

# Cultivating a Choral Culture of Connectedness

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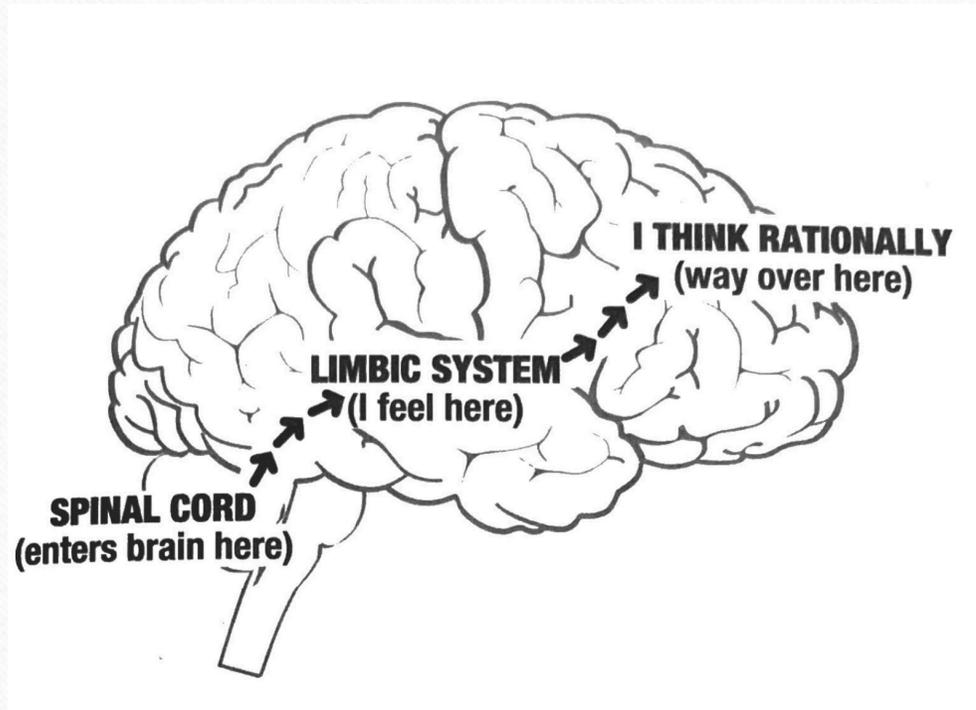
PW: WACDA2022

“I have learned that  
people will forget what you said,  
people will forget what you did, but  
people will never forget how you made  
them *feel*.”

-Maya Angelou

What percentage of your time do you spend preparing the following items?

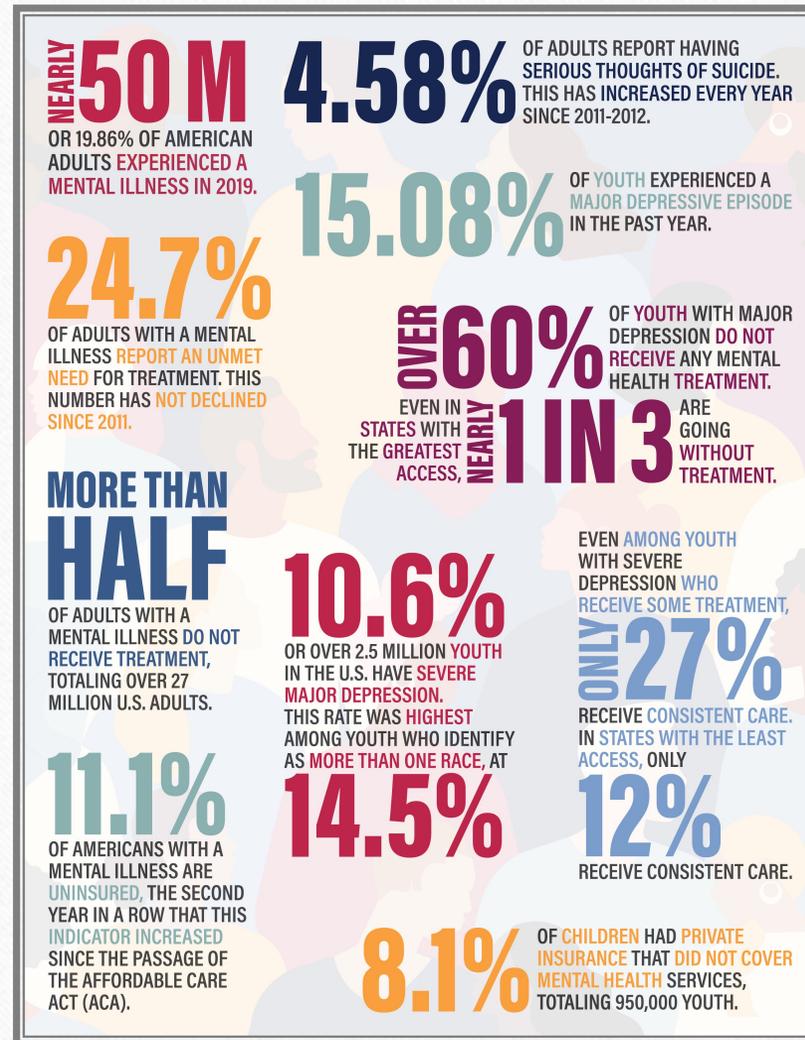
1. Planning for content?
2. Planning for methods and materials?
3. Planning for feelings?



# Education

Image borrowed Bradberry and Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, 2009

# Mental Health



# Trauma

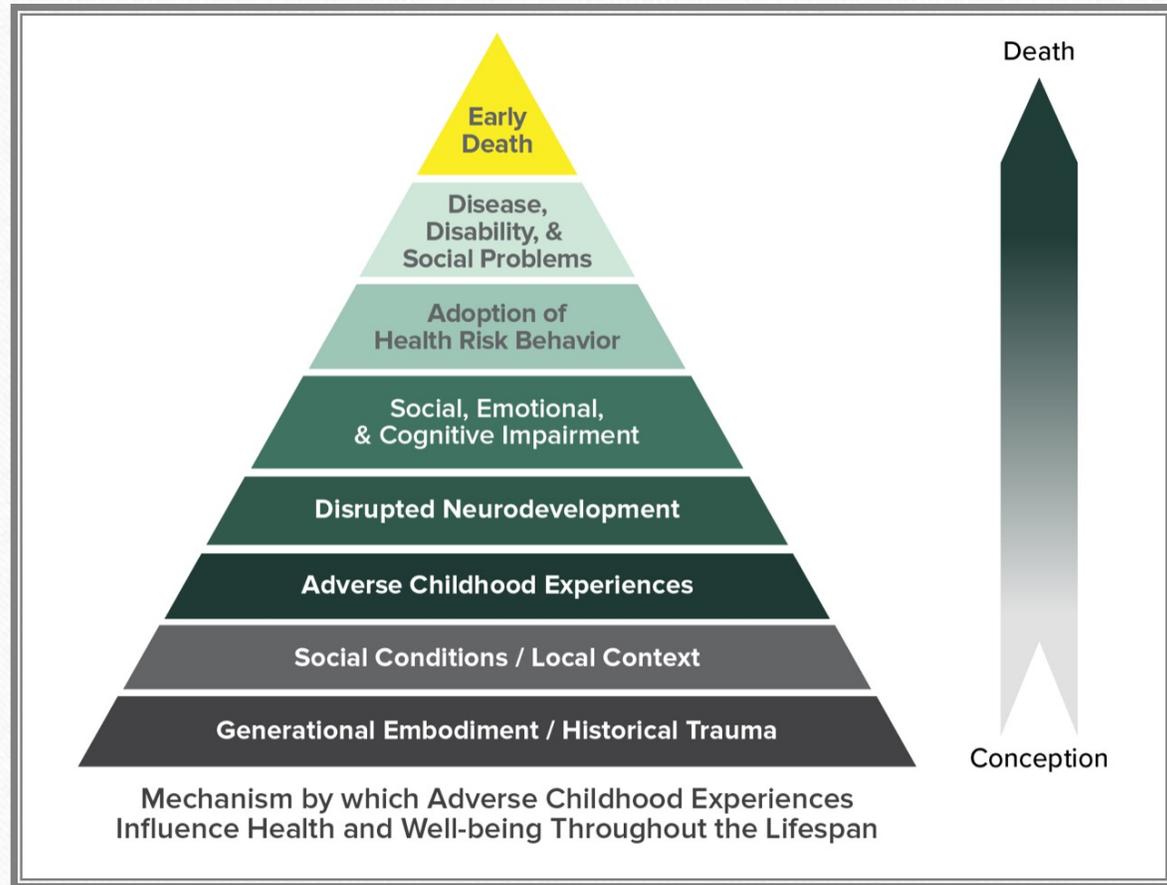


Image borrowed from the CDC, *CDC-Kaiser ACE Study*

# Why is choral music the right place?

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- Music is an incredibly vulnerable place
- Musicians are often exposed to high degrees of criticism and often are more critical of themselves
- Many of the musical skills we teach, most specifically in reference to listening and perception, can incorporate principles of emotional intelligence
- Our bodies and minds are directly connected to our art form
- The voice is one of the most vulnerable instruments



# Disclaimer

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# Big Idea

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Through music teaching, we as music educators can craft safe, comfortable, and emotionally intelligent environments that **empower and value our music musicians**, provide a space for positive coping, encourage authenticity and vulnerability, and develop the most self-actualized musical performance.

Safety

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



(Adapted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Green and Maslow, 1994))

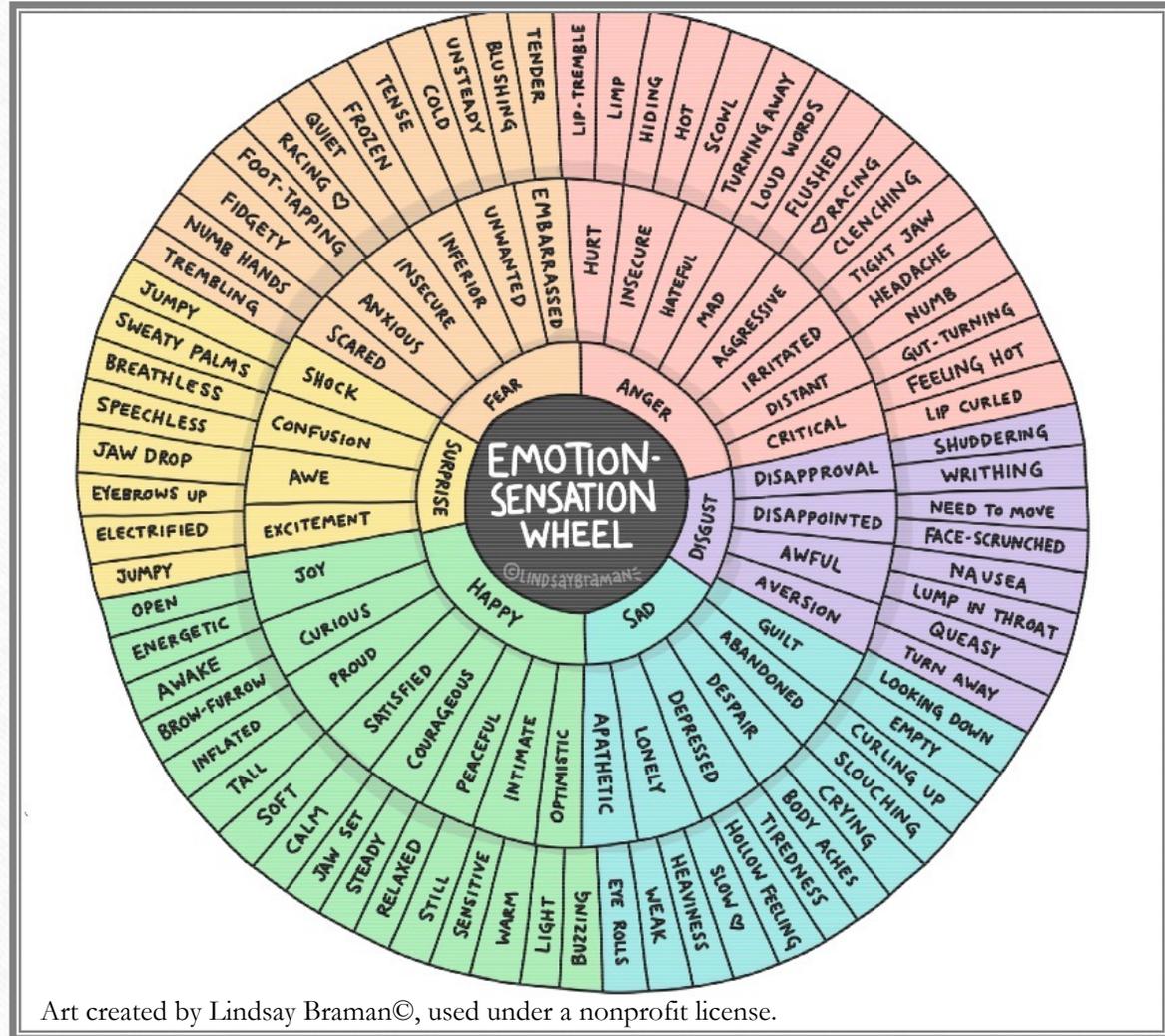
# Comfortable Enough for Discomfort (CEFD)

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- What if we planned for content, methods, and materials the same way that we planned for the emotional environment?
- Feelings
  - A sense of safety allows for a more comfortable space to take risks
  - A sense of value will empower musicians to ask questions and see their contributions as worthy
  - A sense of challenge will motivate musicians to learn and grow

# Picking Some Feelings

- Pick a feeling, or a few, to focus on during instructional periods
  - Ex: I want my musicians to feel calm as this week deals with particularly challenging/frustrating/debatable content



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# CEFD: Affirming Identity

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- Affirming Identity
  - Simple adjustments including pronouncing a musician's name correctly, asking/using their correct pronouns, and using inclusive language in class
    - Set the precedent yourself
  - Using appropriate gender-neutral language
  - Representing compositional identities of various ethnicities, sexualities, genders, and religions across various musical periods

# CEFD: Belonging Cues

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- Belonging Cues (Coyle, 2018)
  - **Non-verbal signals** that humans use in order to create safety, connection, and future within groups.
    - 1. They are a part of the group
    - 2. Reminds them that the group has high standards
    - 3. Assures them that they can reach these standards
  - These signals generally have three factors
    - (1) energy invested in the exchange, (2) showcasing that the group members are unique and valued, (3) signaling the relationship will continue into the future

# CEFD

## Belonging Cues Checklist

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- Body
  - Are my arms crossed?
  - Are my muscles tense?
  - Is my posture open/closed?
  - More generally, does my body showcase vulnerability?
- Eyes
  - Am I making appropriate amount of eye contact?
- Tone
  - Three Categories of Tone
    - Authoritarian
    - Superficial
    - Authentic

# CEFD: Language

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- Growth-Oriented Feedback
  - “I’m giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them” (Yeager et al. 2014)
  - Using a suggestive, rather than authoritarian approach
  - Emphasizing the collaborative, rather than the individual
- If the issues persists
  - Ask the musicians for more information

# Language Con.

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- Five Components of Constructive Feedback
  - Focus on the behavior or action
  - Be specific
  - Be helpful
  - Be suggestive and collaborative
  - Be thoughtful about word choice

# Practical Session

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- Scenario #1

- First Rehearsal: The stepwise descending line of an alto passage continuously flattens as they move further down the scale. You asked them to use a kinesthetic gesture (pointing and motioning upward while singing the descending line), but the alto section only gave about 15% of their usual energy, resulting in the same flattening.

- Scenario #2

- Twelfth Rehearsal: The tenor section of your ensemble has been struggling for weeks with a two-bar phrase. You have tried almost every trick in your book to fix the pitch inaccuracies, but to no avail.



## CEFD: Other Ideas

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- Encourage and normalize mistakes
- Be authentic and don't be afraid to get something wrong
- If you make a promise or set an expectation, do it! Otherwise, provide reasoning for why your perspective has changed
- Be honest
- Add appropriate surprise
- **Don't force connection too soon**



# Scaffolding Vulnerability Cont.

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- For one to connect deeply **to the music**, they must have a subconscious understanding of the musical fundamentals
- For an ensemble to deeply connect **with one another**, they must have a subconscious understanding of the musical fundamentals
- This is **not** to say that you can't feel while learning a piece. This **is** to say that it is much easier to connect emotionally when we are more comfortable with the piece

# Scaffolding Vulnerability: *Microdosing*

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- A Good Place to Start
  - Melinat's *36 Questions to Fall in Love*
  - Change how you ask, "how are you?"
- From There
  - Personal Notecard Activities (Dr. Kimberly Dunn Adams, WMU)
  - Group Improvisation
  - Connection Building Exercises

# Scaffolding Vulnerability: Two Important Notes

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Trust your feelings

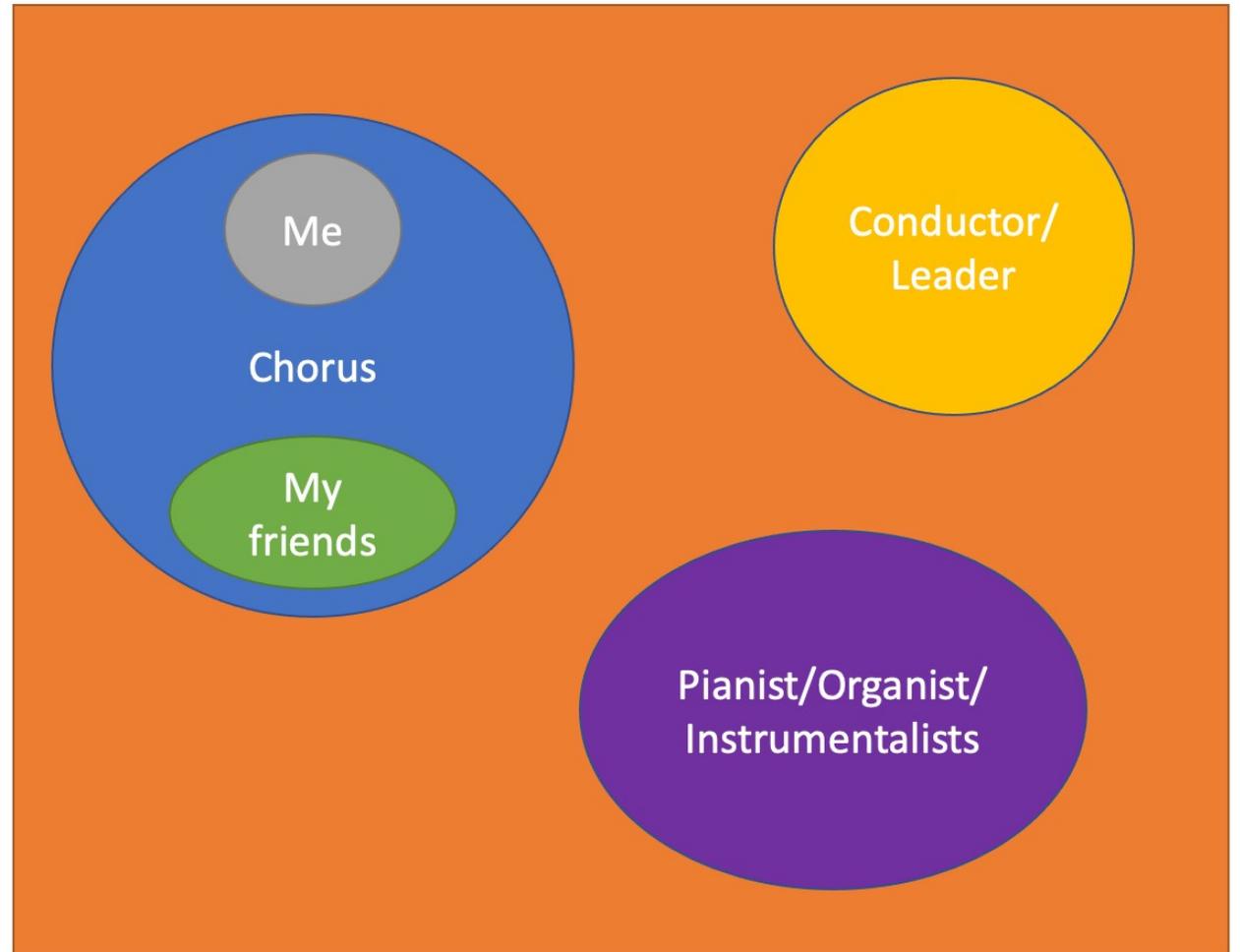
Do not ask your ensemble to be more vulnerable than you are willing to be

# How do I know when the ensemble is ready?

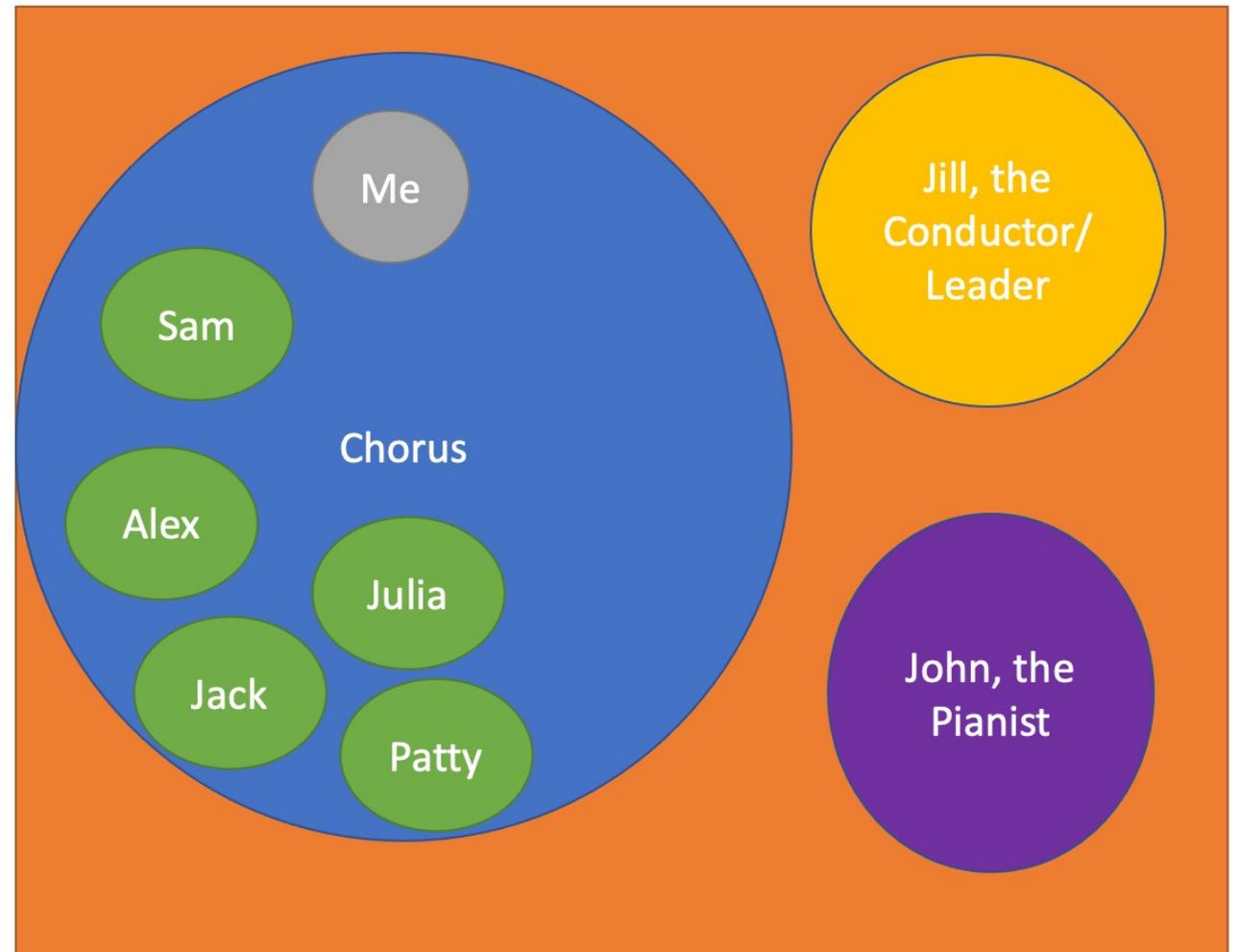
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- Core Motives Approach of Social Psychology (BUC(K)ET)
  - Belonging
  - Understanding
  - Control
  - Enhancing Self
  - Trust
- Transactional Analysis (Imagos)
  - Anticipatory Imago
  - Adjusted Imago
  - Attached/Alienated Imago
  - Adapted Imago

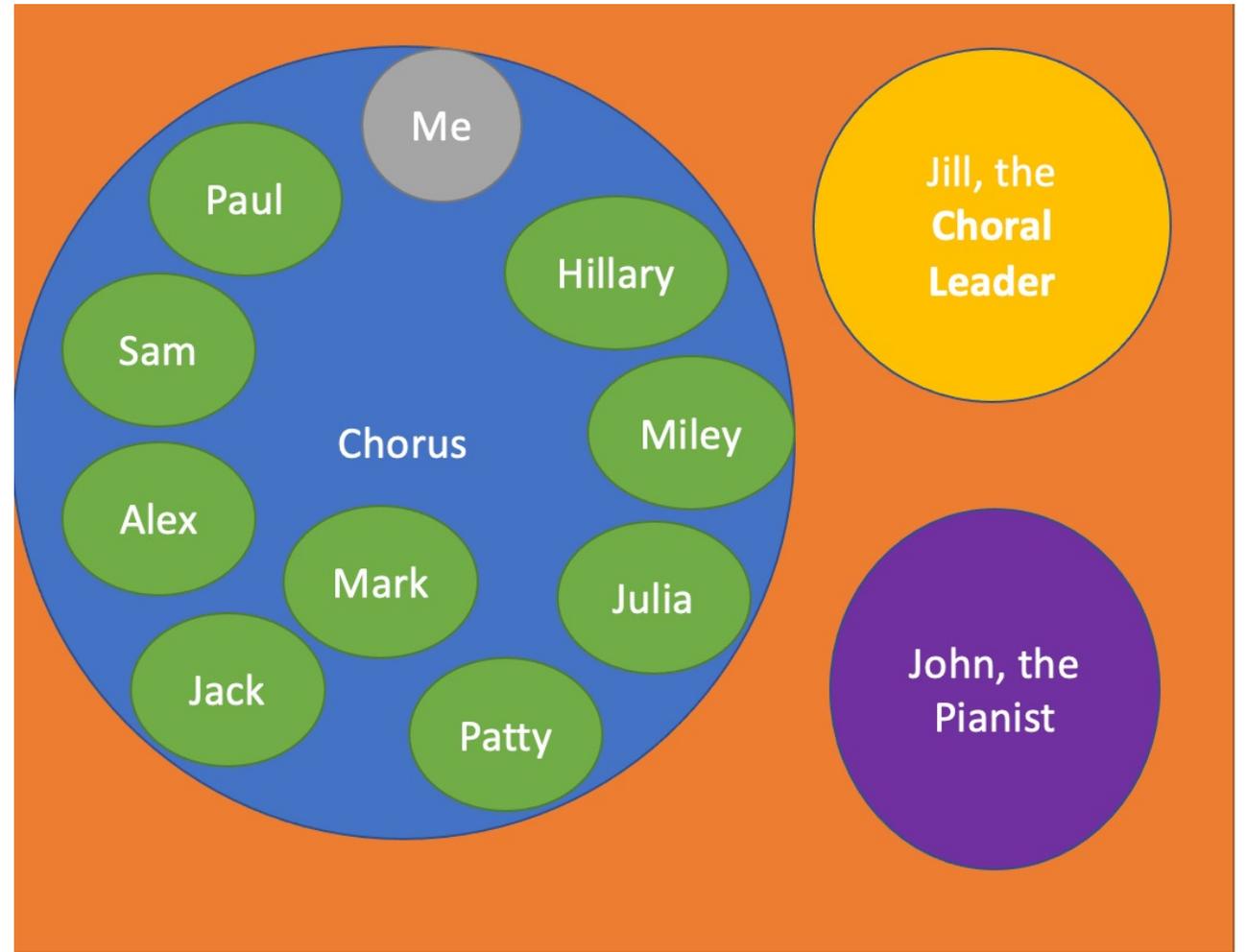
# Anticipatory Imago



# Adjusted Imago

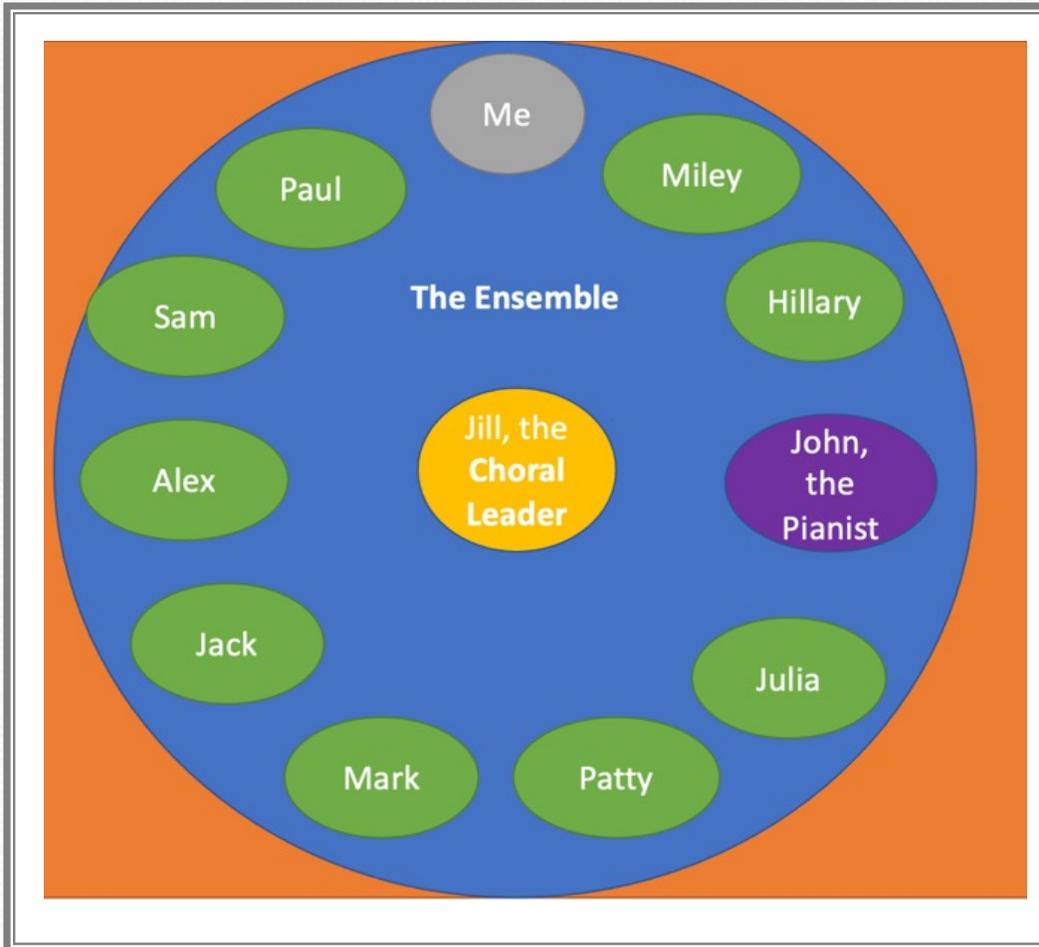


# Adapted Group Imago



# Attached Group Imago

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# Trauma-Informed Lens

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- By adopting an emotionally intelligent pedagogical framework, you are making the first step towards a trauma-informed environment
- If you are unsure about whether to continue moving up the ladder of vulnerability, here are some suggestions
  - *Always* warn about potentially triggering content
  - Take the time to assess the value in showing potentially discussing triggering content and the intent in doing so
  - Talk to members of your ensemble



# Seeing the Bigger Picture

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- By cultivating a choral culture of connectedness, we can...
  - Reduce the levels of MPA, therefore leading to a more technically proficient performance
  - Develop a strong group culture that supports and enhances the individual musician
  - Deeply and intimately connect to the music, therefore crafting a more connected and impactful musical performance
  - Create a space that is CEFD where musicians can take risks and be vulnerable without the fear of judgment or negative repercussions

*“Thank you for always making me feel loved, special, appreciated, and that I matter.”*

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# **Connect with me!**

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