the majority of techs having specified instructional assignments (such as rifles or dance) and a minority that provides instruction in several areas. A hierarchy also exists within the ranks of techs, wherein a tech may take on the leadership role of running a section or sub-section rehearsal while other techs attend to smaller sub-sections (such as the lead trumpets) or provide individualized feedback. Named for how judging is broken down into individual captions based on section and ensemble goals, Caption Heads supervise their sections' techs and provide instructional support for sub-sections.⁵⁷

The sheer amount of time that staff—both techs and caption heads—spend with the members means that they issue the majority of conduct- and performance-related definitions. Because of this, the conduct-related definitions, in particular, tend to have the function of making rehearsals more efficient. Examples of this form of the definition include whole sub-sections

⁵⁶ The idea of “cross-caption” teching is looked down upon in most corps. That is, brass techs are discouraged from providing visual instruction to horn line members and almost entirely prohibited from instructing other sections.

⁵⁷ Another, less common, category of staff members are consultants. Consultants may provide insight and instruction to the whole corps to make the show more cohesive and enhance General Effect scores. They may also serve roles as choreographers, stage acting trainers, etc.

wearing the same color shorts or raising hands to acknowledge the staff member who is providing feedback.⁵⁸

Some corps require members to wear clothing in rehearsal that easily identifies them by sections. These practices are particularly helpful to staff members who may be instructed from “the box”—typically a place that provides a higher vantage point like a scaffolding tower or stadium press box—because it enables them to identify individual members. Most corps rehearsals do not require members to wear shirts—a practice that may lead members to feel pressured into rehearsing shirtless—so the section rehearsal uniform is dictated by the color and/or style of shorts. For example, in Corps A, the horn line members wear yellow shorts, percussionists green, and color guard black; an alternative is to break down these uniforms by instrumental section. Not all corps observe this practice.

⁵⁸ One interviewee who marched in the color guard described her experience of being made to report to the color guard captain (a member) before rehearsal. Her guard tech had complained about the disorganized appearance of guard members’ headbands during rehearsal. Because of this, a policy was instated requiring each guard member’s headband placement to be inspected before rehearsal. Their headbands could be no more—and no less—than two fingers’ width from their hairlines. This became common practice, as did wearing black shorts and a white tank top. The interviewee stated that “it was supposed to be so that we could work as a team [...] [TECH NAME] was in the field of psychology so she knew how to get to you. [...] but also, she worked at a high school where one year, three kids died [they had committed suicide]. And I think it’s because of her that they got through it all.” The tech who insisted upon this practice is currently the wife of George Hopkins, infamous for being the initial subject of DCI’s #MeToo moment.



Example 4. Photo of a baritone section wearing their section shorts⁵⁹

The rehearsal attire thus becomes an opportunity to deemphasize differences within and among sections.

In rehearsal, staff members seize upon the minimal physical differences to provide member-specific feedback through the practice of “calling out” members (providing person-specific feedback from afar, typically via a megaphone or PA system). While instructing from “the box,” techs and Caption Heads may call out members by distinguishing features, such as a hat color or shoes. For those who cannot rehearse fully topless, this practice highlights their nonconformity. This is often done because it is difficult to identify individuals at a distance, or when an instructor does not know the names of all members. For women and non-white members, being called out is often doubly alienating. Not only is an individual’s mistake being announced for all to hear, but an aspect of their identity might be used to relay such instructions. It is wholly possible to call a member via their position on the field thanks to drill charts, which

⁵⁹ Photo courtesy of Alyssa Wells.

assign each member specific coordinates on the field for each set.⁶⁰ Despite this, differences among members are often used to call someone out as it is a quick and easy way to identify individuals. One of the most common distinctions made is via sports bras. Such a practice highlights the presumed gender of an individual for all within earshot. The repeated use of sports bras—and skin color—to provide corrections further solidifies the gender differences among members. These inescapable practices reinforce notions of physical difference, regardless of ability, rendering it impossible for them to be truly indistinguishable from others on the field.

Other ways in which staff members seek to guide members towards total conformity include individual self-regulation. Maxims such as “if you’re on time, you’re late” come to be ubiquitous because of their ability to enforce early arrival to rehearsal on the part of members. The degree to which members are allowed to talk during rehearsal is also regulated by staff members; because of this, members come to anticipate the desires of individual staff members based on the definitions they create. Nearly every corps, and every staff, has a different set of expectations for rehearsal, such as shouting “got it” following a caption head’s correction. As will become clear in the second portion of this chapter, the hyper-definition that results from attempts to control all variables ultimately facilitates silence in the face of abuse.

Self-governance among members results most often in the definition of non-performance-related conduct. The social hierarchy among corps members regulates who can influence definition-related decisions. As will become clear in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**, this hierarchy is purported to be a meritocracy wherein members with the most

⁶⁰ Aligned with musical phrases, sets define a member’s location at a specific moment; they typically occur every eight-to-sixteen counts. The drill system allows members and staff alike to articulate a specific position on the football field within an 8 inch or so radius.

experience hold the most power. However, identity-related factors come heavily influence a members' ability to accumulate the social and political capital necessary to define any activity.

Multi-year veterans (vets) tend to wield the most power, particularly when it comes to defining aspects of corps life. Influenced by a corps' culture and staff's goals, vets may define things like rituals that occur during show warm-ups, whether or not a sub-section walks to rehearsal together, the order in which members are given access to laundry machines, etc. Vets' ability to define conduct on- and off-the-field contributes to the almost total subjugation of the individual to the collective. In attending to the most minute details of daily life, each member is given an understanding of how nearly every aspect of their daily experience presents the opportunity to minimize differences.

These returning members serve to communicate a corps' institutional memory. While some traditions may change slightly over time, defining various actions aids the year-to-year continuity of a singular corps' culture. Viewed through the lens of minimizing difference, vets' authority with regards to definition serves to ensure continuity.

1.5. Accepting some, excluding others

Despite the extent that which conformity is prioritized within DCI, significant space still exists for members to grow as individuals and performers. In particularly welcoming and supportive scenarios, the size of this space can render meritocracy a secondary factor in the search for belonging. Marcy (female, 2010s, guard) described this while speaking of the difficulties they encountered in achieving the demands of their corps' performance:

[...] of course, it's always you just having a supportive section. Because I struggled a lot, my first two seasons, because I wasn't the best at drill. I'm just not a good movement person. When it comes to guard, I can spin a flag, but I can't move very well. So I mean, I broke down a lot, but I always knew that I had people who were there to support me no matter what. And they're always. It's hard to explain because there's just so many memories where I felt, yeah, I can do this every day. They're there for you. So that's awesome.⁶¹

What would normally be a significant barrier for achieving feelings of belonging became an opportunity to strengthen the social bonds.

1.5.1. Acceptance

Conformity and a member's efforts to conform are primary factors in achieving feelings of belonging.⁶² In most situations, this knowledge allows for relatively significant diversity within the activity. Religion and sexuality are two identity markers that are most easily accepted within a corps. An interviewee described her corps' efforts to accommodate the Mormon members:

Every Sunday we was a free day because it was a Sunday. So the kids who were Mormon or were religious could go to church on those days. And if you didn't go, no one said anything about it. Like, it wasn't a big deal. [...] No one was judged for their race or religion or their sexual preference or their gender like ever. So that was nice.⁶³

The interviewee's corps was particularly accepting of members and staff whose identities are not necessarily well-represented. The culture of her corps facilitated the acceptance of varying identities, as all corps members' experiences in rehearsal and performance situations remained the same.

⁶¹ Anonymous Interviews.

⁶² Achieving these feelings parallels Goffman's ideas about upward mobility being predicated on the "presentation of proper performance." Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 36.

⁶³ Anonymous Interviews.

In their response to the survey question about the role of race and ethnicity in DCI, Felix (white, male, 2010s, brass) highlighted the social hierarchies imposed upon non-white members.

The corps were predominately white when I marched both. [CORPS 1] and [CORPS 2] had more membership from Japan than Black or Hispanic Americans. The fact that my own racial and ethnic background was never a thought while I marched is pretty telling. The majority of the corps at [CORPS 2] learned basic Japanese to make the language barrier more manageable.⁶⁴

The privileging of Japanese members over Black and Brown Americans is evident here. With a nod to the positioning of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans in the US as “model minorities,” Japanese members are stereotypically presumed to possess exceptional marching and playing skills. Indeed, several Japanese drum corps, indoor drum lines, indoor color guards, marching bands, and concert bands perform at a professional level that far surpasses any similar groups in the United States. The notoriety of these groups within the drum corps and band communities facilitate the ethos of excellence that is attached to the stereotype of these members. Felix’s corpsmates’ efforts to learn Japanese reflect the influence of these stereotypes. Attempts among corps members to overcome the language barrier implicitly reflect the understanding that some accommodations must be made for everyone to feel welcomed and perform well.

Even still, the emphasis on conformity does not obscure members’ recognition and appreciation of differing identities among corpsmates. This was particularly evident among my interviewees who self-identify as white and heterosexual. The value placed on meritocracy within drum corps culture both whitewashes the experience of marching and brings differences into stark contrast. In her response, Camila (Predominantly white, female, 1960s, guard)

⁶⁴ Anonymous Survey Submission.

described how drum corps created the opportunity for them to recognize the harsh realities of American race relations, particularly in the late twentieth century.

In Boston, neighborhoods were racially divided. So if you were black, you would most likely be in a black drum corps such as those associated with black churches. I have vivid memories of when my father was teaching a black drum corps in Boston. When I was 2 I was their mascot and even had a uniform! I think I was the only white member. When I was about 5 and at one of their rehearsals, I was trying to lift one of the tall flag poles and one of the color guard members came over to me. I remember looking at her face, and for the first time in my life I realized I was not black. It is still a haunting memory.⁶⁵

This anecdote demonstrates how, even in the rehearsal environment where leisurely socialization is not possible, the social relations among corps members demand each individual recognize in great detail how their own body relates to others. The enduring impetus to reflect on how a member's sonic and visual contributions to a show relate to those around them thus creates the space for identity-related reflections.

For those who grew up in areas where there is little variation in terms of identity, marching was an opportunity to be exposed to differing groups. Some interviewees gave insights to the extent of this, recounting that they “knew someone who marched [corps name] in [year 1] and [year 2] who is a black woman. [She] was called “n word” [and] wanted to report the person but peer-pressured not to because the corps didn't want a hole to go into finals.”⁶⁶ Additionally, in some cases, the barriers to belonging that non-white members face were so great that they changed the opinions of some white corps members. Chase's (white, male, 1970s, brass) response highlights such an experience: “It did, in that, for the first time in my life, I saw my

⁶⁵ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁶⁶ Anonymous Interviews.

friends of color experience racism. It was the first time I became aware that my life was different because of my color.⁶⁷

Even those whose experiences are tinted by the rose-colored glasses of merit implicitly acknowledge the roles of race and gender when asked if they had ever experienced or observed a corps mate being treated differently because of their identity. In fact, several revealed what social background they brought with them to drum corps by lauding the presence of individuals with different identities.

Response (white, male, 1970s, battery): No...although it was really good for me to be around Black members, and non-LatinX people. I grew up in a place that had very few Black people, and I think it allowed me to solidify my idea that we had more in common than not. (Although in hindsight, I wish I would have recognized that they had different experiences than I did.)⁶⁸

Response (white, female, 1990s, guard): No. In retrospect, I think it allowed me to know people with different racial/ethnic backgrounds than I would have just in my own hometown.⁶⁹

So, while these interviewees responded that they don't think they had ever experienced or observed someone being treated differently because of their identities, it is clear that racial difference was recognized by many and appreciated by some. An example of this recognition was exhibited by Sean (white, male 1990s, brass), who wrote that "The vast majority of people I marched with were white males, so I can only imagine the difference in my experience compared to others. Luckily, the people of color I marched with have said they always felt equal to everyone else while in [my corps]."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁶⁸ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁶⁹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁷⁰ Anonymous Survey Submission.

Many described how the activity, in turn, led to realizations about the invalidity of stereotypes. Gavin (white, male, 1990s, brass), who identifies as heterosexual and male, described how he had to face the stereotypes and prejudices he held about gay and queer men in particular.

It was an eye-opening experience to say the very least it's like, okay you come back from tour and it's like, well, gay people don't exist in the abstract anymore. Gay people are people. I know that I am friends with. And any preconceived notions you might have had about what those people are like or what they do or what they look like or what they don't do and drum corps just blew out of the water.⁷¹

For more privileged members like Gavin, the emphasis on merit in the drum corps culture creates the opportunity for ability to take priority over identity in determining social status. This assessment, however, notably looks past any harm minoritized individuals endure. The same environment that allows white and heterosexual-identifying individuals to reassess their understanding of the Other necessitates others' compliance. It also fails to acknowledge the barriers that the same individuals face to becoming a member capable of demonstrating their worthiness during the competitive season.

Despite hegemonic norms within DCI reflecting those of the United States more generally, drum corps culture achieved a casual acceptance of LGBTQ members decades before the outside world. I intentionally removed the "T" that represents "Transgender" in this acronym because of the extreme barriers transgender members continue to face. Several interviewees pointed to the role of openly gay men in the development of DCI. Martin (white, male, 2010s, brass) reflected on the issue of homophobia in DCI, saying that"

⁷¹ Anonymous Interviews.

You know, I want to get back to what you said about homophobia and drum corps. I'm not sure if it can exist. I think that there is plenty of sort of more or less good-natured ribbing, but like, it, it's really hard to be homophobic against people that you're going to have to shower with in an hour, you know? It's really hard to be homophobic when half of the people on your design team are homosexuals. Like you're in an activity that is, that is like heavily influenced guided by the hand of people who are gay, you know, George Zingali,⁷²

The invocation of George Zingali, infamous designer and drill writer of the 1970s and 1980s, who famously died from AIDS-related complications, was echoed many times by other interviewees. He continued to say:

I think part of what makes drum corps a really interesting experience for young men who are gay is you can be as gay as you want to be on drum corps tour. My friends who marched [an all-male corps] used to make jokes about the guard guys getting on the phone with their parents in the middle of tour and having to affect like a really masculine voice. At [a different all-male corps] it almost felt like there wasn't an audience to perform for. You could affect some of these more feminine personality characteristics but like you still had to go out and throw a six.⁷³ You are still [a member of this all-male corps] no matter how you decide to express your gender or your sexuality. Some of this stuff is like put up or shut up, you know, like you just had to go out and do it.⁷⁴

Thus, in his opinion, members had the ability to experiment with how they express or perform their gender identity and their sexuality. The hegemonic understanding of masculinity within drum corps culture is thus significantly more plastic than in the outside world.

1.5.2. Exclusion and Meritocracy

Despite the strength and durability of these bonds, they are not a universal guarantee. The degree to which a member comes to feel a sense of belonging is highly contingent upon their

⁷² Anonymous Interviews.

⁷³ “a six” refers to a color guard equipment toss, wherein the object being thrown rotates six times in the air before the member catches

⁷⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

ability to totally minimize identity-related differences. This barrier to belonging is obscured for the majority of members and alumni by the notion that DCI is wholly a meritocracy.

Question: Do you believe your race or ethnicity affected your drum corps experience? If so, how?

Answer (white, male, 1980s, brass): No, bottom line was can you play and march, period. The concept of meritocracy was instilled within competitive drum & bugle corps even before the formation of Drum Corps International.⁶⁰ As discussed earlier, the first judging systems focused solely on recognizing errors that they would track as “ticks” on a score sheet. In the most ideal circumstances, this system reduced members to their mistakes—yet as we recognize today, the internalized biases of judges undoubtedly influenced the frequency with which women and people of color earned ticks. This comes with little surprise given the degree to which Protestant ideas of work ethic permeate American society.⁷⁵ Today, the judging doesn’t solely rest on the individual but rather reflects a corps’ ability to perform the music and movements that have been set for them by designers and arrangers.

Such a framework for achievement and belonging reflects sociologist Jo Littler’s description of a “post-racial neoliberal meritocracy:”

Just as the myth of meritocracy mobilises the idea of a level playing field in terms of class, then, so too does it mobilise the idea of equality of opportunity in terms of race. As the field is nowhere near level – despite the gains since civil rights – these actually existing inequalities are wished away in post-racial discourses.⁷⁶

⁶⁰ Jo Littler, *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2017).

⁷⁵ Still reflected in the being called out by sports bras.

⁷⁶ Littler, *Against Meritocracy*.

The judging framework of both the past and present assume that all corps—and more importantly all members—hold a universal potential for success. As this chapter will come to show, acknowledging the inequality of the playing (or rather, marching) field creates room for members who struggle to attain the same sense of belonging afforded to their more privileged corps mates.

Adding to the historical circumstances in which the idea of meritocracy became so integral in drum & bugle corps is the concept of community. Before the 1980s, corps primarily sourced their members from local youths. As described in the Introduction, corps were established by neighborhoods, churches, schools, cultural associations, and other community organizations. This meant that the membership was generally quite homogeneous in terms of social values and culture. Within this context, members' idea of community was more location-based than today. With the foundation and growth of Drum Corps International, corps were increasingly competing in national rather than regional competitions. This eye towards competition meant that prospective members traveled greater distances. Ultimately, this has resulted in a more global sense of community.

Today, the most competitive corps membership makeup consists overwhelmingly of those who are not from the area in which the corps is based. The geographic heterogeneity of members' places of primary residence necessitated a shift in how they came to understand their relationships with one another. The global community that resulted means that regardless of the corps' location, members report a sense of kinship with others who participate in the activity.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ This was made obvious in my personal experiences conducting ethnographic work in Japan and the Netherlands.

Despite these seismic shifts in how performances are evaluated and the geographic relationships of members' hometowns, the concept of meritocracy above all prevails. Building upon Raymond Williams' articulation of meritocracy as an "alternative to solidarity," Littler articulates the present-day conception of meritocracy as reflective of neoliberal society, in which opportunity is promised whilst producing social division.⁷⁸ Although Littler's focus is on social mobility within contemporary neoliberal discourses of meritocracy, their insistence that meritocracy "functions as an ideological myth to obscure and extend economic and social inequities" is wholly relevant to the present discussion of drum corps.⁷⁹ Littler's insistence that "meritocracy needs to be unpacked as an ideologically charged discourse which permeates so many areas from school to work to reality TV" further supports such a line of inquiry into the meritocratic myth in drum corps.⁸⁰

As my ethnographic research demonstrates, the dominant belief among corps members is that they are all essentially equals, whose ability to march and play well ultimately affects their social standing more than anything else.⁸¹ The extent to which this idea is ingrained can render mistakes or sub-par abilities as character flaws that affect an individual's ability to attain meaningful feelings of belonging. Such was the case for Lily (white, female, 1990s, brass):

⁷⁸ Littler, *Against Meritocracy*.

⁷⁹ Littler.

⁸⁰ Littler.

⁸¹ "The form a meritocratic social system takes is contextually specific.[...] meritocracy needs to be understood as an ideological discourse, as a system of beliefs which constitute a general worldview and uphold particular power dynamics." Littler.

I struggled my first year. I didn't know how to play my horn when I was a rookie (I was a flute player recruited to play bari a week before tour- I couldn't even hold it, let alone play it) and I was way younger than most. I felt like I was struggling to find my place my first year- I was also surrounded by crazy imposing vets... but they treated me like family by the end of season- they saw how hard I was working. My second year I came back a lot stronger. After that, once I had demonstrated that I was going to work harder than most, I felt like I was not only accepted but embraced, acknowledged, and in a family.

Ultimately, members who make the most mistakes often are trapped in the lower end of their corps' social hierarchy.

The culture in which social standing is inextricably tied to members' abilities permeates the experiences of nearly every corps member I interviewed.⁸² Although the mere existence of All-Girl or All-Black drum corps makes it exceedingly visible how whiteness and masculinity are embedded within the American drum corps experience, the looming specter of meritocracy obscures the role of these immutable identities. As this chapter will show, an individual's race and gender ultimately come to bear on their ability to attain a sense of belonging.

Framing the experience of belonging in drum and bugle corps as being contingent upon a member's ability to perform well facilitates a pervasive sense of colorblindness. While for many white individuals, the concept of colorblindness presents the opportunity to declare themselves as being above racism, Pinder articulates colorblindness as a mechanism that "perpetuates, reinforces, and upholds whiteness."⁸³ Through this insistence that race is of no consequence to them, these white individuals reveal the extent to which "racism is not an actual lived experience

⁸² Anonymous Interviews.

⁸³ Sherrow O. Pinder, *Colorblindness, Post-Racality, and Whiteness in the United States* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

for whites but an intellectual exercise.”⁸⁴ Thus, it is through processes such as these that—as Bonilla-Silva articulates—racial domination.

The concept of meritocracy obscures the roles of whiteness and masculinity for members with these hegemonic identities.⁸⁵ The vast majority of interviewees—who were themselves predominantly white—had little knowledge of any barriers to belonging that their corps mates of color faced.

As with American society more generally, the underlying idea that any and all members can perform to a high standard and also achieve feelings of belonging obscures the violence experienced by people of color. While it is impossible to know the extent to which knowledge of white fragility influenced the way people of color surrounding the respondent articulated their feelings of belonging, they do demonstrate the inconsistencies of color blindness among members.

The ability to achieve a higher social status and/or attain feelings of belonging is predicated upon standards that exhibit a variety of masculinities. The role of masculinity and privileging of masculinities is evident from the outset for many non-males. Three women recounted experiences during the audition process wherein an instructor discouraged them from playing an instrument gendered as masculine. As a female baritone player, I have encountered such discrimination first-hand. While auditioning, my ability to hold the instrument was questioned, despite having already marched three years at another corps whose baritones were

⁸⁴ Pinder.

⁸⁵ This may, in fact, be a primarily American phenomenon. “Drum corps, or at least the Corps I marched in was a unique bubble. Maybe it was because I marched in a Canadian corps for 4 years and then a top tier corps where it was all about you doing your part rather than anything else about you.” Anonymous Survey Submission.

much heavier. Two years later, I witnessed another woman attempt to audition for euphonium, only to be told flat-out by the brass caption head that he does not want female euphonium players because they are not strong enough. Again, the auditionee had several years of experience playing euphonium at other drum corps and came highly recommended by her former instructors for her visual abilities. Female percussionists experienced similar discrimination in their auditions. In sum, these experiences reflect Doubleday's assertion that "when any class of people wishes to maintain control over a particular musical instrument, an exclusive instrument-human relationship is developed, forbidding outsider access."⁸⁶

Gender-based discrimination when assigning roles occurs frequently within the color guard section as well. While the member's ability to dance well might affect the assignment of parts, the gendering of equipment and the degree to which a member may be understood as masculine may affect their role. Stephanie (female, guard) recounted how she was not able to spin a rifle because they assumed she was too weak due to her small stature.⁸⁷ This phenomenon exists in all-male color guards as well. The more "masculine" presenting a male is, the more likely they are to be chosen for rifle, while the more "feminine" men are assigned dancing roles or saber as both require a more delicate approach.

Within the context of rehearsals and performances, these masculinities come to assert expectations of toughness and grit on all members. Alums from some corps described the need to act more masculine so they might feel more connected to their male counterparts. Those who achieved social acceptance among their male peers frequently reported being referred to as "a

⁸⁶ Veronica Doubleday, "Sounds of Power: An Overview of Musical Instruments and Gender," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 17, no. 1 (2008): 3–39.

⁸⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

beast.” Such a statement further reinforces the correlation between strength and masculinity, marking non-male members as inherently weak. This was the case, as Mitchell (African American, male, 1980s, brass) observed:

We were definitely a male heavy brass section as in no females in the baritone section. We had only one female in the low brass section, contra player in 1993. I have to say she wasn't treated that well and overall just seen as our weakest link in an otherwise "championship" group.⁸⁸

During rehearsals, some instructors went so far as to label women in specific sections as “liabilities” because of the frequency with which some of them were injured; as athletic trainers and physical therapists have pointed out, this is simply a result of the marching style being harmful to those with wider hips.

Several of my interviewees described the fraternity-like behavior that can dominate a section or the whole corps. These recollections underscore the difficulties non-male members may have in attaining feelings of belonging. For example, Harper (white, female, 1990s, front ensemble) commented that:

All three years, I was one of only a few women in the percussion section, at large. One year, I was the only woman in my section (front ensemble). Members and staff were generally respectful, but drum corps being drum corps, there were still frequent inappropriate comments made.^{89 8}

Descriptions such as this are common among female respondents. “Locker room talk,” profuse profanity, the over-sexualization of any and all women, and the frequent display of genitals in rehearsal or on the bus are all highlight ways in which masculine identities are performed. Larry (white, male, 1980s, brass) articulated this culture as sophomoric and “rife with sexism and

⁸⁸ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁸⁹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

misogyny”⁹⁰ Another interviewee, Leah (white, female, 1980s, battery) detailed how this affected her experiences:

I was one of few girls in the battery, and as someone who was thin with large breasts, I was constantly sexualized. I never took it personally at the time, but definitely felt I had to be extra tough to be taken seriously.”⁹¹

Furthermore, like the first individual quoted, Leah’s experiences underscore the additional labor needed to attain access to the meritocratic system in the first place.

The need to perform a manly identity among members of the corps proper is also likely tied to the gendering of instruments. Veronica Doubleday’s research on the gendering of instruments highlights how “social strictures about gendered divisions of space have frequently supported male instrumental musicianship.”⁹² As a result, the lack of support for female (and non-male) instrumental musicianship has an effect on members’ social standing.

Interestingly, privileging masculinity and encouraging individuals to perform masculine identities creates a space for the exploration of gender identities. Felix (white, male, 2010s, brass) astutely observed this phenomenon, writing that:

The corps was an opportunity to try on a kind of performance that we wouldn't have taken on normally, [...] There was a lot of important experimentation in how we performed gender/sexuality to each other in public/private. Physicality was probably more of a factor in easing navigation through the corps.⁹³

The barriers to belonging thus, also work to minimize prejudices surrounding gender that dominate in the non-drum corps world. Thus, by privileging masculine behaviors, drum corps

⁹⁰ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁹¹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁹² Doubleday, “Sounds of Power.”

⁹³ Anonymous Interviews.

creates an environment with a surprisingly progressive separation of gender identity from gender expression.

The various efforts to minimize difference that result from the definition of daily life poses each member as possessing the ability to become an indistinguishable part of a larger whole. Yet, examining these standards reveals the extent to which they are predicated upon corps members sharing identities. This can result in unachievable definitions.

Age, gender, experience, and role within a corps all influence a given member's ability to feel as if they belong. Members whose identities do not fit with the cultural understanding of their particular role struggle greatly. Those with leadership positions, like drum majors or section leaders, quickly learn whether or not their identities match with their corps' preconceived ideas about who should be in the position. Leon (male, 2010s, conductor) described this exact scenario, telling me about how their identities' incompatibility with cultural expectations made it challenging to feel as if he belonged:

This is one of the questions where I was just kinda like, you know, for all the relationships that I do still have while I was marching. I definitely didn't feel that sense of belonging. There was definitely more of a feeling of alienation. That came with the adherence to a certain amount of responsibility that you kind of have with, cause you have to balance your relationship with, with individual members who are more of your peer group, and then you have to balance the relationship with the administration. And at the time I was only 18. And so that was extremely hard to balance because not only was I not only was, was I having to do both of those balances, that it was, it was that I, I was a rookie and then I was one of the youngest in the corps.⁹⁴

Despite developing feelings of kinship with their corpsmates, they still struggled to gain acceptance. As one of the youngest members in the corps, much less a rookie with a leadership

⁹⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

position, their identities did not align with their corps' cultural understanding of what type of person should hold power.

Members establish and reinforce their corps' cultural expectations, particularly around belonging and acceptance, most frequently. Still, staff members influence the definition of these expectations. Building upon their own experiences as former members, staff members play a significant role in defining who should have power when they select members for leadership roles, assigning musical parts, or solos. Staff members codify the unspoken hegemonic expectations regarding identity through these actions. This has led to the performance of white and masculine identities as being paramount to members' ability to feel as if they belong. For those who do not fit in, the influences of these inherited cultural norms and preferences are evident from the outset. Olive (white, female, brass) responded to my question about whether gender or race affected their experience with the following:

I was told multiple times at [my corps] that I would not be able to do something or march correctly because women's bodies were built differently or more prone to injury. I was also told by the [brass caption head] at that corps to 'man up' and 'stop being emotional'. I've also been DMed a few times in my career asking for hookups—something I never have initiated and made me feel very uncomfortable around those people.⁹⁵

Experiences like this were recounted by a number of non-male members. The non-male member is undesirable in performance contexts due to the supposition that their physicality renders them incapable of achieving the expectations set forth. At the same time, male members' assumptions about the sexuality and sexual availability of the non-male members, yet again marking the non-male member as different. These comments were present within the interviews of non-male

⁹⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

members across a variety of corps and occurring throughout the history of DCI. Lyla (white, female, brass) summarized her feelings on the subject in her survey response as such:

I believe that gender affected my experience in DCI in several ways:

1) While I was pushed physically to achieve my best performance, I often felt that the expectations were set based on male figures and not women. In a hornline that was 92% male, keeping pace with the men during workouts was difficult, especially throughout the day, and often led to more punishment if we were unable to keep up.

2) In the hornline, while not necessarily my experience but that of my seat partner, being a more feminine woman in the hornline made you the subject to sexual harassment from members of the hornline. The bigger your boobs, the bigger your butt, and the different instrument you played made a difference overall.

3) I felt that being a woman in the activity and within my corps produced a sense of solidarity. We created a social media group to stay in touch and provide recommendations for tours that were not included on the "original" packing list... things like longer spandex for uniforms, recommended sports bras, socks, etc. This sense of solidarity created among brassline women was one of the best parts of the activity and helped me feel better connected to the corps.⁹⁶

Although I marched many years before this interviewee, her responses depict an experience quite similar to my own. Because the expectations for members were defined according to masculine standards, any physical difference can serve as a barrier to acceptance. Female and non-male members are sometimes held to an impossible standard that both recognizes difference and rejects it. Likewise, the presumed sexual viability of a female member influenced the degree to which gender differences were emphasized within the horn line. These anecdotes underscore the multiple ways that non-male members can struggle to achieve belonging through the minimization of difference, particularly the consequences of bodily difference.

Not all interviewees felt as if gender made any difference. Omar (white, male, 1980s) articulated his feelings and memories regarding the issue succinctly, stating that all that matters is "if you're good enough period. Stopping the discussion. And I never noticed any. My memories are thirty-six years old, but I don't remember any gender issues in [my corps]."⁹⁷ As

⁹⁶ Anonymous Interviews.

⁹⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

might be expected, the conflicting reflections between male and female interviewees indicated significant division on the issue of gender, with female respondents indicating most frequently that they experienced or observed differences in experiences that they felt were rooted in gender.

For many, aspects of corps life come to be defined with the white, male, able-bodied individual as the standard. Non-male and non-white members are thus forced to work towards an unachievable goal. Color guard makeup and hairstyling present an example of how minimizing difference through definition works to highlight unavoidable differences and subsequently create feelings of exclusion. The required hairstyle for performances is often defined according to expectations that are only applicable to individuals with straight or slightly curly hair; little thought is given to kinky, coily, or curly hair.⁹⁸ In the external world, these goals are at best, culturally insensitive. However, within the context of drum corps, there is much more at stake in the action of defining. As the next section will show, the ability to achieve feelings of belonging is dependent upon the ability to conform. These result in non-conforming members being excluded from the only social group they have throughout three months.

This issue, however, goes largely unrecognized by many within the DCI community. Several shrugged off microaggressions and outright hostile acts as being “comments on stereotypes” or racist language as being “used in a humorous context” that was unable to cause harm because “everyone was friends.” As Naomi (Black, female 1980s, brass) articulated, these experiences go unacknowledged:

⁹⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

As a black woman, a visible minority, I believe that it was more difficult to be accepted by others and therefore making friends despite me having been raised in a mostly white environment. It wasn't until I marched in [corps name] that I had my first black friends (because there were none where I came from).⁹⁹ ”

The knowledge that conforming to certain standards is impossible motivates some to establish solidarity among other marginalized members. This solidarity is especially evident among female and Black individuals in the corps. Just as the above quote intimates, the bonds among those who are unable to conform entirely still help members achieve a sense of belonging. Women in male-dominated sections like the horn line and battery face a larger struggle in their quest for uniformity or conformity and are consequentially more likely to seek connections among those with shared identities. Two female and non-binary respondents described feeling a stronger sense of closeness to their female counterparts. The endurance of these bonds forged out of exclusion is evident in another interviewee's story. When I asked her (white, female, 1990s, brass) about her experience of gender while marching, she described how being a female in a male-dominated horn line led her to choose a seat on the color guard bus. At one point in the summer, a female bus mate taught her how to apply eyeliner. Twenty years later, she still wears her eyeliner that way. In this example, the desire to achieve feelings of belonging led her to seek connections outside of her section. The bonds formed among her and others with shared identities ultimately resulted in her changing her presentation of self. Still, the sense of belonging that is forged within outsider groups is tinged with an awareness that they are not part of the dominant group.

Black members must often seek out these bonds outside of their corps. Unable to escape definitions that are predicated upon whiteness, the minuscule number of Black and non-white

⁹⁹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

members in World Class corps, in particular, facilitates the developing of bonds across corps. Yet as ethnomusicologist Jamil Jorge's work on all-black corps demonstrates, those corps possess the same mechanisms of achieving belonging through minimizing difference.¹⁰⁰

1.5.3. Formal Exclusion

Members who engage in misconduct face the possibility of being socially ostracized from their corpsmates, in addition to the formal punishments that may come from corps administration. Members, particularly vets, are aware of these social consequences. The internal policing of conduct that results from this awareness is exemplified in Ella's (white, female, 1990s, brass) anecdote:

One year, we rehearsed in a 4H reception building or something for that had a stock of beer on tap. We filled up our water coolers with beer for the road that night. Corps director found out and asked people who participated, to be honest, and take punishment. We members knew who weren't being honest and ostracized them until they admitted it and took the punishment.¹⁰¹

The members in this scenario demonstrated the heightened power that peer pressure comes to have over individual conduct. This clear violation of corps policy resulted in members weaponizing belonging and inclusion to reinforce social norms.

1.6. Resisting and Reassessing

Since the 2010s, the drum corps community has increasingly recognized the absence of a true meritocracy. Attempting to remedy this, leaders initiated more formal efforts to eliminate issues associated with gender discrimination in DCI. In-Step is a recently created group that

¹⁰⁰ Ongoing research provided by Jamil George (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2022).

¹⁰¹ Anonymous Interviews.

promotes leadership roles among women in DCI by bringing female instructors and staff together several times throughout the year to discuss systemic problems and articulate potential solutions. Other groups, such as Girls Drum provide opportunities for young women to hone their percussion skills prior to auditioning in an all-female environment.¹⁰² These groups have grown to prominence since the mid-2010s; it was around this time that women broke through glass ceilings in the fields of drill writing and holding caption head positions. Likewise, during audition season for the 2022 season, more corps announced initiatives intended to diversify corps staff. The Bluecoats established an apprenticeship program for show designers specifically aimed at individuals whose identities are minoritized in DCI.

As will become clear throughout the remaining chapters in this dissertation, the importance of belonging ultimately serves as a motivational factor in supporting any inventions or initiatives centered around equity and inclusivity. With the powerful feelings of belonging comes a strong sense of duty, a feeling that all community members have a personal stake in any conversations about moral or ethical issues within DCI.

¹⁰² “Girls Drum,” Girls Drum, accessed November 8, 2021, www.girlsdrum.com.

Chapter 2. Welcome to Drum Corps?: Blurring the Line Between Grit and Abuse

When the job becomes hard, when I am exhausted and cannot give anymore, I reach into my Drum Corps heart and give more.¹

As the previous chapter demonstrates, altering behaviors—related to performances and rehearsals or off-the-field conduct—is an essential component of achieving conformity.² An individual’s ability to conform in the most basic scenarios is a major determining factor in attaining a sense of belonging. Thus, members’ desire to achieve their individual goals and contribute positively to the corps makes intense bonds possible. Considered alongside the isolation that occurs as a result of rehearsing and touring, these altered behaviors and expectations surrounding the drum corps experience function to refashion cultural and social norms, creating the sense that a corps—and DCI more generally—exists in a distinct cultural space.

For the vast majority of members of the DCI community, the existence of a unique cultural space has a profound and positive impact on their lives. As I describe in chapter 2, this often leads members to feel as if outsiders could never attain an understanding of *what it is like*. Marty (white, male) articulated it as: “I think there is a real feeling among people who have marched drum corps—and it doesn’t extend just to people who marched drum corps in a specific

¹ Anonymous Interviews.

² I define conformity as visual and audible similarities between members, primarily in performance contexts, that contribute to the sense that everyone is moving and playing the exact same way.

era—but it's this feeling like nobody else gets this.”³ This othering of non-members only strengthens the bonds among members. It also helps members understand themselves as unique and exceptional for having completed a season and becoming privy to the knowledge of *what it is like*.⁴

For many, knowing what it is like reflects a deep familiarity with the challenges inherent in drum corps. Long rehearsals, physically and mentally challenging performance and the perpetual need to overcome are key to developing an understanding of drum corps culture. Many feel pride in the grit, determination, and strength that are required for success in a drum corps season and knowing that others suffered through the same circumstances further strengthens feelings of kinship.

Many alumni—myself included—are grateful for the difficulties that drum corps presented them. Between the long rehearsal days, in oppressive heat that seem to last forever, and pushing your body and minds farther than you thought possible, completing a season is incredibly difficult. Spending hours perfecting a single step or count, members are constantly challenged with no option but to press on. By the end of a season, members have reevaluated what they believed was possible time and time again. This was Milo’s (white, male, 1980s, brass) experience, which they articulated in the following response: “having to deal with sickness, injury, bus breakdowns, bad facilities, and unpredictable food taught me to assess,

³ Anonymous Interviews.

⁴ In the age of social media, this is even more visible. Membership in an elite corps can turn the average band kid into a minor celebrity.

adapt and move forward, no matter what environmental circumstances I encounter, and pass that along to my students.”⁵

As Milo’s contribution demonstrates, these challenges and bonds are a double-edged sword, particularly when attempting to discern what is an inherent part of the drum corps experiences—and what is abuse. The ever-present demand that members go beyond their perceived physical and mental limits presents the opportunity for profoundly positive, life-changing experiences. At the same time, however, it creates an environment with endless potential for abuse and exploitation. Indeed, DCI recognizes the difficulties inherent in discerning what should be considered part of drum corps culture and what should not. In their 2018 Community Code of Conduct and Ethics Guidelines, DCI recognized the complexities inherent in reconciling safety with challenges:

While DCI supports a competitive culture that emphasizes resiliency, overcoming challenges, rigorous instruction, as well as physical and mental toughness and discipline, at the same time, all members of the DCI community are expected to model, promote, and advocate for a strong and visible culture of professionalism and ethics. These ideals are not mutually exclusive and must be equally embraced by DCI community members. Members of our community are also responsible for creating a respectful and welcoming environment where every person is valued and honored.⁶

With only examples and definitions of unethical conduct, this code of conduct and ethics guidelines document provides little aid in discerning what an ethical competitive culture looks like. In this chapter, I articulate how members’ understanding of drum corps culture influences

⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

⁶ Drum Corps International, “DCI Board of Directors Updates Sweeping Code of Conduct & Ethics Guidelines,” May 16, 2018, <https://www.dci.org/news/dci-board-of-directors-updates-sweeping-code-of-conduct-ethics-guidelines>.

their delineation between normal and abnormal experiences. This, in turn, provides insight into how the culture is capable of normalizing abuse and negligence.

In the first half of this chapter, I attend to the challenges members face while exploring the ease with which they cross the line into the realm of abuse. In doing so, I articulate the roles of whiteness and masculinity in facilitating this boundary-crossing, arguing that race and gender affect the nature of punishments like theories of masculine contest culture. My conception of masculinity has its roots in Bederman's articulations of manliness in American culture during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Bederman writes:

Manhood or masculinity is the cultural process whereby concrete individuals are constituted as members of a preexisting social category—as men. The ideological process of gender—whether manhood or womanhood—works through a complex political technology, composed of a variety of institutions, ideas, and daily practices. Combined, these processes produce a set of truths about who an individual is and what he or she can do, based upon his or her body. Individuals are positioned through that process of gender, whether they choose to or not. [...] Individuals have no choice but to act upon these meanings—to accept or reject them, adopt or adapt them—to be able to live their lives in human society.⁷

The set of processes that Bederman articulates is at the heart of this chapter's inquiries. Obscured by the presumption of these processes as the norm, I reveal how the ideological processes of manliness and masculinity come to bear on disciplinary measures. Furthermore, within the discussion of punishments, I articulate instances where trauma bonds cause members to have a heightened sense of belonging and demonstrate exceptionality attained by having endured ridiculous experiences.

Next, I articulate how the distinction between drum corps life and the outside world can lead members to endure potentially harmful physical conditions. I explore how belonging

⁷ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*, 7.

intersects with isolation, creating the opening for long-term consequences. Through this discussion I highlight how when unchecked, this culture can empower staff and administration to prioritize the physical health and wellbeing of members.

2.1. Being pushed to the limit

There is a strong sense of nostalgia among members of the drum corps community when it comes to overcoming physical and mental obstacles during the season. In our conversation, Kenneth (white, male, 2010s, brass) recalled with a sense of reverence and pride in having faced a particularly difficult challenge, saying that “the staff had to push us because they needed to just pull as much like emotion and energy as they could out of this. Cause it was a young group with a really hard show. And we circled drilled⁸ for like an hour straight and it was, it was, I've never, I don't think I've ever experienced a visual block that tough in my life.”⁹ Demonstrating the shared cultural understanding of the difficulties of circle drill between Kenneth and me, Kenneth was able to convey to me how truly difficult the rehearsal was. The tone of their voice, the loss of words after describing how long they did circle drill for, all point to the pride and importance that drum corps members place on overcoming.

Members reinforce among themselves the idea that drum corps should be difficult and outright painful. Hailey (Asian-American, female, 2010s, percussion), for example, described the expectations she encountered while a front ensemble member as “if your hands aren't bleeding at the end of the day, you didn't work hard enough.”¹⁰ She continued, reflecting on the complexities

⁸ “Circle drill” is a conditioning exercise.

⁹ Anonymous Interviews.

¹⁰ Anonymous Interviews.

presented by these expectations, “there's also a certain element of, you're an adult. Adult in air quotes obviously, but you're enough of an adult to know when you and your body are hurting and need to stop doing something.¹¹” Hailey’s opinions demonstrate how, on one hand, a member is fully capable of making the decisions necessary to leave if their experiences are bad, but on the other, are making these decisions within a culture that ties social status to the performance of grit.

Staff members also play a role in reinforcing the importance of enduring and overcoming. Punishments viewed as contributing to the members’ grit and strength are typically met with less resistance or fewer complaints. Molly’s (white, female, 2000s, guard) description of a particularly abusive staff member highlights this:

I think like in the way that he looked at things really kind of authoritarian kind of got off on the power, you know there was one time where he had us do like pushups and sit-ups in broken glass on a like hot parking lot, you know, like a black parking lot. And so like a lot of us have like lacerations and stuff like that.

And it's like, it wasn't the physical pain. That was the problem. It's just like kind of his like being part of his like weird power trip. There was one guy who was particularly hurt by it, like just like emotionally hurt and also had scars on his back from it. So yeah, otherwise a lot of physical punishments or like a lot of like running and push-ups and stuff.¹²

Moreover, Molly’s anecdote reveals the extent to which instructors’ harmful conduct can go without complaint.

The shared understanding of how it feels to endure challenges outside of rehearsal elicits a similar sense of pride for community members. Mitchell (white, male, 2010s) described a challenging season, where their corps struggled to meet members’ basic needs:

¹¹ Anonymous Interviews.

¹² Anonymous Interviews.

There was a lot of like a lot of things against us. And there was a point where like, we ran out of money in Arizona and some parents like threw in their own money to get us California. We had like a rehearsal in the desert one day where people were passing out everywhere. There were a lot of things against us. Our food truck was a box truck that had like giant crockpots. That's how we had all our food. [...] there's just a lot of insane things about how we got down the road and how we had to rehearse and things we had to deal with. Yet there was something about that year. It was a kinda magic key, like we won. So it felt like it was all worth it. And I feel like because of those things, I feel more connected to my corpsmates.¹³

Mitchell's description of the challenges within that season reflects how these issues can heighten feelings of belonging among corpsmates. The shared experiences in overcoming the unavoidable obstacles created by their corps' circumstances brought Mitchell's corps together. In his situation, the ethical or moral implications of their corps' treatment of members were of little consequence in comparison to the meaningful connections that arose.

In other instances, members actively subvert the typical negative response to punishments by framing it as an inherent part of drum corps culture. It is yet another challenge to overcome.

Part of my draw to the activity was this style of accountability. We, as a culture, we're interested in "hyping everything" so everything was met with a degree of enthusiasm even if performed. We were interested in being a very physically hardened corps and just made pushups and running and strength-building exercises a part of who we were and what we did even if we weren't "being punished."

As Felix (white, male, 2010s, brass) described in a short-answer question, their corps actively fostered a culture that emphasized attaining physical strength through the most common punishments: push-ups and running. As this section will demonstrate, when members stop feeling as if there is a purpose to the punishment, they begin to understand it as harmful.¹⁴ Yet, even in the moments where the whole corps finds a punishment unjust, a corps' culture can

¹³ Anonymous Interviews.

¹⁴ While the most harmful techniques are being utilized with less frequency as the awareness of their ineffectiveness grows, some corps and/or individual educators still use them.

encourage compliance without complaint. After all, complaining or resisting would mean going against the expectation that drum corps should be hard and suggest that the aggrieved is simply not cut out for it.

2.2. Discipline and Punishment

It is expected that every member works to perfect their performance. Depending on the corps, instructional staff and other corps members can aid in this process by providing corrections and feedback throughout the season. When it seems as if a member is not being receptive to feedback, actively resisting receiving any information, or simply appearing unfocused, punishments can be an effective tool. They serve to reinforce behavior patterns, create a stigma around negative behaviors, and even aid in physical conditioning. Punishments, however, can also be incredibly destructive. Throughout this section, I address the ways that race and gender come to affect who is penalized and how. I argue that, when considered alongside the ways drum corps creates and enforces cultural norms divorced from the outside world, the punishments reveal how a member's identity come to affect their ability to conform and achieve feelings of belonging.

In the following section, I explore how drum corps cultural expectations regarding the activity's difficulties function to obscure the boundary between helpful and harmful punishments. Using the stories of my interviewees, and my own experiences, I identify how members and staff come to view punishments as acceptable. I also identify the factors that contribute to identifying punishments as having crossed the line. Examining the most harmful punishments reveals how they function as mechanisms of hyper-masculinity and whiteness, asserting the hegemonic group's dominance through acts that are particularly violent to those on

the margins. I close by assessing the role of trauma bonds and storytelling in the normalization of harmful punishments.

Much like other musical groups, a corps will often guide the focus of rehearsals by working on a specific portion of the show. This may mean that on any given day, all sections are practicing the first half of the second movement or even isolated measures of music. For example, members of the horn line can spend hours on a single note with the end goal of uniformly articulating the beginning of the note (while also accounting for the members' placement on the field), playing at the same volume, tuning according to the note's location and role in the harmonic structure of the phrase, and releasing with a breath (inhalation) simultaneously. Given the typical length of a rehearsal day—three, four-hour “blocks” of time separated by meals—such a rehearsal structure results in many repetitions of the same phrase of music or counts of drill. Such a focus often creates a scenario wherein the mistakes of a specific member are highlighted. The instructional staff, as a result, becomes focused on fixing the biggest mistakes first.

Among the most commonly cited punishments are push-ups and running. Push-ups are often described as a marker of self-accountability: if a member makes a mistake, they can choose to do push-ups between reps. Occasionally, my interviewees reported an instructor demanding push-ups from an individual or section following a mistake. In their interview, Nicolas (white, male, 1990s, battery) articulated that because it takes away from rehearsal time, being told to put down your instrument or equipment and run is less common.

The corporal punishment thing to me was always silly. I never understood what we were getting out of it, except for this sucks. [Our Captain Head] never bought into that. Or he doesn't buy into that now. It's a sense of pragmatism and time, like, okay, we can make everybody run now. We've just lost two reps because they're running and the next rep back, they're going to blow because they're all out of breath. So what do we actually gain by making them go run anything?¹⁵

Typically, running is seen as an acceptable punishment as it can aid with physical conditioning.

Some instructors attempted to lighten the tension that can arise when members become frustrated with running by telling them to bring an object back with them, such as a leaf from a tree or a rock from a pathway.¹⁶ In the eyes of many of my interviewees, punishments that fell into any of the above categories were described with either positive or ambivalent language.

Punishments are not always tied to mistakes during rehearsal. Several interviewees indicated that they observed punishments for off-the-field mistakes. The motivation for these punishments is much more clear-cut, however, as it usually stems from efforts to maintain a positive image of the corps and avoid injury to members or damage to equipment. Because corps are most often housed at K-12 schools, establishing and maintaining a positive relationship between the organization and host institution is essential. Rules such as “no stealing” and “stay in the designated area” are most common.¹⁷ The consequences for violating these rules are incredibly varied, ranging from a stern lecture to being kicked out of the corps.

¹⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

¹⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

¹⁷ DCI codifies these rules, too. Drum Corps International, “Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations,” Adopted 2021, <https://pubhtml5.com/xada/klod/>.

2.2.1. Crossing the line: humiliation

As educator and researcher Megan Boler articulated in her 1999 monograph, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*, punishments and disciplinary measures that result in feelings of shame or humiliation often go unquestioned. Seen as arising from within—rather than being imposed upon an individual—these negative emotions are interpreted as reflecting the individual’s personal accountability for a mistake or action rather than being the direct result of a particular social force. This positioning obscures the role of the instructor or educator in humiliating or striking fear in an individual, as well as the social forces that normalize such actions.

Punishments that lean towards humiliation tend to reflect defining aspects of masculine contest culture. In section 1.5.2 Exclusion and Meritocracy, I described how standards for conformity tend to reflect and reinforce hegemonic ideas. Indeed, Foucault articulates that punishments are an “art of conflicting energies [...] a matter of establishing the representation of pairs of opposing values [...] that may subject the movement of the forces to a power relation.”¹⁸ That is, punishments call attention to a behavior, marking it as undesirable. The person or people who exert influence over defining what is desirable inherently hold power over the delinquent individual. Bringing this understanding of punishments as a tool for asserting dominance and reproducing power into dialog with masculinity contest culture uncovers how pre-held conceptions of masculinity among members come to be weaponized. That is, while Foucault’s conception of punishments informs us about structural implications, turning to theories of masculine contest culture provides a point of entry into how they affect individuals within the

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 104.

drum corps community. Attending to this perspective will ultimately aid in suggestions for interventions that create lasting cultural change.

2.2.2. Justifying Punishments

The justification of a punishment is crucial for members to determine where boundaries lie. My interviewees tended to draw the line between helpful and harmful running as being dependent upon the presence of factors that cause humiliation for the member being punished. Examples of these include being made to run and apologize to another section for “sucking,” or a member being forced to run for 2.5 hours because they were caught not playing when they should have been. Running is a common punishment that also can easily cross the line from helpful to harmful.¹⁹ In my own experience at both elite and mediocre World Class/Division 1 corps, it was very common for my section to be told to put down our horns and go run to touch a landmark. Be it a tree in the distance, goal post, mailbox, if it was in sight or its location could be clearly articulated, we would have to touch it.²⁰ Such was Oscar’s (white, male, brass) experience:

The horn line got punished the day after the Fourth of July for a misunderstanding at a parade. We have something called a “green light” which is basically to go all out, with good quality of course. However, the quality wasn’t great, so the following day at rehearsal brass had to run multiple times and do things like “run to the tree and back” in between reps. Also applied to holding up our horn for an incredible amount of time.²¹

¹⁹ Running is frequently a planned component of rehearsal.

²⁰ One interviewee recounted: “Missing releases, notes, changes- Go get me a leaf- NOPE wrong one.” Anonymous Survey Submission.

²¹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

In this story, their reflection that the “quality wasn’t so great” indicates that they likely felt the punishment was justified. Likewise, others described running for punishments as contributing to team building: “Sometimes it sucked, but we were better for it. My instructors made it about the team. If one didn't know something, we all were accountable.”²²

Beyond punishments that are easily justifiable, humor also serves to either move the line of acceptance or mask the harm when the line is crossed. When alumni described events in a more comical light, such as a member’s horn being replaced with a traffic cone or Shake Weight, the humiliation is rendered invisible. The humor involved in these punishments masks the ways that the delinquent comes to be made an example of, obscuring what Foucault describes as an older method of punishment lacking humanization.²³ In the case of these punishments masked by humor, we can see how they draw attention to the individual rather than rendering them indistinct from the ensemble as a whole. This, in turn, further solidifies power structures and social hierarchies as both contingent upon a member’s success. Adding levity into daily activities provides much-needed comedic relief, but when humor is not present it can more quickly cause punishments to cross the line into the territory of harmful conduct.

The frequency with which this manner of punishment is invoked can be an indicator of how members perceive punishments as acceptable. Repeatedly demanding that members run in response to poor behavior and/or outcomes in rehearsal increases the visibility of such a disciplinary measure. In these moments where the punishment becomes visible, members and staff should theoretically experience the need to speak out against the abusive turn. Articulating such punishments as abusive, however, is not an option in corps that prioritize hyper-masculine

²² Anonymous Interviews.

²³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 101.

values. For those whose cultures reflect masculinity competition culture, the increased visibility of punishments via repetition presents a challenge to be overcome—a challenge to their strength and grit. Interpreting these activities as abusive, thus, comes to signal a member's failure to rise to the standards of masculinity set forth.

The tone of punishments turns even more sinister when instructors ask alternates to shadow contracted members who are making frequent mistakes. Being an alternate typically means that someone rehearses with the corps but does not officially have a spot. This practice is particularly helpful in instances where an injury may take away a contracted member as the alternate has enough familiarity with the corps and show to fill the spot quickly. In several of the more elite corps, a staff member asking an alternate to shadow a member whose abilities are not up to par with the rest of their section serves as a psychological-motivational tool. While contracts prohibit members from being replaced or cut after the season begins, the mere specter of being sent home can motivate some to try harder.

Hyperbolic accusations regarding a members' abilities function to reinforce ideas of replaceability in instances where there are no alternates. Layla (white, female, 2010s, guard) for example, described how a tech asserted her inferiority following a regional competition that takes place halfway through the summer:

I was always left out and the caption head did not like me to the point of pulling me aside after the San Antonio regional saying "you should think of going home you are the worst member on the field" this was after me having a dropless show and another members blew up. after that, I went to a tech asking what I need to do to get better and getting explain that I'm not struggling like she making it out to be and that they did not know why she hated me so much. So with all that I only hung out with the horn line or percussion²⁴

²⁴ Anonymous Survey Submission.

For this interviewee, the caption head's disapproval dramatically affected her ability to achieve feelings of belonging among the color guard section. What is notable about this example is the normalization of degrading and disrespectful comments. Unable to offer any true solution, the tech affirmed the caption head's authority to bully the member.

Targeted harassment of an individual, or group of individuals, also may occur in ways that are hyper-visible to others. Much like the justification that conditioning and strength training provides, punishments that cross into the territory of humiliation go unchallenged because they are justified as having a practical end. To protect the equipment, nearly every corps enacts policies such as "don't leave your instrument unattended;" yet again, the consequences for violating these rules vary as well. For some select corps, leaving your instrument or equipment unattended is cause for significant humiliation. For example, in the mid-2000s, several brass staffs engaged in the practice of completely dismantling the offender's instrument. The offender would then have to reassemble the horn, the pieces of which were placed in a box; in rare cases, an instructor might scatter the parts across the rehearsal site, sending the offender on an Easter egg hunt of sorts. This method of punishment often enters into the territory of being a spectacle when instructors demand the reassembly of the instrument take place in front of the entire horn line before rehearsal can truly begin. Through this punishment, the offense is rendered hyper-visible and has consequences for the entire corps in the form of losing valuable rehearsal time. This course of actions inspires within members both a frustration with the offender, as well as feelings of being entertained as someone struggles to reassemble an instrument in a short amount of time with no instructions. The latter effect ultimately obscures the negative consequences for the offender.

Several interviewees described incidents wherein the punishments are even more problematic and visible but also go unchallenged. One such example was Andrew (white, male, 2010s, brass), who recounted his experiences with a brass tech who was displeased with his section within an all-male corps. Andrew's section was rehearsing without their instruments, so their horns were lined up along the sideline.

I remember we were like learning drill. [...] so we had like our horns, stacked on the front sideline and [...] like our section leader just started joking with whoever our tech was at the time.

I can't even remember who it was, but it was the two of them and they were just sort of like joking back and forth. And the section leader said something that went [...] a little bit too far. And so this tech, like, while we're all standing on the field, learning drill, so we're like not supposed to do anything, standing there, he literally goes down the line of all 16 of our horns, like takes out the mouthpiece of each and like rubs it like all over his like sweaty ball sack, puts it back into the instrument. While we're all just standing there, watching him, and even I remember we're all just like, dude, what the fuck are you doing? But like, he just went down like literally like all 16, took his time.

[...] I don't think that if there were women around that you would do that. Like even not okay with all dudes. But like for whatever reason, I think he felt like he could do that.

[...] he still finished each and the rest of the summer. I mean, maybe something happened behind the scenes and to him or whatever, but like no, never apologized, like nothing ever happened at least that we knew about or anything like that.²⁵

Andrew described this event with frustration. No one had spoken up. He conceded that the tech may have been punished behind-the-scenes, but the members were not made aware of any consequences.²⁶

²⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

²⁶ Anonymous Interviews.

Andrew's experience reflects how men in dominant groups attempt to achieve masculinity.²⁷ Having his masculinity threatened, or being unsure about his social position among staff, the offending tech's behavior reveals an attempt to reassert dominance over the members. Unable to speak out, the members had to accept this humiliation without complaint. Through their silence, the members were also able to compensate for the threat to their own masculinity by allowing them to demonstrate their toughness. This event reflects the simultaneous efforts to assert and uphold the ideas of masculinity that were part of their corps' culture.

The frequency with which a punishment or disciplinary measure occurs also renders the line between helpful and harmful punishments visible. For example, Taylor (white, male, 1980s, front ensemble) wrote that:

During excersizes [sic] and rehearsals we were often all punished with laps or push ups if someone tic'd. At least once a week the drumline and pit had to endure the "pyramid of pain" (1 beat 16th notes, 1 beat open roll, 2 beat 16th, 2 beat open roll all the way up to 120 beats 16th notes and 120 beats open roll then going back down to 1). If anyone ever miscounted (and it was inevitable) we'd stop, do push-ups, and start over. One day that's all we did for a twelve-hour rehearsal. Not a great memory.²⁸

While few viewed any punishment in an entirely favorable light, the persistence of this memory for Taylor highlights the role of repetition and duration in a punishment's acceptance by members. The "pyramid of pain" was posed for Taylor as a strength and endurance-building exercise—both physically and mentally. Their distinction between the exercise occurring weekly

²⁷ Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, *The Social Psychology of Gender, Second Edition: How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2021), 242.

²⁸ Anonymous Survey Submission.

and the single time in which they had to do the exercise for the entirety of a rehearsal highlights where the line between helpful and harmful stands.

Corps administrators also hold the power to discipline the corps. In one now-infamous example, a white, male corps director was displeased by the corps' efforts to clean a stadium after rehearsal. They had overlooked an empty chip bag that had been left on the field. As Alex (white, non-binary, 2010s, brass) recounted, the corps director woke the corps up around 3 AM, demanding that they meet on the field immediately. This order was complicated by the location of the field. To avoid a 1.5-mile walk, members had to take a path through a wooded area with a steep incline. This journey proved dangerous during the daytime. When the members got to the field, they were subjected to a screaming tirade about there being no excuse for sloppiness of that sort, insisting upon continuous and total perfection. At one point, the director turned his head skyward and shouted, "my mother beat me," paused for a few seconds, and then went on to contend that this was no excuse.²⁹ When asked, Alex interpreted Hopkins's statements as attempts to say that there is no excuse for poor behavior, even in the most egregious circumstances. They felt that Hopkins was particularly upset in this scenario because the trash that remained on the field reflected members' lack of respect for the power he wielded. In this view, Hopkins's tirade was an attempt by him to regain feelings of control over the members. The incident did not receive any attention from authority figures within the corps, much less DCI.

²⁹ Anonymous Interviews.

The corps director in Alex's story affirmed his corps' adherence to traditionally masculine values and the power structures that accompany them.³⁰ Indeed, their assessment accurately observed that the chip bag that remained on the field stood as a threat to the director's masculinity and power over members because it represented a corps member not following the rules he had set forth. By demanding the entire corps wake up in the middle of the night and head to the field, he reasserted his power over them.

2.2.3. Social Norms and Acceptance

Turning to studies of masculinity contest culture provides a point of entry to explain why these blatantly problematic behaviors and actions go unchallenged. While the majority of corps exhibit cultural values steeped in masculinity, corps such as those described in this section demonstrate how masculine conduct can become a contest among members. Masculinity contest cultures value strength and stamina, showing no weakness, putting work first, and dog-eat-dog competition.³¹ Raising concerns or complaining about these events would pose a greater threat to the individual's masculinity because of the implication that they are only complaining because they do not have what it takes.

Members enforce their own social norms outside of rehearsal with punishments as well. Like those they experience in rehearsal, any problematic aspects are typically masked by comedy

³⁰ Similar experiences can be observed in fraternities and militaristic organizations. See: Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007); Lynn K. Hall EdD NCC LPC (NM) ACS, "The Importance of Understanding Military Culture," *Social Work in Health Care* 50, no. 1 (January 14, 2011): 4–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00981389.2010.513914>; Kim Loyens and Jeroen Maesschalck, "Whistleblowing and Power," *International Handbook on Whistleblowing Research*, 2014.

³¹ Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape*, 250.

or by having a perceived additional purpose. Freddy's (white, male, 2010s, brass) description of punishments that occurred on their bus encapsulates this well:

"Head-sitting" would be regarded as hazing. If someone was acting out on the bus in a way that was to the detriment of the group as a whole, they would be asked to "sit on their head" and high mark time upside down until they were calm. It was as sort of meme activity, a lot of people did it for fun, so it became a cultural norm in a way. If someone was late for the bus without a reasonable excuse, they would have to do ten bus-ups (push ups) for each minute they were late. This too, was an act that some guys would just engage in for the sake of upkeeping their physical shape. Both of these would become hazing if the person did not feel that they deserved it to happen. In the all-male corps, if two people were caught fighting on the horn bus, "I Just Called To Say I Love You" by Stevie Wonder would play and the fighters would be encouraged to take off their clothing and hug for the duration of the song. Sometimes fights were faked in order for the consequential performance to become an "event" and a way to cheer up other members on the bus - considered to be humor - upon a bad show or a bad day of rehearsal. A lot of these "punishments" were co-opted and turned into "sport."³²

Much like in rehearsal, regulating the behavior of other members through punishments on the bus typically have a secondary purpose. Bus-ups, for example, are a push up where someone puts each foot on armrests, straddling the aisle, and then puts their hands on armrests one or more rows down the bus. From this position, they proceed to do push-ups. Lacking an even surface, bus-ups are a physically challenging activity that can serve to demonstrate strength. The homosocial implications of punishments in response to arguments are intended to force bonding among two feuding members. While it is not clear the degree to which clothing is removed, that members would fake fights to entertain others through the punishment reflects that this did not cross any boundaries for those involved.

Punishments in drum corps reflect and reproduce hegemonic ideas of masculinity and whiteness. Extreme punishments, particularly those that result in humiliation, reinforce masculine norms that are inherently coded as white. For the members, punishments can provide

³² Anonymous Interviews.

the opportunity to prove their masculinity. They are an exercise in social Darwinism that facilitates a “survival of the fittest” through challenges to the physical and mental status of the member. Enduring heinous consequences to trivial mistakes becomes a way to assert the individual’s strength, toughness, grit, etc. The ways that punishments are assigned or prescribed reveals expectations surrounding gender. In most cases, being on the receiving end of such visible and targeted punishments further removes the non-male identifying member from the hegemonic whole. The attention that is drawn to them through punishments has stronger implications for their social standing within the corps. Gendered expectations, however, also affect how punishments are prescribed.

For example, in my fourth year of drum corps, but my first at this particular corps, for example. My corps at the time practiced the punishment of disassembling the horn, as well as the less-significant removal of a mouthpiece which could be returned after the member paid penance in some way.³³ By all standards, I should have been held accountable in some way that is visible to the entire horn line. However, I was subject to no such punishment; merely a stern “don’t do this again” from the high-ranking staff member who had found my instrument. Reflecting on this experience—particularly in light of the research for this dissertation—I now question the extent to which my gender played a role in this interaction. As one of two women in my section of twenty-four baritone and euphonium players, it is quite possible that the assumed fragility some staff members applied to the women affected this decision.

³³ Punishments for leaving equipment unattended are common: “There were several times where people forgot their instruments or other equipment. If this happened, the owner of the item would be “married” to the item, meaning they had to carry it with them wherever they went: to meal breaks, the bathroom, the showers, on the bus, etc. This would go on for about two weeks (I don't remember the exact amount of time).” Anonymous Survey Submission.

This reinforces hegemonic ideas of masculinity, wherein the male body³⁴—and by extension, the psyche—must necessarily endure such punishments to be understood as masculine and achieve their potential. In these interactions, one individual does not possess the need to prove their masculinity because they do not have male sex characteristics. There is thus no threat to the masculinity of the other party. Excusing female members from punishments based on sex is a demonstration of power in itself, that reaffirms the dominance of the male.

Traumatic events and experiences can be categorized into those that are impersonal (natural disasters, car accidents, etc.) and those that are relational. Relational trauma results from a deep betrayal of trust, wherein the abuser misuses their power. This can occur on an individual or group level. For those who experience such trauma, they are often able to maintain a bond with their abuser that excuses the abuse. The punishments described in this chapter reflect the betrayal of trust that allows an action or reaction to cross the boundary from helpful and logical, to illogical and harmful. Masked by the intense feelings of belonging that members experience, these traumatic events or conditions easily demonstrate the concept of trauma bonds.

Attempts to prove masculinity among members further solidify the ability of abuse to be rendered acceptable. This reflects the contention that “strong masculinity contest cultures persist because they suppress complaining, giving leaders more latitude to engage in toxic behaviors.”³⁵ Members often come to understand unrepentant frequent offenders as the true problem. Such was the case for Rose (Female, brass):

³⁴ For many of my interviewees, their experience of DCI is influenced by a cultural conflation of gender with physical sex characteristics.

³⁵ Matos, O’Neill, and Lei, “Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture,” 522.

Yes, we did have group punishments. But only for things that we could control, like mental mistakes. It honestly didn't bother me that they made us do group punishments because it is a group activity and you receive a group score. Not individual scores.

What did bug me though, were the individuals that didn't care that they caused a group punishment. If someone made a mistake and felt bad about it and honestly tried to improve, I'm a happy camper.³⁶

Statements like this reflect the commonly held belief that punishments are an inherent part of the activity. That they are necessary to ensure a disciplined ensemble capable of achieving great success. Yet, as discussions of punishments elsewhere in this chapter have revealed, this sentiment can easily cross the boundary of acceptability.

Despite the ease with which trauma bonds come to form within a corps and among corps mates, many women and non-binary individuals I interviewed indicated that they did not always feel quite “at home” in their male-dominated sections. Likewise, as the interviewees in Chapter 1’s Section 1.5.2 described how their racial and/or ethnic identities were frequently commented upon, causing them to feel excluded. In Chapter 1, Section 1.5.3, I articulated how unavoidable differences can affect a members’ ability to achieve feelings of belonging. Turning to punishments reveals another way in which unavoidable differences may arise. I posit that non-male members’ struggles to belong are exacerbated by different understandings of punishments’ role in confirming masculinity. Lacking the socialization that results in male members viewing punishments as part of a larger contest to prove their masculinity, female and non-binary members struggle to justify the experiences. This not only alienates them, as they are more likely to articulate the problematic aspects of a punishment but also prevents them from achieving trauma bonds with one another and with the staff member prescribing the punishments.

³⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

2.3. Injuries and Neglect

One summer, in between tours (we routinely had two tours per summer) we played some for a local news station. We all gathered at one of the member's house to watch the news. We were on an outside deck and it collapsed from the weight. Many of us were hurt, some seriously (those hanging out under the deck), but thankfully nobody died. I remember the staff doing what they could. Several ambulances arrived quickly. I was one of the members who went the hospital. Everything was handled professionally and with real concern for our safety (wow, I haven't thought about that for years). We were back rehearsing the next morning - some of us with casts!³⁷

Roger's (white, male, 1990s, brass) story recounts a terrifying accident that was handled as best as it could have been. The staff did all they could, yet still some members had to be transported to a hospital. Taken alone, this is an unfortunate scenario that has played out in many communities across the United States.³⁸ But the reflection that some members returned to rehearsal the next morning, despite their injuries, points to larger issues within drum corps culture. Where, exactly, is the line between demonstrating commitment and engaging in risky behavior?

A season of drum corps has incredibly high physical demands for every member. The repetitive motions that come with rehearsing for 10+ hours a day, every day, lead to many

³⁷ Anonymous Survey Submission.

³⁸ Some examples of this include: David Owens, Alaine Griffen, and Kathleen McWilliams, "Trinity Porch Collapse: 'We Were Just Trapped There,'" *Hartford Courant*, September 11, 2016, sec. , Breaking News, <https://www.courant.com/breaking-news/hc-hartford-balcony-collapse-0911-20160910-story.html>; Daniel Susco, "Several Injured after Porch Collapses with 25–30 People on It at Madison Twp Party," *Journal-News*, May 21, 2021, <https://www.journal-news.com/news/several-injured-after-porch-collapses-during-madison-twp-party/MAHQFLBMIFCOXNK3CWZ2ZYL4D4/>; John Schreier, Cindy Lange-Kubick, and Zach Hammack, "Partygoer Describes Moments before Deck Collapse Outside Rural Sutton Home as a 'Bounce House,'" *Lincoln Journal Star*, July 5, 2021, https://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/nebraska/partygoer-describes-moments-before-deck-collapse-outside-rural-sutton-home-as-a-bounce-house/article_e23e3897-5fe4-5c74-9f73-f9f70033c65d.html; "4 Injured after Deck Collapses in Grand Rapids," *WOODTV.Com* (blog), June 15, 2021, <https://www.woodtv.com/news/grand-rapids/4-injured-after-desk-collapses-in-grand-rapids/>.

overuse injuries. Likewise, the intensity of rehearsals results in members burning four- to five times as many calories as they would in their normal life. As with any professional sport, nutrition, rest, physical conditioning and therapy are essential to avoiding injuries and maintaining cognitive and mental strength. Unfortunately, the physical care of members varies widely from corps to corps, year to year. The wellness of members can be threatened by several factors, ranging from malicious to purely coincidental. Just as in the case of punishments, speaking up to have needs met can be interpreted as a sign of weakness, causing problematic scenarios to go unnoticed.

A corps' culture comes to bear on the questionable leadership choices by corps administrators and staff.³⁹ Their toxic leadership styles facilitate harmful or abusive behavior.”⁴⁰ While injuries are inevitable due to the extreme physical exertion and dangers posed by equipment, the consequences are highly dependent on the corps' culture. Values that underpin masculinity contest culture correlate strongly with the acceptance of living conditions for staff and members. Likewise, wellness-related issues like rest and nutrition can arise without any malice, but the culture of a corps and the personalities of individuals in charge has a strong effect on the ways these issues are received. That is, the hardships inherent in drum corps are amplified by a corps' culture and its leaders.

³⁹ Since the writing of this chapter, Spirit of Atlanta Drum and Bugle Corps has encountered significant public relations and legal trouble following their mishandling of a minor's report of sexual assault. kenzeegh, “Spirit 2021,” Reddit Post, *R/Drumcorps*, January 9, 2022, www.reddit.com/r/drumcorps/comments/rzi7ih/spirit_2021/.

⁴⁰ Jean Lipman-Blumen, *Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians—and How We Can Survive Them* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005). Quoted in Matos, O'Neill, and Lei, “Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture,” 503.

While in conversation with Arthur (white, male, 2010s, brass), he reflected with frustration the negative experiences he encountered as a direct result of poor management.

For example not, not calling the laundromat ahead of time to figure out if they're going to be open, then taking us deep into the neighborhoods of [City Name] to run laundry at 11 o'clock at too small of a laundromat. So small that if you're a second-year and you get your clothes in you are about to turn it over into the dryer, the [the tour director] runs in going, "why aren't you on the bus?" and I said "well, my wash is still in here," [tour director] responded, "well, just stick it in a suitcase." It was all sopping wet, like how would we deal with that? And that turned into all of my clothes being mildewed for the rest of the tour. [...] 2 days later ended up on a field that was over the top of an exploded septic tank and marching literal shit for a long time, falling in it and whatnot.⁴¹

Bound to his corps' social hierarchy, Arthur's status as a second-year meant that he was among the last to have access to a washing machine. With adequate time allotted, this would have been a minor inconvenience that would have prompted Arthur, a white man, and his mostly white corpsmates to feel uncomfortable in the poor, mostly Black neighborhood where the laundromat was located.⁴² The tour director's attempt to prioritize the needs of the corps over a few individuals required a sacrifice from Arthur.⁴³ The mildewed clothes were of little consequences, however, when the corps rehearsed on a field where a septic tank had burst.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Anonymous Interviews.

⁴² This situation reflects the ongoing tension between the spaces a corps occupies and the social and economic identities of the corps itself.

⁴³ Deprioritizing laundry is common. Another interviewee described a similar experience, "they postponed our laundry day by like three or four days. So, we get extra time in this stadium. So, all of us were running out of clean laundry. And it was rough cause it's like, I didn't realize you don't realize how much of a sanitary thing that is for people getting sick. That was a year where I don't think the members' best interests were at mind. There was a lot of quarreling among the staff and the members kind of suffered, but from there the next three years were all like, so much better in terms of. The tour, how we were treated and then just the shows were all much better." Anonymous Interviews.

⁴⁴ It was unclear from Arthur or his corpsmates if this was out of ignorance on the part of staff and administration, or merely another sacrifice members were asked to make for the sake of getting in more rehearsal time.

Beyond logistical issues that require a member to put aside their personal comforts and concerns, the handling of injuries reflects the extent to which ideas about toughness and masculinity are present in a corps' culture. The physical exertion inherent in the activity makes injuries inevitable, but a corps' culture is the deciding factor in whether or not a member receives needed medical care and rest or is pressured to hide their injury like a wounded animal. Attention to members' safety around equipment such as semi-trucks, props, or scaffolding similarly reveals a corps' values.

2.3.1. Injuries

A common trope is that many members—particularly those who are younger or less athletically inclined—struggle to differentiate between an injury and soreness.⁴⁵ Indeed, the extreme physical demands that many members experience do lead to a significant amount of non-injury related pain. Working or pushing through pain resulting from soreness is an inescapable component of marching. This knowledge, however, can obscure the factors that differentiate between soreness and injury. Staffs' and members' reactions to a member who is experiencing pain undoubtedly are influenced by the corps' culture and the masculine ideas it promotes. In corps that view complaints as weakness, an injured member is unlikely to advocate for their needs or have someone else tell them to focus on recovery rather than rehearsals.⁴⁶ All

⁴⁵ Indeed, sports psychologists describe this as being particularly common among younger athletes who, “because of their inexperience with pain and injury in sport” may unintentionally underconform to ethical expectations around the handling and treatment of injuries and tending to “assume every ache is a signal of something bad.” Megan Granquist et al., *Psychosocial Strategies for Athletic Training* (Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis, 2014), 36.

⁴⁶ The inclusion of an objective third-party removes the social pressure to participate for the member.

this is even though nearly one-third of members will report an injury throughout the season.⁴⁷

The desire to belong and conform only amplifies the pressure to not sit out, as missing portions of rehearsal come to be viewed as a moral failing that harms the entire corps. Members are therefore encouraged explicitly and implicitly to participate at all costs.

Merely rehearsing presents the opportunity for injuries. Being outside all day, every day renders the activity incredibly susceptible to weather conditions. Likewise, the physical demands placed on members during a show, such as interacting with props or a difficult drill move, create numerous opportunities for injury. The reality of what is necessary for a corps to tour also presents serious hazards, particularly surrounding the transportation of equipment, instruments, and props. Moreover, members make mistakes in rehearsals and performances that threaten the safety of their corps mates. Going to the wrong place on the field opens the possibility for a member to run into another; the brass section experiences this most frequently as someone running into the bell of an instrument often causes a split lip. Color guard members must effectively toss and catch their equipment, lest a stray rifle hit an unknowing member in the head. All in all, injuries are nearly unavoidable in the activity.

Perhaps the most prominent example of this issue occurred in 2010 when a member from Carolina Crown sustained a compound fracture to the tibia and fibula in front of 30,000 audience members during the last seconds of his corps' performance in the World Championship Finals at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, IN. My proximity to the corps and presence at rehearsals and finals has given me insider knowledge of this event. The member, Ryan, had been dealing with an injury nearly the entire season. On the day of the World Championship Finals, I was present

⁴⁷ Jennifer Pohlman, "Prevalence of Musculoskeletal Injuries Among World Class Drum and Bugle Corps: A Cross-Sectional Study" (Master's Thesis, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University, 2021), 8.

at the corps' rehearsal and observed Ryan sitting on the sideline. The corps had a rule that prohibited members from performing if they did not take part in the final run-through of rehearsal. The logic is that a member who is sitting out may miss important changes and could pose a physical risk to other corps members. According to Ryan, the staff had floated the idea of putting an alternate in his place.⁴⁸ To an outsider, this seems like a reasonable compromise. But for Ryan, it would have been a thinly veiled threat: get back in rehearsal or you will be replaced. The corps completed their run-through and members packed up in preparation for the evening.

During the competition that evening, I was seated on the side 1 (stage right) 35-yard line, maybe twenty rows up from the field. I had enjoyed the competition so far but was anticipating Carolina Crown. When they took the field for the Finals competition, I cheered loudly. It seemed like the whole of Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Indiana was cheering on the corps—all 30,000+ spectators. As the corps' performance was coming to a close, I observed a member on the end of a formation fall to the ground. Falls during performances—particularly Finals—is rather rare and I was disappointed to see this happen at my favorite corps. Ryan stood back up and attempted to rejoin his line as it pinwheeled around before joining other lines into a single company front. But he fell again, this time the lower portion of his leg was clearly bending in a place that it shouldn't, and in a direction that it shouldn't. The crowd was cheering wildly as the corps entered the last ten seconds or so of their performance. Silence slowly fell over the stadium as the crowd slowly noticed that a member was incapacitated on the field. Staff members who were seated in the front row hopped the barrier, down 10ft or so to the field level. They ran out to help Ryan as the corps' final notes echoed through the stadium as if it were empty. What should

⁴⁸ Lisa Leinberger, "Drum-Bugle Corps Player with Broken Leg Still Loves Marching," *The Spokesman-Review*, November 4, 2010, <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2010/nov/04/drum-bugle-corps-player-with-broken-leg-still/>.

have been a moment for members to feel the pride that results from thunderous applause was instead marked by feelings of panic and helplessness. Over eleven minutes later, emergency medical services arrived on the field.⁴⁹ Ryan was carried off in a stretcher and the confused corps members were ushered off the field.

In addition to being interviewed by a newspaper in his hometown of Spokane, Washington, Ryan has discussed the event in other public forums. When the incident sparked a thread on the social media platform, Reddit, Ryan (white, male, 2010s, brass) responded:

Hello fellow band friends,

I sort of avoided reading this thread after I was made aware that it existed. I'll admit I was a little afraid to read it all, but I decided to take the leap. Much like DCP [Drum Corps Planet]⁵⁰ I try to stray away from these sources of drum corps "information", mostly because I try to make sure my energy is best spent in the right places.

You can believe or not believe that the guy you're referring to is me (like I mentioned, I've never had an account and was surprised to see I could use this handle here as well), but I am in fact "that guy" that you're all referring to.

To sum it up simply, I'm speechless to the nice things many of you have said and not at all offended by the reactions many of you had in the moment - I often sarcastically apologize for "ruining" the end of that finals performance, but it's all in good fun. And generally speaking I'm speechless as to what to make of all this, especially after 10 years. I thought by now I was old news.

So um, idk how to end this comment.

⁴⁹ The fact that it took that long for EMS to arrive in a professional sports stadium is problematic. It is likely that someone underestimated the potential health risks that come with a performance.

⁵⁰ Drum Corps Planet is a website that includes a forum dedicated to drum corps discussions.

I broke my leg pushing a stress fracture in the last two weeks of tour to the point of a complete fracture of my tibial plateau. It's a blessing my knee didn't give out and that I didn't also fracture my fibula due to the extreme stress after I tried to stand back up a few times. Medical treatment to members was much different back then, a lot more "rub some dirt in it" mentality... And thanks to this accident (I guess?) the Drum Corps Medical Project was born and they were able to save countless members from pushing themselves to this sort of condition. I hold no ill will towards our teaching staff or medical staff back then. 3 surgeries and a few years later I was able to age out, not how I intended, but I was back out there with Crown.⁵¹

I've ran countless half marathons(20+?), currently training for my first full, and do my best to lift heavy things. I've been working full time for Crown since 2013 and am currently the Operation and Logistics Manager/Merchandise Director for the corps and am simply doing whatever I can to get drum corps back on the road next summer.

I guess I can post a picture of x-rays or something, but that seems a little ridiculous.

Anyway, this thread was a surprise to say the least, thanks for not roasting me 😊⁵²

Ryan's description of the events that led up to, and followed, his injury highlights how the drum corps community understands injuries. His sarcastic apology for "ruining" the end of that finals performance" underscores the degree of personal responsibility and obligation members feel to their corps, though the sarcasm makes light of the cultural norm. That he was pleasantly surprised at the Reddit users' response reflects the stigma attached to injuries—even the most catastrophic—within drum corps culture. Moreover, he has taken the opportunity to continue being involved in the drum corps community as an honor and privilege, despite his incredibly painful experience.

This event was a catalyst for many corps to take the health and safety of members more seriously, despite the National Athletic Trainers Association publishing recommendations for

⁵¹ This statement is about his position as a conductor/drum major for his age-out season.

⁵² mellow-mello, "Found This in the Youtube Comments Section. Does Anyone Have More Information? (Crown 2010)," Reddit Post, *R/Drumcorps*, September 18, 2020, www.reddit.com/r/drumcorps/comments/iuweor/found_this_in_the_youtube_comments_section_does/.

safety in this arena four years earlier in 2006 and DCI establishing the Drum Corps Medical Project in 2007 to help establish DCI-specific recommendations.⁵³ Ryan’s experience highlights several ways that the safety and well-being of a member fell to the wayside in attempts to ensure the corps’ success. First, that athletic trainers are essential. Before 2007, very few corps had a dedicated trainer. Second, the experience of a trainer is crucial. Owing to a corps’ efforts to save money, they often employ novice trainers or bring a trainer on as an intern. Additionally, the scarcity of athletic trainers who are familiar with the needs of a drum corps makes it difficult to find anyone to bring on in the first place. Third, staff’s respect for the trainer’s recommendations is essential to maintaining the safety of members.⁵⁴ Fourth, members and staff alike must not pressure an injured member to return to the field before they have recovered.

Since the late 2010s, several DCI alumni with careers in athletic training, occupational therapy, or physical therapy have embarked on a mission to improve health and wellness conditions. I will detail their efforts at the end of this chapter, but their assessments of the problems are of indispensable help here. When asked why they became interested in the field of musician health and wellness, they pointed to the unique nature of drum corps. Despite the intense physical and mental demands conditions inherent in the activity, the perception that it is just band causes rehabilitation professionals to overlook drum corps. One physical therapist described this hurdle, writing that “while a person in any one of these fields would have a strong understanding of anatomy, kinesiology, and how to prevent or treat the injury in an athlete, it is difficult to understand how much stress these individuals are expected to undergo during a drum

⁵³ Jill F. Kilanowski, “Marching Athletes: Injuries and Illnesses at Band Camp,” *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 33, no. 6 (2008): 338–45.

⁵⁴ An athletic trainer described how she experienced push-back from techs and caption heads alike when making rest-based recommendations for specific members.

corps season.”⁵⁵ This, they argue, is exacerbated by corps’ leadership’s attitude that the time necessary to stretching and other preventative measures are perceived as taking time away from rehearsal.

Prioritizing the corps’ success over the wellbeing of members demonstrates the extent to which masculinity contest culture is a part of the corps’ culture more generally. Demanding that members show no weakness, any injury, or physical challenge is construed as an opportunity for members to prove their masculinity. At the same time, becoming injured comes to be viewed as a character flaw. A physical therapist within the community described their frustrations as follows:

Oftentimes injured members are faced with the guilt of missing a rep or a performance. They are looked at as weak and not given the proper time to heal or the tools they need to recover, strengthen, and get better. It seems like the trainers when I marched were solely there to get us into shape to march the program, but other than ice packs and ibuprofen, weren’t much help otherwise.⁵⁶

Jessica’s (white, female, 2000s, brass) experiences were informed by sustaining a spinal injury that made sitting in a bus seat overnight unbearable and horrific shin splints. Their only respite came in the form of Icy Hot and Ibuprofen, as sitting out was not an option. In these situations, the member who is injured in rehearsal is viewed as too weak to achieve success, while the member who becomes injured as a result of an equipment-related accident can be construed as having made an avoidable mistake—regardless of the circumstances. Ultimately, the way a corps deals with injuries reveals how notions of masculinity or masculinities come to bear on a member’s ability to achieve feelings of belonging.

⁵⁵ Amanda Watson, “The Well Musician,” accessed October 25, 2021, www.thewellmusician.com.

⁵⁶ Anonymous Interviews.

2.3.2. Safety Measures

Safety measures have become increasingly important alongside the number and type of props used on the field. DCI has increasingly regulated the use of props, to ensure developments in the activity remain consistent with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards. The requirements included the use of a safety harness or railing if a member's location on the prop exceeds 6 ft from the ground; prohibition on lifting members above 6 ft in the air during stunts; and taking measures to prevent slips and trips.

Despite these regulations, props present numerous opportunities wherein a member may unknowingly create an extreme hazard. Improper placement of the prop may create a tripping hazard, or the improper set-up of a prop may lead to its collapse. Furthermore, now members are instructed to use the prop also creates an opportunity for accidental injury. Such was my experience when I was instructed to climb 6 ft up an 8 ft. high metal truss.

Once at the top, other members surrounded the base of the truss. I descended from the prop by falling backward into the arms of my corpsmates at the base. Despite their best efforts, the lack of training on how to properly execute such a trick resulted in several injuries for me. As we were learning this choreography, they frequently dropped me. Although they broke my fall, many of these instances resulted in me hitting my head on the ground hard enough to become concussed. Despite the same injury appearing for everyone who had the same choreography—and despite some of us wandering on the field, confused, following being dropped repeatedly in succession or a less forgiving field surface of hard ground rather than soft artificial turf—the choreography remained.

Many corps similarly utilize props, requiring members to engage in acrobatic feats that pose an injury threat. When instructed properly and appropriate protocols are followed to ensure

members' safety, props can be used effectively but the privileging of the corps' needs above the safety of an individual member often causes staff and members to ignore the injury threat. This is rendered particularly problematic in corps with a culture that interprets injuries and mistakes as a sign of weakness. In these scenarios, it is merely another obstacle to overcome. That is, corps that privilege id of masculinity as they relate to enduring physical challenges is entangled with the social hierarchy that arises from a members' successes or failures. Accidental injuries are thus viewed among members as representing a character flaw of sorts, revealing that the member is unable to prove their masculinity.

In addition to performance-based injuries, accidents on- and off-the-field cause injury to members. The day-to-day activities of a corps present many opportunities for accidental injury. The semi-tractor trailer used for storing and transporting instruments and other equipment is one such unavoidable hazard. Needing to utilize every square inch of the truck efficiently requires members to pack up their instruments and equipment as if they were playing live-action Tetris. Members of the front ensemble must often climb around the interior of the truck to place equipment in its designated place. Lifting heavy equipment in tight spaces presents numerous opportunities for accidental injury. Props are an additional source that presents the opportunity for accidental injury during the loading and unloading process.

Other tour jobs may also present hazards to the member. The scaffolding from which staff teaches must be set up and broken down with few safety measures in place beyond effective communication among members. There is significant potential for injury while lifting pieces of scaffolding upward to create a three to four-story high vantage point. The transportation of equipment such as scaffolding is most often conducted via an ATV that tows a flatbed trailer. Improperly hooking up the trailer or mistakes made while driving has caused several injuries,

including broken feet.⁵⁷ Likewise, aiding food truck volunteers exposes members to an industrial kitchen rife with opportunities for accidents.

2.4. Neglect

I dealt with some pretty shitty situations while in corps

*I'm honestly surprised no one died that season.*⁵⁸

Beyond injuries, members and staff face a host of mental and wellness-related issues. The amount of floor time, or sleep that occurs at a housing site rather than on a bus, the quantity and quality of food, and access to medical attention are three areas wherein the corps' culture may affect a member or staff's wellbeing. Much like injuries, valid complaints may go ignored because of the implications they have for masculine standards. Although DCI's by-laws prioritize the health and safety of members as the first responsibility requirement for corps to be members of the competitive circuit, the organization maintains that due to individual corps being incorporated as distinct non-for-profit organizations, they have little authority in this area.

The logistics of touring place extreme demands on administrative staff—members requiring medical attention only adds to that burden. While most corps manage to prioritize the medical needs of members, some push them by the wayside. The majority of my interviewees who articulated negative experiences surrounding medical care pointed to similar hurdles in receiving care for an injury. Minor illnesses and injuries that could be solved with an antibiotic or antiviral treatment can turn into significant issues when medical care is delayed. Further complications arise when the distance to a medical provider and expected time for care create

⁵⁷ A member of Carolina Crown sued a fellow corps mate after the corps mate ran over his foot with an ATV.

⁵⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

scenarios wherein there simply isn't enough time for a member to receive care before the corps moves on in tour.

The close quarters and issues of hygiene that corps members, staff, and administrators experience exacerbate the number of medical issues that arise within a group of 160+ individuals throughout 90 days.⁵⁹ The emergence of the Swine Flu in 2009 presented an extreme challenge to these conditions. Halfway through the competitive season, many of the corps were making their way through Mississippi and Alabama. Carolina Crown was among the first corps to have an outbreak among their membership. The virus spread quickly throughout the corps. Although corps administration began to institute policies such as requiring the daily sanitation of the 1-gallon water jugs that every member had and the cleaning of busses, the simple fact that members had little personal space allowed the virus to spread quickly throughout the corps. Corps administration encouraged ill members to rest either on the sidelines or sleep in a segregated area of the housing site. Still, by the third day in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, more members were sleeping in the quarantine area than not. In an unprecedented decision, DCI allowed the corps to not participate in a competition. Corps administration was unable to contain the virus, nor were they able to transport every ill member to a medical facility. Ad-hoc solutions such as lines for cough syrup in the morning and the evening were implemented. They also decided to give the full corps a morning off to sleep in. Some, however, attempted to shame those who were sitting out. Insinuating weakness and inherent character flaws, these individuals engaged in efforts to affirm the masculinity and superiority of their corps.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ These conditions facilitate emergence of illnesses and infections that have been largely eradicated in the United States, such as scurvy. Anonymous Interviews.

⁶⁰ Anonymous Interviews.

I was among the last to become ill. When I began to feel unwell, I went to the tour director. She took my temperature with a digital thermometer. Impatient, once the thermometer read 102 F, she instructed me to take some Tylenol and sit out. With no way of knowing how high my fever was, I cannot help but imagine that this action could have had serious health consequences. It would later be revealed that the tour director was a survivor of sexual assault at the hands of her corps director while she was a member. Just as in the “real world,” abuse in corps is cyclical and enduring.⁶¹ I contend that a major factor in addressing or ending this cycle necessitates a personal reflection on one’s participation in harmful practices, as well as the harm that one endured as a member.⁶²

2.4.1. Nutrition and Rest

*...and that was not great to eat pasta salad, like literally every meal or have like Entenmann's donuts for breakfast, because the fridge situation was not as great.*⁶³

In 2019, DCI introduced a requirement for corps to submit a food and meal plan for inspection before the beginning of tour. The addition of this policy reflects recent backlash to the poor nutritional content of many corps’ meal plans. Much like other aspects of member treatment, food and nutrition are two components of the drum corps experience that have gone

⁶¹ Survivors who perpetuate this harm are typically unaware of how they continue to identify with the system or individual that caused the harm. Peter Shabad, “Repetition and Incomplete Mourning: The Intergenerational Transmission of Traumatic Themes,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 10, no. 1 (1993): 61–75.

⁶² Richard T. Johnson and Michael B. Salzman, “Addressing Trauma and Identity in Teacher Education,” in Michael O’Loughlin and Marilyn Charles, *Fragments of Trauma and the Social Production of Suffering: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 243–259.

⁶³ Anonymous Interviews.

without critical attention due to ideas about grit and toughness that are bound up in notions of masculinity.

Meals are prepared while touring by volunteers, who make use of a semi-trailer outfitted with a compact industrial kitchen. The food truck is an essential component to life on tour, yet it is one of the few remaining areas that have yet to undergo changes related to professionalization. Food issues are manifest in a variety of ways. Most often, these issues arise simply through poor nutrition. Jessica (white, female, 2000s, brass), who is a health care professional today, described this while reflecting on their corps experience.

We had an extremely long bus ride, arrived in a new and much warmer and humid climate, and were expected to consume high sugar snacks for breakfast with no nutritional content before a long day of rehearsal.⁶⁴

In the most extreme of circumstances, corps have been unable to feed their members, staff, and volunteers because of food truck breakdowns or simply not having the funds to purchase food. Mismanagement or unintentional errors can lead to shortages that require the careful rationing of food, while problems recruiting volunteers may result in struggles to prepare food at all. Additionally, a lack of attention to the nutritional needs of members, in particular, can result in a wholly inadequate diet. As a whole, the quality and quantity of food is something that frequently garners complaints by members and staff alike. These complaints, however, are rarely escalated to the administrative level.

The pressure to meet the basic nutritional needs of so many people makes it easy for individual needs to be overlooked, even when it comes to entire sections. Poor or non-existent communication between staff and food truck volunteers exacerbates these issues. While

⁶⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

discussing food on tour Nora (white, female, 2010s, front ensemble) told me about a front ensemble instructor's desire to use every minute of rehearsal impacted the section's ability to eat:

we had sort of a grind mentality, which you know, is in every drum corps. There was this culture of we're gonna only, we're going to use every second that we have. So we would play pretty much all of rehearsal and unless we were moving mid-block, we would always move during the meal break.

So that was a little bit rough because you know, you only get three hours a day off. If you're moving 20, 30 minutes of an hour meal break, you're losing a lot of time. And we ended up getting kind of the dregs of the food, or like some of the entrees were gone, or they would allow like other members and staff members to get second helpings before the front ensemble had even eaten.⁶⁵

Because front ensemble members cannot easily carry their instruments, like the battery or horn line, they must push their wheeled marimbas, vibraphones, and auxiliary percussion equipment to and from rehearsal locations. Thus, while it might take a battery member five minutes to walk from the rehearsal field to the food truck, it might take the front ensemble a half hour. The collective desire of corps' staff and administration to utilize every minute of every day as efficiently as possible reveals members' nutritional needs as being a low priority.

Weather conditions play an active role in the number of injuries a corps can experience by virtue of drum corps being an outdoor activity that takes place in North America during the summer. The extreme heat that causes dehydration or heat exhaustion has potential consequences for the safety of members. Rehearsing in rain renders the field a slippery fall hazard that is exacerbated by complex drill. Windy days affect the color guard's ability to control their equipment while they are spinning or tossing. Members are encouraged to push through weather conditions. Enduring these difficult environments is an almost expected aspect of the activity for

⁶⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

many. Disregarding a tornado siren, for example, to fit in a few more repetitions of a selection demonstrate the supposition that rehearsal is more important than just about anything.

Several interviewees described experiences that were incredibly familiar to me. Andrea's (white, female, 2010s, brass) discussion about a particularly hot day demonstrates how this can affect not only a member's health but the corps overall. "In finals week," Andrea said, "[they were] running the corps so hard that the top bass [drummer] had heat stroke and was down for the count, with four days to go. The bass line had to rewrite [their music] the day before quarters."⁶⁶ Jacob (white, male, 2010s, brass) likewise described his experiences surrounding water and heat comparatively, underscoring the notion that each corps possesses unique cultural norms and values. Jacob said:

That country club drum corps thing was a thing. And some would say well, it's maybe a little bit too nice. But like we slept more. The water situation was annoying because [corps name 2] has that system of every member getting a little cup on a water break. Nobody has a giant water bottle for health reasons, but we kept buying these orange cups and they would all melt. But you know, that's a minor thing relative to other situations like "I'm running out of water at [corps name 2] three or four times in a block, because there's just no sense [among the staff] of like, Hey, it is a hundred [degrees]." If you're not giving us sufficient water breaks, you go over and try to drink a half-gallon of water cause you don't know the next time you're going to get it. [Corps name 2] was on a much stricter clock about that. And it really fucking matters. I just got the sense that by the end [corps name 1] was just trying to hold it together and you know, we kind of recognized it like, hey we're humans with bodies, and if we start to break down things go bad.⁶⁷

Having moved from a lower-placing corps to a championship-level corps, I noticed similar trends as Jacob. Like Andrea, corps struggling to attain competitive success can easily prioritize rehearsal time over member health and safety. A staff member, Jacob expressed similar frustrations, remarking that "you know, water is a thing you need to survive. It's not it's not a

⁶⁶ Anonymous Interviews.

⁶⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

reward. I always try to avoid attaching the water break time to ‘are we doing good or bad?’ And you, the same thing with dog training, you know, smacking the dog or the newspapers, not going to get them to do the thing right.⁶⁸

Although DCI has added several recommendations surrounding the safety, health, and wellness of members, DCI doesn’t have any regulations surrounding sleep. The quality and amount of sleep a corps gets is yet another aspect of life on tour that is heavily dependent on the culture of a given corps. Rest is essential to the physical and mental recovery of members, but it can easily be construed as weakness. However, the amount of time that members can sleep horizontally—not seated in a bus seat—varies significantly. Members of the drum corps community describe the amount of sleep that occurs at a housing site, between the time they arrive in the middle of the night and the time they wake up, as floor time.

The amount of sleep a corps gets is dependent largely on the time of day during which they perform as well as the distance that must be traveled between a housing site and show site and then to the next housing site. Performance order is largely determined by a corps’ placement in the previous year, with lower-ranking corps performing earlier. Open Class corps that perform at shows with World Class corps are at a distinct disadvantage. They typically are smaller in size and have smaller budgets, meaning their options for housing sites can be limited, causing them to be housed further away from a show site. This distance increases travel time and earlier performance time reduces the available time for rehearsal. To get in the same amount of rehearsal as an elite World Class corps, both Open Class and lower-ranking World Class corps must wake up earlier.

⁶⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

How far a corps travels from a show site to a housing site can be affected by ranking as well, while the efficiency of travel is more dependent on the competency of corps administration. Corps that perform earlier may choose to depart from the show site before the competition ends, leaving the drum major(s) and an administrator behind to take part in the awards ceremony. Issues with the fleet, such as breakdowns or rest requirements for drivers, can cause significant delays.⁶⁹ Many members and alumni have tales of waking up on the bus, parked along the side of a road in an unknown location. The later a corps arrives, the less floor time they can have.

The distance between a show and the next housing site affects all corps, but those on the western coast of the US are most impacted in the early season. Still, the culture of a given corps and its reliance upon ideas of masculinity has a greater effect on the amount of floor time members receive than location. At the time of writing this dissertation, World Championships are hosted at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, IN. Furthermore, because the majority of corps have headquarters east of the Rocky Mountains, it follows that the majority of shows occur in the Midwest and on the East Coast. This results in West Coast corps having to travel more in the early season so that they can partake in shows with their immediate competition. Before 2008, this issue was mitigated by rotating the location for DCI World Championships, with the last non-Indianapolis championship taking place at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, CA. The inconsistency in travel distances can come to bear on the amount of floor time tour directors allow for, but as the cases of two elite West Coast corps demonstrates, floor time is more dependent on corps culture and operations. The Blue Devils, from Concord, CA, and the Santa Clara Vanguard from Santa Clara, CA both are faced with tours that are upwards of 1,000+ miles

⁶⁹ The switch from analog to digital logbooks for drivers has significantly impacted the way corps tour. That is, they are no longer able to fudge the numbers to avoid the inevitable conflicts between how far a corps needs to go and how much time is available for rest.

longer in duration than their peer corps in the Midwest and on the East Coast. Yet, the culture of Blue Devils (BD) is such that members are given significantly more floor time than those from Santa Clara Vanguard (SCV). Santa Clara Vanguard's reputation for strictness—as evidenced by practices like not talking while in uniform—creates the expectation that they must rehearse for longer and harder than other corps. Conversely, the BD's reputation for being free-spirited and relaxed allows them to achieve success without the reliance upon extreme rehearsal demands.

Viewed by many as another way by which members may prove their toughness, and by extension their masculinity, floor time has slowly made its way into the growing list of factors of member wellness and health. Much like extreme rehearsal conditions and punishments, the nostalgia for enduring harsh conditions has been increasingly challenged by new notions of what should be accepted. Some corps have revised the formulas by which they calculate their minimum amount of floor time, while others have begun to follow their own formulas for the first time.⁷⁰

2.5. Today

The line between what is and isn't understood as an acceptable part of the drum corps experience has become increasingly clear since the 2000s. A variety of factors likely have influenced this slow change to the cultural expectations, including the rise of social media, a general culture shift in the United States overall, and changing aesthetic expectations for corps'

⁷⁰ A common formula is: $(\# \text{ of hours on the bus} / 2) + \text{floor time} = \text{minimum hours of sleep}$. In my personal experience, the minimum hours of sleep is around 6 hours a day. In practice, this results in bus rides of 10+ hours as meeting the minimum.

shows.⁷¹ Initiatives like the Marching Music Health & Wellness Project have sought to increase the rate of change by advocating for minimum standards for health, safety, and wellness.

Likewise, instructors and alumni have played a large role in improving conditions for members. Staff members and caption heads to espouse a culture more focused on care emphasize the competitive success that follows. Parker (white, male, 1990s, battery) described with frustration his intentional efforts to break with the past:

We're expecting instructors to come in who are more professional, mature, and refined. It's not just the old guys that all they do is yell all the time, and if you're wrong, they're going to beat you physically or emotionally. There's a better way to do it, and we're not going to achieve the level of production that you see out of the top three in any given year if we're wasting time on things that aren't getting us towards, that end result.

Others recognize the ineffectiveness of pushing members just over the very brink of their mental and physical abilities. Marty (white, male, 1980s, brass) spoke with frustration when he said

the Blue Devils figured it out 25 fucking years ago. Give them a day off a week. Let them sleep until one o'clock and make sure they're well-fed. Trust them to do their jobs. Now I get it. It's different when your recruiting pool has fallen out and you've got like sixteen-year-olds and whatnot. I get it. That's difficult, but that doesn't need to turn it into a, "we are going to beat your ass for hours on end," or basis blocks that have almost nothing to do with how shows are constructed today.⁷²

Aligning competitive goals with health and wellness needs, both Parker and Marty demonstrated how cultural changes can yield results that benefit everyone.

⁷¹ Several scholars have attended to the aesthetic and cultural changes, specifically: Cole, *Competitive Drum Corps in the United States: An Ethnographic Field Study*; K. R. Guthrie, "Changing Marching Styles: Traditional Marching Band to Drum Corps Style." (Ed.D. diss., Fayetteville, AR, University of Arkansas, 1984); Marty Hurley, "The Evolution of Competitive Drum Corps Percussion," *Pearl Percussion Educational Resource*, 1975; Maher, "The Amplification Controversy in Drum Corps International: Technological Change and the Meaning of Tradition"; Odello, "Performing Tradition"; Cole, "What Is a Drum and Bugle Corps?"

⁷² Anonymous Interviews.

Responding to the growing recognition of physical health and mental health and wellness, community members such as Amanda Watson and Kristen Reiske have pursued careers dedicated to providing much-needed guidance and education. Through her company The Well Musician, Watson has sought to unite her knowledge of occupational therapy and experiences as a snare drummer in the form of workshops, educational materials, and research into further avenues for improvement.⁷³ “My mission is to eradicate some of the problems we’re talking about,” Watson commented, “my end goal is to make happier and healthier musicians [...] I want to empower educators to implement some health care concepts into their teaching and understand that improving member wellness will directly translate to enhanced performance caliber.” Likewise, when asked, Reiske articulated a lack of knowledge as the primary culprit:

Knowing what I now know about injury prevention, self-care, rest, recovery, and nutrition, it is astonishing to me that we were capable of obtaining the level of athleticism we did 10+ years ago. I would almost attribute more of our success in that manner to a young age than anything. [...] We were not fueling our bodies correctly, nor did we know anything about how that could benefit us.⁷⁴

The cultural changes that come with the re-articulation of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable have garnered a variety of reactions from alumni. Many recognize the positive contribution of these changes. Others, however, vehemently push back against intentional alterations to drum corps culture that are made to improve health and wellness. Those who are the most outspoken about changes to the drum corps experience—from either perspective—ultimately demonstrate the deep connections that develop as a result of participating in drum corps. On one hand, opponents of changes demonstrate their fierce allegiance to their corps and the pride they hold in their accomplishments. Though they recount experiences that come to be

⁷³ Watson, “The Well Musician.”

⁷⁴ Kristen Reiske, Interview with Kristen Reiske, interview by Alyssa Wells, October 20, 2021.

interpreted as incredibly problematic and/or dangerous in the 2020s, the pride they hold in overcoming challenges is central to their definition of what it means to have completed a season.⁷⁵ Conversely, proponents of changes view their efforts with great importance. As such, a great amount of animosity has formed amongst one another in alumni groups.

Indeed, as Glick et. al. articulate, “combating *show no weakness* norms requires leaders to model humility and systematically to shift which behaviors result in valued workplace rewards, leveraging existing organizational values to create alternative norms.”⁷⁶ As Chapter 4 will show, the potential for positive cultural changes is exacerbated by leadership positions having been held by abusive individuals.

⁷⁵ My conversations with alumni of pre-2000s DCI often revealed a hesitancy regarding change, both in terms of rehearsal and living conditions, and performance aesthetics. A cursory glance at any Facebook page dedicated to corps alumni shows the frequency with which conversations—and arguments—about traditions vs. Innovations garners intense reactions.

⁷⁶ Rudman and Glick, *The Social Psychology of Gender, Second Edition*, 471.

Chapter 3. Keeping It In-house: Member Misconduct

The importance placed on feeling a sense of belonging among the drum corps community is a double-edged sword. It creates intense connections among members and alumni, whose feelings of kinship develop out of “knowing what it’s like.” For those struggling to find their way through adolescence, finding security and reassurance in the form of a corps family has a profoundly positive impact on their lives. On the other hand, the desire to belong can render some members susceptible to abuse while simultaneously empowering others to enact harm in ways they would not view as acceptable in the outside world.

In this chapter, I explore instances of misconduct among members. I define misconduct as behaviors or acts that violate DCI’s Community Code of Conduct and Ethics Guidelines (2021).¹ The contents of DCI’s Conduct Expectations are divided into the following categories: Sexual Relationships, Hazing, Disrespect for Other Persons, Respect for Property, Possession of Weapons, and Alcohol and Regulated Substances.² The category that most informs my definition of misconduct is “Disrespect for Other Persons.” “Disrespect for Other Persons” is defined through eleven sub-categories, each of which is elaborated upon to provide a precise understanding. The sub-categories are:³

¹ Drum Corps International, “Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations.”

² See appendix for full guidelines.

³ Drum Corps International, “Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations.”

Harassment – Harassment is a pervasive unwelcome, verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct that embarrasses or shows hostility or ridicule towards another person. Harassment should be prohibited between any of the participating organization’s performers, instructors, staff, and volunteers as well as any harassment directed to any person outside of the participating organization.

Harm and Threats of Harm – No person involved with a participating organization should engage in acts that may injure another person, nor shall such persons threaten to engage in such acts.

Racist, Sexist and Other Discriminatory Language and Symbols – Racist, sexist, or anti-religious or other discriminatory behavior, slurs, statements, or jokes, as well as the display of any symbols supporting such discrimination shall be prohibited by all participating organizations. This prohibition includes a prohibition on the display of the Confederate battle flag or Nazi symbols.⁴

As will become clear throughout the remainder of this chapter, the violation of one or more of these does not necessarily result in disciplinary measures being taken. Reporting misconduct is a challenge to the social hierarchy of any organization. Given how entrenched social hierarchies are within the organizational culture of a corps, any attempts to speak out against misconduct have the potential for intense retaliation despite DCI’s policy against retaliation.

The Hopkins affair of 2018 prominently brought the culture of silence around hazing, bullying, and sexual misconduct into the public sphere. George Hopkins, a prominent corps director, was outed by survivors for sexual misconduct and abuses of power.⁵ Hopkins’ proclivity for wielding his power for self-serving purposes was well-known among the community. Furthermore, while his perpetration of sexual assaults was not quite as visible, it was a poorly kept secret at best. Other problematic experiences were also brought to light following

⁴ The next section has a more detailed anti-discrimination statement that includes prohibitions on “discrimination against any person based on the individual’s race, color, ethnicity, sex, gender, gender identity or expression, age, religion, marital status, disability or physical ability.” Drum Corps International.

⁵ This article preceded the eventual trial of Hopkins. Nadolny, “The Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps: A History of Alleged Sexual Abuse.”

the release of the Hopkins story. Pioneer Drum & Bugle Corps, for example, came under scrutiny for employing convicted sex offenders and conducting tours in a manner that endangered many.⁶ Community members have since begun to reevaluate their experiences, bringing norms of the drum corps world into dialog with the real world. In conversation with Andrew, who I first cited in Chapter 2, he felt that a culture shift necessarily begins with recognizing the problems, commenting that “...we did all this stuff, and now people, like a decade after we were done, pointed out that hey, this is maybe kind of a problem.”⁷ These revelations have opened a Pandora’s Box of complaints—and questions.

Among the key complications in determining whether misconduct has occurred is the intensity of the drum corps experience; extreme proximity, demand for total conformity, and significant isolation are all ways that drum corps is an intense experience. As I detailed in Chapter 2, expectations surrounding the difficulty of a season and the importance placed on grit can easily blur the line between what is and is not acceptable. Challenges inherent in rehearsing and performing a drum corps show can be co-opted as opportunities for proving one’s masculinity. Social hierarchies that naturally arise via seniority can be forcefully imposed in harmful ways. The desire to belong, and the subsequent feelings of exclusivity that follow achieving a sense of belonging, can be exploited for entertainment value by vets. Likewise, the nature of adolescence can exacerbate issues.⁸

⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

⁸ Nicole L. Rosen and Stacey Nofziger, “Boys, Bullying, and Gender Roles: How Hegemonic Masculinity Shapes Bullying Behavior,” *Gender Issues* 36, no. 3 (2019): 295–318, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-018-9226-0>.

I'm sure as a horny teenage boy, I said and did things to girls in my corps that made them uncomfortable, or were unwelcome...and there were other things I knew about and didn't say anything to discourage or bring attention to the behavior.

[As] the father of a teenage girl, 30+ years later, I feel really shitty about it and have had a lot of conversations with some of the women I marched with about what we could have done differently.

Brett's (white, male, 1980s, brass) naivete and lack of education has led him to feel remorse for his actions towards his female corpsmates. When taken together, the factors that contribute to obscuring the boundary of acceptability create an environment wherein misconduct goes unrecognized. When it is recognized, the intense feelings of belonging and allegiance to a corps can encourage within members an inclination to resolve any problems in-house.

The blurred boundaries around the acceptability of punishments and challenges inherent in drum corps are but one contributing factor to the silence surrounding abusive conduct within the drum corps community. Within this chapter, I explore the spectrum of abusive conduct in drum corps to uncover the factors that allow harmless events and traditions to cross the line into the territory of harmful. Using the stories of my interviewees, I articulate how problematic behaviors are normalized. Preserving the status quo, I argue, allows members to retain feelings of belonging and to protect the corps—or activity—from the scrutiny of outsiders who, lacking an insider's understanding of corps culture, may find flaws in the practices that define drum corps culture.⁹

First, I turn to issues of hazing among members. I describe how the almost mythologized sense of belonging that is dangled before rookies can remove their ability to speak up against activities that are often understood as hazing. Descriptions of harmless rituals and traditions

⁹ Chapter 3's conclusion about the difficulty in finding the line between helpful and harmful in drum corps culture is perhaps the most prominent example of instances where outsiders' interference can eliminate the challenges that are inherent to a season of drum corps.

provide contrast, making the distinction between hazing and rituals clearer. I interpret the prevalence of sharing stories of annual hazing activities as reinforcing veteran members' desire to become part of a corps' lore, empowering them to engage in behaviors that they are aware are unacceptable in the outside world. Additionally, I explore how these activities reinforce a culture of silence in the face of abuse and harm. I close out this section by detailing corps' efforts to reduce hazing that have occurred since the late-2000s, revealing the more wholesome ways to achieve belonging that have come to take the place of hazing.

Throughout the chapter, I seek to explain how abusive behaviors and misconduct can go unchecked through an exploration of the effects of belonging and cultural isolation. Using stories of abuse and misconduct, I explore how they have come to be seen as inherent to the drum corps experience, serving as badges of honor for members. This valorization of trauma, I contend, facilitates abuses of power. Ultimately, I demonstrate how the notion of a distinct and isolated drum corps culture wherein social standing is based upon merit and the ability to belong predicated on conformity facilitates a culture of silence.

In this dissertation, I distinguish rituals from hazing by the potential for harm. Activities that can easily cause potential harm undoubtedly fall into the category of hazing, whereas the distinction between rituals and hazing that cause emotional harm is dependent on both intent and impact. They reflect attempts to minimize difference in a deviant way that privileges over-conformity.¹⁰ That is, in demonstrating a willingness to comply with perceived organizational expectations, hazing activities create the opportunity for rookies to demonstrate their commitment and subsumption to the corps. As initiation rites, rituals and hazing are intended to mark a strong distinction between insiders and outsiders.

¹⁰ Waldron and Kowalski, "Crossing the Line," 292.

Both rituals and hazing activities as examples of pastoral power, which is a form of power wherein individuals govern themselves, often through emotional regulation. Speaking to the function of hazing in sports specifically, sociologists Waldron and Kowalski describe hazing as a ritual that “facilitates the conformity of the new athletes to the masculine values inherent in the sport.”¹¹ Though drum corps is not universally recognized as a sport, as this chapter will show, activities that cross the line from ritual into hazing make the prominence of masculine values abundantly clear.

3.1. Initiation Rituals

Rituals are an important component of life in a drum corps.¹² Unlike the ways that rituals are manifest in fraternal organizations or their impact on members, the ritualization of everyday life in drum corps has yet to be studied in depth.¹³ The repetition and precision inherent in nearly every aspect of drum corps life facilitate the creation of rituals unique to each season, as well as their preservation over the years. Whether it is singing the corps song before each performance that endures generations or a secret handshake that is only part of one season, members assign great importance to the actions that reflect their insider status.

Rituals both reflect and define a corps’ culture. They may provide access to knowledge about a corps’ motto or serve as an opportunity for a member to receive a corps necklace. For corps like Phantom Regiment, maintaining secrecy around the meaning of each letter in their motto “S.U.T.A.” is paramount; no outsiders are privy to this information. Thus, rituals become

¹¹ Waldron and Kowalski, 292.

¹² Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape*; Odello, “Ritualized Performance and Community Identity.”

¹³ The exception to this being Odello. Odello, “Ritualized Performance and Community Identity.”

an opportunity for new members to learn this highly coveted knowledge, affirming that they are part of a select group united by a common history. Maintaining the air of mystery and seriousness around “S.U.T.A.” is but one manifestation of their corps’ culture. These values can also be observed in other aspects of corps members’ conduct, such as not talking while in uniform and a strict approach to rehearsal.

Ritual highlights a corps’ values in this way, implicitly or explicitly calling attention to important demonstrations of prized attitudes and behavior. For corps that have rituals that emphasize pride in the corps, they serve as important markers of the transition from insider to outsider. Yet, just as punishments may cross a line from acceptable to unacceptable, the need to perform the corps’ values through rituals can easily be co-opted to prove masculinity. It is unsurprising in these circumstances, that the desire to perform masculinity in such a way creates significant opportunities for non-white, non-masculine members to be excluded because of their inability to conform.

3.1.1. Helpful Rituals

Initiation rituals can be a helpful way to solidify feelings of belonging among new members. They are an inherently liminal space that marks the transition from outsider to insider.¹⁴ Jeff (white, male, 2010s, brass) expressed how these rituals contributed positively to their experiences with two corps:

¹⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

[Corps name 1] - [The rehearsal site] was decorated with memorabilia such as old flags, photographs, uniforms, instruments, etc. set to old [corps name1] songs playing on speakers and lit by candles. Each section is led through the building to soak in what we were going to be a part of, then saw our reflection in a giant mirror with a new uniform next to it. We were then blindfolded and holding on to each other's shoulders, led to the rehearsal field where we stood holding hands until everyone was there. We took the blindfolds off and a giant [corps name 1 symbol] was set up in candles. The drum major then gave an emotional telling of his personal journey through the corps, what it meant to him, and what it might mean to us each individually. We were given a little ring to go on a necklace.

[corps name 2] didn't really have a formal ritual. History night was administered by the directors. We learned to sing [the corps song] around the same time that we received the corps jackets, in the middle of spring training, but again, was done so by a very involved administration. We received our [corps necklace] at different points each season, and it used to pair members up with an alumni [...]. It is given without an alumni pairing now due to security liabilities but is understood to be a symbol of one's membership in the corps, and so has a lot of meaning. If someone quits the corps, they do not keep their [necklace] nor their jacket.

Both corps used initiations to insert the rookies into the narrative history of their corps. [Corps name 1] did so visually and aurally, enveloping the rookies in the imagined past before inducting them into the corps by having them form the corps symbol. [Corps name 2] created connections to the past through more tangible connections that facilitated connections between past- and present members. These initiation rituals fall clearly in the realm of acceptable and helpful.

Rituals reflect the depth of belonging that corps members feel. When a rookie is introduced to a ritual, it provides them an opportunity to articulate themselves as a member of their corps. Nearly every—if not all—corps exhibit these rituals. The corps' song is the most prominent of activities that become ritualized. For many corps, the song is only officially taught to new members at the beginning of spring training, as in Taylor's (white, non-binary, 2010s, brass) experience.

the only place I ever really felt that community sort of thing is probably at [corps name]. And that's more because to do a deep dive on the history of an organization like that, and to sit there and do the song with everybody...That whole experience is very...cathartic, I guess, because you're also sharing this kinship with people that were in the organization 20 or 30 years before I was born. There's like three generations of people that have been in this organization.¹⁵

Despite having marched at several corps that had equally storied histories, Taylor's experience with their corps' history night evoked feelings of belonging and connection like they had never experienced. Whether spontaneous or part of a decades-long history, rituals can contribute effectively to members' feelings of belonging.

Taylor's corps's ritual of initiating rookies by gathering them in the gym and blindfolding before leading them out to the field for a short ceremony involving welcoming speeches and singing the corps song is largely within the range of acceptability. However, when vets attempted to obscure the wholesome ceremony by calling it "Naked Mile Night," the perception of the ritual became wholly negative. Torturing the rookies, vets eliminated all hints as to what they could actually expect by telling them to prepare for running a mile, naked. After several years of this rouse, a member complained to their parent, who then complained to the corps director. The director recognized the problematic nature of the alleged initiation ritual and demanded that all talk of running in the nude cease immediately. In this example, the line between acceptable and unacceptable rituals was made evident through outside intervention.

3.1.2. Finding the Line

Other initiations are more complicated, making it difficult to discern if the negative aspects are harmful or helpful. Milo (white, male, 1980s, brass) articulated this in response to the question "Did your corps engage in activities that could be understood today as hazing?":

¹⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

We did basics block for the vets while being teased, and we had a rookie scavenger hunt. It was meant to be serious for us, but I never felt threatened. I feel like it helped us get to know each other and build relationships in and out of our sections, and with the vets as well as fellow rookies.¹⁶

In Milo's experience, the pressure of being singled out for status as a rookie renders the basics block (a form of visual warm-up) a high-stakes activity. The heckling the rookies experienced presented them with a challenge that they had to overcome, implying that successfully doing so would bring them one step closer to being considered an insider. The rookie scavenger hunt also singled out the rookies in a productive way by providing an excuse for the rookies to talk to others in the corps without being concerned about power differences. Overall, these activities likely pushed the rookies into the realm of discomfort, but the productive outcomes ensured that these feelings were only temporary and had a defined goal.

Although rituals can cross the line into the realm of harmful behavior just as easily as punishments, discerning helpful rituals from harmful hazing practices proves significantly easier. It is expected that initiation of some sort occurs at some point in the season, but the nature of it depends both on the ritual's history and the corps' culture. That is, a corps with a problematic history can reverse course because of improvements to the corps culture, while acknowledging or adapting the problematic aspects of the ritual. Indeed, as education expert Shucha describes within the context of high school bands, hazing can be differentiated from rituals and other successful initiation processes by the degree to which the event is presented as safe and positive.¹⁷

¹⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

¹⁷ Tobin C. Shucha, "In': A Qualitative Study of Induction and Belonging in United States High School Bands" (Ph.D., Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Madison, 2019), 19.

Many corps include the teaching of their corps song or a celebration of the corps' history as part of the rituals, but in corps where the need to prove one's masculinity is foregrounded, the method of instruction or additional rituals can render them unacceptable. Likewise, the ritualization of aspects of daily life can go from an acknowledged social hierarchy that allows vets to be prioritized, to something wherein the rookies are actively put down. In corps that prioritize masculinity contest culture, the rituals may be interpreted as a way to prove an individual or groups' masculinity. As this section will show, members' perception of whether or not a ritual can be negatively articulated as hazing is heavily influenced by the culture of their corps.

3.2. Hazing

*Any hazing was wrong then and now, especially when [we] were so tight a team.*¹⁸

DCI defines hazing as:

Hazing includes any action taken or situation created, intentionally or unintentionally, whether presented as optional or required, to produce: mental, physical, or emotional discomfort; servitude, degradation; embarrassment; harassment; or ridicule for the purpose of (or implying such as a requirement for) initiation into, affiliation with, or admission to, or as a condition for continued membership in a formal or informal group, clique, team, or organization, regardless of an individual's willingness to participate. Aiding and abetting another person who is engaged in hazing shall be prohibited.¹⁹

¹⁸ Anonymous Survey Submission.

¹⁹ Drum Corps International, "Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations," 5.

Although DCI's definition accurately encapsulates the legal definitions of hazing,²⁰ it does not provide insights into how hazing might be prevented, nor the factors that render it acceptable in the minds of members.²¹ In this section, I seek to provide insight and clarity that might help prevent hazing. The culture and priorities of a corps have historically had a significant effect on what comes to be interpreted as hazing and what does not. For corps like the individual quoted above, the implication that their corps may have engaged in hazing activities stands in opposition to their corps' values. This, however, is not the case for all involved. For corps that exhibit characteristics of masculinity contest culture, pushing initiation rituals or rites across the line into the category of hazing becomes a way to affirm a rookie's insider status, as well as their individual masculinity.

Hazing typically manifests as one-time events and/or as daily codes of conduct that continually affirm the social hierarchy. The daily hazing differs significantly from corps to corps, with common themes such as requiring rookies to take on additional tour jobs or the least desirable jobs. Conversely, the nature of one-time events is rather similar across corps. Over one-third of the interviewees representing 40% of corps named in interviews, for example, experienced Rookie Talent Night in some capacity.

²⁰ An assessment of the laws around hazing in the 46 states wherein such laws exist can be found here: Angela Tylock, "A 50-State Summary of Hazing Laws," SUNY, April 21, 2021, <https://system.suny.edu/sci/news/4-21-21-hazing/index.html>.

²¹ Hank Nuwer, *Wrongs of Passage: Fraternities, Sororities, Hazing, and Binge Drinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Benjamin D. Ganellen, "When Marching to the Beat of the Drum Means Beating the Drummer: An Analysis of Hazing in University Marching Bands," *University of Illinois Law Review* 2016 (2016): 2309; Sandra L. Kirby and Glen Wintrup, "Running the Gauntlet: An Examination of Initiation/Hazing and Sexual Abuse in Sport," *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 8, no. 2 (2002): 49–68.

Because members were asked to reflect on how their experiences might be interpreted by outsiders, several articulated their perception as a member being significantly different. The differences were always described in negative terms. However, those who marched before the 2000s were more likely to describe their experiences with hazing and initiation rituals in a positive manner, regardless of outsiders' opinions. These responses further reflect the notion that drum corps exists in a distinct cultural space with distinct cultural norms but is not completely unethical in comparison to the outside world.

Further problematizing hazing activities, particularly in higher-ranking corps, is the question of members' ages. In general, corps culture promotes the dissolution of boundaries between minors and adults; an action that is logical in efforts to ensure conformity. DCI's latest code of conduct and ethics guidelines attend to issues of age as it relates to sexual relationships between legal adults and minors, as well as in a section on mandatory reporting.²² However, the disregard for legal distinctions surrounding age is a significant issue when discussing hazing. Only one interviewee described efforts being made to exclude minors from the most egregious hazing.

In what follows, I argue that the imagined distance between drum corps and the "outside world"—though likely influenced by the increased presence of technology that facilitates connections beyond the corps—creates space for initiation rituals to cross the line of acceptability. Free from the judgment of outsiders, the corps' culture can play a larger role in the content and execution of a ritual.

²² Drum Corps International, "Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations," 7.

3.2.1. Rookie Talent Night

Rookie Talent Night (RTN) is, as its name describes, an opportunity for rookies to take part in a talent show. Although the exact format and performance expectations differ significantly from corps to corps and decade to decade, in total, interviewees' discussions of Rookie Talent night indicated that the tradition was, or is, present at over 40% of corps identified during interviews. Many described their experiences positively, like Josephine's (white, female, 1970s, guard) response: "I feel there was no harm, it was pure fun."²³ Others like Rose (Female, brass) stressed the voluntary nature²⁴ of the event, emphasizing that the choice to participate was key in distinguishing hazing from traditions, "I participated in rookie talent night. I honestly didn't feel like it was hazing, for us it was a choice. In my opinion, no one singled anyone out for not participating. For me it felt like I was participating in a long-held tradition."²⁵ Further affecting respondent's perception of RTN is community knowledge about the event at other corps. Gabe's (white, male, 1980s, brass) articulation that their RTN was "quite tame compared to most corps as we often had parents watch the actual 'talent'" highlights both knowledge about RTN within the drum corps community, as well as the role of outsiders' gaze in determining the content of an individual's talent.

The talents put on display during RTN were described frequently with words like "sexual, outrageous, disgusting, etc.," yet even then, respondents described the event positively.

²³ Anonymous Survey Submission.

²⁴ DCI's 2021 Code of Conduct and Ethics Guidelines state that the voluntary nature of a hazing activity does not disqualify the activity from being designated as hazing. Drum Corps International, "Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations," 4.

²⁵ Anonymous Survey Submission.

A key factor in this determination was not the choice to participate or not, but rather the presence of consent before anything potentially harmful. Marcus (white and Hispanic, male, 2010s) described this distinction through their response:

Rookie Talent Night - It was not mandatory, but there was an expectation you would do it. I can't remember too much of what happened, but it was very sexual but all consensual. I'm not sure how I feel about it, but personally, those on my bus and myself don't look at it with negative emotions.²⁶

Though it is not possible to determine the true agency that any involved had in consenting to the activity, Marcus's perception that those on their bus did not "look at it with negative emotions" highlights the extent to which the "talents" reflect the corps' values.

Questions of consent and agency are present in Eloise's (Female, brass) response, who was made to participate in RTN despite being a vet.

I also had to do rookie talent night as a second-year member because members from before I marched came back during my second year and decided that everyone who hadn't marched before my rookie year would have to do rookie talent night. This felt unfair because the goal was to put rookies on the spot and make them feel embarrassed, and I wasn't a rookie. Not that the rookies at the time deserved that either.²⁷

Eloise's complaint reveals that the purpose of RTN in their corps was to embarrass rookies. That returning vets had missed out on the previous year's RTN hints at a secondary purpose of establishing and affirming the corps' social hierarchy. Witnessing the embarrassment of rookies and second years, in this scenario, lends the returning vets social capital that affirms their ranking above the RTN participants.

The degree of perceived acceptability is not only affected by the drum corps community and a particular corps' culture but that of a section as well. RTN most frequently occurs on

²⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

²⁷ Anonymous Survey Submission.

buses, making use of rare evenings when the corps departs a location in the late afternoon, rather than the late evening. Because the division of members among buses is most often defined by the members' section, this can result in the cultural and social norms of an individual section having a profound effect on the content of a talent. Randall (Asian, non-binary, 2010s, guard) articulated this in their response, writing that "Right after San Antonio Free Day, we would do rookie talent night, and 'perform.' [...] and we don't consider the talent night to be hazing unless it's too uncomfortable. (It's the guard, come on.)"²⁸ I interpreted Randall's statement that "It's the guard, come on." as reflecting the stereotypical role of femininity as being prioritized, thus discouraging any lewd, disgusting, or harmful acts. Such a perception stands in opposition to masculine expectations for those riding the percussion or horn line buses.

In my own experiences with RTN as a rookie, I felt immense pressure for my performance to be entertaining not just to the vets who were judging, but the entire bus. Knowing that a member could accumulate significant social capital if the talent was positively received was a strong motivating factor in choosing my talent. Additional motivation came from the knowledge that the loser of my bus's RTN would be assigned the job of "bus bitch," meaning they would have to spend valuable free time on laundry days cleaning the bus. It was also made clear to me that the judges—typically a select group of vets who had marched the longest—were more than willing to take bribes in the form of candy. Armed with the knowledge of the benefits, consequences, and mitigation tactics, we rookies took part in what we understood to be an important tradition within our corps.

Several respondents explained their positioning about RTN by way of the entertainment value it provided. Acknowledging humiliation as a potential outcome, Isla (white, female, 1980s,

²⁸ Anonymous Survey Submission.

guard) wrote that “I do believe that others may view activities as hazing now but we are in a different time. [...] Yeah the talent shows could be humiliating but when you didn’t perform it was entertaining.”²⁹ Much like the punishments, the degree of entertainment RTN provides for onlookers masks any harm that participants may experience. Moreover, Ilsa’s response suggests that the humiliation is viewed as a rite of passage. Whether observing someone else’s discomfort as a vet or as a rookie who was not the one “performing” creates the opportunity for all to be entertained by the performer.

The lore surrounding RTN makes the prospect of participating intimidating. Stories of past years’ exploits circulated around the corps to varying degrees during a given season. They reached a fever pitch, however, in the days leading up to the scheduled RTN. Normal opportunities for socialization among rookies and vets turn into an exchange of stories among vets about the time that someone exposed her breasts when someone branded themselves with a paperclip in the shape of their corps’ logo, or even the following, particularly violent incident. Reed (male, 2000s) described his experiences:

He was a big dude. And he was like, he was pretty intimidating. [...] I think he was like training in the offseason to be an MMA fighter. You know, that was his kind of thing, right. On rookie talent night, he kneed himself in the nose. So hard that he broke his own nose. He got third, which means that the guy who broke his nose for rookie talent got beat out by two people.³⁰

Not only do these stories instill fear in many rookies, but they are a form of one-upmanship that allow vets to gain social capital through describing their talents or retelling those they observed several years past. Genuine talents, like performing as part of an all-rookie barbershop quartet,

²⁹ Anonymous Interviews.

³⁰ Anonymous Interviews.

may receive significant praise during RTN, but they rarely earned a prominent place in the institutional memory. The message became clear: do something disgusting, sexual, or both and you will place higher.

In some instances, RTN is promoted or enabled by corps staff, administrators, and volunteers. This top-down support for the hazing activity makes it difficult for anyone to speak up, even in instances where a line is clearly being crossed. In my first phone interview with him, Mike (white, male, 2010s, brass) described his horrified reaction to RTN:

We did it in the gym at our finals housing site in Indianapolis. Um, with like Indianapolis school police officers, like there, and there was like guys and girls like naked, like people were having sex with each other for the rookie talent. It was just this whole, like, And the staff knows like the staff, director, like everybody top-down, they all knew about it.

And they're just like, "ha it's funny. It's tradition" and like, no, like definitely issue, like legal issues had a parent gotten involved. Cause there's underage members being naked around over-age members. Like I was super outward [about it]. I'm like that girl's 15 and she's topless right now. Like what the fuck.³¹

As an 18-year-old, Mike felt incredibly uncomfortable in this situation.³² Knowing that even staff and administrators were supporting the activities, or even willing to ignore obvious legal and ethical problems, he was unable to speak up. The sense of solidarity among corpsmates and feelings of belonging meant in this situation, that seeking any sort of accountability for illegal activities would be an inherent betrayal.

³¹ Anonymous Interviews.

³² This issue of a minor being naked around adults might be addressable under the prohibition against "Violation of the Law" within the Ethics Guidelines. However, this would pose a significant problem to DCI's overall touring model, that necessitates members showering together daily. Drum Corps International, "Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations."

Some rookies attempt to negotiate their corps' cultural expectations for RTN and their individual comfort level. Nora (white, female, 1990s, guard), for example, describes making this choice:

We had to do rookie talent. My friend and I didn't want to do it but we're not given much of a choice and felt we would be ostracized if we didn't. A lot of people were doing suggestive/risqué things. We didn't agree with that approach. My friend and I made up a silly song that roasted a staff member and sang it upside down with eyes painted on our chins. It was dorky but we actually came in second.

The fear of ostracization because of not participating motivated Nora to find alternatives in the form of humor. By "roasting," or making fun of, a staff member, the duo avoided accusations of unworthiness. They entertained others while demonstrating their knowledge of the corps, which in turn, assisted in confirming their status as insiders.

In corps where participation is mandatory, those who refuse to participate all together can invite criticism and ire from their corpsmates. Jeffrey (white, male, 2010s, brass) experienced this when he refused to partake because he found the event problematic. Furthermore, having marched at a different World Class corps in the years prior, he had conflicting feelings about being a rookie. On one hand, he was new to the corps, but on the other, he had significantly more knowledge and skills than other rookies. His cultural knowledge of drum corps led him to resist by threatening violence. Jeffrey said: "I was like I'm done with this. [They said,] well, you can make us an offer and we'll make a judgment. I threw a pack [of candy] and said if this isn't good enough where you're going to, I'm going to fight you. Grab me or try to make me do something. I will break your jaw."³³ His familiarity with strict social hierarchies at his previous corps led to the realization that he had few options that would not result in his social status being lowered.

³³ Anonymous Interviews.

Threatening violence allowed him to prove his masculinity while avoiding potential humiliation. Likewise, Brady (white, male, 1990s, battery) sought to avoid RTN by using it as an opportunity to assert his social status:

We did Rookie Talent. There was some peer pressure to it, but it wasn't really forced on anyone. I personally refused, because of issues I had with one particular Vet. Then and Now, I think it's fine as long as no one feels pressured into it and is doing anything against their will. I've basically just always seen it as a fun way to pass time on the bus, and it can sometimes ingratiate new members, kind of brings people out of their shell. As long as everyone is supportive, and it isn't turned into a negative energy, bullying situation. Which is why I refused, there was one Vet, from my section, who was being shitty about it. He had been cut in the winter even though he was a Vet, but was brought back in after someone was injured. So when he was calling people "Fucking Rookie Jitbags" I responded that "I'd rather be a Rookie Jitbag than a Vet who got cut," and refused to participate.³⁴

Brady presents a unique situation wherein refusal to participate did not stem from a fear of humiliation or disapproval of the practice altogether, but rather, tensions with a specific member. Given the option, Brady chose not to participate. RTN still provided the opportunity for him to assert social status. In reminding the vet in question that he was cut in the winter, Brady problematized the immediate conflation of veteran status with superior performance abilities. Moreover, he demonstrated the knowledge that performance abilities are more meaningful in determining social status, particularly for rookies than their RTN performance. Calling out the vet in question, Brady asserted their dominance through the reminder that they had beaten the vet during auditions and were therefore superior.

As with any instance of hazing, the most problematic manifestations of RTN can provide a stronger sense of community and kinship among members. It is a rare instance wherein

³⁴ A "Jitbag" is a regional colloquialism within the immediate vicinity of Philadelphia, PA. A "Jitbag" is someone who is perceived as unintelligent, ignorant, selfish, and/or arrogant. Anonymous Survey Submission.

conformity is not prioritized, but instead frowned upon. In corps that emphasize social hierarchy in a way that discourages rookies from talking to vets on- or off-the-field, RTN is a structured opportunity to gain insider knowledge about the rookie. Brett (white, male 1980s, brass) described how their corps gave out awards that reflected the rookie's social standing in the corps, writing that "there was an "award" called DBI, for Douche Bag International, that went to the member or group of people who were voted to be the most annoying or strange. We all kinda joked about it, if I remember right...it didn't feel like it had a mean spirit to it, even though my bus partner and I got a couple votes."³⁵

The knowledge that the talents would not be viewed with acceptance by outsiders, such as in Mike's experience that is described above, reinforces the dichotomy between insider and outsider status. Resisting such a practice would be a traitorous act that could invite the judgmental gaze of outsiders.

Moreover, RTN can affirm the importance of masculinity contest culture within a corps. The need to be stronger, more disgusting, and demonstrate confidence in one's sexuality than others allow for an outright competition of masculinity. Even for women, appealing to the predominantly heterosexual, male audience through nudity is understood as being a sure path to success—or at least, not last place. Talents that reflect masculinity contest culture demonstrate shared, unspoken knowledge about the value of masculinity within a section or corps.

3.2.2. Initiations

While participation in RTN is generally subject to the rookies on a given bus, there are instances of corps engaging all in hazing activities. Specifically, several corps have attached an

³⁵ Anonymous Survey Submission.

initiation ritual to what is typically a more wholesome history night. These rituals exhibit traits that push them over the line into hazing.

History night is, for most corps, an opportunity to learn the history of your corps. Whether it is told by the corps director, drum major, or alumni, history night imparts institutional knowledge to rookies. This knowledge, in turn, allows them to recognize their place in the history of the corps and envision themselves as part of something bigger than their corpsmates. Members of a select few corps, however, must undergo an additional step. Jessica (white, female, 2010s, brass) described their corps' requirement of drinking the "corps blood," a "a gross mix of tomato juice and whatever the vets brought. It was a little scary anticipating it but overall, nothing 'bad' or hurtful happened."³⁶ With vaguely religious undertones, the vets of Jessica's corps had the opportunity to contribute to the initiation. For the rookies, this initiation was a way they could prove their allegiance to the corps, as well as their masculinity. It is no surprise that this anecdote comes from a corps that exhibits masculinity contest culture in codes of conduct and expectations for members.

A similar event occurred as part of Natalia's (female, 1960s, battery) initiation.

Interestingly, Natalia compared their experiences of RTN with History Night.

Rookie talent night was something you didn't have to participate in but I made the choice to. Not many participated but it was 100% a choice for me, I can see how maybe some friends peer pressured others to participate because they wanted to win.

Like others, Natalia described the presumed agency of rookies as a distinguishing factor when determining if an activity constitutes hazing. Though they alluded to the peer pressure and competitiveness—clear indicators of masculinity contest culture—that not many rookies

³⁶ Anonymous Survey Submission.

participated suggests that participation was perhaps more voluntary than in many other scenarios.

Natalia continued to write that:

History Night was awful, 100% hazing, as a professional who is studying higher education, someone who has experienced hazing at a university and reported on it... this was hazing.

Waking up in the middle of the night to run laps, blindfolded and asked to drink a concoction of stuff in a cup (oreos, tea, gatorade, toothpaste, who knows). This was all that happened and then we received our corps necklace. It could have been worse but this is absolutely hazing.³⁷

Rookies being made to run laps unexpectedly in the middle of the night was an opportunity for the vets to assert their dominance over the rookies. Given the value that members place on sleep, waking up rookies to run demonstrates the vets' power on multiple levels. Not only are they displaying the authority to make others run, but they highlighted their control over basic needs. Natalia's experience also reveals the opportunities that exist for shared power. That multiple vets contributed to the concoction signals a sense of unity in this hazing ritual. Concluding history night by bestowing rookies with their corps necklace is an additional demonstration of power and social control. Having proved their worthiness, the rookies can be officially considered members of the corps.

There is a strong understanding among community members that RTN can easily cross the threshold from an initiation activity to hazing. This is largely reflected in the reluctance to discuss it with outsiders, which is contrasted by the sharing of stories within the community. In conversation with Reid about the event, he commented on the nature of RTN, saying that:

³⁷ This interviewee is correct in asserting that the activities they described constitute hazing, even according to DCI's Ethics Guidelines. Anonymous Survey Submission.

When we started to see some competitive success and relax a little bit it became progressively more debauched. [...] Yeah, it was pretty debauched. I don't know another word to describe it. To call it depraved would make it sound almost like more grim than what it was like: a totally wild party. The kind of experience you have where you walk into a party and you're like, oh man, I don't know if I should be here. This is maybe more intense than what I signed up for.³⁸

Reid's choice of words, selecting "debauched" rather than "depraved," further highlights the sense that RTN occupies a space between acceptability—even within the context of drum corps culture—and problematic behaviors. Being caught up in the excitement of the moment, his corpsmates lost sight of the line between the two.

3.2.3. Everyday Hazing

The opportunity for hazing is present in nearly every aspect of daily life. The degree to which everyday life can be defined necessarily requires members, staff, and volunteers alike to make distinctions based upon a member's social status. Often, these decisions reflect efforts to ensure the order or expediency of an activity. Much like table numbers determining who eats first in a banquet setting, these harmless determinations serve a definable purpose that has little negative consequence for rookies other than being reminded of their status as a new member.

A primary factor that facilitates the distinction between hazing and less harmful reflections of a corps social hierarchy is the degree to which strictness is prioritized within a corps. Corps whose cultures promote clear definitions of as much of life on the road as possible create more potential for harm. Every attempt to define conduct presents the opportunity for the definition to affirm social hierarchies. In some instances, this may merely result in prohibiting rookies from deciding where to put their section's horns down. Defaulting to the social hierarchy

³⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

in this scenario reflects an attempt to ensure that no instruments are placed in an unsuitable location. Other times, it can result in rookies being actively excluded or harassed.

Prohibitions on rookies talking on the field, for example, can reflect the prioritization of visual and sonic conformity through attempts to rehearse efficiently, while in other contexts it creates an opportunity for insults. This is the case particularly for corps that proudly enforce rules like “#1 - Rookies shut the fuck up.” In these instances, the definition of who may speak on the field creates opportunities for significant harassment of anyone who intentionally or mistakenly breaks the rule in the form of techs or vets yelling the rule at members. Amy (white, female, battery) explained:

My first corps [...] had a pretty strict rule that since rookies were inexperienced we couldn't talk or say anything to anyone. I almost got in trouble for asking another rookie to stop kicking me in the head during ground visuals and for helping her learn to read drill, which she had never done before because I was a rookie and shouldn't be telling anyone else anything (even though she was asking me for help because she felt comfortable with me I should've directed her to a vet).³⁹

Amy's experience reveals how a rule likely intended to help facilitate rehearsal can result in physical and emotional harm. Her recognition that efforts to protect herself in choreography underscore the detrimental impact of status-based rules. Had she not spoken up, she could have been injured. Furthermore, the insistence that she does not know worth sharing because of her status as a rookie delegitimized her knowledge, placing her at the same level in the social hierarchy as the corpsmate who asked for help. Finally, Amy's statement that “I should've directed her to a vet” underscores the level of commitment she has to these social codes.

A corps' culture can change significantly when there are many rookies, particularly in finalist corps whose rookies tend to have previous experience marching at other corps. Revisiting

³⁹ Anonymous Interviews.

Hugh's memories, first mentioned in Chapter 1, provides an example of this. When Hugh went from his first corps to the second, he found himself frustrated by a similar rule. Having already marched two seasons at a World Class corps, he found it difficult to adhere to the new corps' social hierarchy.

they try to strictly enforce the rookie nothing rule which is if you're working shut up. If you're a second year, you're in nothing, you have no rights to say anything at all. Which worked okay. Except for the part where there were no vets or the vets who ended up kind of assume this leadership role, at least in my section we're second years themselves. And they were not leaders, which led to most of us who had marched in other places going we're just not listening to you because what you're saying doesn't make sense.⁴⁰

Frustrated by the inability of his corps' vets to live up to preconceived expectations, he and the others in his section ignored the cultural demand for rookies to be silent. The social norms that prohibited rookies and second years from talking were a vestige of the past; any attempts to enforce the rule were futile due to the rookies' expectations for vets.

The social hierarchy, which is described in detail in Chapter 2, affects nearly every aspect of a member's experience on tour. The social hierarchy can determine conduct during everyday activities from who gets to eat first, who can speak on the field. Less frequent events, such as laundry and free days, also present opportunities wherein the social hierarchy and corps' values may affect an individual's experience.⁴¹ Taken together, these two categories are examples of hazing that affects everyday life.

Everyday hazing activities can serve as inside jokes, affirming their status as part of a select group. Gabriel's (white and Hispanic, male, brass) experience as a brass player on the percussion bus demonstrates this.

⁴⁰ Anonymous Interviews.

⁴¹ These examples appear to fall under DCI's definition of hazing.

I was a brass player riding on the percussion bus. At the start of the season, we were required to tell an embarrassing story to the entire bus to receive our nicknames. These were degrading and I never felt comfortable with it (I was 'Dick'ey Mouse, since I live in Florida and my story revolved around Disney).⁴²

On Gabriel's bus, the percussionists affirmed their group's boundaries and superiority by demanding to know embarrassing details about non-percussionists. Assigning nicknames based on these stories allowed them to affirm their superior status off-the-bus by using the nicknames when engaging with their non-percussionist bus mates. For any non-percussionist onlookers, the nicknames enforce a social hierarchy that excludes anyone in the brass or color guard.

Hazing activities that occur as part of everyday life for corps members are less common than one-off initiation rituals gone awry. The most common way that rookies are routinely hazed is in the form of rookie jobs. Ranging from the functional to the inane, rookie jobs are tasks or responsibilities intended to remind them of their place in the corps' social hierarchy while also allowing them to earn their status as a vet, should they return the following year.

Much like punishments, rookie jobs can have a function. Paul's (white, male, 1980s, brass) corps practiced assigning rookies as "slaves" to vets for a week.⁴³

We were a "rookie slave" to a older member. But that was a week and no one ever made you do anything stupid. It was actually fun to have an older member show you the ropes and how things were done.

My older member actually was such a good friend that she would sometimes forget that I was supposed to do things.

Though the title of this practice is more widely recognized as problematic in 2021, the practical knowledge transferred during this partnership places Paul's experience in a gray area. In Paul's

⁴² Anonymous Interviews.

⁴³ This example falls under the designation of hazing according to DCI's Ethics Guidelines.

view, this practice was not quite hazing, as the partnership did not appear to cause humiliation for any rookies. Yet, demanding labor from a rookie member on the basis of their membership status both reveals and affirms the corps' power structures.

Unlike the one-time hazing events, rookie jobs seem to have little-to-no correlation with the strictness of a corps or the extent to which aspects of life are defined; however, they do signal the importance placed on the social hierarchy. This is largely reflected in Corey's (white, male, 1990s, guard) description of his rookie job. "[...] all the rookies had a job. I was Bug Boy and in charge of killing large bugs. It was silly and we didn't take it too seriously. In that organization, the hierarchy and seniority had an unsaid respect level that you obeyed." His contention that it was a silly responsibility further emphasizes the importance his corps placed on the social hierarchy. That is, rookie jobs were an opportunity to reinforce the notion that vets had the unilateral power to dictate the activities and conduct of a rookie. Philip (white, male, 2010s, brass), who marched the same corps as Corey, gave further insight. Describing the function of Boy Jobs, Philip said they "were about creating social situations" before going on to list some examples: Corps History Boy, Random Fact Boy, Soothing Ocean Sounds Boy, Random Obscenity Boy, Stadium Lights Boy, and Febreze⁴⁴ Boy.⁴⁵

During several seasons, Philip's corps assigned two rookies the job of "Ambiguously Gay Duo Boy," referring to the recurring Saturday Night Live animated sketch that depicted two superheroes whose nearly every action was a homoerotic double entendre.⁴⁶ While Philip did not

⁴⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

⁴⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

⁴⁶ When taken in the context of US homophobia in the late-1990s and early-2000s, the choice to interpret homoerotic acts as a source of entertainment reflects a relatively accepting environment for LGBTQ individuals in the corps.

comment on his personal opinions about the experience, one interviewee described his experience with Boy Jobs in detail:

Let me tell you a little bit about boy jobs. So every rookie on the drum bus had a boy job and the boy jobs ranged from the sort of the banal to the absurd. So on the banal end, you had stuff like trash boy trash boy's job was to collect trash on the bus. Everybody thought that trash boy was like a shitty job, but trash boy was actually a great job because it was really easy and not on the absurd end. So my seat partner and I got assigned...do you remember the Saturday night live cartoon, Ambiguously Gay Duo? So the two of us were assigned the Ambiguously Gay Duo Boy Jobs. So we were Ace and Gary and it was basically our job to like entertain a bunch of 21 year old dudes by doing the exact same shit that was in the cartoon. So you feigned some sort of homoerotic act. And then when everybody's howling with laughter, and you say, what's everybody looking at?

You know I remember thinking...I knew that was gonna be my last season marching and when we got the job and I was like, this isn't even that bad of a job.⁴⁷

Philip's description of Boy Jobs as functioning to create social situations is certainly confirmed by Corey's recounting of his Boy Job shows how they provided entertainment for bus members and confirms that Boy Jobs certainly functioned to create social situations. As one member of the Ambiguously Gay Duo, Phillip's job of feigning homoerotic acts highlights the degree of acceptance for non-heterosexuality within this all-male corps. This certainly adds depth and complexity to Corey's description of his corps as a "frat house on wheels."⁴⁸

Vets' attempts to further enforce their place in a corps' social hierarchy can turn physical. With boundaries between what's acceptable and not already obscured, physical acts of hazing can turn somewhat violent. One phenomenon that appears across several corps is the act of "bunching." Shane (white, male, 1980s, brass) described the practice as an "atomic underwear wedgie," acknowledging that "back then it was widely accepted, and nobody really got butt hurt

⁴⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

⁴⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

(pun intended) about it. Today... NONE of that stuff would be tolerated.”⁴⁹ One instructor I interviewed described his corps’ decision to intervene and end the practice:

But we had something that we had to stop. We called bunching. Have you ever heard of that. Well, basically every rookie would be bunched. You grabbed them by their underwear strap, with a couple of guys because it is hard to do a solo bunch, and you just rip their underwear band. They’d be like bouncing, hitting their head on the ceiling of the bus and stuff like this. And if it was really brutal, you’d their underwear and it just wouldn’t rip. So you would just be just abusing them, physically abusing them. And it got to the point where if you were a vet, you can kind of choose to bunch somebody at will. Anytime you want. [...]. So we put a stop to that.⁵⁰

Shane had been introduced to bunching as a member. When he went on to become an instructor and saw how far members had taken it, he had the power necessary to stop it. By the time that Corey marched in the 2010s, bunching was barely part of his corps’ cultural memory. It was merely “one of those things that when I marched you heard about it from the past, but I don’t know what that is.”⁵¹

3.2.4. Eliminating Hazing

Since the mid-2000s, corps have become increasingly incentivized to eliminate aspects of rituals that facilitate harm. In addition to the advent of digital cameras and social media making any misdeeds visible, two events served as catalysts for changes. The first is the death of Florida A & M Marching 100 Drum Major Robert Champion in 2011 that resulted from a hazing incident.⁵² The second was the release of an incredibly detailed dossier on hazing in the Ohio

⁴⁹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

⁵⁰ Anonymous Interviews.

⁵¹ Anonymous Interviews.

⁵² Ben Montgomery, “Recounting the Deadly Hazing That Destroyed FAMU Band’s Reputation,” *Tampa Bay Times*, November 10, 2012,

State University Marching Band in 2014.⁵³ Both high-profile incidents prompted many corps to rethink their corps' cultures.⁵⁴ The culture shift was also aided by corps members who were involved in Greek life at their universities have received increasing awareness and prevention training about hazing.⁵⁵

Those who marched in the mid-2010s and beyond retain an awareness of hazing. Kaylee (female, brass) described her feelings about this, writing that “I am very lucky to have marched a corps that did not believe in hazing. It was a big problem a few years before I joined, but by the time I joined they were committed to ending that culture.” Amy’s (white, female, battery) corps’ commitment to eliminating problematic activities underscores the role that organizations must have in eliminating abuse. Members are also invested in preventing abuse that stems from hazing, as Amy articulated:

My second corps used to haze a lot, but all that is left of that is rookie initiation night which is a nice ceremony where we welcome the rookies to the corps and give them their necklaces. I cried at mine because I felt so welcomed and I loved it. I was upset to find out that the other bus that I was not on held their own rookie talent night and even made some second-year members do it who really didn't want to because they didn't have a rookie talent night the year before. I am still very upset that this happened and I plan on making sure it doesn't happen again while I am around.⁵⁶

<https://www.tampabay.com/news/humaninterest/recounting-the-deadly-hazing-that-destroyed-famu-bands-reputation/1260765/>.

⁵³ “Ohio State Fires Marching Band Director After Finding Tradition of Sexual Hazing - The New York Times,” accessed February 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/25/us/ohio-state-fires-marching-band-director-after-finding-tradition-of-sexual-hazing.html>.

⁵⁴ Marvin Fong, “Ohio State University’s Marching Band Will Be Led by Interim Director as Search Continues to Replace Jonathan Waters,” *The Plain Dealer*, May 15, 2015, sec. Metro, https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2015/05/ohio_state_universitys_marchin_2.html.

⁵⁵ An example of this is the music fraternity, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia’s efforts to prevent hazing. “National Hazing Prevention Week 2019 – Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia,” September 22, 2019, <https://www.sinfonia.org/2019/09/22/national-hazing-prevention-week-2019/>.

⁵⁶ Anonymous Interviews.

Amy's commitment to ensuring that RTN is entirely removed from her corps' culture also reveals the extent to which the activity is part of their corps' institutional knowledge. The longevity of someone's marching career means they can have had a positive experience with RTN in the past, while also giving them the social capital necessary for re-instating RTN. It is thus necessary for all involved in the corps to be vigilant.

After the distinction is made between helpful and harmful, eliminating or altering the practices is the next step. The ability to alter or eliminate a ritual is also dependent on the culture of a corps. In instances wherein masculine values are privileged, rituals are an opportunity to affirm masculine identities. Many corps' resistance to change in this area results in the continued presence of harmful actions, despite attempts at intervention. This resistance only exacerbates the situation. As Simon (white, male, 1990s, brass) demonstrated, the mere suggestion that a ritual holds the potential to be understood by outsiders invokes a strong sense of opposition: "I felt glad to be accepted into the fraternity. If your goal is to criticize traditions as horrible hazing, then I STRONGLY disagree with your agenda."⁵⁷

3.3. Bullying

The emphasis placed on conformity and adherence to social norms further exacerbates tensions, requiring members to negotiate their perception of their self as it relates to the corps. Attempts to reimagine the self according to the image of the corps inevitably create conflict among other members seeking to do the same. For those who struggle to conform, find connections among other members, or perform well, the potential for conflict is much higher. Likewise, staff members can become involved in these conflicts and perpetuate bullying, directly

⁵⁷ Anonymous Survey Submission.

or indirectly. The outcomes of the tensions that arise, however, are significantly dependent on a corps' culture and the degree to which masculinity is prioritized.

Reinforcing the social hierarchy is the primary outcome of most instances of bullying. Vets were most frequently cited as the instigators of bullying, while rookies with significant amounts of social capital—from either their experiences at previous corps or high level of performance skills—took on a secondary role. In both cases, the act of bullying a member viewed as weaker allows the perpetrator to affirm their higher social ranking. Unlike hazing, bullying rarely results in the eventual inclusion of a particular individual—most often a rookie.⁵⁸ In most of the examples that my interviewees brought up, bullying was often employed as a tactic to force conformity among members. Enduring bullying presents the opportunity for a member to prove their strength and masculinity while reacting negatively or fighting back demonstrates weakness.

3.3.1. Among Members

Masculinity contest culture facilitates bullying by insisting that everyone should be held to the same standard, and those who are unable to do so should be excluded. Bullying is a tactic often employed in corps with cultures that prioritize self-sufficiency and one's obligation to the corps. It provides the opportunity to remind a struggling member that they are harming the corps by not performing as expected. Tying social acceptance to the ability to conform through performance is understood as effectively incentivizing improvement.

⁵⁸ Shucha, ““In,”” 19.

Because it does not hold as much potential for physical injuries, mental bullying is common. Ruby's (white, female, 2010s, brass) experiences provide an example of how bullying can be manifest throughout a season.

We picked on [an alternate] a ton in [year]. He wasn't great at playing or marching but also was very insecure and had [been given a nickname that made fun of a flaw]. So the food truck always had a whiteboard with the schedule and it'd list birthdays for the day. One day it was [nickname]'s birthday and we sang happy birthday to him. He was embarrassed and got super frustrated. The next day they hadn't updated birthdays and his was still on the list, so we sang it again. He got frustrated again. A group of us realized that it could be hilarious to write his name on the board every day. By day 3 most of the hornline had picked up on the joke and it became a thing for someone to announce it was [nickname]'s birthday.

This was all super entertaining for us until one day he apparently had had enough. We began to sing happy birthday to him and he had his horn in his and kinda threw it at the ground and yelled "IT'S NOT MY BIRTHDAY" before storming off. We stopped after that.⁵⁹

In this anecdote, members of the horn line targeted a member-based both on their performance ability as well as their personality⁶⁰. Unable to view him as an equal, their actions ostracized him further. The feelings of entertainment that Ruby described as resulting from his negative reactions likely masked the effects of bullying. Already struggling to be accepted, the bullied's reactions further marked him as different and unable to live up to the horn line's masculine standards.

When bullying does not yield the expected improvement, members can double down on their exclusion of the bullied. Armed with the knowledge that contracts prohibit members from being reassigned to an alternate position or sent home altogether, bullying serves as an

⁵⁹ Anonymous Interviews.

⁶⁰ This violates DCI's Ethics Guidelines because it made the member feel unwelcomed.

opportunity to circumvent the corps' legal obligations. That is, intensely targeting a specific member may lead them to quit, thus solving the problem of their poor performance.

3.3.2. *Silence*

Bullying and hazing typically go unreported, reflecting the ways in which commitment to sonic and visual conformity on the field is manifest in incidents outside of rehearsal. One interviewee described an event wherein a member's bullying comments toward another member of their section on Instagram were cause for disciplinary action.⁶¹ Yet the everyday bullying that occurs without written documentation is rarely challenged. Likewise, while several interviewees articulated their distaste for hazing activities and their intention to report them in the future, many accepted it as an inevitable experience that they choose to partake in.

Reporting bullying and hazing is seen by many as inviting scrutiny from outsiders. The drum corps community is particularly aware that outsiders' lack of insider knowledge and unfamiliarity with the cultural norms of drum corps would elicit a negative reaction. Stella (Asian-American, female, 2000s, battery) discussed this with me following our conversation about RTN, saying that:

That's what I think causes and ends up leading to a lot of the issues that exist within the community because people are too afraid. It's kind of like, like trying to tell a family member that they're saying or doing something wrong. It's really hard to say to somebody that you care about.⁶²

The bonds that I described in Chapter 1 proved to be a significant hurdle in reporting misconduct. Likewise, Stella expressed that reporting was not an option, as it could ruin a corps'

⁶¹ Anonymous Interviews.

⁶² Anonymous Interviews.

reputation.⁶³ Instead, members are encouraged to either pursue a resolution by working it out amongst themselves or simply overcome the challenges they are presented with. Lily's (white, brass, 1990s, female) response sums up how a culture predicated on belonging, conformity, and excellence can encourage silence:

There were lots of rules for visible/ public-facing things and we got away with murder behind the scenes.

RULE #1 (as publicly reinforced by staff, leadership including the Captions/Corps Director/Board, in addition to vets and alumni): DONT GET CAUGHT. This statement was basically a daily mantra, so you can understand how it influenced the corps.⁶⁴

Privileging the public's perception of a corps over members' experiences, Lily's corps fostered a culture that handled things internally.

The sentiment that "we all have skeletons in our closets" best reflects former marching members' decisions to remain quiet. In my conversation with Andrew, we discussed how "we all just kind of did this stuff, and it's a problem." As many responses about hazing and RTN demonstrate, even when recognizing that our actions were considered acceptable within the context of a corps' culture, discussing them with outsiders is still taboo. The fear that outsiders' scrutiny might cause the downfall of the activity reflects collective knowledge about the harm that results from hazing and bullying. The desire to conform and retain positive interpretations of our experiences, thus preserving our sense of belonging, is amplified by the notion that drum corps should be hard. Silence, then, is an expectation.

⁶³ Anonymous Interviews.

⁶⁴ Anonymous Survey Submission.

3.4. Misconduct

Overt instances of misconduct among members arise in nearly every area of life in a drum corps. It is almost inevitable that interpersonal conflicts and misinterpretations of intent will occur throughout the season. A corps' social hierarchy comes to bear on a members' ability to speak out against both minor and major incidents. For example, an event wherein a member does not recognize sarcasm in a statement, and subsequently interprets it as intentionally harmful, can be easily clarified. Yet if the social hierarchy asserts that a member cannot criticize those with more power, it becomes impossible to have any clarifying conversations. Over time, these cultures facilitate the creation and support of a culture of silence that also affects reporting of clearly problematic actions.

Identifying instances of misconduct and reporting them is challenging. The blurred distinction between a challenge that is inherent in the drum corps experience and an inappropriate or harmful situation can make it difficult for a member to determine whether something violates expectations for conduct or ethics. As I articulated in Chapter 2, if a punishment appears to have a pedagogical function, then it is far more likely to be accepted by members. The impetus for members to resolve issues among themselves, or within the corps specifically, heightens the difficulties in identifying harmful actions. Without a clear sense of what behaviors are clearly right or wrong, members' attempts to mediate issues are ultimately influenced by unspoken characteristics of their corps' culture.

Remediating any of these issues requires a more concrete definition of the line between acceptable and unacceptable conduct. DCI's Ethics Guidelines define sexual harassment as

“unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated, intimidated, or coerced.”⁶⁵ DCI provides further guidance in the form of examples:⁶⁶

- Pressure for a dating, romantic, or intimate relationship, or for sexual activity
- Unwelcome touching, kissing, hugging, rubbing, massaging, or sexual contact
- Sexual innuendos, jokes, humor, or gestures
- Displaying sexual graffiti, pictures, videos, or posters
- Using sexually explicit profanity
- Asking about, or telling about, sexual fantasies, sexual preferences, or sexual activities
- Leering or staring at someone in a sexual way, such as staring at a person’s breasts or groin
- Sending sexually explicit emails or text messages
- Commenting on a person’s clothing in a sexual manner
- Commenting on a person’s body, gender, sexual orientation or relationship, or sexual activities
- Harassing a male because he “isn’t manly enough” or a female because she “is too manly”⁶⁷
- Exposing breasts or sexual organs to another person
- Voyeurism

The discussions of misconduct I present in this section all are considered as such according to these guidelines. This section begins an assessment of instances wherein a member felt as if they

⁶⁵ Drum Corps International, “Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations,” 5.

⁶⁶ Drum Corps International, 5.

⁶⁷ It should be noted that both examples point towards expectations around performing masculinity.

had been a victim or witnessed acts of misconduct that is distinct from instances of hazing or bullying. I explore the emotional and practical factors surrounding each story to explain how and why the situation arose. In attending to the outcomes of the instance of misconduct, I ultimately highlight the numerous conflicts that members and staff feel when addressing misconduct.

There are relatively few opportunities for casual socialization among members during rehearsal, especially for larger sections like the brass and color guard. At corps that discourage talking among members while on the field, the opportunities are even fewer. Breaks between repetitions may provide an opening for a conversation while water breaks, though brief, provide members brief opportunities to talk among themselves. Despite these limited opportunities, enough social interaction is possible that misconduct can occur. Harmless games of “made you look” can take on a less acceptable form, particularly when members have different understandings of the corps’ expectations. This subject came up in conversation with Ralph (white, male, 2000s, brass), who described an incident that occurred while he was marching:

I don’t know if you remember the movie “Waiting” where they were doing, like all the penis trick stuff. There was a kid [...] who, he had made it a game of like trying to do as many of those things to people as he could. And anytime that he got somebody, he was keeping a tally on his water jug. And so like every morning, like when we were stretching someone would ask [the member] for an update on his tally [...]

And again, there was like one of those things that, for the most part, we were all just like, oh, this is funny, it was in a movie at the time. But there was a [...] girl in the horn line who he did one of those things too. And she got very offended, ended up quitting, and then suing the drum corps for sexual harassment.

And so [the corps director] was not having any of that stuff. And so he's shut that down pretty quick. [The corps director] [...] the week before we ended up going on tour at the start of that season, had a big sit-down like “come to Jesus” kind of moment with the whole corps where he was like, “y'all are acting like fucking idiots. You have all these talents and you're wasting it by just like being idiots or whatever.” That moment I do think is one of the things that like really galvanized the group.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

Having marched at other corps before, the offender in this situation had interpreted his current corps' culture as one wherein this behavior would be acceptable. The 2005 film *Waiting*'s prominence in popular culture led him to believe it was something that could be replicated and well-received in drum corps. Indeed, the drum major's promotion of the offender's antics confirmed for him the acceptability of such actions, underscoring the extent to which masculinity contest culture was present in the corps. One member's disapproval and willingness to speak up brought the corps' culture into sharp contrast with the social norms of the outside world. The corps' director's response illuminated this disconnect, ensuring that the entire corps understood what was and was not acceptable conduct. Likewise, the members' recognition that such conduct can hinder their ability to succeed brought them together through the articulation of shared values.

3.4.1. Housing Site

As a 16-year-old member, I was largely oblivious to the sexual escapades of my corpsmates—until we began our 10-day European tour. Unbeknown to me, many of my corpsmates seized the opportunity presented by their understanding that the risk of harming a relationship between a corps and housing site was perceived to be much lower. After lights out one evening in France, the gym did not seem to quiet down as it typically would. Jet-lagged and teeming with the excitement of leaving the country, most of us for the first time, the gym was abuzz for quite some time. That is until a vet guard member stood up and yelled “STOP. FUCKING. GO TO SLEEP.” At the time, I saw this as a hilarious example of just another day in drum corps where the social norms of outside society do not seem to apply. More upset by the disruption the amorous were causing to other members' sleep, the guard member was simply trying to look out for the wellbeing of her fellow corpsmates. In our collective understanding of

drum corps culture, everyone was rendered equal by being held to the same standards and contributing to the same goals. Presuming that all who earned the ire of the guard member had consented, there was little reason for anyone to be concerned about safety.

The presumption that sexual relationships are an inherent part of the drum corps experience for most reveals how deeply hetero-masculine values are entrenched within corps culture.⁶⁹ These presumptions create an environment wherein female members are seen not just as members who happen to be female, but potential sexual conquests for the male members. Within the context of sleeping areas, this can lead female members to feel uncomfortable and take additional measures to ensure their safety. Daisy (white, female, brass) described this in her response to my inquiry about sleeping areas, writing that “the floor wasn’t gendered but I still felt more comfortable sleeping next to my girl friends since I knew some of the dudes were looking to hook up.”⁷⁰ She continued on to say that “I’m hoping there could be some happy in between at some point.” Daisy’s statement also underscores the ability of toxic masculinity to encourage women to take measures to protect themselves rather than fostering a culture that discourages such behavior from male members. The happy medium, for Daisy, is likely present in corps other than hers, which makes efforts to discourage male members from objectifying their female corpsmates.

Corps’ and DCI’s rules that apply to the sleeping area are largely framed for members as a way to maintain the activity’s wholesome veneer. By the 2010s, it had become a common practice for the sleeping area at a housing site—typically a high school gymnasium—to be segregated by gender. Presuming heteronormativity, dividing members is an effective way to

⁶⁹ This is an area that needs further study.

⁷⁰ Anonymous Survey Submission.

prohibit opposite-gender couples from sharing a bed and inviting scrutiny from any errant outsiders who happen to wander in. Though this practice is somewhat ironic when the sheer volume of LGBTQIA2S+ members are considered, splitting the membership up by gender helps corps maintain a positive relationship with the housing site. At least one corps, according to my interviews, separates members by age with one side of a gym or sleeping area being designated for members under 18. This practice is by far more practical for the corps as it discourages relationships between adults and minors in the corps' membership. Still, even with preventative measures in place, members can feel a strong level of discomfort, or even unsafe.

Sexual assault among members often leads to the dismissal of the accused, particularly in instances where there are witnesses or the evidence is abundant and clear. Mark (white, male, 2010s, brass) recalled an instance wherein a member from the percussion section, Member 1, was sent home for sexually assaulting a female member who played the same instrument, Member 2.

He was around my age. Maybe a year older. [...] I got a weird vibe is always trying to hook up with those guard girls [...] So Member 1 and Member 2 they weren't dating or anything. [...] We did put a mirror on the main floor [of the housing site]. We just heard it shatter during breakfast and then when someone yelling calm down or whatever.

Get to visual block. He's not here. We finished basics 20 minutes early and then [corps director] and [percussion coordinator] come out and are like alright let's have this corps meeting. And they said that there's an incident and that Member 1 was being sent home. And they didn't explicitly say what the event was about.

Nobody was mad about it. Nobody liked Member 1. [Corps director] and [caption head] and the percussion staff a separate meeting with the percussion ensemble.

I found out later [...] Member 3 and I ended up sitting next to each other having dinner later. And she told me that Member 1 had after lights out, left the boy's sleeping area, all the way upstairs, gone down into the gym and like laid down on top of her while she was already asleep and tried to like slide her pants down. Straight up tried to rape her in her sleep. The next morning, he kicked the mirror thing out of anger or something.⁷¹

During our interviews, Mark recounted many experiences wherein he felt that the corps administration did not handle misconduct properly. Yet, events like this demonstrate that there is a consensus among community members about behaviors and actions that warrant dismissal.

Member 1 was able to be quickly dismissed from the corps with little objection for several reasons. Because this occurred in the housing site, there were numerous witnesses. There was little pushback from members because of his negative reputation within the corps. Although it is much more difficult to replace a percussionist than a guard or horn line member because the event occurred during spring training, the corps had significantly more time to find and train someone new. As the next section will show, instances of misconduct that occur later in the season and/or involve a member that is more difficult to replace are less likely to be favorably resolved.

3.4.2. On the Bus

The intensity that members experience on the field can carry over beyond rehearsal. When this occurs, common leisure activities can take on a heightened sense of importance. In environments where the policing of misconduct among members is encouraged, individuals who struggle to make distinctions regarding when and where to be aggressive can be reined in. Yet, when the culture is such that the social hierarchy or needs of the corps are prioritized over ensuring ethical conduct, the same individuals can run amok.

⁷¹ Anonymous Interviews.

Michelle (white, female, 2010s, brass) experienced this firsthand when she was attacked for refusing to engage in a “bus war.” Bus wars, as they’re most named, take a variety of forms from a game of capture the flag to an all-out brawl. Because the seat assignments are permanent, members develop their own social groups based upon their location on the bus. Bus wars typically involve a member of one group attempting to touch the furthest portion of the bus with the support of others in their group; put more simply, a member of the back of the bus will attempt to touch the front seat. While this can be a harmless, fun activity, it often turns much more physical. Members of the opposite group will do everything they can—within the limits of what their corps’ social norms dictate—to block the intruders. The mass of bodies pushing against one another can be so intense that people end up pressed against the ceiling, crawling through the overhead bays or under the seats, grabbing, pulling, or even using physical restraints such as duct tape. Often, those who wish to abstain from the activity are left alone. Yet for those who are caught in the middle, the consequences can be greatly influenced by gender.

I sat in the middle of the bus, so I kind of just didn't get involved in bus wars. That was always for me, like my line, like I'm not doing that y'all are stupid.

I remember a specific incident where there was a bus war, and I was just like, not involved trying to take a nap, whatever. There was an age-out member who was trying to get to the back of the bus or whatever. He got into my seat. And we're talking about somebody who is 8-9 inches taller and probably 40 pounds heavier than me.

He got in my seat and he had his foot like on my rib cage. I remember like, it hurt, like it was hurting me. And I was like, “Hey man, you got to get off.” He's like “stop being a bitch.” I'm like, “no, you're hurting me. I need you to get off of my body.” He said, no again. And so at this point, like I'm kind of hitting the guy, like, dude, get off. He wouldn't move.

So I remember grabbing, like I had a Febreze bottle, like chilling as you would. Should I have spread this thing on this guy? No. But I sprayed him square in the back, like between the shoulder blades sprayed this dude, like literally once. Get off! This guy turned around, took his hand, pinned me to the window of the bus and sprayed me in the face with the Febreze. Like not once or twice, but like until I could no longer see or breathe. That was an assault.

I didn't tell anybody about, like, I was so like...even talking about it now I get upset. I was so upset obviously when that happened, like inconsolable and we got into the housing site and because this guy was a soloist, [member with power] was like "Don't you dare tell anybody we're a week before finals. Like if you go to admin, you're such a bitch, like. Don't try to make something out of this that it's not like, basically like trying to make light of this whole incident." I'm like traumatized. Cause this thing just happened to me.

Like, can't see. Febreze in my eyes. Um, so I never told any of the, like people in charge that this happened. The whole [section], like it turned into this whole thing. Like "you've fabricated the story you're making it sound so much worse than it was." This guy comes up to me at breakfast the next morning, like "I heard you came into the housing site and were crying and said, all these things happened, but you sprayed the Febreze on me first, like this whole like confrontation." And so it was like the rest, I think there was a week and a half or two weeks left in the season at that point.

But for me, like I was done with DCI.⁷²

Michelle's story articulates how her refusal to participate and subsequent attempts to defend herself from injury resulted in a male member screaming gendered slurs. Though she attempted to report the incident, she was discouraged from doing so. She was told that because it was finals week, and the offending member would surely be sent home, there is no way the offender could be replaced. Without a replacement, not only would the offender's spot remain open, but the solo would need to be eliminated from the show, presenting a significant distraction during competitions that would likely result in lower scores. Left without any option for recourse, Michelle had no choice but to shrug off the incident because she did not want to harm the corps or upset her corpsmates.

Romantic relationships among members in a corps present and/or incite a variety of problems that are easily categorized as misconduct. Differences in age and perceived power are the primary factors that render romantic relationships problematic. Lacking a distinction between

⁷² Anonymous Interviews.

adults and minors, drum corps creates an environment where a 16-year-old is understood as equal to someone who is 20 or 21 years old. For Andrea (white, female, 2010s, guard), this was when her problems began:

So I'm 16. He's about to turn 20. We started hanging out and we started dating. No one's putting a stop to this. No one in the corps is creating attention to this. The staff think it's sweet because they all liked him a lot because he's a very charismatic guy and blah, blah, blah [...] He started secluding me from the rest of the drum corps so I would not hear the negative talk about him, because obviously people are like, "that's not" cool, but no one's really confronting him about [...].⁷³

In addition to enduring abuse from her partner, Andrea would go on to experience bullying and emotional abuse from other members as a result of this relationship throughout the summer. She had hoped her situation would improve when she returned the following summer.

Let's fast forward. So in between this time I am being groomed. I was told by my staff that I was not going to face the harassment that I did in [the previous year for dating him]. And so I was very eager to come back because they were like, "we hear, we hear you. We saw what happened. We're here to help you."

It continued. And this time I was ostracized by my staff because of my situation. [They thought] I was causing drama because it was lots of fighting. We broke up and that just caused people to pick a side, you know. Even to this day, I'm just like, how did no one ever go like "yo, this dude is three, four years older than this girl? She's still not even like an adult. She's a minor." And people still had that audacity to side with him--the same people that harassed me [the year before].

Throughout the summer, Andrea's situation worsened.

A lot of people in corps liked him and that came with a lot of jealousy from a lot of women in the color guard. So I did not have a good experience with the majority of the people in this corps.

There was a point where my [air] mattress was popped by a color guard member.

⁷³ Anonymous Interviews.

And when I was like, “I know who it is.” I was told by my [male] section leader that I needed to shut up that I was being dramatic and that I probably deserved it. ‘Cause he, he despised me and he thought I was just full of drama and et cetera. I was just trying to have a good time. I was tired of going through everything. Another color guard member who saw what happened came forth and, in secret, told the caption head. And she didn't really get any punishment. Like I heard that she got something, but I'm pretty sure it, maybe it lasted like one day, like it was just like glimpsed over.⁷⁴

Much like Michelle's experience of being assaulted during a bus war, Andrea's complaints were dismissed. Leaning heavily into stereotypes about women, her male section leader insisted that she was being overly emotional. As a multi-year, age-out vet, her abuser was protected by his status, making it easy for Andrea's complaints to go unheard.

Gone are the days of waiting in line for a single pay phone—along with the rest of your corps. The barrier between the drum corps world and the outside world has slowly been dismantled because of cell phones and other devices with internet access. Alumni who marched before the advent of cell phones, and before they became financially accessible to the average drum corps member, frequently expressed awareness of the dissolution of this barrier. Ryan (white, male, 2010s, brass) and I discussed this and its ramifications for the social experience of drum corps. Ryan commented:

The drum corps is not allowed to be that separated subculture anymore. Like maybe part of it, you know, it gets into a whole bigger sociological conversation. But when I marched, I was one of three people on the road that had a cell phone. You know, so everyday people are, you know, you get to a school that has a pay phone and everyone's lined up at lunchtime using their phone cards and on free days, all of a sudden, like you get to see real people.⁷⁵

Ryan's thoughts underscore the isolation that had been an integral component of drum corps culture. The profound cultural shift that followed in the wake of technological advances in the

⁷⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

⁷⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has ushered in a significantly different experience of drum corps culture.⁷⁶ Increased access to the outside world through cell phones has shed significant light on issues of abuse and misconduct within drum corps culture. Ryan went on to describe the dissolution of barriers between corps life and “real life.”

Now kids live on their cell phones and you can take a water break and they're looking at Twitter and Facebook and all this stuff and whatever. They're never really separated from the outside world. It's not like they're going into this whole separate existence for 90 days. They're just on a bus for 90 days, but they're still connected to everything happening outside.⁷⁷

With one foot in each world, members can more easily maintain an understanding of how their actions can be perceived by outsiders. Members can find resources and support they might otherwise have not, empowering them to speak up more frequently. Furthermore, the ability to document every moment in real-time has made it significantly easier for problematic behaviors to be identified by outsiders, even if it opens corps members up to being blackmailed by fellow corpsmates who have saved media from Snapchat or Instagram Stories.⁷⁸

The technological advances of the past twenty years have also created new avenues for socialization among members. For example, Cloe (white, female, brass) corps utilized

⁷⁶ Having marched from 2006 to 2011, I was witness to cultural negotiations that were brought to the fore through cell phones and digital cameras. During several seasons, members were prohibited from having cell phones on the rehearsal field, even if they were in our backpacks. This, however, resulted in a significant increase in thefts from outsiders because members typically left their phones charging in the housing site. The rules were then revised, permitting us to keep our cell phones in our backpack but prohibiting us from using them during rehearsal. In the decade since, cell phones have become a useful tool to members and staff while they learn drill.

⁷⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

⁷⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

technology in a novel and positive way. Rather than attempting to get to know one another through games like RTN, they conducted bus interviews.

We would have a game called bus interview. Because the bus had a little microphone with the speakers, so someone would go up to the front of the bus and we'd all have a group chat [on our phones] and we'd send questions through and they would pick someone and they would just interview them and give them questions.⁷⁹

This practice allowed the interviewee to determine what they felt comfortable answering. The crowdsourcing of questions further subverted traditional hierarchies, allowing vets and rookies the opportunity to contribute equally.

3.5. Addressing the Problem

After determining that a member has violated the corps' expectations for conduct, the administrative staff must decide whether to send the member home. A member caught stealing from a school or punching inanimate objects can be handled swiftly by administration. The choice to do so is rendered complex because a missing member creates performance issues that typically garner lower scores from judges. In the instances wherein a member is sent home or dismissed from the corps, the question then becomes how publicly the issue should be addressed. Indeed, in a section on Sexual Relationships in their Ethics Guidelines, DCI underscores the potential public relations issues that might come with sexual relationships between members and staff, volunteers, and instructors. Their statement maintains that "because of the potential for conflicts of interest, exploitation, favoritism, and bias, such relationships may undermine the real or perceived integrity of the involved organization, DCI, and the DCI community as a whole."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Anonymous Interviews.

⁸⁰ Drum Corps International, "Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations," 3.

The decisions relating to how these events should be handled ultimately reveal how the culture of silence affects issues of misconduct.

There is typically no need to alert the press when a member is sent home for misconduct. Likewise, some administrative staffs possess the ability to determine who is informed about the situation. The impetus to “keep things in-house” is taken to an extreme, making it so that only administrators and a select group of members are aware of the situation. This was what occurred at Troy’s (male, brass) corps when a member was found to have disparaged his corpsmates on Instagram:

Yes, one of our hornline members was let go due to an Instagram post with a couple of the colorguard members and the caption he put related to the lines of calling the colorguard "hoes"

This info was leaked to a handful of the vets and we tried to hide that info from the rookies. The official statement given out by administration staff was vague and they said he left the corps.

Considering his overall "elitist" attitude, I felt that this was justified as I heard stories regarding that specific member from other vets that put him into a negative light.⁸¹

In the member’s reply, the lack of respect for the color guard he publicly put on display was grounds for dismissal from the corps. The administrative staff’s decision to pose the dismissal as a vague, personal choice is an example of the culture of silence surrounding misconduct of all variates.

⁸¹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

Chapter 4. Where There's Smoke, There's Fire

As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, it can be difficult for staff and members to determine where, exactly, the line lies between what is and is not considered acceptable. While this is particularly evident in the nature of punishments and responses to injuries, other instances of abusive conduct are not necessarily as obvious.

Members have a difficult time determining what is and isn't acceptable, often not processing what has occurred until many years later. Brody (white, male, 1980s, brass) described such a realization:¹

I also saw multiple gay staff members do things in the shower with members present that were meant to be funny and outrageous, but in hindsight, just made everyone feel awkward and were NOT acceptable for adults to do.²

The solution, at the time of writing this chapter in late 2021, has been for DCI to set forth the expectation that “all participating organizations to develop an environment where reports of such conduct are encouraged, as a necessary check on individual conduct as well as on the climate and culture of the organization.”³ Superficially sensible, achieving the goals outlined in this statement is particularly difficult because it requires a reassessment of a given corps' social

¹ Remembering trauma, or remembering events as traumatic, is contingent upon the emotions felt while experiencing a given event. Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Viking, 2014), 177.

² Anonymous Survey Submission.

³ Drum Corps International, “Community Code of Conduct. Ethics Guidelines and Expectations for Participating Organizations.”

hierarchy and the extent to which that hierarchy is prioritized, the distinction between challenges inherent in DCI and abuse, and the immense power wielded by prominent figures within the activity. Further compounding these issues is the overwhelming fear of scrutiny from outsiders that any abuse allegations might invite, as well as a fierce desire to protect the activity.

In this chapter, I analyze several instances of misconduct and abuse to identify the most prominent hurdles a corps faces in empowering survivors to speak up. I begin with examples of misconduct in terms of abusing or bullying members and discrimination. I then turn to misconduct in the form of romantic relationships between staff and members, highlighting ongoing attempts to eliminate the potential for the abuse of power in these scenarios. This is then followed by an examination of the community's response to several instances of nonconsensual sexual misconduct. Because silencing mechanisms have led to few publicly acknowledged instances wherein abuse or misconduct was addressed, I explore the role of rumors in perpetuating silence in the face of abuse. Finally, I conclude with two case studies that encapsulate the ongoing discussions that have dominated drum corps discourse in 2021 and 2022.

4.1. Staff and Abuse

In the area of non-sexual misconduct, there have been significant developments in defining what constitutes misconduct and/or abuse. The corps Pacific Crest, for example, maintains that “staff members who create, through word or action, a hostile work environment for students or other staff are subject to dismissal.”⁴ As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, however,

⁴ Pacific Crest Youth Arts Organization, “Pacific Crest Youth Arts Organization. Employee Handbook,” September 2020, <https://pacific-crest.org/download/policies/staff/Employee-Handbook-Sep-2020.pdf>.

distinguishing between a hostile work environment and one with incredibly high expectations that are regularly enforced can be difficult. In this section, I will explore single events and patterns that I contend should be classified as misconduct because they demonstrate an abuse of power on the part of the staff member. These examples highlight verbal and physical abuse, as bullying, motivated by a member's identity or not.

Bullying puts a corps' social hierarchy on full display. For members, it is an opportunity to assert their dominance over an individual. For staff, it is an abuse of power that masks their inability to help a member achieve a given skillset at the expected level. It challenges members to respond in the appropriately masculine way, soliciting from the bullied a sign of weakness that can confirm their status on the margins of the corps. Bystanders often described feeling as if the bullying was warranted, which demonstrates its perceived effectiveness.⁵ Ultimately, bullying provides the opportunity to mark someone as different and block them from achieving the feelings of belonging that are so desired.

Staff members can encourage bullying by ignoring the problems it creates. In some instances, however, staff members are the primary source of bullying. In my interview with Mike (white, male, 2010s, brass), he described a pattern of bullying that occurred in his third year of drum corps:

There was a kid would be bullied a lot in 2012. Um, but I was definitely included in this, um, this 15-year-old kid named [Steve] from a big public school districts around [city] with a pretty good marching band who showed up. He thought he was hot shit because he was like a sophomore playing lead trumpet at his high school. He didn't know what he was getting himself into.

⁵ The fact that they are not the one being bullied is almost certainly a contributing factor.

This kid [...] would just be always leaving shit everywhere. Like he left his trumpet in the shower at [the rehearsal site] before [an evening off] and the staff dismantled it. They unscrewed, took apart the entire instrument and handed it out to every other adult in the building. And this kid had to spend three days trying to acquire the parts of his trumpet to put back together.

He marched with a traffic cone. And if he pissed off [a staff member], he would come up like during lunch or something and go “Which one is [Steve]’s bed?” [...] and he just went over and like flipped it over and just like threw his shit all over the room.

This kid was getting it from like every angle because he was a tick and he was like a mess of a human [...] nobody like this guy.⁶

While Mike described other instances where “Steve” was bullied, his story about the staff member’s involvement underscored the extent to which a culture of bullying can be instigated by staff members. Unable to send the rookie home because of contractual obligations, the staff member felt that his only opportunity for recourse was to motivate the rookie to leave.

This incident encapsulates the power that staff hold and the disastrous consequences that can arise when a staff member chooses to exploit that relationship. Moreover, the staff member’s lack of interest in aiding or educating Steve occurred within a highly visible space. Mike’s corpsmates, the other staff members, and administrators were all bystanders who did not feel it necessary, empowered, or justified in speaking up. The corps’ culture’s emphasis on meritocracy as the only factor in a member’s social standing obscured the fact that, in the eyes of the law, Steve was a minor being harassed by an adult.

Beyond ability, instances of bullying based on physical appearance frequently occur. Color guard members are more frequently subjected to bullying based on their body shape and/or size than their corpsmates. Bullying and shaming surrounding food is a tactic employed by fat-phobic staff members. Demonstrating a disregard for a member’s performance abilities, these

⁶ Anonymous Interviews.

staff members emphasize physical conformity. During my time marching, I observed at least one color guard captain head policing the food line during meals. Having already prohibited color guard members from taking seconds, he would harass any members he felt were too large about what they had on their plate. This carried over onto the field, where he made frequent sized-based comments, binding a member's performance abilities to their physical appearance. My observations from the 2000s and 2010s were not new. Camila (white, female, 1980s, guard) described the frustrating and humiliating experience of weigh-ins and food policing as a color guard:

They would have weigh-ins and [the guard instructor] [...], he should have never been put in charge of girls, or anybody, but younger girls, especially. So he would have the weigh-ins. [...]

And the shaming...he would tell the people serving the food "so-and-so only gets a half a portion," and of course, the ladies would sneak stuff behind because, you know, you had to. He really did some damage, you know? With the eating disorders and things like that.⁷

Speaking to the typical physical qualities of color guard members from her era as compared today, Camila emphasized that this was not only harmful to the members, but made little sense with regard to things like muscle mass:

The color guards especially tended to be heavier than now, because everybody has to have a ton of dance training [now] and back then we didn't. And so the girls who joined the guard were people who weren't the cheerleaders and the dancers, you know, that type of thing. So we could be, big, ole manly men out there. Super strong with all the military stuff, carrying five pound rifles and these seven foot flags. Just ridiculous stuff. So we were buff.⁸

⁷ Anonymous Interviews.

⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

The irony was audible in Camila's voice when speaking about the need to have a high percentage of muscle mass in order to be successful. The instructor's privileging of appearance over ability was illogical to Camila and her fellow color guard members.

Furthermore, assessing Camila's scenario with gender roles in mind highlights the problems that arise because of conflicting expectations. Her fellow guard members were expected to display strength that has been coded as masculine while appearing wholly feminine. These expectations proved, as Camila observed, to be wholly irreconcilable. The conflicting expectations had to be reconciled, however, because of the value placed on minimizing difference, displaying grit, and responding positively to criticism from staff members.⁹

Staff members' forceful attempts to promote their interpretation of the corps' values are on display during the off-season as well. For many, audition season is significantly less stressful as a returning member than as a prospective rookie. At the first corps I marched, it was all but guaranteed that any returning member or vet would automatically receive a spot for the upcoming summer.¹⁰ The returning member has demonstrated their loyalty to the corps and, perhaps more important, their familiarity with the corps' culture and norms makes it much less likely that they will choose to leave mid-season because the experience was more difficult than they had expected. In an attempt to get the best possible performers, however, some corps require that returning members audition.¹¹

⁹ This also points to staff and administrator's power over members; by holding members to impossible standards, they are simply exercising power.

¹⁰ Although "returning member" implies that the person auditioning has marched one season with the corps previously, I will use it interchangeably with "vet" in this section because there are no instances where the distinction is helpful.

¹¹ This practice is typically most beneficial to higher-ranking, World Class corps that receive hundreds of auditionees each season.

Staff members may use contracts as a tool for positive motivation, while others employ them as a threat to returning members they feel are not deserving. Casey (white, female, 2000s, brass) experienced this during her second year marching at an elite corps. Having marched the summer before, she was aware that the caption head had a habit of discriminating against women in the horn line.

It was obvious from the beginning that he preferred the guys. He doesn't even try to hide it. Like, there was always a small group of dudes that [the brass caption head] would give preferential treatment. As a chick, it was hard to even get [the caption head] to acknowledge your existence.¹²

Casey went on to describe her caption head's attempt to bully her out of the corps:

When it came time for auditions, they pulled the vets to audition first so I was in the audition room with the other lead [instrument]s. Everyone goes one at a time and we all watched. [Caption head] had something positive to say about all of them. Then it was my turn and he's like "yeah you play well but I know that [visual caption head] wasn't happy with you last season so it'll be up to him." I was the only one who got a comment like that. I was also the only woman.

I legit [sic] don't remember being called out for visual more than anyone else the year before. I asked some other vets and they were all confused too [...] during dinner I went up to [the visual caption head] and asked him about the situation 'cause I wanted to figure out what I needed to do to earn my keep. He denied ever saying anything like that to [brass caption head]. I still have no idea who was telling the truth but knowing what I do about [brass caption head], my money is on him trying to get me to quit because I am a woman.¹³

In his attempt to avoid the appearance of any outright sexism, Casey believes that he was lying about the visual caption head's opinions about her. Bullying and manipulation of this sort allow those who see female members as lesser than their male corpsmates to push women out without.

¹² Anonymous Interviews.

¹³ Anonymous Interviews.

Even after being contracted, corps members can experience bullying at the hands of staff during the off-season. Eva (white, female, 2010s, brass) described her experiences as the only woman in her section, recounting a moment of humiliation that occurred while her caption head was reviewing the rankings he established based on visual and musical assignments that the members had to complete between camps.

We had an on-the-move assignment and again, at this point I was a[n established vet], but I remember going in and [the brass caption head] did his little ranking system. It was a January or February camp.

And he said, Eva is first right now. “I have her listed first” and then his next words are “that’s embarrassing.” He said that to everybody in the room while I’m standing on the stage. And I was the only girl that summer on [instrument]. The rest of the section was all male.¹⁴

These informants’ recollections demonstrate three things. First, they reveal how staff members can bully contracted members with the hope of them quitting. Second, a way in which performance expectations are gendered. And third, how a woman’s success can be weaponized as a threat to male members’ masculinity in order to elicit better performances.

4.2. Staff and Discrimination

The biases of staff, administrators, and volunteers are particularly clear for members whose identities are marginalized within DCI. Most corps within DCI primarily serve middle-class or wealthy, white, able-bodied, and cisgender masculine members.¹⁵ This renders those

¹⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

¹⁵ To the best of my knowledge, DCI has not collected demographic data since 2015. This information is also not made publicly available. I was unable to secure permission to share the report I obtained in 2015 for use in this dissertation. Bluecoats’ recent annual demographic data provides insights into overall trends: Bluecoats, “2021 Diversity & Socioeconomic Impact Report,” Bluecoats, February 3, 2022, <https://bluecoats.com/news/2022/2/3/2021-diversity-amp-socioeconomic-impact-report>.

outside of the hegemonic group particularly susceptible to misconduct in the form of identity-based discrimination. Just as abusive conduct can be reframed as difficulties inherent in the drum corps experience, discrimination holds the potential to be interpreted as an attempt to hold members to the same standard or masked by humor.

Misconduct that occurs because of discriminatory actions is difficult to identify because of several factors. First, the prevailing notion that drum corps is inherently a meritocracy obscures instances wherein a member is discriminated against because of any particular identity. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, many survey responses reflected the sentiment that a member's skills are all that matter. Second, for the World Class finalist corps, in particular, the ability to earn a spot in the corps is predicated upon a high level of prior training in a very specialized area. Members who participated in high school marching bands that have achieved competitive success at the state level, or in circuits like Bands of America (BOA), have a strong advantage during the audition process due to the shared aesthetic values between BOA and DCI. This, in turn, serves as a substantial barrier of entry to individuals from socioeconomically marginalized communities, as well as auditionees from HBCU style marching bands.¹⁶ Within Open Class and non-finalist World Class corps, however, the member selection process relies less heavily on a member's prior training.¹⁷ Third, a member's physical and mental abilities present an additional barrier to access. Neurodivergent potential members, and those with other learning disabilities, are faced with additional difficulties due to the expectations surrounding conformity; accommodations thus are a marker of difference. Fourth, the cost of a season in a World Class

¹⁶ Krista Leann Johns Mulcahy, "The Effects of Resources on the Performance of Competitive High School Marching Bands" (DMA dissertation, Boston University, 2017).

¹⁷ This is largely because the pool of highly competitive potential members is not large enough for every corps to have similar expectations for potential members.

and many Open Class corps has grown financially prohibitive since the early 2000s. What was once an opportunity for working-class students now excludes them in favor of the middle-class and wealthy—two groups that are disproportionately white in the United States. Fifth, the extreme physical demands of the activity make it less accessible for those who are fat or obese. Likewise, rampant fat-phobia among staff serves as an additional barrier.

The preoccupation with body size and shape was particularly evident for Wyatt, a member of the color guard who was romantically involved with a horn line member. Overlooking professional boundaries, Wyatt (white, male, 2000s, guard) guard instructor provided unsolicited criticism regarding his choice of romantic partners:

There was a guy in the horn line that was my summer fling. He was not a heavier step, but he was a big guy [...] stocky, very tall. But I remember [instructor name] talking to me, he was like, shaming me over being involved with him. Not because age I was 21 and he was 18. Not the age difference, but more because of his body because [my instructor] felt that he wasn't who I should be with and he would try to verbally try and sway me in different directions.¹⁸

Acknowledging the issues of power, age, and maturity that were present in the relationship Wyatt called out the inappropriate conduct of his guard instructor while speaking with me. He went on to point out further problems with his instructor. Wyatt recalled that there a member of the color guard that year was larger but was not subject to criticism or harassment from their instructor. The comments, Wyatt concluded, were limited to the social and romantic activities of guard members. This further underscores the potential for these interactions to be understood as instances of misconduct.

¹⁸ Anonymous Interviews.

4.3. DFTK; or Sexual Misconduct

Like many aspects of society in the United States since the mid-2010s, there has been a cultural awakening to the problems inherent in relationships between staff members and students—even among adults. For the drum corps community, the power differential is particularly prone to exploitation. Caption heads and techs alike wield the ability to end someone’s marching career through retaliation; they also have historically been the gatekeepers of jobs in the activity. Having a poor working relationship with any, or all, of a corps’ staff, can make it nearly impossible for a member to get a teaching job in a corps or a competitive corps-style marching band. This problem is magnified for female members, who struggle to gain entry into the educational side of drum corps.¹⁹ Despite the negative ramifications—and DCI’s clear policy against relationships between staff and members—interviewees from the 2010s still reported instances wherein a staff member pursued a romantic or sexual relationship.

I honestly cannot recall exactly when I first heard the phrase “Rule #1: D-F-T-K.” It’s such a ubiquitous acronym that my introduction to “Don’t Fuck The Kids” was completely unremarkable. DFTK reflects the ethical problems inherent in a relationship or sexual encounters between an instructor and member. It is just crude enough of a phrase to be seen as amusing by those within the drum corps community.

These posts reflect a sort of gallows humor. They demonstrate the community’s recognition of how frequently staff members engage in romantic relationships with their students and the problems this creates. DFTK points to the parts of drum corps that we don’t wish to acknowledge. It points to the fact that there is something about drum corps (or music more

¹⁹ I remember clearly overhearing the statement that “having female staff on the field is too distracting” for members and staff.

generally) that renders relationships or sexual contact between an instructor and member something that must be resisted and rightly places the onus on the instructors. Despite the prominence of this saying, there are still numerous instances wherein a staff member has pursued an inappropriate relationship with a student.

4.3.1. Staff & Member Relationships

Staff members and instructors who pursue relationships with corps members need not do so in secret. Well into the 2000s, it was considered acceptable for staff members to date or have a romantic involvement with corps members they had instructed during the previous season, particularly recent age-outs.²⁰ Because instructor hiring practices prioritize those with knowledge specific to a single corps—knowledge that is most frequently obtained by having been a member at that corps—there are many opportunities for a romantic relationship that had developed among members to transform into a teacher-student relationship. Thus, a relationship that had developed among consenting adults of equal social standing can be called into question. Even without this personal history, romantic relationships between staff and members (ages 18-21 specifically) often more closely resemble a relationship between coworkers of different standings. That is, these relationships are primarily problematic in the sense that they exhibit a clear conflict of interest, particularly on the part of the staff member. The question in these instances thus becomes more about a staff member's ability to instruct fairly and the member's ability to consent without fear of retaliation or negative consequences than coercion or a total lack of consent. Indeed, in the time I spent marching I observed several such relationships; after all,

²⁰ Indeed, a number of prominent figures within the activity today are in marriages or long-term relationships with former students.

D.F.T.K. was not relevant when the “kid” had aged-out the year before. The legacy of this now-defunct cultural norm has continued to obscure the line between acceptable and unacceptable.

For example, Grace (white, female, 2000s, guard) described observing her male roommate pursue a questionable relationship in the late-2010s. Henry (white, male, 2000s, brass), her boyfriend, and her roommate, Ian (white, male, 2000s, battery), all aged out from DCI nearly a decade earlier; Ian and Henry were teaching an independent indoor drumline and at local high school bands. Despite the age difference and the knowledge that many marching arts organizations prohibited instructors from dating current students, or students who they had taught in the year prior, Ian invited a recently aged-out student to a party at their home. Grace explained the situation as follows:

[My boyfriend and I] had returned early from a trip, but we did not let his roommates know that we were on our way back to the condo [...] we realized that his roommate had people over. [...] We didn't recognize the cars that were in the street or driveway. When we walked up the stairs, entering the living space I noticed that Ian and [the girl] were sitting very close, but since we entered through the front door they did not notice that we were home. It was also quite noisy so that probably aided in them not hearing us. As soon as they noticed we were coming up the stairs, they moved away from each other. Later in the day we went down to the living room. I was sitting at a table behind the main couch (those who sat on the couch had their back towards me). I noticed that Ian was texting her as she sat across from him and that's when I put two and two together and realized that something more than friends was going on between them. This was really awkward and uncomfortable since I knew that Ian was recently a teacher to her both at a high school level.²¹

Grace explained further that in the time since she first saw the two together, she has seen them together at various local band events. Although she is unsure of the exact amount of time that had passed between Ian teaching his girlfriend, Grace expressed the extreme discomfort she felt arising from the knowledge that the girl had recently been a student of both Ian and Henry.

²¹ Anonymous Interviews.

Grace's experience exposes just how easily the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable relationships can be obscured, as well as the drum corps community's struggle to articulate these boundaries.

Even in instances where it is very clear that a staff member's actions qualify as sexual misconduct, there is often little recourse. Furthermore, these incidents are not limited to female-identifying members. Erik (white, male, 2010s, brass) described an instance wherein he was made to feel uncomfortable by an instructor:

I got hit on by the guard caption head at [corps name 1], even though I no longer marched there. I was marching [corps name 2] and I felt like I was in halves,²² were at a show and like somebody came up and like, I felt like, the hot breath behind my ears, like what the fuck. It was the guard caption head at [corps name 1]. "Hi Erik," he's like, "I didn't know you were on tour this year." I was like, "yeah, I'm going to warm up. See you later."²³

While Erik was able to establish the professional boundary that the caption head had obscured, the numerous bystanders failed to intervene in this clear moment of unacceptable behavior. In this case, the misconduct was likely further obscured by Erik's gender. Given the power that the caption head wielded over his students and within the drum corps community as a whole—as well as the degree to which same-sex sexual misconduct among men and boys fails to be as condemned—Erik was likely not alone in experiencing sexual harassment from the caption head.²⁴ More generally, Erik's experience points to the significant amount of power that caption heads hold in general and the ways this power can be unjustly wielded. The caption head in Erik's anecdote has not faced any consequences for his actions.

²² "Halves" refers to the overall pants that make up half of the uniform. The other half is the jacket. When a member is in halves, they are wearing overalls with a t-shirt or tank top.

²³ Anonymous Interviews.

²⁴ Citation about boys experiencing sexual assault

4.4. Rumor Mill

As a tight-knit community that is largely closed off to outsiders, rumors spread quickly during the competitive season. Although cell phones have lessened the extent to which fictional stories about the outside world spread, each season presents the opportunity to affirm rumors from the previous season and establish new ones. For example, in the first few years of my time marching DCI, the lack of widespread cell phone usage meant that rumors, like allegations that Bob Barker had died, took on an almost mythologized status. A member's exclamation of "did you hear? Bob Barker died!" would be followed with many eye rolls and groans, as we were forced to acknowledge that this major celebrity could have passed away without anyone knowing. Even with increased access to the outside world, rumors spread quickly and effectively among corps members regardless of whether or not they are based on facts.

Rumors of misconduct—even when unsubstantiated—ultimately come to bear on the community's perception of how these issues should be handled, by whom, and whether the potential negative outcomes outweigh the benefits. The strong sense of belonging, and the extent to which the drum corps community comes to influence a members' sense of self, makes it difficult for survivors to feel comfortable reporting misconduct for fear of the damage it might do to their corps or community. In instances where the rumors are about high-profile figures, the strict social hierarchy among members and staff promotes the notion that some individuals are untouchable. Furthermore, the discourse surrounding rumors of misconduct within the community can enforce silence from survivors by making them believe that speaking up might ostracize them. The overwhelming understanding that the activity has its own cultural values that can be condemned by outsiders within these discussions invites community members to automatically assume that any bad press could result in the downfall of DCI as a whole. Despite

their best intentions and efforts to protect members, individual corps and DCI encourages silence. Thus, without any real opportunity for recourse, and with a significant power differential between staff and members, instances of sexual misconduct may only be acknowledged through rumors.

With regard to rumors of sexual misconduct, this transfer of information via the rumor mill resembles a whisper network. The term “whisper network” grew to prominence in the wake of the #MeToo movement in 2018. Whisper networks, like the rumor mill, are a strategy that targets of abuse employ to discretely pass along information about who is—or is not—safe. The members of a whisper network are primarily women, whose attempts to warn other women about unsafe men must be secretly disseminated. I have chosen to apply the notion of a whisper network to the following case study because it involves a cisgender man targeting another cisgender man. That is, both in violence against women and men at the hands of men are consequences of toxic masculinity.

In the section that follows, I will explore the rumors surrounding a prominent figure within the drum corps community that has gone unaddressed for over a decade. I have taken particular care in anonymizing this information, as the individuals who are named or implied can be easily identified. Still, it is important to note that this section is more concerned with the negative effects of rumors on eliminating abuse within the activity. I demonstrate how community members’ sense of belonging invites us to feel a personal stake in each instance of misconduct that receives attention outside of the drum corps world.

One of the most widely spread rumors in DCI involves a prominent figure who I will call Grant. I first heard rumors of Grant’s sexual misconduct, and alleged rape, of members while a corps member myself. I distinctly remember the sinking feeling that washed over me while in a

gymnasium during a meal break or other downtime. His name had come up during a different conversation, prompting me to realize that I had not been aware that Grant had left the corps with which he was originally working, so I asked if it was known why. A corpsmate of mine went on to describe Grant's practice of engaging in sexual acts with corps members in locker rooms. These allegations remain unsubstantiated (as of October 2021), yet the spread of this rumor has a deep impact on reporting of misconduct.

In my attempts to discuss these issues with members who were most likely to have some knowledge, it became clear that the responsibilities of everyday life often obscured any misconduct. When asked specifically about Grant, interviewees explained the situation as such:

Response (white, male, 2000s): Well, it didn't really come up like as a day-to-day thing until there was some, I think that there was something that happened on finals night of my age-out year with a member, I can't confirm that, but I seem to recall something happening.

Response (white, male, 2010s): You know, I didn't really think about it very much until then. I mean, I did know of the rumors before but you know, it didn't weigh on me in that manner. It actually became a bigger deal for me as an alum after hearing what I heard about in [year] and going like, okay, [corps name] board of directors. When are you going to figure this out? As usual, they were incompetent.

Response (white, male): Yeah, I, it didn't weigh on me. The thing is like he is good at the logistics shit and as a member, you care more about the "can you get me from A to B and not feed me pancakes six days a week," than solving these bigger existential issues that are like Catholic church sexual scandal.²⁵

Speaking to rumors about abuse at the hands of Grant, these responses demonstrate how abusers can conduct themselves in a way that appears normal to members other than the survivors.

Without a major disruption to daily life, or very clear evidence of misconduct, abuse at the hands of prominent figures can go unopposed and unnoticed by other members.

²⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

When issues of sexual misconduct are brought up on a popular drum corps message board, community members are quick to make vague references to the rumors surrounding Grant. Phrases like “the worst kept secret in DCI” are repeated throughout these threads, highlighting how far the whisper network has allowed the allegations to spread. The message board’s moderators have attempted to contain the rumors by prohibiting any mention of them that is not accompanied by evidence. Vague statements alluding to Grant, his corps, and his actions appeared frequently alongside statements about a ban on the subject. Still, for those of us familiar with the rumors, it is not difficult to read between the lines.

Unable to discern the veracity of these rumors, it is nearly impossible to determine whether they have been addressed. The strong sense of belonging within the community creates a sense that we all have a personal stake in instances of abuse allegations and should, as a result, be privy to all information. This viewpoint leads members to readily share gossip and rumors. That is, lacking the reassurance that could be provided by a culture of accountability, members of the community feel as if rumors must be handled amongst themselves. With the knowledge that the corps’ image and DCI’s reputation often take priority over investigating the veracity of abuse claims, the lack of upfront discussion about allegations against Grant can be easily reframed as a cover-up. Together, these factors perpetuate the idea that “we all know” but no one has come forward because of the potential ramifications for the activity at large.

Regardless of the veracity of any rumors, the community is negatively impacted by their spread. The rumors surrounding Grant in particular perpetuate the notion that those with the most power are “untouchable.” While the Hopkins scandal revealed that abusers do face consequences, it also set a precedent for future whistleblowers that the community is unable to address any problem without outside intervention. When considered alongside the community’s

insularity, would-be whistleblowers face almost certain resistance in any reporting scenario. experiences. Indeed, complaints are construed as a sign of weakness in such an environment, implying that the individual in question is simply not strong enough or is incapable of minimizing social and physical differences enough to deserve to be heard. Furthermore, the lure of belonging to the drum corps family further silences any complaints.

Whether tales of misconduct and assault are substantiated or merely rumored to have happened, both play a significant role in the activity's cultural understanding of what a "normal" drum corps experience should be. The boundaries between abusive and non-abusive conduct—that is, anything that does not qualify as sexual or romantic—are difficult to locate. Influenced by the notion that the activity should be difficult, and that only the strong should survive, ideas about meritocracy work to silence questions about potentially harmful events or behaviors.

Ultimately, drum corps culture penalizes self-advocacy through these silencing mechanisms and blurred boundaries. This creates an environment where potential abusers can exploit the silence for their gain. Moreover, the significant power that staff and administrators hold further protects them from consequences if a member chooses to speak out. Only through increased reporting that is highly visible will the community come to reckon with the problematic experiences cultivated through blurred boundaries and the privileging of meritocracy.

4.5. Staff and Administration

The question of whether a member being dismissed from the corps is avoided altogether when a member's ranking in the corps prevents them from being subjected to any disciplinary action. Members who rank significantly higher within a corps' social hierarchy have the power necessary to violate rules of conduct and codes of ethics without consequence. As a season

progresses, this power grows because it is increasingly difficult to find a suitable replacement. Those with solos and battery members are particularly difficult to replace. Thus, within corps that emphasize social hierarchy and grit, abusers who are among the most powerful face the least consequences while survivors deal with lasting consequences.

In the experiences of my interviewees, the use of prohibited substances by members is the most frequent example of misconduct that is intentionally overlooked by corps administration. Second, to the use of prohibited substances, stealing is another instance of misconduct that could result in a member being sent home.

4.5.1. Phantom Regiment 2018

Speaking out against misconduct is rendered even more difficult and complex when instructors and caption heads portray any such actions as inherent demonstrations of betrayal to the corps. This was made particularly evident when, in January of 2021, a whistle-blower released a recording of their percussion caption head speaking about an instance of sexual misconduct. Rob (white, male), the percussion caption head at a World Class corps, felt the need to speak to corps members after a member quit following allegations that the member had sexually assaulted one of his co-performers in an indoor drumline. Rob also led this independent indoor drumline, which competes in Winter Guard International during the off-season for drum corps.

Teaching both the indoor drumline and the drum corps, Rob felt the need to absolve the accused member of any guilt. He began by recounting the series of events that took place in the offseason, starting with the member who reported that she had been assaulted.

Five people were sleeping at his house that on the way there like throughout the evening or something there had been Snapchats and texting and [he] was texting back and forth with her and things had gotten flurry or whatever in the course of that. And she woke up in the middle of night and [he] was rubbing her shoulders and her back. But she made it like she was sleeping, still sleeping to try to get that to stop. Didn't stop. He started kissing her she said stop. He said, I'm sorry. Or went back to sleep. That's what I was told.²⁶

Less than three minutes into a 2.5-hour-long speech, Rob began to sow the seeds of doubt in the members' minds. In full acknowledgment of the problematic nature of disclosing such information to a group of members, he immediately followed the above statement with "Now, I do need to say that much to you: how many of you are like, I can't believe he's actually saying this to us right now. I am." He gave no further explanation as to why he was discussing this with the members but rather continued.

I'm like, okay say it all to you one more time, you know? And we talked about how just again, that if it's not okay and the difference in just today's society [...] and she said to me, I've been told that when something like this happens, that the person is kicked out of the ensemble. My response is okay. Who'd you hear this from?

There was no like if this then this [for this situation]. If you smoke pot tonight, you're kicked out of the ensemble. You signed that. Notarized. That stuff makes sense. If John punches someone in the face, in rehearsal tonight. What happens? Like what happens organization? I don't know. I mean, we've got there's no, like, this is what happens. You know what I'm saying? There's not. What I'd probably do is sit you both down. Be like, how's it going on? and try to get the two of you to like sort it out and own it and somebody feel bad and somebody else could apologize and get past that.

My, my initial reaction in that moment when I said my number one, one thing is trying to make sure both of you are as okay as you can possibly be.²⁷

Citing a lack of defined protocols, Rob resorted to addressing the situation as one might mediate between bickering children.²⁸ His response highlights a key issue in the handling of sexual

²⁶ Rob Ferguson, *Untitled*, 2018.

²⁷ Ferguson, *Untitled*.

²⁸ Troopers did the same thing.

misconduct: instructors and administrators are understood by members as being the ultimate authority figures who should handle every problem. Indeed, in my interview with Rebecca Compton-Allen—who assumed the role of Director at Santa Clara Vanguard in October of 2021—she emphasized the need to establish experts as a first or second contact when faced with abuse allegations.

As Rob’s speech goes on to demonstrate, Compton-Allen’s suggestion is difficult to implement because of the community’s fierce allegiance to their corps and desire to protect the activity. Less than a minute after describing the lack of protocol surrounding reporting, he demonstrated that he was acutely aware of the potential ramifications for the organization, were these accusations made public.

And so I just go, I'm proud of you for calling. And then the next thing goes through my head is #MeToo is like Weinstein, right? And like, if people start talking about this, this is going to get insane for both of them. It makes sense. Let alone your organization, let alone you understand but this gets insane.²⁹

Rather than focusing his energy on the potential harm that may have occurred, Rob declared that his first priority was the ensemble. By expressing this to a group of corps members, he reinforced the expectation that the corps should be a member’s top priority. Rob’s explanations about the cultural differences between the drum corps world and the real world underscore the potentially harmful effects of involving outsiders. In the same breath, he also further obscured the boundaries between what a member should expect from drum corps.

Raise your hand if you've been on the same bus, changing. A bunch of people. Naked and guys and girls. So now if you say that around your average 45-year-olds they'd be like, what? No,

²⁹ Ferguson, *Untitled*.

I'm not stupid, I know what it is. I know what it is. I know that. Yeah. There's a line down the floor. I said girls, you guys sleep here. But they were both naked on the bus last night changing. So, I mean, it's. I know that I know that it's an environment you run around in the best shape of your life, half-dressed, highly hormonal around other people that are in the best shape of their lives. And you're an age where you all flirt and you're trying to figure out who you're going to date and who you are and who you like³⁰.

Obscuring the boundaries between everyday life and the pursuit of sexual relationships, Rob appealed to members' recognition of distinct cultural norms within drum corps. His statement that members are trying to figure out who they do and don't like creates further doubt as to the validity of the accuser's claims.

The above quotes constitute a total of 6 minutes out of the 2.5-hour long recording. Despite being only a fraction of the entire speech, they are representative of Rob's attempts to discern right from wrong. His statements make it clear that he decided to prioritize the ensemble's needs, going so far as to condemn the abuser's choice to seek assistance from the local police department. The rambling speech had one clear message: the member accused of sexual assault had been wrongfully bullied out of the ensemble—as no clear rules existed for how such a situation should be handled—and subsequently decided to leave the drum corps. In the last half hour, it becomes clear that Rob is seeking to absolve the accused from any wrongdoing to encourage the corps members to reach out and apologize for ostracizing the accused. All this is despite his assertion that he is unable to discern what is and what is not potentially sexual misconduct:

We basically said, okay, you know I have no training. She said sexual assault. I don't know what that is. I don't know what this is and this isn't. Does that make sense? I know what a paradiddle is and when it's not a paradiddle. I'm not trying to make light. I just literally have no, I have never worked a job where I had to go through that training.

³⁰ Ferguson, *Untitled*.

He instead chose to lean on an instructor who had “gone through something similar,” stating that she indicated that she had not interpreted her experience as sexual assault. Rob thus concluded that the incident did not constitute sexual assault. While this assertion superficially appears to reflect Rob’s lack of interest in protecting students, it also highlights how little training that corps staff and administrators receive in this subject area. With a stronger training program that provides a clear path to seeking expert input, situations like this would be remedied.

4.5.2. Spirit of Atlanta 2022

During auditions for the 2022 competitive season, McKenzee, a 16-year-old white alumna of Spirit of Atlanta Drum & Bugle Corps, came forward on the internet, highlighting the problems she experienced in the previous season. Her allegations regarding the treatment of minors reflected many of the stories recounted in this dissertation. From being subjected to unwanted sexual contact by other members to stories of RTN, McKenzee’s complaints and her experiences with the drum corps community encapsulate much of what I have discussed within this dissertation thus far.

Dissatisfied with her corps’ response to her complaints, McKenzee took to social media in search of justice. She first shared her experiences on Reddit, posting the following on the DCI-focused subreddit, r/DrumCorps.

My 2021 Spirit of Atlanta Drum and Bugle Corps Experience

I have been hesitant to make this post. I've been scared for backlash, retaliation, fear of opportunity, and much more. One day I knew I would want to stand up and advocate for member safety. That day is today and every day after. I am no longer scared, and this is my story.

Tuesday, June 1st, 2021, I received my Spirit of Atlanta member contract to march as part of their hornline on trumpet. Receiving that contract was a dream come true, however my dream quickly turned into a nightmare once move-in’s came around.

June 26th, 2021 I moved in with Spirit of Atlanta Drum and Bugles Corps at Carrollton High School in Carrollton, GA. Less than a week later, I was sexually assaulted by a veteran member of the corps. The sexual assault happened repeatedly and almost daily during the corps stay at Mortimer Jordan High School in Liberty, AL (7/6-7/12), and then Dora High School in Dora, AL (7/13-7/30). Up until 7/9/21, I didn't fully realize the behavior was grooming behavior and inappropriate until the member decided to smack my chest on that same day. Up until then, it'd been small things like poking my stomach, hand placements on my lower back, etc. Not long after, I went to 3 staff members about the incident, a Medical Staff Member, the Head of Operations, and the Corps Manager. The three of us spoke, and the head of operations and corps manager assured me something would be done. Absolutely nothing was done to protect myself from said individual, and there was zero separation. Each day the touching got worse, and I reported it daily from then on. Each time I reported it to the corps manager, nothing changed. It wasn't until 7/25 that the individual was removed, and no kind of resolution was given. From late June, to late July, it took nearly a full month for my safety to even be considered by corps staff. Not once was I given the opportunity to report him to the police. Not once did the corps staff separate him from me or other victims he had put his hands on. Not once did the corps inform my parents of any kind of action being taken, or what was happening to me. Spirit of Atlanta was incredibly negligent not only with my safety, but other corps members as well. Each day I was in fear for my safety, and for the members around me.

Once my assaulter was removed from the corps, tour life started and I had 14 days of normalcy. Then on August 9th, 2021 a text went out explaining the rules of Rookie Talent Night from a veteran trumpet player on my bus. He told us the activity would be taking place after our performance in Akron, OH. I happened to be on the guard bus, and almost everyone except for me and one other guard member participated in Rookie Talent Night. The two of us that didn't participate, were behind a blanket duct taped to the ceiling to block the camera in the back of the bus. There was one other blanket at the front of the bus that blocked the driver's view of what was happening. Some did things like sing, minors making out with other minors, and adults performing oral sex in front of minors. There was an adult that was fully naked and urinated into a plastic bottle in front of those on the bus. On several occasions we asked the bus to stop so we could sleep, people being uncomfortable etc. I sent our Corps Manager a text stating there were illegal things happening and it was disregarded. The event continued. Once we got to our site, I vocalized to my section leader how uncomfortable the entire event made me. He then went on to tell the person who led Rookie Talent Night. As I was planning to go to sleep, the person who led Rookie Talent Night demanded I speak to him in the hallway, and tried to tell me this is the dark side of drum corps and it's normal. I told him multiple times it made me uncomfortable, and he tried to justify it each time. The very next day after breakfast, I went to the Corps Manager and reported what happened. Before I even reported the incident, the bullying and harassment by corps members had started. When I told the Corps Manager, he assured me action would be taken but they couldn't penalize everyone because "that would be the whole corps". The harassment was so bad and to the point where I was ready to go home just days before finals. Members were threatening me, threatening to steal my items, and damage my property.

I was once again scared for my safety. The very next day I had packed all of my belongings and threatened to leave because nothing had been done. The Corps Director and Corps Manager gathered the corps into the gym for a meeting to discuss what had happened and to discuss the whistleblower policy. The recording of that can be found here <https://youtu.be/vJIMQhrtsa4>. Two corps members received punishments which were that they would not perform in the next two performances because they participated in the more “severe” acts of Rookie Talent Night. There were no consequences for the ringleader(s) of the game, other participants of Rookie Talent Night, or those who bullied me. The harassment continued beyond that meeting in the gym, up until December 18th, 2021. On finals day (August 14th, 2021), Spirit of Atlanta had our Corps banquet. Several of the members who participated in Rookie Talent Night and harassed me extensively were given awards for the season. At the end of the banquet, the Corps Manager informed me the remaining \$700 in tuition was waived due to the nature of my season, and for my experience.

Since my season with Spirit of Atlanta has ended, we have called the ethics reporting line, and an investigation was completed by EquitAbility Consulting, LLC. Drum Corps International and Spirit of Atlanta have had the recommendations since the beginning of October. Nothing has been done, changed, or brought to the public. No reporting procedures for members under the age of 18 who have been violated have changed at Spirit of Atlanta. Members who led the hazing and harassment still have spots within Spirit of Atlanta as “student-leadership”. The ringleader of Rookie Talent Night for the guard bus has moved on to the Blue Devils and still has yet to be penalized. We were told that Spirit would have to provide us a copy of the report which they seem unwilling and non-responsive with our attempts to obtain it. Spirit of Atlanta claimed they went to the police regarding the sexual assault, but I never gave a victim statement, my parents were never contacted, and they’ve ignored our requests for a police statement.

The Drum Corps community needs to do better. Not just in regard to member safety and accountability, but timeliness as well. We sent in our initial report in August. It is unacceptable that it has taken this long for anything to be done. When are we going to start making the necessary changes for member safety and experience? I’m angry that this Drum Corps almost killed my passion and spark for music as a whole. No person should ever have to go through anything like this. No person should have to sacrifice their dream just so they remain safe. No one should want to forfeit their passion because of a corps’ negligence to do the right thing. It shouldn’t take going public for action to be made. Do better, Spirit of Atlanta.

Thank you for your time and Attention³¹

McKenzee’s description of her experience highlights the systemic issues that perpetuate

problematic behavior, particularly around social hierarchies. While many corps phased out RTN

³¹ kenzeegh, “Spirit 2021.”

by the mid-2000s, the tradition continued at Spirit. McKenzie's perspective underscores the incompatibility of post-#MeToo American culture with that of pre-#MeToo drum corps. The distinction she makes based on the age of vets, designating them as either adults or minors, renders the hazing of RTN even more problematic. A given corps' social hierarchy, however, blurs the line between minors and adults in favor of labeling them all as rookies.

McKenzie's statement also demonstrates the problematic handling of the situations she encountered in a way that underscores a lack of awareness of power structures and social hierarchies within the corps. RTN participants were punished, however, it was only the rookies. The vets who were promoting the event were not reportedly punished as it would mean penalizing a large percentage of the corps. Overlooking questions of coercion and peer pressure entirely, punishing only the rookies implies that the vets were not culpable. Had the corps recognized the vet's position above the rookies in the corps' social hierarchy, they would have been able to address the systemic cause of hazing. These decisions communicate that the success of a corps should be prioritized over all else, intimating that the corps' culture does not warrant any criticism.

Despite the negative experiences, McKenzie's desire to bring public attention reflects a continued love and passion for the activity. Her explicit statement that Spirit should "do better," shows that, even in the face of harm, drum corps remains worthy of saving. Assigning blame to bad actors and poor decisions spares the activity from any accusations of inherent or ubiquitous flaws. This open letter poses her feelings of belonging in the community as unshaken, as something worth saving.

Spirit's response to her letter incited an uproar among community members, highlighting the degree of personal investment we feel in all DCI-related issues. Spirit maintained that they

had handled the situation properly. While a certain degree of distance is to be expected from any public organization that could be viewed as culpable for the harm of a minor, the community's response to further communications signals that there remains a strong disconnect between our cultural expectations and those of the outside world. Bringing the two together to solve criminally related, or at the very least litigious, issues underscore the need for transparent communication. The intense ties to one another, regardless of actual closeness, foster a culture wherein the harm of one means a degree of harm to the community. As Rebecca Compton-Allen's handling of the sexual assault allegations in her corps reveals, complete transparency—to the fullest extent of the law—is necessary if a corps is seeking to maintain good relations with the public while addressing abuse.

4.6. Time is Up

McKenzie's decision to speak so publicly about her experiences demonstrates the ongoing cultural shift within DCI. As many interviewees in Chapter 3 intimated, they did not feel remotely empowered to speak up. When faced with a problematic situation, members of yesteryear had few options: cope or be silent. Still, McKenzie faced significant push-back from those unwilling to recognize the shift that has brought drum corps culture into stark relief with the outside world.

In the days immediately following McKenzie's first public post, a handful of individuals within the community felt it necessary to attack her decision to speak up and her credibility. Several sought to dismiss her claims based on rumors about her playing and marching abilities; these attempts appealed to the shared cultural value that equates merit with belonging. One individual, in particular, went so far as to post a printed letter on Facebook. The letter's contents detailed the author's investigation into McKenzie, alleging that students at her high school had

spoken poorly about her abilities and character. The author continued to dismiss McKenzie's complaints using sexist tropes, declaring that she is simply an overly emotional 16-year-old girl.³²

Unlike the other scenarios that I have discussed in this dissertation, however, the overall reaction from the drum corps community has been one of frustration. Community spaces known for their conservatism—in terms of aesthetic and technical developments in DCI—reacted with far more sympathy than they had to previous allegations. The forum on Drum Corps Planet, for example, centered its discussion of Spirit around the incompetence of corps administrators, the unfairness of the RTN punishments, and sympathy for McKenzie.³³ That most of the community sought to protect McKenzie and voiced frustration that similar harm signals a shift in perspective that extends the notion of “drum corps family” to all, regardless of identity. It is clear from this incident that time is indeed up.

The timing of McKenzie's statement and the community's response coincided with the completion of this dissertation. It seemed quite fitting that DCI's issues are being addressed more appropriately. My concerns about the reception of this document have been mildly assuaged by the outpouring of support for her. The community's frustration with the continuation of harmful traditions like RTN signals that members are being recognized for their individual humanity rather than their ability to contribute fruitfully to the corps' success. Much like McKenzie

³² After being made aware of this anonymous individual's allegations against McKenzie, I felt compelled to report the situation to the high school named in the letter.

³³ “And the Floodgates Are Opening,” *Drum Corps Planet Forums*, January 12, 2022, <https://www.drumcorpsplanet.com/forums/index.php?/topic/176408-and-the-floodgates-are-opening/>.

demonstrated, the powerful sense of belonging that binds community members with one another cannot be entirely broken by disagreements around how to handle harm.

Conclusion

The dramatic shift in cultural perspective ushered in by the #MeToo movement has ignited a moment of reckoning within DCI. As more and more individuals speak up about misconduct, mistreatment, and abuse, the community's awareness of these problems has dramatically increased. Most importantly, the community's conversations about member safety have shifted significantly in tone. Where whistleblowers might have previously been disregarded or discredited, they are now being hailed for their desire to out abusers and improve the activity. Now that abuse is garnering the recognition it deserves, the community's attention has turned to prevention and ensuring that drum corps may continue to have a positive impact on the lives of members. I hope that this dissertation will aid the conversations that are, as of February 2022, important and ongoing. It is ultimately my contention that this activity is worthy and capable of reform.

In this conclusion, I will re-articulate each chapter's analysis through the lens of the capacity for change, seeking to answer the question of where DCI and similar cultural organizations might go from here. I do not intend to propose any hard-and-fast solutions, but rather I hope to provide a starting point for further conversations within the drum corps community. Next, I will describe the challenges I faced while conducting interviews and having conversations with community members on the topic of abuse. Though occasionally frustrating, recognizing the challenges that lie ahead of us is essential to improving our culture as quickly as possible. After that, I will briefly detail potential solutions and interventions communicated to

me by my interlocutors. I then conclude with this dissertation's implications for musicology, ethnomusicology, public scholarship, and the social responsibility of the researcher.

Before attending to the question of what comes next, it is necessary to consider if DCI even possesses the capacity to enact the monumental changes that must occur to ensure member safety. Throughout the process of interviewing and collecting survey responses I encountered many individuals whose experiences reflect the improvements that have been made to drum corps culture in recent years.

In my first year of marching, I lowkey felt like I did not belong due to the toxicity of the vets and there was this dynamic of "rookies don't know a thing, and the vets are superior." So I felt some animosity and shunning from some of the vets because of that power dynamic or I did something that I didn't know I did wrong.

But in my second year, when I was put into a position of power. The rookie-vet dynamic drastically changed for the better as the vets collectively decided to be more supportive and outwardly caring towards our rookies. Doing this made me and everyone else in the corps feel that they felt loved here."¹

Troy's (male, brass) anecdote reveals how quickly a corps' culture can change. Concerted efforts to improve the culture achieved significant progress in a single season. Belonging does not lose any importance in the new environment, but rather is enhanced. While Troy's experience reflects an instance wherein members led the improvement efforts, that is not the only way in which change can occur. Tommy (white, male, 2000s, battery) recounted how staff can initiate cultural improvements as well.

that eventually the staff had to have a moment of reckoning with drumline because they just were drunk all the time and they weren't willing to listen to anybody and they were not performing well. And you know, of course, they didn't think about it, but like that has impacts on the people who are employed, you know?"²

¹ Anonymous Survey Submission.

² Anonymous Interviews.

Tommy's staff recognized the far-reaching consequences of cultural problems. The drum line's low scores would reflect poorly on their staff. This, in turn, could make the staff less likely to be re-hired or find employment elsewhere. As a consequence, the staff no longer would accept the drum line's drunken antics. In the time since the intervention, Tommy described, the corps' scores and ranking have improved significantly. This correlation likely reflects larger changes made within the corps, but it demonstrates how small shifts in cultural expectations can have positive effects beyond a member's experience. Though many in the community might question whether change within the existing structure of DCI is possible, I argue that it is.

In Chapter 1, I demonstrated the ways that belonging is positioned and achieved within the drum corps community. This, however, proves both helpful and harmful. Members' fierce allegiances to their corps and the drum corps community overall—fueled by their feelings of belonging—has led some to strongly oppose the public airing of any grievances. At the same time, the continued importance placed on belonging can be reframed as a desire ensure others to have similarly positive experiences or avoid negative ones. Such is the case for the grassroots organizers who have recently created affinity groups such as Girls March. Their efforts to empower girls to play percussion instruments send the message that interventions within the existing social structure of drum corps are possible.

Where Chapter 1 conveyed how the personal and emotional connections to the drum corps community are coveted, Chapter 2 describes how these intense feelings of belonging aid in obscuring the boundary between helpful and harmful traditions, especially concerning punishment. Distorted by the prevalent notion that drum corps is inherently difficult, members can lose the ability to discern whether their concerns are legitimate or if they are simply lacking the grit that is necessary to be successful. Yet, DCI has increasingly implemented measures

intended to protect members. Where an athletic trainer might have once been a rarity, they are now compulsory. Moreover, staff members' growing disinterest in physical punishments signals a cultural change. Though ostensibly motivated by the desire to use rehearsal time more efficiently, over time this resistance to physical punishments will likely render the line between abuse and helpful correction more visible.

Chapter 3 details the experiences of members with abuse or misconduct at the hands of other members. From the outset, my discussion of rituals and hazing demonstrates that this line has been more strictly defined. Though this chapter is primarily about members, many of the measures taken to prevent hazing have come from staff and administrators. The overall understanding among members that tour is a time without consequence has shifted dramatically. Now aware of the potential fallout, personally and for the corps, members are giving more consideration to the impact of their actions.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I address issues of staff misconduct. The concept of DFTK remains prevalent but the rate at which abusers are punished or called out for their actions has increased dramatically. Though there is hope to be had around staff's mistreatment of members, discrimination remains a prominent issue that is only receiving attention from a few isolated corps. The Bluecoats, for example, created a Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Council in 2020. This council has since begun to release annual reports detailing the gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic makeup of their corps.³ As one of the more prominent drum corps in the activity, frequently placing in the top-3 of World Class corps, the Bluecoats and their example is important. I view these reports and accompanying initiatives as having the potential to affect greater change within the activity overall.

³ Bluecoats, "2021 Diversity & Socioeconomic Impact Report."

Before beginning my research, I was aware of the challenges I would likely face. I had witnessed and experienced the community's reaction to others' attempts to discuss these issues. My primary concern was remaining transparent. After the Hopkins story broke, many were wary of discussing anything that might be seen in a negative light if shared publicly. Throughout my interviews, I frequently reiterated my intention to seek out the factors that make abuse possible rather than confronting abusers and rapists.

It is important to note that my ability to position this dissertation in a way that did not invite significant scrutiny or hostility from the community was likely entirely dependent on my personal identities. Within the drum corps world, having marched five years—with two of those at a prominent corps—gave me significant social capital that I posit allowed me to disarm many of my more defensive interviewees. Moreover, my status as a white, middle-class person afforded me the ability to attempt to extend the metaphorical olive branch to those who were most skeptical of this project. Not only was I likely assumed to be less threatening due to physical similarities, but I also do not carry with me the emotional trauma that can come from experiencing race or ethnicity-based discrimination firsthand. This emotional distance that is facilitated by white privilege was certainly helpful in situations where it appeared that an interviewee offered opinions that were contrary to mine.

Discussing instances of staff sexual misconduct was a significant hurdle while conducting this research, particularly among those age 30 and older. Many were hesitant to describe any scenarios, despite knowing them. In addition to the concerns about retaliation that arise in any whistle-blower scenario, Tommy located this hesitancy as lying within the fear of legal ramifications:

there were some things that I saw when I marched there's no doubt in my mind, absolutely criminal act and, and I'm not sure what the statute of limitations is on all of that stuff. There are things that I witnessed and that I experienced that absolutely qualify as abuse in every facet of the definition.⁴

Tommy's fears of prosecution are well-founded as many states have no statute of limitations when it comes to sexual assault. Child abuse, on the other hand, is generally limited to five years. Still, concerns about one's culpability in any potential criminal investigations remain a major concern among the drum corps community. Despite the fear of persecution that silences many alumni, current members are becoming increasingly aware of the problems inherent in these relationships. In her response to the survey, Kaylee (female, 2010s, brass) described the discomfort she felt when a staff member initiated a relationship that is best described as "grooming."

There was also a time when a staff member was being too "friendly" with me. He made jokes at me a lot, would always hang around the part of the field that I was marching, and even private messaged me occasionally after he went back home. I think the other members noticed because they started making jokes about it and it made me feel really uncomfortable. But I never went to anyone about it because I didn't want to start any drama. Eventually after the season, I told him to leave me alone and he did. I still have screenshots of our private messages though, just in case it gets to the point where I need to report him.⁵

Her concerns regarding the offending staff member demonstrate the extent to which current members feel empowered to resist and fight back against problematic behaviors.

Discussing misconduct and abuse was difficult even for those who vehemently decry abuse and offer their utmost support for survivors. Perhaps an avenue for further study, I discovered there is a facade of closeness that can undermine any attempts to address reports of misconduct. That is, the sense of belonging within the community empowers individuals who

⁴ Anonymous Interviews.

⁵ Anonymous Interviews.

have no stake in the handling or reporting of misconduct to feel as if they are entitled to all of the information. This was most evident when speaking with a 2021 whistleblower. She described being satisfied with the support she received after outing her abuser. The support, however, came at the price of privacy. To support her claims and win over the community, she publicly shared every available detail. This was done partly out of necessity, as she had already exhausted official reporting options. At the same time, the intimate details of her life became the subject of conversations across the community. Moreover, this facade of closeness allows former members to assume they know everything about their accused corpsmate or instructor. The solidarity that exists among corpsmates and within the drum corps community more generally compels individuals to defend the accused in ways that are wholly contrary to their values outside of the drum corps world.

Overall, this research has revealed to me several conflicting ideas, principles, and values within the community. DCI members want to be more inclusive, and we want to belong. Yet we also uphold a system that actively excludes. Abuse needs to be addressed, but that might mean addressing personal culpability. The conflict that weighs most heavily on me is my role in these conversations. Torn between the academic and drum corps worlds, I hold the ethical responsibility of a researcher alongside my values. Handling the stories of individuals with care, I sought to represent them in contexts that accurately represent the interlocutor's personal interpretation. While something might have appeared abhorrent to me, my interviewee could remember it with fondness. I remain unsure whether this is a coping mechanism born out of trauma or a desire to see the positives in everything. This is a question rendered useless by the full recognition of my ethical duties to not retraumatize individuals or reveal to them the extent of the trauma they communicated to me. It is for these reasons that I implore future researchers

on this subject to carefully consider their personal and ethical values before beginning their work.

There are no easy solutions to propose and the problems within drum corps culture are simultaneously insulated from and representative of systemic issues within the outside world. Still, my research has strong implications for what interventions are necessary. Following the research of Matos et al., I advocate for transparency and training above all.

In sum, training should provide unambiguous definitions of toxic behavior and encourage values, norms, and assumptions that reinforce nonhegemonic masculine ideals (e.g., protecting others). Additionally, training should emphasize how inclusive, civil, and considerate behaviors and values are more effective ways of carrying out the organization's mission to avoid the trap that perpetuates both the masculinity contest culture and tolerance for toxic leaders within organizations."⁶

In providing positive examples, corps might work to minimize problematic behaviors. I contend that the impetus for conformity and hyper-definition inherent to drum corps might be leveraged with this knowledge in mind. This would necessitate reevaluating cultural norms, as well as the basic concepts that inform auditions, touring, and competitions.

In October 2021, Shadow Marching Arts announced that they had terminated a staff member for grooming. In addition to validating the concerns of the whistleblower, they used this as an opportunity to define problematic behaviors and educate current members and staff on issues of abuse. Shadow's statement began with the following acknowledgment of abuse:

Shadow Marching Arts have received reports of, investigated, and confirmed inappropriate and grooming behavior of a former senior staff member, David Henzie Skogen. He was dismissed from the organization and reported to DCI to prevent his continued participation in the drum corps activity at large.

⁶ Matos, O'Neill, and Lei, "Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture," 523.

Shadow Drum & Bugle Corps (formerly known as Oregon Marching Band and Shadow Armada) as well as the former guard and drumline programs were created with the intention of providing positive life-changing experiences for young people. We acknowledge that this space has been abused.⁷

Shadow's statement goes on to include the corps' definition of "grooming," instructions on how such behaviors might be reported, as well as numerous links to assist survivors. Their statement reflects the efforts to educate the drum corps community in regard to ethical conduct between staff and members. Moreover, Shadow's statement offers an example of how a corps can address internal problems and be an example for further improvements in the marching arts as a whole.

Indeed, strong leadership focused on positive change can have an incredibly positive impact on members' experiences.

I felt very much like I had found my family. I was surrounded by a group of strong female leaders in my section, and they established the standard of performance and behavior in the entire horn line. The veteran women in the horn line were among the strongest leaders in the corps. Everyone was accepted if they worked hard and were decent to one another. We had a lot of local kids marching then (including myself) so many families were involved in day-to-day operations. Many family members marched together. People were not expected to come in as polished musicians-work ethic was the overwhelming criteria. The staff taught us where we were and helped us grow to become the musicians the show and performance level demanded.⁸

Emilia's (white, female, 1980s, brass) description of the solidarity she felt among other women in the horn line provides an example of the types of experiences that could be born from these changes. Emilia's interpretation of her experiences demonstrated how a corps can foster personal growth through positive means.

⁷ Rebecca Compton-Allen, "OFFICIAL SHADOW PRESS RELEASE," Shadow Marching Arts, October 4, 2021, <https://www.shadowdbc.org/post/official-shadow-press-release>.

⁸ Anonymous Survey Submission.

Rather than providing concrete solutions, I believe that fostering conversations within the community about the historical roles of masculinity and whiteness could raise awareness that the activity is not a meritocracy. Even absent issues of race and gender, conversations about the purported meritocracy within DCI could serve as an effective starting point. Asking community members how they think punishments and strict hierarchies might affect a member's experience is also important. For those most reluctant to engage in these conversations, it could be helpful to reframe these conversations with how a corps' performance or success is ultimately affected by these issues. Ultimately, continuing to encourage conversations about abuse in DCI and what can be done is necessary if meaningful change is to occur.

At the heart of this dissertation is the issue of abuse, exploitation, misconduct, and mistreatment within the performing arts. Unlike the manifestations of these issues in the military, fraternities, and sports, discussions of abuse in the arts have largely been limited to public media such as newspapers. Researched and written amid an explosive cultural reexamination that the #MeToo movement initiated, it is my hope that the performing arts might give more consideration to the role of institutions and cultural norms in facilitating abuse. Within musical spaces, these abuses take on an altered form of sonic violence. That is, the power dynamics created and reinforced throughout the instructional process create ample room for instructors and staff to manifest violent outcomes.

Concern for a cultural institution's public image is another key component in issues of abuse within the performing arts. The precarity of funding and the continued idolization of those deemed exceptional promotes an environment similar to DCI. Despite assertions that students' best interests are of utmost concern and promises that abuse will not be tolerated, the needs of the institution render whistleblowers and survivors disposable. Rather than addressing a problem,

those who speak up are instead encouraged to remain silent or even apologize to their abusers. Without intentional interventions—or at the bare minimum—posing the questions in the introduction, meaningful change is impossible.

Moreover, students and individuals of lower social status are powerless to speak up if those who hold power are still beholden to antiquated structures that celebrate a false meritocracy. Insisting upon absolute meritocracy necessitates purported “colorblindness” that actively erases all differences. Just as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, failing to acknowledge the degree to which whiteness and masculinity have informed the construction of meritocratic standards makes it nearly impossible for an individual to feel a sense of belonging. Outcast and Othered—while also being whitewashed—those who experience violence, misconduct, abuse, or other traumas are reduced to their performance abilities or academic merit, which is then weaponized to discredit their complaints. These efforts to delegitimize the voices of those who speak up resemble almost identically my interlocutor’s experiences. Preventing abuse is impossible in an environment that silences survivors at every opportunity.

At the University of Michigan’s School of Music, Theatre & Dance alone survivors and whistleblowers have brought no fewer than four accusations of misconduct, discrimination, and abuse to the attention of the general public in the time it has taken me to earn my Ph.D. (7 years).⁹ As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, the continued presence of rumors and advice communicated via whisper networks only exacerbates the challenges inherent to whistleblowing and the handling of whistleblowers. That is, a lack of trust in reporting processes—when they do

⁹ These accusations span a wide array of topics from discrimination to rape. They include those made against: David Daniels, Stephen Shipp, Bright Sheng, and an unnamed graduate student. This list is likely not comprehensive, representing only those cases with which I am most familiar.

exist—renders whisper networks essential acts of self-preservation that ultimately perpetuate the notion that institutional accountability is impossible. Without deep and meaningful acknowledgments of the power dynamics that render us vulnerable to abuse, change will only happen when every whisper becomes a scream.

* * *

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Survey 1 – Ethnography of DCI Participants

Q1 Thank you for your interest in being interviewed for my dissertation research on how individuals experience drum corps culture within Drum Corps International. This ethnography will take place from October 2, 2020, until February 1, 2021. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required, and your rights as a participant.

Information and Purpose: The interview in which you are being asked to participate is part of ethnographic research on how militarism and masculinity influence the experiences of corps members and staff. This work will be a part of a larger dissertation that traces how marching bands and drum corps have influenced audiences as well as participants throughout history.

The **purpose** of this ethnographic research in particular is: To articulate the experiences of current and former members of Drum Corps International, specifically as they relate to member and staff conduct; feels of belonging or exclusion; initiation or hazing events; other experiences that have contributed to recent reform efforts.

Requirements for participation: Interviewees must be at least 18 years old and have been a member, instructor, or staff member of a Drum Corps International participating corps.

Your Participation: Your participation in this ethnography will consist of an interview lasting approximately one hour. You will be asked a series of questions about your involvement in Drum Corps International. You are not required to answer any questions. You may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time, you may stop the interview and your participation in this research. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation. In the event you choose to withdraw, all of the information you provide (including recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from any publications.

The audio from our discussions **will be recorded** to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. These recordings will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable being recorded, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

The **interview methods** to meet these goals will be:

Virtual or phone interviews

Group or individual discussions

Email or other text-based discussions

The **benefits** of taking part in this ethnographic research will be:

A better understanding of social dynamics within and among DCI corps.

Informing efforts being made to prevent abuse, sexual misconduct, discrimination, hazing, etc.
Identifying and highlighting aspects of drum corps that contribute to a positive experience for members, staff, and volunteers.

The **risks** of taking part in this ethnographic research will be:

Reliving potentially negative experiences.

Your experiences and contribution being publicly outed by outside actors.

Confidentiality and Data Storage: You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of this ethnographic research. Please contact me anytime at abwells@umich.edu. - All identifying information will be removed or anonymized, including names and corps affiliation. All names will be kept anonymous before, during, and after the interview process. Details from high-profile events or experiences that may be easily recognized by others will be altered. You have the right to opt-out of these anonymization steps.

Anonymized, direct quotations from your interview may be used. All interviewees will receive the opportunity to review the document before it made public. Because all data is anonymous, you will be able to provide feedback on the usage of any facts or events that you believe are from your interview.

The following steps will be taken to ensure the **security** of any private information:

Immediate anonymization and coding of information. The coding key will be kept only as a hard copy.

Your real name and corps affiliation(s) will not be used at any point.

Recordings and documents will be stored on a remote hard drive with no cloud backup.

Video interviews will be conducted using a platform that offers end-to-end encryption such as WhatsApp, Signal, Google Duo, or Line. Other platforms can be used upon request.

The same platforms are available for text-based interviews.

Sharing of this research: The information gathered from you and other participants will be used anonymously in my dissertation at the University of Michigan, which will be accessible online via ProQuest upon completion. I may also use this information in journal and book publications, workshops and consulting activities within the marching arts, as well as academic presentations. All interviewees will receive the change to offer feedback prior to the final publication or presentation of this research.

If you have any questions prior to taking part in this project, please email the principal researcher, Alyssa Wells at abwells@umich.edu.

By clicking the "I consent" button below, I acknowledge that:

1. I am at least 18 years of age
2. I have read and understood the above information.
3. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation in this study at any time.

I consent (1)

I do not consent (2)

Q2 What is your preferred name?

Q3 How old are you?

Q4 Please enter your email address in the box below

Q5 If you would prefer to be contacted via another method, please indicate so here:

Q6 How would you like your interview to be conducted?

Video Call (1)

Phone Call (2)

Texting, emailing, or messaging (3)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Appendix B. Survey 2 – Interview of DCI Participants

Q1: This survey can be completely anonymous if you choose. Unless you choose to provide your contact information for the purposes of follow-up questions at the end of the survey, I will have no way of connecting the survey results with you or your corps. You may choose to use pseudonyms or other anonymizing techniques in your answers if you do not feel comfortable identifying a corps, individual, year, etc.

You will be asked some demographics-related questions that you have answered in the previous survey. This is to help me understand how your various identities (race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, decade marched, etc.) connect to your experiences.

No question is required, and you may opt-out at any time.

By filling out this survey, I am confirming that I filled out the Informed Consent form at bit.ly/WellsDissInfo.

If you have any accessibility needs, please contact me at abwells@umich.edu.

Q2 What decade(s) did you march a DCI corps? [1960s/1970s/1980s/1990s/2000s/2010s/2020s (contracted)]

Q3 What section(s) were/are you in? [Battery/Brass/Color guard/Front Ensemble/Drum Major or Conductor/Other: _____]

Q4 How many years did you march?

Q5 Where did you march and when? If you marched more than one corps, please enter the name of each corps in its own box.

Please format this as:

Corps 1 2006 - 2008: Glassmen (baritone)

Corps 2 2009, 2011: Carolina Crown (baritone)

Q6 What is your current career, job, or major?

Q7 How do you describe your gender identity? [Male/Female/Non-binary/Agender/Other: _____]

Q8 Do you believe your gender had any impact on your drum corps experience?
[Yes/No/Unsure]

Q9 How do believe your gender identity affected your drum corps experience?

If you marched multiple corps, please indicate which corps you are talking about in these essay/short answer questions. *Example: Glassmen - There were only a handful of women in the low brass, but our gender differences were never really brought up. Crown - One year I was the only female baritone/euph player. I sometimes felt left out because they guys were together 24/7 (showers, sleeping area), but my section treated me as an equal.*

Q10 With the understanding that sexuality is distinct from gender, do you think your sexuality affected your drum corps experience? (*If you do not believe it did, you can skip this question*)

- Q11 What is your racial or ethnic identity?
- Q12 Do you believe your race or ethnicity affected your drum corps experience? If so, how?
- Q13 What is your favorite drum corps memory?
- Q14 How do you feel that marching affected your life?
- Q15 Do you feel like you belonged while marching? How so?
- Q16 Have you ever served, or are you currently serving in the US Military? [Yes/No]
- If yes:
- What branch?
- What job did/do you do? (MOS, AFSC, NEC, etc.)
- Did your time marching DCI influence your choice to enlist? If yes, how so?
- How would you compare your time serving with your time marching?
- Q17 Did your corps have any sort of initiation ritual? *Examples include corps history night, receiving a past member's delta to wear for the season, learning the corps song in a meaningful situation, learning what something like SUTA means, etc.* [Yes/No] If yes, what was it like and how did you feel about the ritual(s)? You do not need to provide details that are not intended to be shared beyond your corps.
- Q18 Did your corps engage in anything that could be understood today by outsiders as hazing? Examples include Rookie Talent Night or assigning rookies specific jobs on the bus. [Yes/No]
- Q19 What hazing activities did your corps engage in? How did you feel about the activities then and how do you feel about them now?
- Q20 Did your corps play physical bus games such as bus wars? [Yes/No]
- Q21 Did your corps play other bus games, such as interviews? [Yes/No] If so, what were these bus games like? Did you enjoy playing them?
- Q22 Did your corps have any rules intended to protect members under the age of 18? [Yes/No]
- Q23 What were they? What did the members think about them?
- Q24 Did you march a mixed gender corps? [Yes/No] If so, how do you think marching an all-male or all-female corps affected your experience?
- Q25 Was the sleeping area "segregated" by gender? [Yes/No]
- Q26 Do you have any memories of the sleeping area that stick out? If so, please describe them:
- Q27 Do you feel like your corps was strict about member conduct or lax? For example, a corps that doesn't allow members to talk while in uniform might be understood as strict. *If you marched more than one corps, answer for the one you spent the most time at. If you marched DCA or SoundSport corps/ensemble in addition to a DCI corps, answer for the DCI corps.*
- Choose one:
- There were very strict rules.

There were a lot of rules, but members had a bit of freedom.

There were some very important rules, but not a lot.

There weren't many rules.

There weren't any rules beyond basics like showing up to rehearsal.

Q 28 Did your corps ever have an incident where members felt the need to hold someone accountable? If so, how did the members handle this situation? Staff and admin? Did you think the situation was handled properly? *For example, did someone get caught stealing, forget their instrument somewhere they shouldn't have left it, or constantly start fights?*

Q29 Was your section "punished" as a group for mistakes? If so, how? What did you think about this as a member? *Examples include being told to run to touch a stop sign or grab a leaf from a tree, push-ups, or having to hold your horn up for an unusually long amount of time.*

Q30 Was someone ever kicked out of your corps mid-season? If so, why? Did you think it was an appropriate action?

Q31 Did your corps have a lot of "super vets?" Super vets being members who have marched for a long time. [Yes/No]

Q32 How did the super vets treat rookies?

Q33 Did your corps have any sort of training for staff or members on subjects like sexual harassment, discrimination, abuse, etc.? [Yes/No]

Q34 What was this training like? How was it received by members and staff?

Q35 Do you feel like you learned some important life lessons from your time marching? If so, what were they and how do you think they impact your life today?

Q36 Are there any skills you learned in drum corps that are applicable to your current career/schooling/job? If so, what are they and how do they help you?

Q37 Do you keep in contact with your former corpsmates? If so, how would you compare your friendships with them to your friendships with people who did not march DCI?

Q38 I would like to make myself available for follow-up questions. I acknowledge that by including this information, my survey will not be anonymous. My email address is:

Q39 Thank you for completing this survey!

What comes next? I will contact you by mid-January with a draft of this chapter of my dissertation. I will be anonymizing **everything** so it may be difficult or impossible to figure out if something is from your interview in particular. Because of this, I will be sending out this draft to everyone who filled out the initial Informed Consent document. When you receive this draft, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback on anything that you think may be about you or from our interview.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at abwells@umich.edu.

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