Fall 9-1-2024

EXPERIENCES WITH COMING OUT: A STUDY OF LGBTQ+ MUSIC STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MUSIC EDUCATION PEDAGOGY

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A Dissertation Presented

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

June, 2024

Ph.D. Education Studies

Human Development and Learning Specialization

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Approvals

In the judgement of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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Acknowledgements

In reflecting on the completion of this dissertation, I am filled with profound gratitude for the individuals whose unwavering support and guidance have been pivotal throughout this transformative journey. To my husband, Michael, and our daughter, Cassidy, whose unwavering love and understanding provided the foundation upon which I could navigate the challenges and triumphs of doctoral study, I extend my deepest appreciation. Their steadfast encouragement and belief in my abilities sustained me through moments of doubt and uncertainty. I want to express my gratitude to my grandmother, Mary Louise Adams. Her unwavering belief in my abilities and her support have been indispensable to the success of this project.

I am indebted to Alicia Gray for her inspirational guidance, which ignited the spark that led me to embark on this academic pursuit at Lesley University. Her mentorship has been a beacon of light, guiding me towards academic fulfillment and personal growth.

The camaraderie and shared passion of my music education colleagues have been a source of strength and inspiration throughout this journey. Their support and encouragement have reaffirmed my commitment to advancing the field and have enriched my academic experience immeasurably.

To the five participants who graciously contributed their time and insights to this study, I am profoundly grateful. Your willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue and share your experiences has been instrumental in shaping the findings and contributing to the broader discourse in our field.

I am deeply appreciative of my senior advisor, Dr. Ulas Kaplan, whose exceptional mentorship and guidance have been instrumental in navigating the complexities of doctoral

research. His unwavering support and belief in my potential have empowered me to strive for excellence and have enriched my academic journey immeasurably. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my doctoral committee members, Drs. Tawnya Smith and Sal Terrasi, for their invaluable feedback, guidance, and unwavering commitment to academic rigor. Their expertise and insights have played a vital role in shaping the development and refinement of this dissertation.

Lastly, I wish to express my appreciation to all those who have supported me along this journey, whether through encouragement, advice, or simply lending a listening ear. Your presence has been a source of strength and inspiration, and I am deeply grateful for your unwavering support.

Abstract

Because LGBTQ+ people are disclosing their non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identities at younger ages, music educators should consider how their pedagogical decisions impact an LGBTQ+ person's decision to disclose their identity (come out). Previous research has explored how to create affirming and inclusive space for LGBTQ+ students to learn within music education spaces. However, past research has been limited on how those decisions impact the LGBTQ+ student's decision to disclose their identity. I used data from five participants to discover how they perceived music education pedagogical practices and how those practices facilitated or hindered their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. The findings from this study show that positive, affirming, and inclusive pedagogical practices which contribute to positive relationships with teachers may have an influence on LGBTQ+ students' sense of well-being and identity which contributes in some way to their decision to disclose.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, coming out, music education, pedagogy, mental health, relationships

List of Figures

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In this qualitative phenomenological investigation, I aimed to discern the perceptions of music students identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, or belonging to various non-heterosexual or cisgender identities (LGBTQ+). The study focused on their encounters within music learning environments and the consequential influence of these experiences on their individual choices regarding the disclosure of their LGBTQ+ identities. While extant literature has delved into related themes, particularly concerning how music educators establish secure environments through sensitive and inclusive pedagogical methods (Berman, 2017; Palkki, 2017; Cayari et al., 2021), there is a notable gap in research concerning the impact of such spaces and practices on the decisions of LGBTQ+ music students to reveal their LGBTQ+ identities.

General Statement

For youths who identify as a historically marginalized sexual or gender identity, including, but not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, pansexual, or questioning, the process of "coming out" is often accompanied by increased anxiety or fear (D'Augelli et al., 2005; Guittar, 2014; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). The increased stress associated with coming out may make learning more challenging. Several scholars have postulated that negative feelings and emotions provide barriers to learning. Early 20th-century scholars such as Maslow (1943) illustrated the concept through the hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, individuals must fulfill earlier needs before the organism can be motivated by higher needs. In the case of LGBTQ+ youth who may perceive their safety, well-being, esteem, and belonging as under threat due to their disclosure status, learning in

educational contexts may be at risk because they are not able to meet their fundamental needs. However, current trends in diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging (DEIJB) practices aim to create safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth where the school actively works to mitigate the fear and stress before the individual chooses to come out.

Although many schools actively work to create such safe spaces, this is not a national sentiment. As recently as 2022, River Valley High School in Marion County, Ohio, invited an alum speaker to address the graduates where he said, "Friends and family. Choose a spouse, I suggest. I also strongly suggest to make sure to choose biblical principles, you know a male with a female and female with a male" (Valle, 2022, p. 1). In 2021, the principal of Eastern Regional High School in New Jersey cut off the Valedictorian's speech by unplugging the microphone and taking away his prepared remarks after the Valedictorian began discussing his coming out process (Shepherd, 2021). The State of Florida recently enacted the Parental Rights in Education Act (2022). The colloquially termed "Don't Say Gay Bill" encompasses a state statute that prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through third grade or in any grade where the state does not consider such instruction age or developmentally appropriate. However, the bill does not provide guidance or definitions for what would be considered age or developmentally appropriate. Given the current sociocultural environment that many LGBTQ+ youths exist within, 81.8% of LGBTQ+ students reported feeling unsafe, and 58.9% had experienced discriminatory policies and practices while attending school (Kosciw et al., 2022)

Sentiments such as these have kept historically marginalized gender and sexual identities on the periphery of educational institutions. Nevertheless, it is significant to mention that many

organizations are involved in LGBTQ+ youth awareness campaigns and education lobbying on behalf of LGBTQ+ students. Such organizations include the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), The Trevor Project, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER).

Although creating safe spaces for students to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity publicly is a school-wide effort, music teachers should be particularly aware of the classroom environments and cultures they build for their students (Palkki, 2015; Berman, 2017; Garret & Spana, 2017). Music participation in secondary school settings is much more group and community-centered than in other courses students experience (Rawlings & Espelage, 2020). Music classes often work toward a team goal, such as a concert or performance, requiring students to work together much more frequently than other classes. A music teacher should build a community where communal or pedagogical standards do not interfere with the learning and contributions of LGBTQ+ music students.

Personal Background

My earliest recollection of not being attracted to girls was when I was young, probably around seven or eight. I distinctly recall being called a "fag" in the fourth grade, but I had no idea that it was derogative or demeaning in any way. Although this event occurred circa 1996, Kosciw et al. (2022) reported that 89.9% of LGBTQ+ students heard such types of homophobic name-calling or remarks. When I went home and nonchalantly recounted my experience to my parents, they were infuriated and called the school. This aggressive response led me to assume that something horrible had happened, and my parents later explained that a fag is a word to describe

a boy who likes other boys. Before this experience, I did not know there was a word to describe this kind of relationship, and at this point, my only reference for the orientation was the word "fag," and I associated that word with my parents' angry reaction. Therefore, I learned the derogatory slur before hearing the word "gay." Unfortunately, my parents did not explain that being gay was acceptable; instead, the implication was that being gay was something about which to be angry. All I knew was that I liked boys, so I must be a fag, which is a terrible thing to be.

Although I acknowledged these feelings from a young age, I hid them through my adolescence, and I would engage in "beard" relationships and date girls to conceal my sexual orientation. Throughout my teenage years, I dated several girls, often for long periods, but I still knew it was for naught. Additionally, I buried myself in my music-making and participating in various music ensembles. Bry et al. (2017) describe such behavior as hypervigilance, which is increased attentiveness to one's surroundings or heightened awareness to preserve the current situation. Although my directors were kind, knowledgeable, and inspiring, I do not remember any instance of making me feel safe because of my homosexual identity; instead, I felt safe because I was a student under their instruction, which every student (marginalized or not) should feel.

It was not until my sophomore year of college that I came out. I, like many, first came out as bisexual before coming out as gay. Guittar (2014) defines such disclosure trajectories as the *queer apologetic*, which occurs when the individual will "come out with an identity that differs from their internalized sexuality in an effort to be more palatable to all parties involved in coming out (family, friends, even oneself)" (p. 44). Beemyn and Rankin (2011) reported similar

findings concerning female-to-male transgender individuals who would identify as butch lesbians as it "initially satisfied their desire to date women and dress and present in more traditionally masculine ways" (p. 51-52). In both cases, there is a strategic choice in identity disclosure, whether it involves presenting as bisexual rather than homosexual or identifying as butch lesbian as a stepping stone for female-to-male transgender individuals. These instances suggest a negotiation between personal identity and societal expectations while coming out. For myself, it was easier to admit to others that I was bisexual than homosexual.

Eventually, as I became comfortable with my identity, I continued to thrive as a music education student and eventual music educator. However, it was not until many years into my teaching career that I realized my pre-service training lacked anything regarding DEIJB issues, including LGBTQ+ concerns, in the music classroom. Scholars (Jennings & Sherwin, 2008; Garret, 2012; Palkki, 2015; Silver & Goff, 2016; Garret & Spana, 2017; Palkki & Sauerland, 2019) have drawn attention to deficiencies within teacher training programs, noting a discernible lack of specific training or instructional components addressing LGBTQ+ issues. Participating in this doctoral studies program has allowed me to focus my research on meaningful topics. I became increasingly interested in identity development and the experiences of historically marginalized communities. At one point, a colleague questioned my interest in DEIJB work as I was a cis-gendered, White male. I then shifted my focus to LGBTQ+ identity development, a historically marginalized group with which I identify.

Researcher Positionality

If I were to describe my epistemological perspective at the start of my teaching career, it would have its roots in the scientific method. Although I excelled in the humanities and arts, I

intended to enter a scientific field after high school. My fascination with science caused me to take an overload of science courses in high school to fill up my schedule. Due to my schooling, this was the only way I knew how to question. I would develop a hypothesis, test it through experimentation, and draw a conclusion based on the results. This philosophy was deterministic, meaning that causes determine outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 6). A standard deterministic theory in music education during my school was that musical participation positively affects academic achievement. It was not until much later in my career that I began to explore other means of understanding knowledge. I currently identify with both constructivist and transformative worldviews. In the subsequent sections, I provide a description of each to disclose the ways that these worldviews shaped this study.

Constructivist Worldview

In a constructivist worldview:

> Human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting... Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives... [and] the primary generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8)

One of my biggest criticisms of educational trends that rely on data from standardized testing is that such exams cannot consider individual school or community cultures when interpreting data. Ideally, schools should tailor education to the sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts of the specific communities they serve. Educational practice is not a one-size-fits-all, and standardized tests perpetuate such notions. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2024b), *standardized* is "to bring into conformity with a standard especially in order to assure

consistency and regularity." Furthermore, Webster defines *a standard* as "something set up and established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality" (Merriam-Webster, 2024a). If something is standardized, it assumes everyone is the same. If something is standardized, it cannot take context into account, as one community does not have the same lived experiences as another.

Transformative Worldview

A transformative worldview is similar to a constructivist worldview. However, a transformative worldview "places central importance on the study of lives and experiences of diverse groups that have traditionally been marginalized" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 10). The transformative worldview is the antithesis of the one-size-fits-all theoretical models. For example, Garcia-Coll and colleagues (1996) developed the integrative model of human development because they did not feel past models accurately reflected marginalized communities' developmental needs and influences. According to the authors, most past developmental models were standardized to white, middle-class benchmarks, which do not necessarily reflect the sociocultural or sociohistorical contexts in which marginalized people develop (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996, p. 1894). Like Garcia-Coll and colleagues' criticism of past developmental models, I endeavor to promote educational practices away from the Eurocentric, white, middle-class status quo.

Personal Experiences Guiding a Transformative Worldview.

My inclination toward a transformative worldview has come from two places: my work in urban school settings and my identification as a gay man. When I moved to Massachusetts in 2018, I suddenly found myself in a world of teaching with which I was very uncomfortable.

Most of my students represented communities of color coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of my students had experienced significant trauma in their lives, and traumatic responses would manifest in the classroom through an inability to regulate their emotions (Jennings, 2018, p. 30). At this point in my career, I became keenly aware of trauma-informed teaching practices, and I actively worked to create a learning environment conducive to the needs of many of my students. Furthermore, I saw the needs of these students that were unique to their community. All of my previous teaching experience (white, upper-middle-class) was my status quo, and it was not until this point in my career that I began to recognize disparities in educational practices that did not serve students of color.

As a gay man, I have experienced first-hand the trauma associated with hate, bigotry, and heteronormativity. Much of my life has been an illustration of adaptive culture, which "involves a social system defined by sets of goals, values, and attitudes that differs from the dominant culture... [which] evolves from a combination of both historical forces and current demands" (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996, p. 1896). Perez-Brena et al. (2018) built upon Garcia-Coll and colleagues' definition of adaptive culture by saying that "adaptive culture is simply a collection of tools used to cope with the demands of the one's environment and these forms of coping can be adaptive or maladaptive" (p. 723). I frequently find myself adapting to fit into and be accepted by a heteronormative society which serves as a means of protection. For example, I am uncomfortable holding hands with my husband in public, I have increased anxiety when I introduce my spouse as "my husband," and I am concerned about others' perceptions of my sexuality, so I will have to "rein in" any tendencies that may identify me as a gay man to the outside world. My experiences as a marginalized community member have propelled my

research interests toward a transformative worldview because I have lived experiences that play an influential role in understanding and interpreting the world around me.

With both worldviews in mind, I am more inclined to pursue questions requiring qualitative methods. I have always been fascinated by stories and storytelling. Creswell (2013) says, "subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views. This is how knowledge is known—through the subjective experiences of people" (p. 20). Many qualitative methods allow participants to tell their stories, and through a constructivist or transformative lens, the researcher can decipher meanings and trends. To me, it is the stories, spoken directly from the originator, that matter the most. These stories allow for relevant inquiry that considers sociohistorical and sociocultural contexts. When a researcher talks to multiple people, they can examine the stories' nuances to understand the bigger picture.

Furthermore, I am fascinated by the subjective nature of qualitative data collection. Creswell (2013) states, "Different researchers embrace different realities, as do the individuals being studied and the readers of a qualitative study. When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities" (p. 20). For example, one participant may have a completely different recounting or interpretation of events, feelings, emotions, or insights from another participant. For this reason, I emphasize sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts when interpreting data. I often consider what leads individuals to different societal experiences or phenomena interpretations. Through a constructivist and transformative lens, researchers can explore the nuances of context closely to draw connections and meaning from participant experiences.

Statement of the Research Problem

The research problem examines the coming out process as the target phenomenon among adolescent LGBTQ+ music students, explicitly investigating how they perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments concerning their decision to disclose their gender or sexual identity. Pedagogical practices also include assessing the role of the student-teacher relationship in the coming out process, evaluating the efforts of music teachers in creating safe learning spaces, and analyzing the impact of educational practices on the mental health of LGBTQ+ students within these settings.

According to the Trevor Project's (2022) report on the age of sexual orientation outness and suicide risk, LGBTQ+ adolescents are disclosing their sexual or gender identity at earlier ages than other generations or age groups. According to the report, 35% of students aged 13-17 came out before 13, compared to 8% of young adults aged 18-24. In the same report, over half of youths aged 13-17 years old who came out before the age of 13 had seriously considered suicide compared to the 42% who had come out later. The report suggests that since students come out younger, they are not provided with a safe space and are likely to consider suicide as an alternative. The specific problem is that as the number of LGBTQ+ people coming out during adolescence increases, music teachers should provide a space for those under their tutelage and in their ensembles to confidently build their musical skills while also providing a space for the students to be their authentic selves. Music teachers may work to provide safe spaces for their LGBTQ+ students; however, LGBTQ+ youth may perceive their teachers' pedagogical practices as a hindrance or as supporting their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. Creating such inclusive spaces is generally examined from the perspective of sustainable well-being (Hendricks

et al., 2014; Silvera & Goff, 2016; Berman, 2017; Garrett, 2017; Palkki & Sauerland, 2019). However, a knowledge gap exists as to how those practices and strategies affect the decision of LGBTQ+ students to disclose their identities.

LGBTQ+ people have always existed in society; however, their historically marginalized identities are not necessarily phenotypical. Society at large promotes cisgendered and heteronormative standards (Wimberly & Blackburn, 2015); Goodrich, 2020), and such norms are pervasive in societal ideology (Binder & Ward, 2016). The same applies to music classrooms and the LGBTQ+ students who learn there. Traditionally, music education pedagogy promotes a cisgender, heteronormative perspective (Bergonzi, 2009; Goodrich, 2020). Therefore, the teachers should consider such practices and how they may affect LGBTQ+ students who may or may not have disclosed their LGBTQ+ identities.

By studying this problem and taking informed action, music educators might learn to create safe spaces for musical learning more skillfully. As such, LGBTQ+ music students may feel more comfortable disclosing their identity than existing in a space where pre-disclosure anxiety negatively affects their musical learning and well-being. As previously stated, over half of youth who disclose their LGBTQ+ identity before age 13 experience suicidal ideation. Additionally, the same report found that in LGBTQ+ adolescents, 75% experienced symptoms of anxiety, 61% experienced symptoms of depression, 82% wanted mental health care, and 60% wanted but did not receive mental health care (Kosciw et al., 2022). Music teachers should play their part in bringing these percentages down by examining their pedagogical practices and creating a safe space where LGBTQ+ can freely learn in their authentic identities.

LGBTQ+ adolescents are disclosing their non-conforming sexual or gender identities at earlier ages (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018) and are at higher risk of physical harassment (Plöderal et al., 2014) and mental health issues, including suicide (Kosciw et al., 2022; The Trevor Project, 2022). Music teachers should provide a safe space for their LGBQT+ students to learn while considering how their pedagogical practices may affect their students. The desired outcome is to create a safe space where LGBTQ+ students can freely learn in their authentic identities and reduce the percentage of LGBTQ+ students experiencing anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Drawing upon these considerations, concepts, and objectives, the current study explores the perceptions of LGBTQ+ music students towards music education praxis and its potential impact on their decision to reveal their non-conforming gender and/or sexual identity.

Purpose of Study

While there a significant body of literature on identity negotiation for LGBTQ+ music teachers (Panetta, 2021), there has been less focus on identity negotiation for music students. In this study, I aim to understand the perceptions of LGBTQ+ music students. Such perceptions include what students see, hear, and feel in the classroom and the emotional and psychological responses that those perceptions elicit. Specifically, this study considers music pedagogical praxis and how students' perceptions of those practices influence or hinder students' choice to disclose their sexual or gender identity. Education professionals may use the information garnered from this study to amend or reinforce current pedagogical practices in secondary music learning environments. The desire is to create secondary music learning environments where LGBTQ+ music students feel comfortable existing in their authentic identities and create systems

and practices that relieve anxiety associated with identity disclosure so that students do not sacrifice their musical learning experiences and well-being.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes significantly to understanding LGBTQ+ identity development and inform future music education pedagogical practices to create environments that foster the positive well-being of LGBTQ+ music students. Furthermore, this study will explore how music educators can create safe spaces for their LGBTQ+ students and why those spaces are necessary for positive identity development. Secondly, this study will better understand individual disclosure ("coming out") processes and how pedagogical practices in music learning environments may foster or inhibit a student's willingness to disclose their non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identity.

The Need to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ+ Youth

There has been significant contributions from scholars regarding how music teachers can meet the needs of their LGBTQ+ students (Garret, 2012; Wimberly & Blackburn, 2015; Garret & Spana, 2017; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Southerland, 2018; Goodrich, 2020) As stated, scholars have examined how individuals must meet physiological and psychological needs for learning to occur. This notion is especially true for those who identify as a historically marginalized sexual or gender identity because their marginalized status is not phenotypical. For example, research shows that homophobic actions in the music classroom may cause adverse effects on musical learning, such as creative inhibitions, poorly formed relationships, and lack of open communication between teacher and student (Bergonzi, 2009; Southerland, 2018). To a degree, LGBTQ+ people can hide their identity more skillfully than other historically marginalized

communities based on race, ethnicity, nationality, ability, and religious practices due to the non-visual nature of their identity. Contrary to this, some in the LGBTQ+ spectrum may have phenotypical indicators of their identity. For example, people who express their gender outside the male/female dichotomy or identify as transgender or non-binary may present such indicators.

The need to create safe spaces is essential for music educators to consider. If LGBTQ+ students constantly worry about disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity, then learning may be lost. As Palkki (2017) presents, there are various actionable strategies for music educators seeking to enhance the inclusion of transgender students within choral classrooms. Notably, the author provides recommendations addressing prevalent non-inclusive practices, including but not limited to reevaluating ensemble naming conventions (e.g., men's chorus), reconsidering traditional uniform requirements for performances, and modifying rehearsal language that may inadvertently marginalize transgender individuals (e.g., questioning, "Can the women sing?"). The findings of this study will provide data on potentially building safe spaces within music ensembles and classroom settings. As a music teacher, the primary goal of my classroom is to create a place where a student can feel safe and have a sense of belonging. Understanding the perceptions of LGBTQ+ students may help educators build a stronger sense of how to foster such spaces.

Understanding the Coming Out Process in Contemporary Society.

The concept and importance of coming out have always been present in traditional LGBTQ+ identity models (Cass, 1979, 1985; Coleman, 1982; D'Augelli, 1994; Rhoads, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Savin-Williams, 1998; Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999). Scholars have argued that the coming out process has changed over time (Guittar, 2014) and that the

proverbial metaphor of "coming out of the closet" is becoming much more common. Rhoads (1994) argued that most LGBTQ+ people self-disclose by the age of 21. However, since Rhoads's study, youth are coming out as LGBTQ+ at younger ages than previous generations (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Kosciw et al., 2022). As evidence of this declining age of disclosure, Grossman and D'Augelli (2006) revealed that transgender youth generally become aware of their incongruence with their assigned biological sex around the average age of 10.4 years. Subsequently, these individuals tend to disclose their non-cisgender identity at an average age of approximately 14.1 years. In a separate investigation by Gattamorta and Quidley (2018), findings indicated that the average age for disclosing a non-heterosexual identity is approximately 17.5 years. Due to this new evidence regarding rates of LGBTQ+ disclosure, teachers should be more cognizant of the needs of these students. Pre-service teacher training has historically lacked training in LGBTQ+ inclusive practices (Garret, 2012), and all teachers should adjust their practices to account for this societal shift.

In this study I provide a more robust framework for the coming out process and how it may affect teaching praxis and learning outcomes. Educators will learn how LGBTQ+ students in their music classrooms perceive their teaching practices and how those practices affect the students' choice to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, educators will understand how the disclosure process affects those in their classrooms navigating the emergence and disclosure of their LGBTQ+ identities. Such understandings will inform music educators of the process in contemporary society, especially since the stigma of disclosing LGBTQ+ identity is becoming more acceptable and mainstream.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research requires a grounding theoretical framing because the researcher can use the framework to support their claims and justify the outcomes. All stakeholders, including the participants, the research, and the audience, should be aware of the theoretical framework. This research inquiry is grounded in queer theory.

Queer Theory

Queer theory scholar Teresa de Laurentis (1991) eloquently describes a foundational belief in queer theory; that we are all different, and describing similarities and differences between LGBTQ+ experiences is increasingly difficult.

> The fact of the matter is, most of us, lesbians and gay men, do not know much about one another's sexual history, experience, fantasies, desire, or modes of theorizing. And we do not know enough about ourselves, as well, when it comes to differences between and within lesbians, and between and within gay men, in relation to race and its attendant differences of class or ethic culture, generational, geographical, or socio-political location. We do not know enough to theorize those differences. (de Laurentis, 1991, p. viii)

The primary tenet of queer theory is the challenge of the traditional splits between sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. homosexual) and sex/gender (male vs. female) and advocates for the acceptance of all sexual and gender categories as open, fluid, and non-fixed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Queer theorists subvert the conditioning established by heteronormative culture. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on how LGBTQ+ identities occur in "historical, cultural, discursive and relational locations" (Watson, 2005, p. 74). Bergonzi et al. (2016) share this sentiment, saying that "queer theory is more useful as a problematizing lens on cultural contexts"

(p. 11). Therefore, queer theory is most useful when employed as a critical tool for analyzing and questioning sociocultural contexts, bringing attention to complexities, challenges, and issues within cultural expressions, encouraging nuanced and critical examination of various aspects related to gender, sexuality, and identity.

In the case of this study, queer theory will provide the basis for understanding the coming out process. Queer theorists denounce any form of Cartesian dualism. Everything, including sexuality and gender, exists on a spectrum. People are not heterosexual or homosexual; they are not cisgender or transgender. There is an infinite spectrum of identities between the two bookends. According to Garrett (2012), "proponents of Queer Theory advocate for more fluid personal identities that defy the formality of socially constructed labels. The main goal of this postmodern theory is to question the basis for identity labels and disrupt hegemonic norms that can lead to discrimination" (p. 56). As such, queer theory supports the idea of flexible and less rigid personal identities that challenge the strict categorization imposed by socially constructed labels. The same is true for experiences with the disclosure of those identities. The coming out process is unique to the individual; therefore, coming out cannot be generalized amongst the entire LGBTQ+ population. However, each story exists on the "coming out spectrum" to understand better what LGBTQ+ people experience during the process. In essence, queer theory aims to encourage a more open and inclusive understanding of identities beyond conventional societal constraints.

As such, queer theory will be the primary framework through which the data will be analyzed and interpreted. I will carefully consider the data as existing alongside heteronormative and gender normative standards, and I must account for the historical power that heteronormative

and gender normative ideology has historically pervaded academic and societal thought. In this study I strive to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ music students in secondary music learning environments under the premise that sexuality and gender are significant components to investigate.

Research Questions

In this study, I used the following research questions to guide this dissertation:

1. What are the various ways adolescent LGBTQ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments that are related to their decision to disclose their gender or sexual identity?
2. Does the relationship between the music student and the teacher play a role in the coming out process, as perceived by the LGBTQ+ student? What do LGBTQ+ music students report to be the role of the music teacher to be in creating a safe space for learning if and when a student discloses their gender or sexual identity?
3. What are LGBTQ+ music students' beliefs and perceptions in terms of how well pedagogical practices in music learning environments help support their mental health?

Given the scarcity of research exploring the impact of music educational pedagogical practices on the decisions of LGBTQ+ music students to disclose their identities, a quantitative research design could be constraining. The decision to disclose may be influenced by various factors, suggesting a need for a more nuanced approach. Consequently, a qualitative phenomenological study was employed to unveil insights and cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary trends in pedagogical practices actively shape LGBTQ+ disclosures.

Overview of Research

A phenomenological qualitative study explores the shared significance individuals attribute to their lived experiences of a specific concept or phenomenon. The study focused on current secondary school students (aged 14-18) or those who had graduated within three years of study participation. To be eligible, participants had to have engaged in music instruction and disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity during their secondary school years. The inclusion criteria allowed for diversity in LGBTQ+ identities and encompassed various non-heterosexual and non-cisgender backgrounds. Further details on the study design are available in Chapter III.

Definition of Terms

- **Ally** - An ally is a person who does not identify as LGBTQ+ but supports the LGBTQ+ community (Human Rights Campaign, 2022).
- **Cisgender** - The term cisgender is used to describe a person whose gender identity conforms to their sex assigned at birth (Human Rights Campaign, 2022).
- **Coming Out** - To "come out" means to share one's gender identity or sexual orientation with others, which typically occurs after the person acknowledges and accepts such identities for themselves (Human Rights Campaign, 2022). Guittar (2014) describes three types of coming out: self-disclosure, disclosure to friends and family, and full disclosure. The latter implies that the individual is openly and publicly living their authentic identity.
- **Gendernormativity** - The idea that cisgender identity dictates acceptable gender identity and expression while favoring traditional gender roles and norms (Browne, 2022).

- **Heteronormativity** - The reinforcement of heterosexuality and the heterosexual lifestyle and how such underpinnings bias societal norms (Bergonzi, 2009).
- **Homophobia** - Homophobia represents negative sentiments toward homosexuality or those who identify or are perceived to be LGBTQ+ (Rawlings & Espelage, 2020). Wimberly et al. (2015) argue that "homophobia is the more explicit form of oppression [compared to heteronormativity] related to LGBTQ" (p. 90) populations.
- **LGBTQ+** - "LGBTQ, one currently popular acronym for sexual-minority identities, stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer" (Southerland, 2018, p. 41) with a "+" sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community" (Human Rights Campaign, 2022).
    - LGB - refers to sexual orientation
    - T - refers to gender identity not matching their biological sex or sex assigned at birth.
    - Q - refers to queer, a historically derogatory slur which the LGBTQ+ community has reappropriated to apply to individuals whose identities move beyond simple categories of gender and sexual orientation." (Southerland, 2018, p. 41).
- **Pedagogy** - Knapp (2021) defines pedagogy as "the interaction of the teacher with the physical classroom, and between the teacher and students" (p. 17).
- **Safe Space** - A safe space is "a place in which students feel welcome expressing traits that define them as 'other.'" (Palkkki & Caldwell, 2018, p. 29). The teacher and youth co-create a psychological sense of community or connectedness (Rawlings & Espelage, 2020, p. 1241).

While the preceding list of terms describes general vocabulary that is important to this study, the list below explains specific words that the participants of this study used to define their identities:

- **Aroace** - A colloquial term for those who identify as aromantic and asexual, meaning they experience little to no romantic or sexual attraction to others (Antonsen et al., 2020).
- **Gay** - In a broader context, the term "gay" encompasses individuals who experience romantic, emotional, or sexual attraction to members of the same gender (Human Rights Campaign, 2022). However, for this study, participants exclusively utilized the term "gay" to denote a male participant's identification with an attraction to other males.
- **Genderfluid** - Individuals who identify as gender fluid diverge from adherence to a singular, immutable gender identity and manifest a fluid or non-fixed expression of gender (Human Rights Campaign, 2022). Cayari et al. (2021) argue that there is a component of gender expression as it may include both masculine and feminine characteristics.
- **Lesbian** - This term denotes an individual who experiences romantic, emotional, or sexual attractions exclusively or predominantly towards individuals of the same gender, mainly focusing on women who are attracted to other women (Human Rights Campaign, 2022).
- **Non-binary** - Individuals who identify as non-binary do not solely align themselves with the categories of male or female; instead, their identity exists somewhere along the

spectrum between the traditional male and female distinctions (Human Rights Campaign, 2022)

- **Queer** - The term "queer" possesses a historical origin as a derogatory slang expression (Bergonzi et al., 2016). Nevertheless, within the LGBTQ+ community, there has been a reclamation process, transforming the term into one of empowerment (Garrett, 2012). The conceptualization of "queer" aligns with the principle articulated by Watson (2005), wherein the term functions as a means of figuratively "turning inside out," thereby challenging conventional norms and redefining societal perceptions by juxtaposing the natural with the contrived.
- **Transwoman/Transman** - These terms pertain to gender identities that diverge from the sex assigned to an individual at birth. For instance, a trans woman was initially assigned male at birth but identifies with a female gender (Palkki, 2017). It is crucial to note that these terms do not inherently convey or define a specific sexual orientation, as emphasized by the Human Rights Campaign (2022).
- **Transfemme** - This term encompasses both gender identity and expression, referring to individuals whose gender identity aligns with femininity, particularly among transgender individuals who express themselves in a feminine manner (Cayari et al., 2021).

Summary

In this study, I aim to understand current pedagogical practices in contemporary music instruction and how those practices affect LGBTQ+ music students to disclose their LGBTQ+ identities. Much of the previous literature focuses on creating inclusive classroom environments and how such environments may affect the emotional well-being of LGBTQ+ music students.

However, a knowledge gap exists in how such practices might specifically affect a student's decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identities. The findings from this study may serve multiple constituents, including music educators, DEIJB coordinators, curriculum designers, and school administration.

There will be four additional chapters. Chapter II is a comprehensive review of the literature regarding LGBTQ+ identity development, the disclosure process, current trends in general, and music education regarding LGBTQ+ students in the classroom. Chapter III will provide a comprehensive overview of the research design and outline specific details regarding the implementation of the study. Chapter IV will present the research results, and Chapter V will include an interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter I provide an overview of scholarship pertinent to the coming-out process and pedagogical practices, including creating safe spaces, inclusive curriculum, and relational trust amongst LGBTQ+ music students. The first section of the review will provide a chronological overview of LGBTQ+ identity models, beginning with Cass's (1979) study, as that study provides a point of reference for most future models. The second section will explore literature regarding LGBTQ+ issues in current education practices, with a subsection explicitly devoted to those issues in music education. This section will also provide a systematic review of the literature examining LGBTQ+ students' experiences with the concept of safe spaces and scholarship regarding the role of relational trust between educator and student in disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Overview of Developmental Models

The purpose of the subsequent section is to provide a chronological overview of scholarship regarding LGBTQ+ identity development. Although homosexuality dates back to ancient times, the term *homosexual* was coined in Western society in 1868 by sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrich, and by 1880 academics used the term *heterosexuality* in scholarly writing (Endres, 2015). These bookends of human sexuality encompass a boundless spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities. Since the terms' coinage, scholars of LGBTQ+ studies have sought to comprehend the development of the LGBTQ+ identity.

Sexual Identity Development Models

To better understand contemporary notions of identity development in modern LGBTQ+ populations, it is essential to examine the foundational models of sexual minority identity

development. Troiden (1989) argues that many of the models regarding homosexual identity formation follow very similar patterns of growth. Troiden lists five commonalities between such models:

1. Nearly all models suggest that the formation of non-heterosexual identities unfolds within a context of societal stigma.
2. These identities evolve gradually, often conceptualized as progressing through distinct stages.
3. There is a process of coming to terms with the label "homosexual."
4. The journey of revealing one's sexual orientation involves various stages of disclosure.
5. There is an increase in social interaction with other individuals who identify as non-heterosexual.

In summary, the journey of non-heterosexual identity development is complex and multi-layered, deeply embedded within a societal context marked by stigma. It encompasses a gradual process of self-acceptance, strategic disclosure, and enhanced community connection, all pivotal in navigating the nuances of sexual identity formation.

Cass

An early pioneer of LGBTQ+ identity research was Vivienne Cass (1979), who proposed a six-stage identity development model. This model is the cornerstone of LGBTQ+ identity development. However, it is essential to note that Cass's original study developed from analyzing the experiences of gay men and lesbians. Therefore, it may not apply to the orientations and identities outside those constraints. The first three stages of Cass's model are introspective, whereby the individual examines their identity within a more personal scope. Cass calls the first

stage *identity confusion*, where there is a misalignment between how the individual perceives themselves as heterosexual and their realization of potential same-sex attraction. The second stage, called *identity comparison*, concerns the individual's acceptance of having a homosexual orientation accompanied by potential feelings of ostracization. The third stage is called *identity tolerance*. During this stage, the individual self-discloses their orientation. A decrease in identity confusion often accompanies the act of self-disclosure, and the individual explores emotional, social, and sexual needs. Additionally, the individual tends to seek out contacts in the LGBTQ+ community.

During the last three stages of Cass's model, the individual's identity tends to dilate to encompass larger societal constructs. The fourth stage is called *identity acceptance*, where the individual increases their contact with the gay and lesbian community while potentially still perceiving exclusion from the heterosexual community. Frequently, the individual will attempt to fit into both the heterosexual and non-heterosexual worlds. Cass calls the penultimate stage *identity pride*, wherein the individual no longer adapts to fit into a heteronormative world. Activism sometimes accompanies this stage. The final stage is *identity synthesis.* The person moves away from the "us versus them" mentality and acknowledges that the incongruity between the two worlds is not as clear-cut as once considered. The person synthesizes personal and public views of self, and sexual identity becomes less important as the sexual identity integrates into all other aspects of self.

Later, the author tested the model (Cass, 1984) to assess the validity of several critical components of the previously proposed model. Cass supported some of the six stages she previously outlined; however, the results found unclarity between stages 1-2 and 5-6, implying

that the model more accurately represents four stages rather than six. However, Cass argued that there is, in fact, distinguishability between all six stages and that the scoring guide to the instrument may have yet to measure the differences between the stages fully. Additionally, Cass provides the continued assertion that "homosexual identity occurs step-by-step over a period of time" (p. 165).

Although the Cass (1979; 1984) model has provided the cornerstone of LGBTQ+ identity development scholarship, it is not without criticism. Kaufman and Johnson (2004) argue that the model is no longer valid due to multiple contemporary factors. First, the framework fails to account for sociocultural elements that affect the formation of identity. Second, social stigma and approaches to dealing with it have shifted since the framework was established. Third, the sequential design of the framework implies that individuals who do not follow its prescribed stages may not be regarded as well-adjusted within the queer community.

Coleman

Coleman (1982) expanded upon the frameworks of Cass and her contemporaries. Coleman posits five linear stages: pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships, and integration. In the pre-coming out stage, individuals become aware of their non-heterosexual feelings. Coleman asserts that "most individuals in this stage would never reveal themselves to anyone" (p. 472), and they often dismiss the notions. In the coming out stage, the person discloses their non-heterosexual identity to someone else. At this stage, Coleman asserts that acceptance or rejection plays a significant role in the developmental trajectory of the individual. The third stage, exploration, involves the individual experimenting with their identity and contacting others in the community. The fourth stage involves participation in non-heterosexual

relationships. Coleman asserts that the prerequisite for this stage is for the individual to accept that they can give and receive love from another. Coleman's final stage is called integration, whereby the individual becomes confident in maintaining long-term committed relationships. Cass (1984) criticized models such as Coleman's as she argued that models with limited stages might "offer too narrow conception of the developmental process" (p. 164).

Troiden

Regardless of Cass's concerns about such limited generalizations, Troiden (1989) articulates and advances a four-stage model of homosexual identity formation, which integrates and refines components of antecedent frameworks. In the initial stage, termed "Sensitization," Troiden extends and elaborates upon the constructs introduced by Plummer (1975), providing a foundation for subsequent phases. During this initial stage, LGBTQ+ individuals "acquire social experiences during their childhood that serve later as bases for seeing homosexuality as personally relevant" (p. 50). In this stage, Troiden describes feelings of marginalization and perceptions of their sexual attraction being different from that of their peers. Troiden emphasizes the meanings attached to the experiences rather than the meaningful experiences themselves.

The second stage, designated as "identity confusion," incorporates and adapts theoretical perspectives from Plummer and Cass (1979), signifying a synthesis of prior academic discourse. In Troiden's model, this particular stage is situated within adolescence, wherein individuals commence a contemplative process concerning the notion that their emotions, behaviors, or a combination thereof might indicate a homosexual orientation. Troiden cites stigma, ignorance, and inaccurate knowledge as primary contributions to identity confusion. Additionally, Troiden argues that individuals will adopt one or more of the following "stigma-management strategies"

(p. 59) when dealing with their feelings: denial, repair, avoidance, redefinition, and acceptance. Several of these strategies are also present in the Cass model.

The progression into the third and fourth stages, labeled identity assumption and commitment, respectively, reflects a further elaboration and consolidation of Cass's theoretical contributions. In the third stage, individuals adopt the homosexual label, but they may adopt "stigma-evasion strategies" (p. 61) before ultimately accepting themselves as homosexual. In the fourth stage, individuals "adopt homosexuality as a way of life" (p. 61). Through this integrative approach, Troiden not only constructs a comprehensive model of homosexual identity formation but also situates his work within a broader scholarly context, acknowledging and building upon the foundational theories of Plummer and Cass.

It is important to note that Troiden developed his model at the height of the AIDS epidemic. Troiden explains that the AIDS epidemic "may delay homosexual identity formation (at least among males) because it has amplified the stigma surrounding homosexuality" (p. 69). Troiden first addresses the impact of AIDS in the third stage, saying that individuals may have been less likely to experience sexual experimentation due to the possibility of infection.

D'Augelli

Like the Cass model, D'Augelli's (1994) identity development model requires individuals to progress through six predetermined stages. The first stage occurs when the individual exits their heterosexual identity through personal and social recognition of their non-heterosexual orientation. Second, the individual develops a personal identity with their non-heterosexual orientation wherein they begin to mold their non-heterosexuality within the constructs of their proximal environment or community. Third, the individual develops their social identity by

creating a large and varied set of people who know their orientation and can provide social support. Fourth, the individual discloses their orientation to their family before the fifth stage of developing intimate relationships. Finally, the individual enters the non-heterosexual community prepared to confront the current social stigma or political barriers that are present.

As previously stated, one of the main criticism of Cass's model is that it does not allow individuals to move through the stages depending on their current sociocultural contexts (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). However, D'Augelli purposefully accounts for such criticisms through *developmental plasticity*, which "suggests that human functioning is highly responsive to environmental circumstances and to changes induced by physical and other biological barriers" (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 320). The model also weighs the importance of recognizing the inter-individual differences in the development of intra-individual behavior while criticizing past models' ability to recognize the individual's embodiment and the personal role of their development. These statements suggest that LGBTQ identities are not fixed or predetermined but are highly responsive circumstances outside of the individual's sphere of influence. The previously discussed model by Troiden (1989) directly illustrates D'Augelli's presumption when explaining how the AIDS epidemic may have directly impacted the identity development of LGBTQ+ people.

McCarn & Fassinger

McCarn & Fassinger (1996) argued that previous well-known models (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982) need to account for the paramount distinction between personal and social identity. The proposed model consists of four stages; however, the model associates respective layers with individual development and group membership. The stages of the two layers have the

same theme, but the lens through which the theme applies depends on the individual or group mentality. The first stage (Awareness) involves the individual perceiving themself as different from others (individual) while they become aware of different sexual orientations (group membership). The second stage (Exploration) involves the investigation of feelings of non-heterosexual attraction (individual) while exploring one's position in non-heterosexual culture (group membership). The third stage (Deepening/Commitment) occurs when there is an internalized sense of identity (individual) while there is more personal involvement with the non-heterosexual community (group membership). Finally, the individual enters the Internalization/ Synthesis phase, where they incorporate their sexual identity into their overall identity (individual) and identifies as a group member across contexts (group membership).

Later, Fassinger expanded the model, arguing that although the individual and group models exist within the same framework, they are "reciprocal and perhaps mutually catalytic, are not necessarily simultaneous" (Fassinger & Miller, 1997, p. 59). Accordingly, individuals may develop their non-heterosexual identity at a different rate than their group identity. Additionally, this model prefers the term *phases* over the term *stages*, implying greater "flexibility and circularity" (p. 56). The idea of such motion is similar to D'Augelli's (1994) notion of developmental plasticity. Such concepts account for an individual's capacity or need to repeat phases as new sociocultural contexts arise.

Rhoads

Rhoads (1997) published an ethnographic study of LGBTQ+ college students seeking to examine the experiences of gay and bisexual college males by examining a subcultural analysis of diverse experiences in an attempt to "resist the tendency towards monolithic portals of

‘homosexual’ identity" (pp. 460-461) and to encourage dialogue regarding the practicality of such models. Rhoads emphasizes societal context and social interactions as primary catalysts for LGBTQ+ identity development. Unlike previous scholars, such an emphasis also provides context for LGBTQ+ people of color who may face different sociocultural experiences and, thus, develop their LGBTQ+ identities in differing contexts than their white peers.

Additionally, Rhoads argues against previously accepted models by arguing that models like Cass’s suggest that LGBTQ+ individuals should address, through assimilation, their negative attitudes and develop a less radicalized sense of identity. Rhoads argues that past developmental models overlook the fact that some people may prefer to uphold a strong sense of pride and even experience anger as a response to social inequities, with the models’ downfall being that they imply and suggest a tendency for LGBTQ+ individuals to assimilate, indicating the expectation for them to adhere to prevailing societal norms. This viewpoint may devalue the contributions of dedicated individuals who challenge social and cultural norms, proposing that some level of assertiveness could be advantageous in fostering change.

Dubé & Savin-Williams

Like Rhoads, Dubé and Savin-Williams (1999) criticized the past two decades of research regarding LGBTQ+ identity models for two primary reasons. The first is that previous models suggest universal and age-based milestones, and the second is that past models do not account for ethnicity in LGBTQ+ identity development. This study utilized gay men and recorded the age at which the participant achieved each of the five typical sexual identity milestones (awareness, sex with a male, self-labeling, disclosure, and relationship). The authors compared the responses to the participants' self-identified ethnicity (White, African American, Latino, Asian American).

Furthermore, the study divided participants into two identity development tracks: (a) sex before identification and (b) identification before sex. In the first track, the individual would engage in non-heterosexual sex before identifying as non-heterosexual, and the second is vice versa. The study found that African American and White men were more likely to engage in homosexual sex before identifying as homosexual compared to Latino and Asian American participants. This racial difference may account for varying sociocultural expectations or norms within different racial demographics in American culture.

Exploring contemporary LGBTQ+ identity development encompasses an analysis of foundational models, beginning with Cass (1979), who provided the foundational six-stage model emphasizing the pervasive societal stigma surrounding non-heterosexual identities, a gradual progression through distinct stages, the process of reconciling with the label "homosexual," stages of disclosure, and increased social interaction within the LGBTQ+ community. Coleman's model expands on Cass's framework, introducing five linear stages, while Troiden's model integrates and refines elements from previous frameworks, highlighting the influence of cultural and societal contexts on homosexual identity formation. D'Augelli's six-stage model emphasizes developmental plasticity, acknowledging the high responsiveness of human functioning to environmental circumstances. McCarn and Fassinger propose a four-stage model, distinguishing between personal and social identity development, with Fassinger later highlighting the reciprocal and potentially non-simultaneous nature of individual and group identity development. Rhoads challenges traditional models, emphasizing societal context and social interactions as primary catalysts for LGBTQ+ identity development, critiquing assimilation expectations. Dubé and Savin-Williams critique past research suggesting universal

milestones and overlooking ethnicity in LGBTQ+ identity development, revealing differences in milestone timing among participants of different ethnicities and identity development tracks. However, early models are not without criticism. Despite the influential nature of Cass's model, criticisms emerge, including its limited applicability beyond gay men and lesbians, its linear structure, and a lack of consideration for sociocultural factors. Together, these models contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the diverse and evolving nature of LGBTQ+ identity development.

Gender Identity Development

It is important to this study to include a historical overview of gender identity development because the LGBTQ+ community includes the entire spectrum of gender identities. Since society has historically marginalized non-cisgendered identities, they, too, may present the opportunity to disclose their identity. Furthermore, it is essential to note that sex and gender are not identical, and some gender non-conforming individuals identify with a gender that falls outside of the traditional male/female binary (Jackson & Bussey, 2022). This section overviews four traditional perspectives of gender identity development: psychodynamic theory, symbolic interactionism, social learning theory, and cognitive learning theory.

Psychodynamic Theory

In psychodynamic theory, Freud emphasized the role of gender identity development on familial connections and relationships, particularly that of the child-mother relationship. According to Freud, gender schema develops during the phallic stage, roughly between the ages of three and five, when boys identify with their fathers and girls identify with their mothers. However, scholars have criticized Freud’s theory highlighting the "uncertain testability of control

claims concerning development and overemphasis on childhood sexuality" (Miller, 2011, p. 138). Due to the overemphasis on childhood experiences, psychodynamic theory may ignore sociocultural elements of identity development.

Scholars may consider Winnicott's (1953) theory as psychodynamic because it shares fundamental principles and concerns with the broader psychodynamic perspective, especially in its emphasis on the internal processes, the unconscious mind, and early development stages influencing later personality and emotional well-being. Scholars have explored two concepts developed by Winnicott (1953) to develop an understanding of transgender identity development.

The first concept is Winnicott's theory of transitional objects, which Winnicott argues are objects, usually blankets and soft toys, to which young children develop attachments. Hansbury (2005) argues that the body under transition may qualify as a transitional object because following the transition, a transgender individual "must let go of childish things - that lost perfection that cannot, and must not, be recovered" (p. 29). This statement implies that part of the transition involves relinquishing the idea of a perfect, immutable body that may have been idealized or expected in childhood. Instead, the individual must come to terms with the reality of their body as it is and embrace their authentic identity, even if it diverges from societal or personal ideals.

Bailey (2023), however, criticizes Hansbury's notion that transgender bodies are comparable to transitional objects. Bailey's first criticism is that this theory regards the trans body as something disposable, which "leaves trans folks no healthy option to relate to their body outside of total dissociation" (p.3). Second, Bailey criticizes the language ("pre" and "post" when regarding transition) used as essentialist and representative of Western paradigms, thus forcing a

linear narrative. Bailey argues that the emphasis on linear modeling does not account for the myriad of experiences within the trans community. This criticism is similar to the critiques of sexual orientation identity development as previously discussed. However, the most significant criticism of the theory is that for a trans body to be considered a transitional object, the individual has ownership of when to change the relationship with said object. However, Bailey asserts that during puberty, changes in the transgender body occur without the individual's consent.

The second of Winnicott's concepts that explored by scholars is the notion of true and false selves (Winnicott, 1960). The premise is that one's "true self" refers to an individual's authentic, spontaneous, and genuine sense of self, while the "false self" develops as a defense mechanism in response to environmental demands and expectations. Bailey (2023) contends that there exist parallels between Winnicott's notion of the "false self" and the developmental trajectory of transgender identity. These parallels encompass an emphasis on childhood relationships and a fixation on realizing the "true self."

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism, as postulated by George Herbert Mead (1934), revolves around the centrality of communication. Mead suggests four stages of development: impulse, perception, manipulation, and completion. Although its original formulation did not explicitly focus on elucidating gender development, its relevance becomes evident. Even though the acquisition of gender identity occurs through communicative processes within cultural settings, communication becomes paramount in shaping and disseminating such societal messages. For instance, when young girls receive directives such as "be nurturing and caring" or caretakers instruct boys to

"take charge of the situation," gender socialization unfolds through symbolic messages. In essence, the linguistic symbols conveyed through interpersonal interactions contribute significantly to constructing gender identities, delineating the expected behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity.

Abidin and Djabbar (2019) studied the identity development of transgender women in Indonesia, known as *waria*, under the lens of symbolic interactionism. The authors found that participants would progress through the four stages outlined by Mead. In the impulse stage, the participants react to stimuli like stigma and social exclusion. In the perception stage, the participants would negotiate the reduction of stigma and social exclusion while not placing themselves or others in danger. In the manipulation stage, the participant would respond to the stigma and social marginalization through conditional neglect and procrastination. In the final phase, after examining various options, the participant chose not to disclose their existence. The authors concluded that transgender women's perception of social exclusion contributes to a delay in their public acknowledgment of their existence.

Abidin and Djabbar also criticize symbolic interactionism about the transgender experience. They say that "transgender social interaction with the community is a form of communication mediated by symbols that have different bases" (p. 209). Therefore, society's general understandings regarding sex and gender are opposed to those of transgender women. Thus, the authors argue that this conflict in understanding creates a natural barrier to social cohesion between the two groups.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory emphasizes socialization, wherein society strives to instill in children behavioral norms aligning with the societal construct of idealized adulthood within a specific cultural schema. Furthermore, gender development "flows from the interaction of intrapersonal, behavioral, and social influences iteration within the societal systems composed of parents, peers, teachers, mass media, and various institutions" (Miller, 2011, p. 249). As such, society socializes children to receive praise when they engage in culturally appropriate behavior while being punished if they do not.

In their study, Rodgers et al. (2023) confirmed the principles of social learning theory by investigating how individuals confront the internalization of gender norms through gender resocialization. This process encompasses initiatives such as promoting gender equity in sports, embracing various forms of gender expressions and identities, and facilitating the open articulation and expression of these societal concerns. Previously, this dissertation provided context for the work of Rhoads (1997), who utilized aspects of social learning theory. Rhoads argues that the identity development of LGBTQ+ people involves an intricate intertwinement of culture and identity. Roads describe social interaction as the "vehicle through which culture and identity become so interwoven" (p. 462).

Cognitive Learning Theory

In contrast to Social Learning theory, which hinges on external reinforcements and consequences, Cognitive Learning theory, as articulated by Kohlberg (1966), posits that children undergo gender development at individualized rates. This model suggests that children become aware of their gender identity around three, but they do not perceive it as relatively stable until

they are between five and seven years old. This conceptualization of gender identity furnishes children with a cognitive framework or schema, comprising observed or verbalized rules governing social and cultural interactions. Consequently, this framework serves as an organizational structure for their behaviors and those of their peers. As children progress in age, they actively seek role models to emulate expressions of maleness or femaleness within the parameters of their evolving gender schema. As such, individuals play a more active role in gender identity development (Jackson & Bussey, 2022), as compared to Social Learning Theory, which relies more heavily on external sources.

Olson et al. (2015) conducted a study with thirty-two transgender children to impact the discussion of gender cognition among transgender youth. The author's rationale was to understand if the children were experiencing confusion, delay, or pretense and if their expressed gender authentically reflected their genuine identity; they would anticipate their responses to align with control participants in self-report assessments and implicit measures. The authors found that there was precise alignment between the transgender children and their expressed gender because when matched based on gender identity, their responses were identical to those of the two cisgender control groups. This work is significant because it contrasts "the assumption that transgender children are simply confused by the questions at hand, delayed, pretending, or being oppositional" (p. 473).

Fast and Olson (2018) examined the role of gender constancy in preschool-aged children who had undergone what they call "social transition" (p. 620), whereby the child had changed the social indicators of their gender, such as name, pronouns, and other indicators of gender expression. The authors found that most children stated that their gender would be unchanged as

adults. This concept illustrates Kohlberg's notion of gender stability. Fast and Olson also examined gender consistency and found that most children defined their genders as unchanging across all aspects of their lifetimes (including early childhood and infancy). Gender stability, understood between the ages of three and a half to four and a half, is the awareness that one's gender and that of others remains constant over time. Gender stability evolves into gender constancy by age six when children grasp that external appearances do not alter an individual's gender—for example, understanding that a male child wearing a dress remains a male child (Goldberg & Beemyn, 2021).

The work outlined in the previously mentioned studies (Olson et al., 2015; Fast & Olson, 2018) is significant because their findings show that transgender identity development is comparable to the gender identity development of their cis-gender peers. However, Jackson and Bussey (2022) state that this work is not without criticism as it has illustrated a lack of attention to nonbinary gender identity development. They also continue to criticize cognitive learning theory as it has historically excluded transgender identity,

Coming Out

The process of recognizing and eventually disclosing one’s non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identity ("coming out") is often a paramount step in the identity development process. Early scholars such as Cass (1984) and Troiden (1989) included the coming out process within their identity models as a critical indicator of identity development, saying that, on average, disclosure to non-gay friends occurs at 23 for women and 23 to 28 for men. Rhoads (1994) worked on the premise established by past research that "many, if not most, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people self-disclose by age 21" (p. 78), arguing that the coming out process is often

two-tracked. The first is the act of disclosure, which is the point from which the individual begins a positive developmental trajectory. The second, the act of self-disclosure, "may be seen as opposition to a normalizing society and culture that frames homosexuality as deviant" (p.79). Most models of LGBTQ+ identity development include a stage or phase first involving self-disclosure of one's sexual or gender identity. It is during this phase that the individual comes to terms with and admits to themselves their non-heterosexual orientation. At some point after this moment during their developmental trajectory, the individual will disclose their non-heterosexual identity to someone else. The table below indicates where self-disclosure and interpersonal disclosure occur according to previously described foundational models.

There is notable variation in self-disclosure depending on the model. Notably, Coleman (1982) and D'Augelli (1994) indicate that self-disclosure occurs in the first stage of their models, Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989) place the event near the midpoint, and Savin-Williams near the end. Notably, disclosure is not an indicator of developmental progression in Fassinger's model. Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull (2019) argue that the act of disclosure is not simply a one-time occurrence and argue that it is "complex, interactional, and largely influenced by others" (p. 1158). The authors state that the act of disclosing one's gender identity involves three spheres of navigation: others' gender expectations, others' reactions, and the threat of violence. Participants in this study expressed a form of code-switching wherein they would alter their gender presentation based on the expectations and perceptions of others. Secondly, the perceived reaction of others frequently impacted the decision to disclose. For some, the threat of violence significantly influenced their decision to disclose.

Scholars have identified numerous constructs as potential impediments to the process of disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity. For non-heterosexual identities, Troiden (1989) found that there was a direct effect of the AIDS epidemic on the decision to disclose, especially among gay males. Troiden argued that younger gay males and lesbians may defer disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity due to the societal stigmatization of the AIDS epidemic. The threat of violence is common in other studies around LGBTQ+ identity disclosure. For example, Plöderal et al. (2014) found that those who disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity at an earlier age often faced more violence than those who did at an older age. This finding is similar to that of D'Augelli et al. (2005).

Since Rhoads's study, other scholars have found that sexual (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018) and gender (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011) diverse youth are disclosing their non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identities at younger ages than before. In Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez's study, the authors explored the coming out experiences of Latinx young adults in South Florida. In their interview process, they found that the median age of first disclosure was 17.15 years old while providing context for the intersectionality of participants' identities.

While Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez found a decreased median age for the disclosure of non-heterosexual sexual orientations, Grossman and D'Augelli (2006) studied transgender youth. The authors found that transgender youth first became aware of their non-correspondence to their biological sex at the average age of 10.4 years old and the average age of disclosure of their non-cisgender identity at an average age of 14.1 years old.

What factors affect a person's decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity? Scholars have studied the role of age, religious affiliation, geographic location, home, workplace, and school settings. Schope (2002) studied levels of disclosure among various age groups in various settings. Schope found that the younger generation was more likely to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity, with over one-third of participants being "very open, at school. However, that also means that two-thirds of the participants were somewhat or not open in school. Schope found that respondents were the most closeted at school compared to other settings such as parents, siblings, friends, workplaces, or neighborhoods.

Similar to Grossman and D'Augelli, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) conducted a significant study of the lives of transgender people. Their study found that the mean age of recognizing a differing gender identity was 5.4 years old. This finding is congruent with Kohlberg's (1966) suggestion that gender consistency, or the belief that one's gender will not change, between the ages of five and seven. However, the authors also argue that if participants did not begin to question their gender identities during childhood, it would occur during the onset of puberty during adolescence when their changing bodies created increasing feelings of dysmorphia. Participants in the younger age groups of this study typically disclosed their transgender identity before their twenties. However, a significant percentage of participants in their older age groups did not consider they might be transgender until they were at least forty years old. Beemyn and Rankin attribute lacking access to the internet, writings on transgender people, or coverage of popular culture as attributing to the discrepancy in the coming out processes between age groups.

LGBTQ+ Issues in Classroom Contexts

Bergonzi (2015) explains that there are three popular misconceptions around the discussion of gender and sexual diversity in school systems. The first is that the mere reference to sexual and gender minorities is akin to teaching about sexual behaviors and advances the clandestine "gay agenda." The second misconception is that teaching topics regarding LGBTQ+ issues is not the job of an educator, and more troubling that it is not a topic that belongs in schooling. The primary issue with this misconception is that it inherently asks schools to adopt a policy of blindness regarding gender and sexual diversity. Florida's "Parental Rights in Education Act" (2022) operationalizes such a policy. Finally, Bergonzi argues that discussing or acknowledging such topics may be "misunderstood as a violation of a constitutionally protected right" (p.244), and parents argue that educational institutions have no place in childrearing.

In an earlier writing, Bergonzi (2009) states, "too often, however, high schools are developmental wastelands for youth in sexual orientation minorities" (p. 29), a profound sentiment on the lack of support that is made available to such historically marginalized communities. There are two primary studies which many scholars reference when specifically addressing LGBTQ+ issues in schools: the National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2022) funded by GLSEN and The Trevor Project's (2022) Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.

In Kosciw et al.'s (2022) report, the author's sought to examine the experiences of LGBTQ+ students regarding various measures of adverse school climate. These benchmarks include biased/homophobic remarks, feelings of lack of safety due to actual or perceived marginalized identity, absences due to feelings of unsafe, experiences of harassment or assault, and experiences of systemic discrimination through policies and practices. Furthermore, the

report examines the degree to which LGBTQ+ students can access support and resources. The Trevor Project's (2022) report on LGBTQ youth mental health provides current information on mental health and suicide risk of LGBTQ+ youth. I will provide specific information from both reports as needed in the subsequent sections.

Curriculum

Kosciw et al. (2022) provide recommendations based on the findings of the GLSEN School Climate Report, saying that "increasing student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBTQ+ people, history, and events through inclusive curricula, and library and internet resources... and move us toward a future in which all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression" (p. 26). However, as of the writing of this section, there are currently 25 bills introduced in 13 state legislatures (Alaska, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Wyoming), while 18 bills in 12 state legislatures (Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia) are advancing that aim to censor LGBTQ+-inclusive curricula (American Civil Liberties Union, 2024). One year after Florida passed House Bill 1557, the State Board of Education amended the education rules to expand non-inclusive LGBTQ+ teaching practices in the 4th through 12th grades. The updated statute says that Florida educators "Shall not intentionally provide classroom instruction to students in grades 4 through 12 on sexual orientation or gender identity unless such instruction is either expressly required by state academic standards... or is part of a

reproductive health course or health lesson for which a student's parent has the option to have his or her student not attend" (Florida State Board of Education, 2023).

Although Florida's previously mentioned "Parental Rights to Education Act" specifically addresses policies regarding LGBTQ+-inclusive practices in schools, it is not the only state legislature that has passed laws that block positive LGBTQ+ curricula and even include similar, if not identical, verbiage. Indiana's bill states, "A school, an employee or staff member of a school, or a third party vendor used by a school to provide instruction may not provide any instruction to a student in prekindergarten through grade 3 on human sexuality" (House Enrolled Act No. 1608, 2023, p. 2). Alabama passed a law (Alabama House Bill 322, 2022) that restricts the teaching of gender identity or sexual orientation in public schools for students from kindergarten to 5th grade. The law specifies that instruction on these topics should not appear "in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards" (p.2). Meanwhile, a similar bill in Arkansas (Arkansas Senate Bill 294, 2023) places restrictions on classroom instruction related to sexual orientation and gender identity before the 5th grade. Additionally, Kentucky's Senate Bill 150 (2023) prohibits the provision of any instruction or presentation that aims or intends for students to examine or explore topics related to gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, irrespective of the student's grade level. None of the state statutes outlined above provide context or guidance for what would be developmentally appropriate for particular age groups.

Other states, including Louisiana (2011 Louisiana Laws Revised Statutes Title 17 — Education RS 17:281, 2018), Mississippi (House Bill No. 1347, 2019), and Texas (Texas Health and Safety Code, 1991), currently have legislation that requires homosexuality to be discussed

negatively in sexual education curricula and laws around abstinence-only education embedded such opposing viewpoints. Section 163.002 of the Texas Health and Safety Code states that "homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under Section 21.06, Penal Code" (p. 940) even though the United States Supreme Court declared all state laws that criminalize homosexual behavior to be unconstitutional (*Lawrence vs. Texas,* 2003). The statute remains in the Texas code despite Section 21.06 becoming invalidated due to the Supreme Court decision.

The Louisiana law does not allow public schools to "utilize any sexually explicit materials depicting male or female homosexual activity" (p. 1), but it does not clarify what materials might be explicit. Texas and Oklahoma laws also require that schools within those states teach that homosexual activity is a cause of the transmission of HIV. Implementing a curriculum that singles out homosexual activity as a primary or exclusive method of HIV transmission can have significant implications for LGBTQ+ students. Such an approach risks contributing to the stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ community, reinforcing negative stereotypes, and potentially compromising the mental and emotional well-being of these students. It may create an environment of increased stress, anxiety, or feelings of exclusion, impacting their ability to fully engage in the educational process. Inclusivity and acceptance are crucial in fostering a positive learning environment, and a curriculum that lacks these qualities may not provide the educational equity that LGBTQ+ students deserve.

When discussing the curricular decisions of school systems, Bergonzi (2009) states that "curricular content in schools is decidedly heterosexual" (p. 22). This sentiment aligns with Kosciw et al. (2022) findings that a majority (71.6%) of the students surveyed reported no

representation or inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in their classes. Knapp (2021) describes this lack of inclusion as the null curriculum, or "what is taught by what educators do not teach" (p. 18). In this case, Knapp describes the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in educational settings. The term "null curriculum" suggests that by not incorporating information or discussions about LGBTQ+ issues, educators implicitly communicate that what schools do not teach students becomes as influential as what schools teach. The implication is that the omission of LGBTQ+ content may contribute to a lack of awareness, understanding, and representation for LGBTQ+ students, potentially reinforcing societal norms and marginalizing diverse perspectives within the educational environment. For instance, excluding discussions of significant events such as the Stonewall Riots or the AIDS epidemic or influential LGBTQ+ figures such as Harvey Milk would be considered part of the null curriculum. The commission sends students a message that these aspects of history are not deemed essential or relevant. The exclusion of such topics could lead to sentiments of invisibility, seclusion, or invalidation on the part of LGBTQ+ students.

Conversely, only 16.3% of students surveyed in Kosciw et al.'s (2022) report reported positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in their schools. The report found that compared to students in schools without an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, students attending schools that present an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum were less likely to hear homophobic remarks, negative remarks regarding gender expression, transphobic comments, were less likely to feel unsafe, and experience lower levels of in-person victimization related to their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity. Additionally, students were less likely to miss school, felt greater belonging, reported a higher rate of acceptance of LGBTQ+ people from their peers, and maintained higher levels of well-being.

LGBTQ+ Issues in Music Learning Environments

Why and how are students drawn to participation in music ensembles or other music learning and performance opportunities? Adderly et al. (2003) found that it was not just learning the instrument or meeting an external expectation but also a sense of value placed on the social aspects of their membership in an ensemble. The authors state, "the social climate of these ensembles is vital to each member and provides many with an outlet that they might not have had to meet others from within the larger school setting or form relationships away from the home environment that assist them in negotiating the often turbulent high school years" (p. 204). This statement emphasizes the importance of the social atmosphere within school musical or performance groups. The authors suggest that the sense of community within these ensembles is crucial for each member, and for many participants, being part of these groups serves as an essential outlet, providing an opportunity to connect with peers outside the larger school context. The relationships formed within these ensembles can be precious, offering support and companionship beyond the home environment. This sense of community is significant in helping individuals navigate the challenges often associated with high school years, which can be tumultuous for many students. In essence, the authors highlight the positive impact of these ensembles on social connections and support networks for their members.

The critical relationships and social aspects that music learning environments foster may play a role in developing LGBTQ+ identities and may account for LGBTQ+ youth's decision to participate in such activities. As such, LGBTQ+ issues in music education research are becoming more apparent. Bergonzi (2009) was the first to explicitly mention sexual orientation in the Music Educators Journal. In the article, Bergonzi explicitly depicts the experiences of LGBTQ+

students in secondary schools and activities and describes the privilege that heterosexual identity has historically held in music classrooms, including the privileges of both students and teachers. For example, Bergonzi says heterosexual music students are privileged in the following ways, including their teacher understanding adolescent romantic attraction, representation in romantic musical selections, and perceived non-discriminatory placements in music ensembles. Bergonzi cites the privileges of being a heterosexual teacher, which include speaking openly about their personal life, not often thinking about discriminatory hiring/firing practices, and having meaningful relationships with students without others questioning them.

Bergonzi also argues that one of the national music standards, "Standard 9: Understanding music in relation to history and culture", systemically embedded heteronormalcy into music education curricula. Bergonzi argued that it might seem acceptable for a teacher to discuss the heterosexual influences in the creation of a particular composition, but would the teacher be able to have the same discussion if the relationship was homosexual? Because individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ often face marginalization, artistic portrayals from historically marginalized communities can help to normalize and humanize these groups, offering insights into experiences beyond one's perspective (Hess, 2019). However, it is essential to note that the National Association of Music Education updated the standards in 2014. For example, the following standards are from the current standards for performing ensembles:

> MU: Re7.2.E.5a Identify how knowledge of context and the use of repetition, similarities, and contrasts inform the response to music [and] MU: Re8.1.E.5a Identify interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works, referring to the elements of

> music, contexts, and (when appropriate) the setting of the text. (National Association for Music Education, 2014)

The updated standards are still open-ended and could create similar dilemmas to those that Bergonzi described.

Since Bergonzi published his article, there has been an increase in research focused on LGBTQ+ issues in music education. Freer (2013) published a study that examined major journals associated with arts education, including five journals affiliated with the National Association for Music Education. Freer found no statistical significance in any increase in the publication of LGBTQ+ issues in arts education journals.

The music taught in schools may have implications once students enter adulthood. Binder and Ward (2016) published a study aimed to examine the potential impact of heterosexist media messages on young men, specifically whether exposure to such messages could lead them to evaluate a gay male job candidate more unfavorably compared to their assessments in the absence of these messages. The authors found that exposure to heterosexist messages in music can exhibit adverse effects on their evaluations of gay male job candidates across specific assessment criteria.

While Binder and Ward situate their research in post-education settings, Palkki (2015) discusses how choral classroom contexts also contain heterosexist and hypermasculine messages. One of the primary ways in which Palkki argues that the choral classroom can create heterosexist tendencies among male-identifying singers is through texts that may reinforce gender stereotypes. Additionally, to engage more male singers, teachers may include pirate songs, sea chanties, work songs, and barbershop quartets to appeal to young male singers. However, the

messages in many of these songs provide antiquated views of masculinity and gender norms. Palkki concludes the article by providing a list of bass clef repertoire, which provides text and themes that are non-heteronormative and non-misogynistic.

Transgender & Choral Participation

There has been significant research regarding the experiences of transgender students in secondary school choral classrooms (Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2017; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Finch, 2019; Palkki, 2020; Cayari et al., 2021). Transgender issues in choral music education are currently under much scrutiny because the timbre of the human voice is often associated with one's biological sex. As such, choral programs are historically rooted in gendered norms. Secondary choral programs often split into "men's" and "women's" choirs to accommodate different voice types. Directors often gender concert clothes through the use of choral dress and tuxedos. There is an overabundance of rehearsal language that emphasizes gender over voice type ("Can the women sing this passage?" rather than "Can the sopranos and altos sing this passage?"). As such, several researchers have focused on the needs and concerns of transgender students specifically in choral settings. This section outlines selected literature that address this area.

Nichols (2013) presents a narrative account of one transgender student through critical and emancipatory storytelling. The inquiry explores the events during middle school that caused the participant, Rie, to leave the public school in her hometown. Rie is home-schooled but can participate in chorus at another local school, where Rie "insisted on singing alto instead of tenor in the choir and chose feminine-styled concert clothing" (p.271). Palkki and Caldwell (2018) conducted a mixed methods survey on safe spaces for LGBQT+ students in secondary choral

environments. While the survey did encompass an array of LGBTQ+ identities, the authors did find themes that were unique to transgender students. Specifically regarding transgender students, the survey found that gendered language and uniforms were the primary methods of creating a sense of discomfort among transgender individuals.

Finch (2019) outlines three primary ways gender intersects with choral education. The first involves the role of the voice and its connection to the person's identity. Finch argues that transgender students who take hormones may experience dysphoria as their voice changes. The second point that Finch argues occurs due to physical limitations. It ties to the first point, as hormones cause changes in the vocal folds. Additionally, chest binding, a practice where one applies constrictive undergarments over the breasts, can create a physical barrier to effective singing practices. Finally, Finch argues that there are systemic issues in choral programs that may not account for the transgender experience. For example, gender-based seating arrangements, performance attire, and language are historically non-inclusive.

Palkki (2020) conducted a narrative inquiry into the experiences of three transgender students in American secondary choral programs. The primary themes that emerged from this study were:

- issues around the name and legal logistics
- the tension between voice and gender identity
- influential relationships with choral teachers
- an apparent need for more inclusive policies

Cayari et al. (2021) discuss an interesting point that is not common in the literature: educators should take time to learn about the trans community. The authors encourage educators

to seek knowledge in music education resources and related fields such as vocal pedagogy, speech and language pathology, psychology, cognitive development, and gender studies. The authors also recommend that educators purposefully seek out diverse trans identities so as not to promote a "homogenous representation of trans people" (p 52). The need to reach beyond the immediate scope of music education illustrates the intersectionality of the trans experience in the music classroom.

Overall, there has been significant research on the experiences of transgender students in secondary school choral classrooms, with a focus on the challenges they face due to gendered norms inherent in traditional choral pedagogy and programs. Many scholars have shed light on the specific needs and concerns of transgender students in such music-learning contexts (Nichols, 2013; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Finch, 2019; Palkki, 2020). Historically, choral ensembles adhere to gendered norms, often segregating choirs into genders and gendering concert attire. Rehearsal language and terminology also tend to emphasize gender over voice type, contributing to a lack of inclusivity for transgender students. The studies have examined physical changes related to voice changes due to hormone therapy and chest bind and highlighted the importance of supportive relationships with teachers. The studies underscore the need for more inclusive policies and approaches in secondary school choral programs to address the distinctive experiences and challenges encountered by transgender choral students.

Safe Spaces

Safe spaces are "a place in which students feel welcome, expressing traits that define them as ‘other’" (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018, p. 29). Interestingly, Palkki and Caldwell (2018) provide context for "safe people" as a preferred term. The argument for this distinction is that

safe spaces, such as classrooms, are immobile and stagnant; however, the people within those spaces are mobile and can enact change or positive development.

Hendricks et al. (2014) provide a list of considerations music educators can incorporate into creating safe spaces for learning. The first consideration is to actively listen to students and be emotionally present so that students feel like their perceptions, emotions, or feelings are being seen and heard. The second approach involves presenting tasks that match the individual's abilities while emphasizing their specific challenges. The third strategy entails informing others about establishing a supportive environment through verbal communication and setting an example. This strategy encompasses all school community members, including parents, administrators, and students. The fourth is paying critical attention to the intersectionality of students' identities as musicians and other aspects of their lives. The final consideration is to welcome moments of unconventional instruction that adapt to student needs.

Fitzpatrick and Hansen (2011) conducted a study to explore the encounters of undergraduate lesbian and gay students who engaged in their high school music programs. The research delved into the perspectives of four LGBTQ+ students, revealing recurring themes related to music education serving as a means of integration, the cultivation of diverse identities, avenues for self-expression, and the fostering of a sense of community. One of Fitzpatrick and Hansen's (2011) significant findings was that music learning environments created an opportunity to feel safe, supported, and accepted. Such findings are essential because youth who feel safe and supported have a lower risk of suicide (Trevor Project, 2022) and are less likely to miss days of school due to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw et al., 2022)

Relational Trust

For those who have experienced trauma, including LGBTQ+ students, "building a nonacademic relationship is one of the most effective ways for a teacher to help... When a child feels appreciated and cared for by a teacher, a sense of safety grows, and the child consequently becomes more open to learning" (Cole et al., 2005, p. 67). In their study regarding the difficulties experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals, Mermer et al. (2021) found that "nearly half of the participants said they did not like or trust other people and so they kept away from them. This might be due to general problems experienced by LGBT people or their failure to find social acceptance" (p. 249). Synthesizing the insights from Cole et al. (2005) and Mermer et al. (2021), we can understand the critical importance of fostering supportive, nonacademic relationships between teachers and students, especially within vulnerable groups such as LGBTQ+ youth who have experienced trauma or feel marginalized.

Wimberly et al. (2015) contend that the absence of solid attachments between LGBTQ students and their schools, teachers, and peers can be attributed, in part, to the students' restrained efforts in developing significant relationships with others, a situation often exacerbated by experiences of bullying and harassment. In a study by Adderley et al. (2003), the authors explored students' motivations to join music ensemble courses in secondary school settings and participants' subsequent feelings and perceptions of such spaces upon joining. The authors found that "the social climate of these ensembles is important to each member… to form relationships away from the home environment that assist them in negotiating the often turbulent high school years" (p. 204). This statement underscores the social atmosphere within ensembles, highlighting its role as a crucial support system. The ensemble setting provides members a space

to forge connections outside of their home environments, and these relationships are instrumental in helping members navigate the complexities and challenges of high school life.

In the previously mentioned article by Hendricks et al. (2014), the authors mentioned five considerations for building safe spaces within music programs. Three of the five considerations explicitly mention trust as a critical component or potential outcome of the strategy. The authors argue against having students compare themselves to their peers and for students to focus on personal challenges. The authors note that teachers can erode significant trust when students feel their teachers have positioned them for failure, either by selecting overly challenging material or fostering a competitive atmosphere highlighting their deficiencies and failures. The second explicit mention of trust concerns the community's education regarding creating and fostering safe spaces. This strategy is effective when teachers "nurture mutual trust and respect while holding themselves and all students to the expectations of being present and offering honest and affirming critique of each other" (p.38). The final mention of trust is considering unconventional instruction practices that respond to student needs. The authors contend that such a practice can enhance the trusting relationship and provide a genuine perspective of the teacher, which might motivate a student to persist.

In a more recent article, Hendricks et al. 2023 conducted a review of the literature regarding relational trust in school settings. The authors concentrated on teaching practices informed by trauma and examined their interplay with the principles of relational trust within music education settings. Teaching practices found to foster greater levels of trust among students and teachers included: (a) fostering teamwork and uniformity, (b) ensuring transparent dialogue and genuine engagement, (c) dedication and determination towards common objectives,

and (d) the educator’s readiness to embrace vulnerability, experiment musically, and pursue learning alongside their students. These principles not only enhance the educational experience but also deepen the mutual respect and understanding between teachers and students, paving the way for a more dynamic and interactive learning environment.

Berman (2017) argues that building trust is done primarily through intrapersonal means, attending to the expressions of needs voiced by LGBTQ+ students, providing respect during such expressions, and considering the act of coming out as a noteworthy personal achievement while maintaining discretion. Palkki (2017) echoes Berman's findings while providing specific examples regarding building solid and positive relationships with LGBTQ+ students. These include using the teacher's ability to use a student's preferred pronouns and real (or chosen) name and degendering the traditional language of the choral classroom.

Hansen (2016) asserts that LGBTQ+ music students need queer role models. Moreover, Hansen argues that those teachers who identify as LGBTQ+ may consider disclosing their sexual or gender minority identity to their constituencies should it be safe to do so. The act of living openly is so that LGBTQ+ gives LGBTQ+ students, regardless of disclosure status, someone they can "trust, confide in, and consider a model of success" (p. 129).

In navigating the multifaceted challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students, particularly those who have experienced trauma or marginalization, it becomes evident that nurturing supportive and affirming relationships is vital. Cole et al. (2005) stress the profound impact of such relationships on a child's sense of safety and openness to learning, while Mermer et al. (2021) expand upon the difficulties in developing trust and finding social acceptance among LGBTQ+ individuals. Synthesizing these insights underscores teachers' critical role in providing safe

spaces and building trust within educational environments. Studies by Wimberly et al. (2015), Adderley et al. (2003), and Hendricks et al. (2014) further emphasize the significance of fostering supportive communities and trusting relationships, particularly within music programs where students often seek refuge and camaraderie. Scholars such as Berman (2017) and Palkki (2017) provide actionable strategies for building trust and respect with LGBTQ+ students, while Hansen (2016) spotlights the importance of queer role models in providing support and guidance. Collectively, these findings accentuate the need for educators to prioritize the creation of inclusive, affirming spaces where all students, regardless of their identity or past experiences, feel valued, respected, and supported in their journey toward academic and personal development.

Summary

In the introductory portion of this chapter, I extensively examined identity development models and theories. Cass (1979) pioneered the study of sexual orientation with her seminal 6-stage model, which was subsequently expanded upon by her contemporaries to incorporate various sociocultural influences, as evidenced by the work of Coleman (1982), Troiden (1989), D'Augelli (1994), McCarn & Fassinger (1996), Rhoads (1997), and Dubé & Savin-Williams (1999). Additionally, foundational frameworks for understanding gender identity development were presented, including psychodynamic theory, symbolic interactionism, social learning theory, and cognitive learning theory. Finally, the section explored research about disclosing one's LGBTQ+ identity, colloquially known as "coming out."

The subsequent section shifted the focus to the LGBTQ+ experience in educational settings, highlighting the passage of laws in several states that affect LGBTQ+ experiences and

examining the roles of heteronormativity and homophobia in school curricula before shifting to specifically address LGBTQ+ issues in music education contexts, discussing the prevalence of heteronormative music pedagogy and delving into transgender-specific challenges within choral classroom settings. Finally, the chapter emphasized creating safe spaces and fostering relational trust as foundational principles for establishing LGBTQ+-inclusive environments in music education. An overview of the qualitative approach, using a phenomenological design, is provided in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

In this chapter I introduce the research methodology for this qualitative phenomenological study regarding music pedagogical praxis and how students' perceptions of those practices influence or hinder their choice to disclose their sexual or gender identity. This approach allowed for a more in-depth understanding of LGBTQ+ music student's experiences within music learning environments and supplied a way to understand what inspires LGBTQ+ students to reveal their LGBTQ+ identities. In this chapter I discuss the relevance of a phenomenological design for this study. Additionally, this chapter supplies a thorough account of the methodology, participants, procedures, data collection, analysis method, and ethical concerns.

Research Questions

During the course of this study, I sought to understand the following research questions:

1. What are the various ways adolescent LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments that are related to their decision to disclose their gender or sexual identity?
2. Does the relationship between the music student and the teacher play a role in the coming out process, as perceived by the LGBTQ+ student? What do LGBTQ+ music students report to be the role of the music teacher in creating a safe space for learning if and when a student discloses their gender or sexual identity?
3. What are LGBTQ+ music students' beliefs and perceptions in terms of how well pedagogical practices in music learning environments help support their mental health?

Methodology Selected

Creswell and Poth (2018) explain when it is appropriate to undertake a qualitative study. They argue that qualitative issues are complex, require exploration, empower individuals to share stories, understand contexts, explain mechanisms, and develop theories. A quantitative approach is more suited to testing objective information and discovering relationships among variables that can be analyzed using statistical methodologies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given this study's objective to comprehend the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ+ music students within their secondary music learning settings, I determined a qualitative methodology as the most fitting selection.

Phenomenological Methodology

I utilized a phenomenological methodology in its design. "A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). The culminating goal of a phenomenological study is to understand the nature of the participants' experiences who have all encountered the phenomenon in question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomenon studied in this project is the process that LGBTQ+ people undergo when disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity.

As a design, the nature of phenomenology is interpretive or constructivist (Leavy, 2017). Interpretive or constructivist frameworks assume that reality is an amalgam of social construction, meaning that there is no singular omnipresent experience and that one constructs knowledge through interpreting experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivist researchers frequently explore how individuals interact and emphasize the particular environments in which people live and work. By doing so, they aim to comprehend the historical

and cultural backgrounds that influence the participants' experiences. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I examine the current pedagogical trends within music learning environments, focusing on understanding their historical and cultural contexts. Furthermore, it aims to investigate how these trends impact the decisions of LGBTQ+ music students to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity by exploring the participants' experiences.

As a leading voice in contemporary phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) says, "the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection" (p. 47). Bracketing, an essential aspect of phenomenology, involves researchers setting aside their personal beliefs regarding the experiences under exploration. Bracketing is particularly crucial as phenomenological research often delves into "intense human experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26), which the researchers may have personally encountered. The goal of bracketing is to partially set aside personal experiences or beliefs regarding a phenomenon so that the research focus can explore the participants' experiences without interference from the researcher's biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue for suspending belief, suggesting that their awareness becomes heightened when researchers temporarily set aside their beliefs or preconceptions. This heightened state of consciousness enables individuals to scrutinize and analyze their consciousness similarly to how they might examine an external object of consciousness. In other words, by suspending their beliefs, individuals can gain deeper insight into the participants' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.

Despite its interpretive approach, the outcome of phenomenological research is descriptive because it aims to provide a detailed and nuanced description of the essence of the experience under study (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). After interpreting the individual experiences, the researcher synthesizes these interpretations to describe the elemental nature or essence of the phenomenon as the group experiences it as a whole. This description is not just a surface-level account but a deep, rich, and textured portrayal that captures the complexity and nuance of human experience. The descriptive outcome articulates the central themes, structures, and implications of the experience to reveal its fundamental nature.

Unlike other qualitative designs, phenomenology does not necessarily contain a direct theoretical orientation because the research strives to build upon the experiences of the individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As described in Chapter I, however, this study uses queer theory as a theoretical framework due to the overlapping nature of the research questions and the objectives of queer theory.

Study Participants

I used a purposeful sampling method when selecting participants. Purposeful sampling deliberately chooses specific individuals and locations for investigation because they can provide valuable insights into the research problem and the central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample of participants originated from a population meeting the following criteria: 1.) Current or recently graduated high school students; 2.) Participation in music instruction during secondary schooling; and 3.) Disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity during that period. High school graduation generally occurs at age 18, implying that some participants may

be adults while others may be minors. There were no restrictions concerning gender; however, all participants must identify as LGBTQ+ in some manner.

Two methods facilitated the recruitment of participants. The first method involved using online music educator forums. The selection included four forums, each with a specific focus: one on band instruction, one on choral instruction, and two on orchestra instruction. The initial recruitment document was posted within these forums, allowing music educators to access and distribute the information to potential participants. There was a fifth forum, but the moderators denied the recruitment posting. Their rationale was out of an abundance of caution. Since the forum membership included teachers throughout the United States, they felt that due to divisive content laws in various states (outlined in Chapter II), they wanted to avoid any members potentially facing any consequences or repercussions for their efforts in recruiting participants.

The second recruitment strategy leveraged my professional network of music educators. Utilizing the initial recruitment letter, I emailed professional contacts within this network requesting referrals to current or former students who met the participation criteria. If they were 18 or older, I asked the participants to complete the participant consent form. If they were under 18, they had to obtain parental permission through the parental consent form and complete the participant assent form. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), sample sizes for a typical phenomenological study should be between 3-10 participants. I anticipated 6-8 participants for this study, but data saturation determined that the final number of participants was five.

Data Collection

The research instrument for this study used an interviewing protocol (Appendix A), and the interview questions were the instrument used. I used notes and memos to capture thoughts

and ideas during the interview. The interviews were video and audio recorded using the Zoom platform. The interview began with the opening, outlining the interview's purpose and disclosing participant rights and potential risks. First, the participants read that opening to themselves. Upon completing the first reading, I read the exact text out loud. The purpose of this practice was to ensure the participant's understanding of the process and clarify any questions prior to the beginning of the interview. I divided the interview into three sections with the intention of exploring the following themes:

1. exploration of their identity as a musician and as an LGBTQ+ person,
2. questions specifically about their music learning environments, and
3. questions about their disclosure process.

I conducted all interviews via the Zoom video conferencing platform. The interviews were audio and video recorded electronically and saved on an external hard drive. I did not conduct any interview without confirming the participants' written informed consent or, if required, the written consent of their parents or guardians. Each interview occurred in a single interview session lasting between 60 - 90 minutes. Following each session, I transcribed the interview using Zoom's transcription functionality, which I then edited for clarity in the text.

Procedures Followed

Prior to the beginning of the study, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Lesley University. Upon receipt of IRB approval, I posted on online music educator forums and made contact with colleagues in my professional network using the Initial Recruitment Letter (Appendix B). Through various contacts, five participants volunteered to participate in the study. A signed Participant Consent Form (Appendix C) was required prior to

participation for participants 18 or older. If the participant was younger than 18, they provided a signed Parental Consent Form (Appendix D) and a signed Participant Assent Form (Appendix E) before participating in the study.

Participants were interviewed only on the Zoom video conferencing platform. I confirmed the participant's written and verbal consent before conducting any interview. Each participant participated in one interview that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Zoom transcribed each interview using its transcription functionality, and I edited the transcript to ensure clarity. I opted to edit the transcript personally as this process facilitates a more intimate engagement with the data, as posited by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

The primary method of collecting data in a phenomenological study is via interview to "get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.27). During the interview, I followed the protocol outlined in the "Interview Protocol and Interview Questions" document. (Appendix A). However, I also asked probing questions to have the participants expand on the subjects and topics they brought up. Following each interview, I sent the transcript to the participants for review. I asked the participants to examine the transcript and correct or amend any responses. Additionally, I allowed them to add anything else after reading through the transcript. Upon receipt of the transcript, I could make any necessary edits or addendums.

Assessment

The interview protocol underwent multiple revisions before being conducted with any participant. After a few revisions of questions, there were three clear categories of questioning. The first category, *Pathways,* involved questions asking the participants to discuss their identities

as a musician and an LGBTQ+ person. The second category, *Music Learning Environments,* involved questions about how participants perceived teacher decisions in their music-learning environments. These questions aimed to guide participants into thinking about LGBTQ+ representation, classroom culture, teacher-student relationships, and perceptions of curricular decisions. The final category of questioning was entitled *Disclosure*. This line of questioning asked the participants to recount their disclosure process and how their experiences in music learning environments may have influenced their decision to disclose.

Under the guidance of the doctoral committee, I used the following research protocol (*Figure 1*) to guide the interview with the participant.

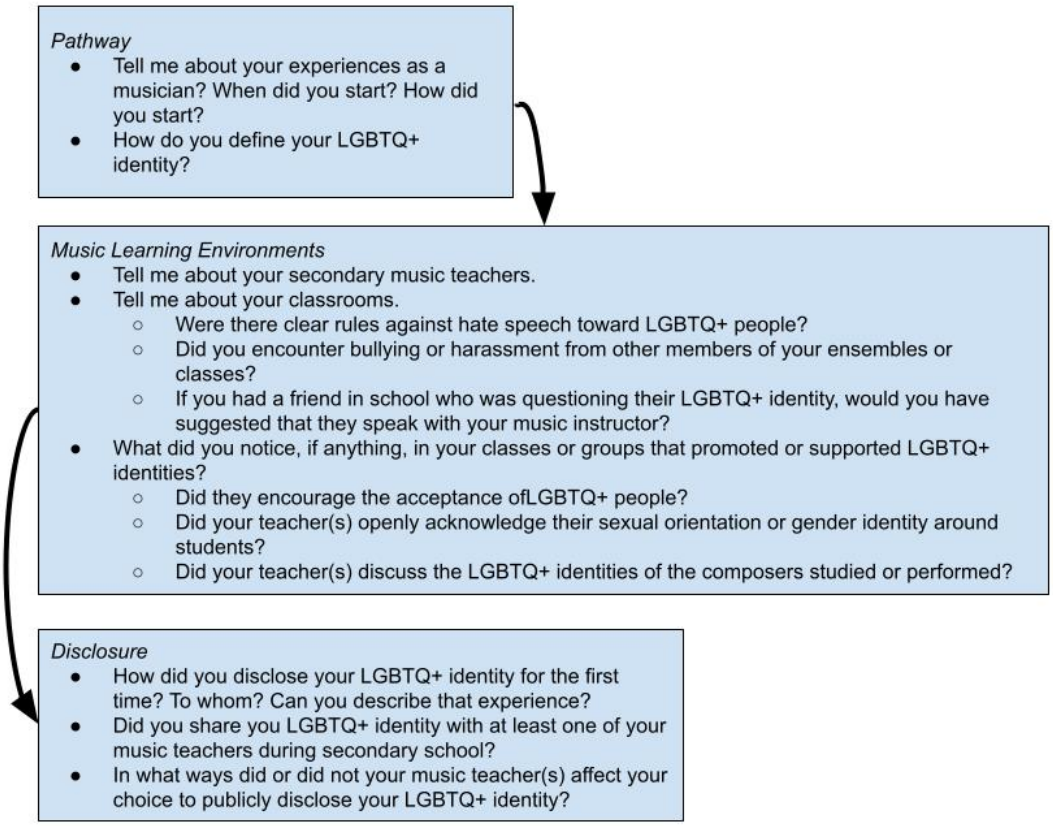

Figure 1: Interview Protocol

Relation to Research Questions

Each research question provided the guiding framework for each interview question. The following questions addressed the first research question: What are the various ways adolescent LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments that are related to their decision to disclose their gender or sexual identity?

1. Tell me about your experiences as a musician. When did you start? How did you start?
2. Were there clear rules against hate speech toward LGBTQ+ people?
3. Did you encounter bullying or harassment from other members of your ensembles or classes?
4. What did you notice, if anything, in your classes or groups that promoted or supported LGBTQ+ identities?
5. Did your teacher(s) discuss the LGBTQ+ identities of the composers studied or performed?

The next series of questions addressed the second research question: Does the relationship between the music student and the teacher play a role in the coming out process, as perceived by the LGBTQ+ student? What do LGBTQ+ music students report as the role of the music teacher in creating a safe space for learning if and when a student discloses their gender or sexual identity?

1. If you had a friend in school who was questioning their LGBTQ+ identity, would you have suggested that they speak with your music instructor?
2. Did your teacher(s) openly acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity around students?

3. Did you share your LGBTQ+ identity with at least on of your music teachers during secondary school?
4. In what ways did or did not your music teacher(s) affect your choice to publicly disclose your LGBTQ+ identity?

I designed the final set of questions to primarily address the third research question: What are LGBTQ+ music students' beliefs and perceptions in terms of how well pedagogical practices in music learning environments help support their mental health?

1. How do you define your LGBTQ+ identity?
2. Did they encourage the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people?
3. Did you encounter bullying or harassment from other members of your ensembles or classes?
4. What did you notice, if anything, in your classes or groups that promoted or supported LGBTQ+ identities?
5. How did you disclose your LGBTQ+ identity for the first time? To whom? Can you describe that experience?

As highlighted above, I designed some interview questions to explore more than one research area. This overlap is because there is a significant crossover among three key areas: teaching methods, building relationships, and students' mental health. To clarify, in Chapter I, I define pedagogy broadly, adopting Knapp's (2021) perspective that it involves "the interaction of the teacher with the physical classroom, and between the teacher and students" (p. 17). This author views pedagogy not as a mere collection of techniques but as a series of interactions. Such a view inherently suggests that teaching is relational and, by extension, has an emotional impact

on students. Therefore, it is necessary to include the relational context of the classroom experience when examining perceptions of pedagogical practice.

Data Analysis

The data underwent analysis following guidelines for phenomenological analysis based on Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The first step to this approach is for the researcher to undergo a bracketing process by obtaining a complete description of their experience with the phenomena. This initial stage aims to temporarily put aside the researcher's own experiences, recognizing that complete detachment might not be possible, to focus on the study's participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The second step requires the researcher to develop a list of significant statements describing the topic's experience. The topics under investigation encompass perceptions of music education pedagogical practices, relationships within music education settings, and mental health and well-being, all in the context of participants' decisions regarding disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity. Then, those statements are grouped into larger units and themes.

The third step of this coding process is to describe the textural and structural essences of the participants' interactions with the topics. The textural essences are what the participant experienced with the phenomena, while the structural essences are how those experiences happened (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) states that there is a continuous interplay between texture and structure. In coding participant experiences into combined themes, researchers progress from describing the tangible aspects of what participants experience to understanding the deeper reflective nuances of how the experience unfolds.

The final step of this analysis process is to incorporate and combine the textural and structural descriptions. In this ultimate phase, the aim is to merge all textual and structural descriptions into a comprehensive portrayal of the experience that captures the essence of the entire group (Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Concerns

As the researcher of this study, I ensured a steadfast commitment to ethical standards throughout its execution. Before beginning this study, I knew I would be studying the experiences of a historically marginalized community. As such, I recognize and respect the level of diversity within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and I have guided my interview practice to ensure that interactions are inclusive and affirming of diverse experiences. I was additionally mindful of taking proactive steps to minimize harm. Participants were duly informed of the availability of complimentary counseling services if required.

To guarantee the credibility and dependability of the study outcomes, I rigorously followed the prescribed methodologies outlined earlier in this chapter. I administered informed consent and assent procedures via signed documentation detailed in Appendices B, C, and D. At the start of each interview, participants were thoroughly briefed on the study's objectives, entitlements, and potential risks, as outlined in Appendix A. I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Lesley University for this study, with minimal risk posed to participating individuals.

I securely stored all pertinent materials on a password-protected external hard drive. Furthermore, I have implemented a provision for deleting all data after five years, pending approval by the doctoral committee overseeing my dissertation. I meticulously anonymized any

references to identifiable individuals, institutions, or locations using pseudonyms to safeguard participant confidentiality. These measures, including robust data storage protocols and pseudonymization techniques, mitigate risks associated with participant confidentiality.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research method used to answer the research questions. A phenomenological approach was used to explore LGBTQ+ music students' experiences within music learning environments and supplied a way to understand what inspires LGBTQ+ students to reveal their LGBTQ+ identities.

In this chapter I provide a comprehensive rationale for a phenomenological approach. Participants were selected using the criteria of purposeful sampling. The research instrument consisted of a single 60-90 minute interview following an interview protocol. Data analysis followed Moustaka's (1994) phenomenological coding and analysis procedures method. Finally, this chapter discussed all ethical considerations, including affirming interview protocols, obtaining all necessary informed consents and assents, and explaining confidentiality procedures. The following chapter aims to provide results from this study and verify that I followed the methodology summarized in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In this study I explored the disclosure process of LGBTQ+ identities and how LGBTQ+ music students perceived music education pedagogical practices regarding their decision to disclose their LGBQT+ identities. Although there has been significant literature on methods to create affirming music learning environments, little research has been conducted regarding how such spaces affect LGBTQ+ music students' decisions to disclose their LGBTQ+ identities. Studying the intricacy of how students perceive such pedagogical practices revealed how teaching practices influenced decisions to disclose. Approaches typically used in phenomenological research helped shape how I gathered and analyzed the data. The results of this study amalgamate the participants' stories and convey a nuanced perspective on their lived experiences. This chapter contains the results of the phenomenological methodology study to answer the research questions:

1. What are the various ways adolescent LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments that are related to their decision to disclose their gender or sexual identity?
2. Does the relationship between the music student and the teacher play a role in the coming out process, as perceived by the LGBTQ+ student? What do LGBTQ+ music students report to be the role of the music teacher in creating a safe space for learning if and when a student discloses their gender or sexual identity?
3. What are LGBTQ+ music students' beliefs and perceptions in terms of how well pedagogical practices in music learning environments help support their mental health?

Chapter IV presents findings that developed from data collected through interviewing five participants selected from three regions of the United States who all identify as LGBTQ+, participated in music during secondary school, and disclosed their LGBQT+ identity during that time. Careful analysis of each interview transcription allowed for a thorough understanding of each participant's lived experience with the intersection of music education and the disclosure process. After transcribing each interview, I began the reduction process by extracting significant statements that correlated to the topics under exploration: mental health, pedagogy, and relationships. Then, I coded those significant statements into major themes. I wrote a culminating description of each participant's experience and combined those descriptions to extrapolate a combined description of the phenomenon.

Summary of Participants

The results of this study were developed using data collected from five interviews. I selected the participants using a purposeful sampling method. All participants had to meet three eligibility requirements:

1. They had to identify as LGBTQ+.
2. They had to participate in music instruction during secondary school.
3. They had to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity during secondary school.

All five participants identified as LGBTQ+ in some way. Kiran (they/them) describes themselves as queer, non-binary, and trans-femme, indicating they feel their gender identity is feminine and they do not strictly identify as male or female. They are part of the broader LGBTQ+ community. Taylor (she/her) identifies as aromantic and asexual (often shortened to aroace), meaning she does not experience romantic or sexual attraction to others, and she is

cisgender, which means her gender identity matches her sex assigned at birth. Casey (any pronouns - she/her for the purpose of this paper) identifies as a lesbian and genderfluid. These identities means she is attracted to women, and her gender identity can change over time, not being fixed as male or female. Morgan (she/her) identifies as aroace, like Taylor, and as a transwoman, which means she was assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. Jordan (he/him) identifies as a gay transman, meaning he was assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man and is attracted to men. All participants partook in music instruction during secondary schooling when they disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity.

In this study I aimed to find various locations and experiences regarding location as a potential variable of differing experiences. Kiran attended secondary school in the Southwest but currently resides in the Pacific Northwest. Taylor, Casey, and Morgan all graduated from or currently participate in high school in the Northeast. Jordan is a current high school student in the Midwest. Additionally, participants Taylor, Casey, and Jordan were all current high school students, while participants Kiran and Morgan had recently graduated high school.

In terms of where they learned music individually, three out of five participants shared insights about private learning settings. Specifically, Kiran studied on Carnatic vocal music, Taylor studied the piano, and Casey studied the harp. When it came to group involvement, two participants (Taylor and Morgan) were part of wind ensembles, two (Taylor and Jordan) were in orchestra ensembles, and two (Casey and Jordan) took part in chorus activities. Taylor also mentioned involvement in professional and community ensembles during secondary school. The pertinent demographic information for the five participants are displayed in *Figure 2*.

	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Pronouns	Music Learning Environments	Instrument/ Voice
Kiran	Queer	Non-Binary Trans-femme	They/ Them	Private Instruction	Vocal
Taylor	Aromantic/ Asexual (Aroace)	Cisgender Female	She/Her	Private Instruction Band Orchestra Professional/ Community	Piano Viola Flute Clarinet Baritone Horn
Casey	Lesbian	Genderfluid	Any	Chorus	Vocal
Morgan	Aromantic/ Asexual (Aroace)	Transwoman	She/Her	Band	Alto Saxophone
Jordan	Gay	Transman	He/Him	Private Instruction Orchestra Chorus	Vocal Harp

Figure 2: Participant Demographic Information

Individual Participant Composite Descriptions

Following the extrapolation of the significant statements from the transcripts, I wrote composite descriptions of the textural and structural experiences of each participant. The following descriptions are designed to illustrate each participant's experience with being an LGBTQ+ music student and how those experiences shaped the development of their LGBTQ+ identity and their decision to disclose.

Kiran Composite Description

Kiran is a 21-year-old who identifies as a queer, non-binary, and trans femme. While they did not participate in music instruction at school, they did participate heavily in private Carnatic vocal instruction. Carnatic music is traditional Indian classical music originating in Southern

India. They studied with the same teacher for most of their learning in various modalities, including in-person and online instruction. While under their teacher's instruction, Kiran described the teaching as very traditional regarding South Indian customs and norms, which put them at odds with their learning. Kiran described a lack of LGBTQ+ representation and talked several times about how South Indian cultural norms would not have allowed for such a conversation to occur. Regarding protections from LGBTQ+ bullying in their music learning space, they said, "There was definitely no protections against it, but also it wasn't ever explicitly talked about."

However, Kiran described one experience that featured a song containing LGBTQ+ themes. The particular song featured Ardhanarishvara. This figure is a form of the deity Shiva combined with his wife, Parvati, who is depicted as half man and half woman.

They frequently talked about how the teacher's demeanor and attitude negatively affected their mental health. They provided several examples of such negative interactions:

> But with her, like, especially looking back, there is a clear buildup of, like, not antagonism, but just like belligerency. And, like, just, like, looks and feels and aura… There was lots of ridiculing. There was lots of little comments here and there… It became a huge source of contention between me and my mother because I would just bitch about her constantly… And… the way that [primary teacher] started treating me after I came out was… it was a lot slower noticeably it was a lot slower.

Because Carnatic music has its roots in sacred Hindu traditions, participation in Carnatic music instruction clashed with their Hindu faith, causing an existential crisis.

> Like the context as a whole of just being, like, this call out, I mean, every song I learn is a is about calling to God and about about these requests or songs and like praisings of God… I didn't feel connected to God anymore and I didn't feel connected enough to these to what I was singing about.

Taylor Composite Description

Taylor is a 17-year-old who identifies as a cisgender female and is aromantic and asexual (aroace). She participated in music instruction in private and ensemble settings in her school and community. She became aware of her LGBTQ+ identity during early adolescence, at which time she tried to identify as bisexual before understanding her aroace identity.

> When we were 15 and I almost tried to convince myself that I was bisexual because it was that sort of 0 plus 0 equals 2 of like I'm not necessarily attracted to males, not necessarily attracted to females, like, neither at large.

During her music instruction, she spoke of LGBQT+ representation and affirming environments for LGBTQ+ individuals.

> Yeah, there was a pride flag, I think on the like the bulletin board, right outside of the classroom. So it was very visible… Both of my teachers that I had in high school especially were very forthcoming with kind of how they were opposed to any degree of, like, hate speech or discrimination, and they were very active against it and would take would take measures, theoretically, like, nothing really happened, but they would have taken measures if something had happened that involved any type of discrimination or anything like that.

Additionally, Taylor spoke of positive, lasting relationships. She described her music instructors as affirming, accepting, and familiar. When asked how her music teachers may have affected her decision to disclose her LGBTQ+ identity, she said, "My music teachers as a like just as a sort of collective really didn't. It was more so things that happened in those environments around me that caused me to question where I kind of stood with my identity."

Casey Composite Description

Casey is a 16-year-old who identifies as a genderfluid lesbian. She participated in chorus and musical theater settings in a public school. Like Taylor, she began to question her identity during early adolescence and initially thought that she was bisexual before coming out as a lesbian.

During the interview, Casey spoke about two of the chorus teachers she has had during secondary schooling. With one teacher, the erasure of LGBTQ+ identity was apparent to her:

> We did like a whole song singing, like, we did a whole entire Queen song without bringing up Freddie Mercury at all. It was… It was, oh, *Somebody to Love.* And the whole thing, we were, I was like, "[teacher 2]! [teacher 2]! can you tell us something about this song?" And he was like, "No."… Like, we talk about it like at lunch, be like, "Hey, this is kind of odd. This really famous queer man sings this song about being queer." And we're like, "Hey, let's just sing this for a chorus concert and not say anything about it." So like we discussed it separate from him.

However, in another teacher's class, she described a representative and affirming environment:

> In [teacher 1]'s classroom, there was, like, a sign that said like, "All are welcome here" with the rainbow. There is stuff posted on the walls, so that, like, specifically were like,

there was this one sign, I think it was, like, "You are accepted here if you are… LGBT… Any racial identity," like stuff like that.

When asked how her music teachers may have affected her decision to disclose her LGBTQ+ identity, she described how one of her teachers played a role due to the affirming relationship:

She's [teacher 1] wonderful. I honestly love her as a teacher so much. She was already laid back and like very accepting of everything…So [teacher 1] was actually one of the people like I publicly like kind of disclosed it to it.

Morgan Composite Description

Morgan is a 20-year-old transwoman who played the alto saxophone in the band during high school. Unlike other participants, she did not become fully aware of her LGBTQ+ identity until later in adolescence and did not disclose her identity until her senior year of high school. Morgan spoke heavily about the effects of her experiences on her mental health, describing experiences of dysphoria, doubt, and crisis of faith, but also themes of affirmation, confidence, and acceptance.

Morgan described the band as a place of refuge for stigmatized individuals in the school:

And a lot of the other kids outside the band kind of viewed the band as outcasts. So it was very much like. In the sense that I think a lot of LGBTQ people kind of our put on that like. In those spaces like it was one of those spaces that. Was very accepting because there's probably a lot of people already in there who faced that kind of like mistreatment.

She said that, for the most part, the band was an affirming environment but was rooted in rather traditional instruction:

> Like, it was almost always just, like, focusing on, like, play this like this and, like, try to… We wanna go, like, staccato, like, teaching us, like, specifically how to play it and less of the history of it… So there was actually a poster that's like this is an accepting space. This is like a safe space for students.

However, she specifically mentions that the students in the band played a larger role in creating the affirming environment than the teacher did. She said, "As much like he was good. I think it's mostly the students creating that space, that inclusive atmosphere."

She specifically mentions noticing the erasure of LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum:

> I'm not sure… like, it was if anything it was probably glossed over. We did do, like, David Bowie, which Bye. But if that would probably be a time to talk about it… some of it was, like, concert band pieces, but we didn't really talk much about the composers themselves.

When it came to discussing relationships, Morgan described positive interactions with her band teacher:

> He's cool. Well-meaning. I don't know if he knows as much about the specific things. He never said something like ignorant or anything like that in my memory… Just like the respect that he would show the students who were out. Like, he would, I mean. He respected my identity. He respected other people that day in my experience. I don't want to speak for other people who, were in band. In my experience, I did not have any sign that he didn't respect me I actually, I think [band teacher] did actually pull me aside and it was like if you want to talk about it you can [sic regarding coming out]

However, she did describe the chorus teacher at school who disclosed her trans identity during her time on faculty. Morgan found this role modeling to be affirming of her identity. She stated, "And I think it was actually is probably very good for other students to be able to see an openly trans teacher."

When asked what role her music teacher played in her decision to disclose her trans identity, she said, "They didn't have that big an influence on me....no matter what, I was going to come out." However, they did mention that the trans choral teacher may have played a role in her decision to disclose.

Jordan Composite Description

Jordan is an 18-year-old gay transman who participated in music in private and ensemble settings during secondary schooling. In private, he studied the harp and participated in orchestra and chorus ensemble instruction. Jordan identified as non-binary before he came out as trans during his junior year in high school. Jordan described many negative feelings around the development of his trans identity and often felt misunderstood by his peers:

> The the most common insult I've got or I don't know as been like you're a "pick me girl." Or you're doing it for attention. And that comes from my family, like past peers, past friends. I don't know. That's the most common thing.

Jordan described multiple teachers during his music instruction who each had an impact on his mental health and identity development. Most notably, Jordan described detecting gendered versus non-gendered pedagogy. He described an instance of interaction with gendered uniforms by saying, "The choir I had with [teacher 2], we had uniforms and there was two uniforms at that time. And there was like the dress or the like the semi formal suit. However,

regarding another teacher, he noticed how the language became degendered. Jordan recalled, "she'll say, like, so say the voices or she'll say the voice part where she'll say like, 'okay, basses come with me.' Or like, 'sopranos come with me' or 'high voices, low voices.'" Jordan recounted how the degendered language applied to the names of the particular musical groups at the school:

> She's like, "you should join our treble voices choir." And I had, I had joined this, I had been to the school before and I knew that. Before that choir had been called the *Girls Choir*. So I knew immediately like, "oh, she changed that. And so that was pretty cool."

Additionally, Jordan described the importance of representation and role modeling in the curriculum. He discussed a song that was written for LGBTQ+ people. He said, "it was like this remembrance song about like trans people who have died." Another teacher was able to be a queer role model. Jordan recounted, "My orchestra teacher is talking about how he used to drag and I was like 'Oh, that's kind of, like, that's cool,' like, just normalizing that in the classroom." As well as a teacher acknowledging his same-sex partner saying "my last year in that choir, he said like, 'yeah, you know, I am gay. I'm a gay man.'"

When asked how his music teachers may have affected his decision to disclose his LGBTQ+ identity, he expressed various important themes:

> With [teacher 2], it was definitely me hearing, like, him acknowledge his partner. I didn't end up, I came out to him, actually, I came out to him 2 nights ago. And I saw him at a concert and he was, like, "oh my gosh, [dead name], like, hi" and I'm, like, oh actually told him and he, like, gave me a hug and it was really nice. That's what I would say for [teacher 2]. [harp teacher] It was out of necessity….I told my mom if she doesn't take this well. I'm just not gonna play harp anymore. Like it's not worth it. It's not worth it for my

> mental health. It's not worth it for. Really any reason. And she ended up. She wasn't really great about it, but she, she took it and I'm still playing hard with her. And then with [teacher 3] It was out of this… It was… It was him showing me time and time again that he was gonna stand up for me. Or stand up for trans people. I was… I was the only trans person in the room. Or knowingly, the only transperson in the room. And when that happens and somebody makes a comment about trans people and your closeted and they choose to, like, stand up, like that means a lot to me.

Combined Participant Composite Description

Across the diverse experiences of these five participants, a common theme emerges. Music learning environments have a profound impact on LGBTQ+ identity development and mental health. Despite the varied backgrounds, ages, and identities, each participant's narrative highlights a critical intersection of music education and personal identity exploration. For some, traditional music instruction and a lack of LGBTQ+ representation created barriers to acceptance and understanding, while for others, affirming and inclusive educational settings provided a sanctuary for identity exploration and acceptance. Notably, the presence or absence of LGBTQ+ representation, affirming pedagogies, and supportive teacher-student relationships played significant roles in shaping their experiences. Whether through the acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ themes in music, the adaptation of gender-neutral language in choir settings, or the personal support from educators, the influence of music education on these individuals' journeys toward embracing their LGBTQ+ identity underscores the necessity for inclusive and representative music education practices.

The decision to disclose one's LGBTQ+ identity within the context of music education settings was influenced by a confluence of factors that underscore the importance of visibility, representation, and supportive interactions. Participants reported a range of experiences that affected their openness about their identities, from the explicit support and representation of LGBTQ+ identities within the music environment to the subtle cues of acceptance or rejection by teachers and peers. For some, affirming actions by educators, such as the acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ composers or the adaptation of non-gendered language, served as catalysts for disclosure. For others, the presence of LGBTQ+ role models among faculty or the explicit support against discrimination provided a sense of safety and belonging that facilitated their decision to come out. Interestingly, while some participants cited positive representations and supportive relationships as key to their disclosure, others navigated their identity in more traditional or less affirming environments, highlighting the resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals in diverse educational contexts. These narratives collectively illustrate the nuanced ways in which music education spaces can either hinder or foster the disclosure of one's LGBTQ+ identity, pointing to the critical role of educators in creating environments where all students feel seen, supported, and safe to be their authentic selves.

Data Coding

Through data analysis, I identified 220 significant statements pertaining to mental health, pedagogy, and relationships related to the LGBTQ+ experience. I repeatedly reviewed the data and placed them under the appropriate topic. Once I had organized all the significant statements, I began to look for themes within each subject. Upon the completion of the initial categorization

of statements, I found there to be 39 different subtopics. *Figure 3* illustrates the topics extracted from each participant's interview and the frequency of themes across participants.

Figure 3: Frequency of Themes Across Participants

Figure 3 organizes the themes represented within each participant interview. Some themes are present multiple times (representation, role modeling, compartmentalization, traditional instruction, affirming relationships, erasure) while others are shown minimally (familiarity, harassment, objectification, dysphoria). This variability in theme occurrence highlights the diverse experiences and perceptions of the participants, underscoring the complexity of the issues addressed in their interviews.

I then repeatedly examined those subtopics and organized them thematically, which led to the emergence of four core themes. Those themes were *identity awareness and acceptance, compartmentalization and coping mechanisms, pedagogical styles and learning environments*, and *social dynamics and relationships*. *Figure 4* illustrates the categorization of subtopics into four core themes.

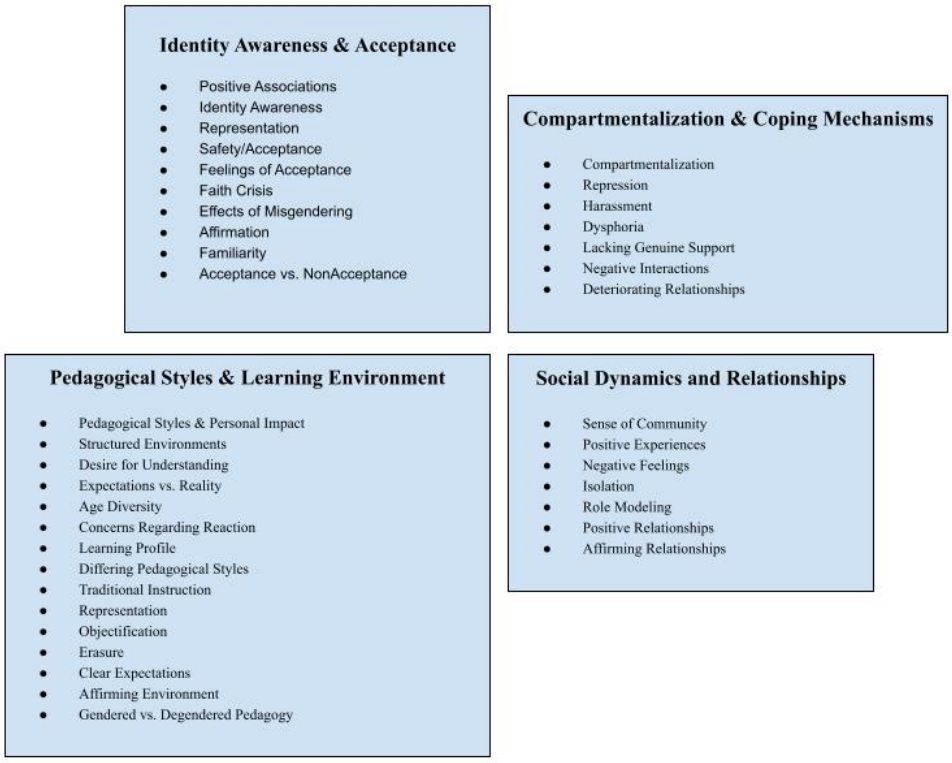

Figure 4: Categorization of Subtopics into Core Themes

The first theme, *identity awareness and acceptance***,** demonstrates the experiences that participants underwent that made them become aware of and eventually accept their LGBQT+ identity. The second theme is *compartmentalization and coping mechanisms***,** and this theme encompasses the various ways that participants would deal with their identity. A common phenomenon in the identity process was coming out as something else before fully disclosing

their true identity. Oftentimes, the experiences present in this theme are negative and describe feelings of dysphoria, harassment, and deterioration. The third theme is *pedagogical styles and learning environments***,** which describe what the participants perceive in their music learning environments. For example, participants would offer instances of representation or erasure, traditional versus affirming instruction, or points regarding classroom culture. The fourth theme is *social dynamics and relationships.* This theme represents participants' perceptions of those that they interact with regarding their music learning environments. These interactions may be from peers, family, and instructors within such environments.

Theme One: Identity Awareness and Acceptance

All participants, at some point during the interview, expressed their process for coming to understand their LGBTQ+ identity. All participants disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity before graduating from high school. However, there were varying accounts of coming to understand those identities. Several participants explained as they developed a more grounded concept of their LGBTQ+ identity, they began to experience more positive self-awareness. Casey underscored this notion when she said, "I was a lot more closed off in middle school about my identity," and as she became more comfortable with her identity, she described it as "so much better because I didn't feel like I had to actually, like, come out. I could just, like, be me."

Theme Two: Compartmentalization and Coping Mechanisms

Three participants experienced transitional identities, also referred to as the *queer apologetic* (Guittar, 2013), which occurs when a person chooses to reveal an identity that does not fully align with their true sexual orientation or gender identity, aiming to make it more

acceptable to everyone involved in the coming-out process, including family, friends, and even themselves. Taylor highlighted this concept by saying:

> I actually didn't really identify as asexual and aromantic until I was 16 because I tried, I didn't consciously try to convince myself that I wasn't.... I almost tried to convince myself that I was bisexual because it was that sort of 0 plus 0 equals 2 of like I'm not necessarily attracted to males…not necessarily attracted to females like neither at large.

Similar to Taylor, Casey also first tried to identify as bisexual before coming to the conclusion that she was, in fact, a lesbian. "And at the time I thought I was bi, I was very wrong."

While the previously mentioned participants illustrated the concept of the queer apologetic from a sexual orientation perspective, Jordan highlighted the concept from a gender viewpoint by saying, "So, I don't usually pass, and so for a period of time before I actually came out, people would make the assumption that I was nonbinary, which, for me, it was easier than explaining what was going on." Before coming out with their true gender identity, Jordan found it easier to let others assume he was nonbinary, as he often was not recognized as his affirmed gender. *Figure 5* illustrates how three participants used a transitional identity compared to their authentic sexual orientation or gender identity.

Participant	Transitional Identity	Authentic Identity
Taylor	Bisexual	Aroace
Casey	Bisexual	Lesbian
Jordan	Non-binary	Transman

Figure 5: Participant Transitional Versus Authentic Identities

Other participants coped with their developing LGBTQ+ identities in other ways in lieu of the queer apologetic phenomenon. Kiran recounted their internalized struggle with understanding their trans identity around their junior year of high school, saying, "It really was just a combination of me not accepting and not realizing and not… and just repression." Jordan also described how, as his trans identity developed, there was emotional fallout from suppressing his identity. He said:

> My mental health had deteriorated to a point that was really, really bad. It felt like I was living two lives, like, at school and at home. And I was struggling with PTSD and depression. And, really, really serious self-harm. And I felt in my, in my soul, it felt like being trans was making it so much so much worse.

The second theme, *compartmentalization and coping mechanisms*, describes how students experience and deal with their developing LGBTQ+ identities. Three participants expressed the notion of the queer apologetic as a way to control the development of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Participants expressed additional methods of coping, such as repression and self-harm, as mechanisms for addressing their development.

Theme Three: Pedagogical Styles and Learning Environments

All participants recounted how pedagogical decisions in music learning environments affected their understanding of the LGBTQ+ identity in some way. Commonly, several participants discussed how their music learning spaces were often represented with affirming paraphernalia such as inclusive signage, rainbow flags, and LGBTQ+ advertisements for organizations outside of the music room. Casey recounted her experience noticing such affirming material:

> In [teacher 1] 's classroom, there was, like, a sign that said, like, "All are welcome here," with the rainbow. There is stuff posted on the walls, so that, like, specifically were, like, there was this one sign, I think it was, like, "You are accepted here if you are… LGBT… any racial identity," like, stuff like that.

However, due to the sociocultural context in which Kiran learned Carnatic music, they did not see any such affirming materials. They said, "No, no, there were not in either the private classes or the public settings."

There was also a variety of instances, sometimes among the same participant, of perceptions of LGBTQ+ representation and erasure in the pedagogy. Casey recounted how the teacher took time to affirm trans identities when many trans people were under attack in the news. She said, "I feel like it was at, like, its highest point, and it... she, like, brought it up and talked with us about it and, like, raised awareness for the issue."

While Casey's teacher discussed LGBTQ+ issues outside the context of music learning, Jordan's chorus instructor specifically programmed a song that was written for trans people who had fallen fighting for LGBTQ+ rights. Jordan described the experience:

> This is, like, oh, this is dedicated to all the trans students out there who... and all the people who are fallen, like, trying to get us farther in life. And I remember reading that and being, like, "oh. I love singing this song."

While it is inspiring to hear that music educators are representing LGBTQ+ issues in the curriculum, this was not the case for all participants. Casey and Morgan both discussed pioneering LGBTQ+ artists (Freddy Mercury and David Bowie, respectively) whose LGBTQ+ identities were glossed over during the instruction. The erasure of Freddy Mercury’s LGBTQ+

identity was noticeable to Casey since she was singing "Somebody to Love," a song that speaks about the struggles of queer people finding love. Casey recounted her feelings about this erasure:

> Like, we talk about it, like, at lunch, be like, "Hey, this is kind of odd. This really famous queer man sings this song about being queer." And we're like, "Hey, let's just sing this for a chorus concert and not say anything about it." So, like, we discussed it separate from him, but nobody's, like, brought it up.

A final pedagogical piece that came up during the interviews was usually noticed by those participants who did not identify as cisgender. This piece pertains to the use of gendered language in music classes, especially in vocal music ensembles. Traditionally, choral education is gendered since biological sex is often attributed to vocal ranges. As discussed in Chapter II, there are many scholars who have argued for degendered language used in choral education. Jordan discussed his thoughts on gendered uniforms (e.g., tuxes/suits for men and dress for women). He explained, "The choir I had with [teacher 2], we had uniforms and there was 2 uniforms at that time. And there was like the dress or the like the semi formal suit." However, Jordan described how the culture of that particular ensemble changed when he began to question the gendered uniforms saying, "And they actually made the decision that anyone could pick whatever uniform they wanted."

Another aspect of gendered language pertains to the naming of vocal ensembles, especially when the primary vocal ranges match the biological sex of the singer. It has been common practice to name choruses consisting of low voices as "Men's Chorus" and high voices

as "Women's Chorus." Jordan described how he actively noticed the degendered naming conventions when going to his new school:

> She's like, "you should join our treble voices choir." And I had... I had joined this... I had been to the school before, and I knew that before that choir had been called the *Girls Choir*. So, I knew immediately, like, "oh, she changed that," and, so, that was pretty cool.

While Jordan noticed the gendered language in choral settings, Kiran experienced gender in a different way. They described an interaction with their Carnatic teacher:

> "You stand like a girl when you do tala"… I was literally constantly told that I do a tala like a girl, which is the most, even to the day, I get so fucking worked over because, like, tala is literally just doing this *[pats hands on palm]* on your lap and it's literally just a way for you to keep beat and I was told I did it like a girl and I should do it more manly.

Overall, the participants experienced pedagogical decisions that impacted their perceptions of their music learning environments. There were varying degrees of how teachers would try to create affirming and inclusive learning environments through representative signage and LGBTQ+ inclusive materials. Some participants actively noticed the erasure of LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum, while some noticed instances of representation that felt affirming. Finally, some participants discussed the impact of gendered pedagogical practices or the effects of traditional gender norms in their music learning spaces.

Theme Four: Social Dynamics and Relationships

The fourth emergent theme of this study is *social dynamics and relationships*. This theme pertains to the interactions among participants and the various constituents within music learning environments. Participants discussed the impact of interactions on their learning and LGBTQ+

identity processes, aspects of social identity and inclusion, social support networks, teacher-student relationships, and role modeling. When learning in music education spaces, participants would often discuss how the interactions among students and teachers would affect their perceptions of themselves as LGBTQ+ people. Kiran discussed the impact of harassing messaging from his teacher

> I would get teased a lot often by [primary teacher] and by the other kids... she started off as, like, a no-nonsense teacher, which is fine, but then it turned into, like, you know, mild aggression. Then it turned into belligerency. And then it was, like, at times, felt like a personal attack upon me.

While Kiran faced harassment from their teacher, Jordan felt that his peers did not understand his identity as a transman. Jordan talked about the notion of the "pick me" trope, which implies that the person is doing the action for attention. He described the experience as:

> The most common insult I've got, or, I don't know, has been, like, you're a "pick me girl." Or you're doing it for attention. And that comes from my family, like past peers, past friends. I don't know. That's the most common thing.

There was also a commonality among talking about how social identity intersected with the inclusion of participants' LGBTQ+ identity. For example, Kiran comes from a South Indian heritage and the culture was embedded within their music learning spaces. When talking about whether their music teacher had ever disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to them, Kiran described the sociocultural implications of the question. They said, "It was never explicitly in the sense that she came out and said, I'm a cisgender woman who is straight. She

didn't even have those words to talk about it as a Desi older woman." This statement exemplifies how the sociocultural context of music learning and identity intersect.

Several participants talked about how their religious identity was at odds with their LGBTQ+ identity. Participants Kiran, Morgan, and Jordan all discussed how their personal religion or the religion of their community played a role in their interactions with individuals in music learning spaces. When talking about why they stepped away from Carnatic music learning, Kiran said, "And It became more and more of me questioning myself of, like, it lost its authenticity… I didn't feel connected to God anymore and I didn't feel connected enough to these to what I was singing about."

Morgan discussed how their religious upbringing impacted their decision to disclose their identity. She said, "I was raised very religious. And it took escaping that to even be, like, 'Wait! Am I what I always thought I was?'"

Jordan mentioned the religious atmosphere in the community and felt unsure about revealing his identity to his private music teacher, who was deeply religious. He explained that despite the significance of learning the harp, his mental well-being was a higher priority, which is why he emphasized the importance of being open about his LGBTQ+ identity to his teacher. He said:

> It was out of necessity. It was not out of a place of... I told my mom if she doesn't take this well, I'm just not gonna play harp anymore. Like, it's not worth it. It's not worth it for my mental health. It's not worth it for really any reason.

While some participants felt pressure from various components of their community, some discussed positive social support networks that they experienced in their music learning spaces.

Those social support networks provided a space for them to discover more about their LGBTQ+ identity, but it also provided a space for them to feel affirmed. Morgan discussed how the band room was a place for the marginalized people in the school to coexist in a judgement free space:

While Kiran did not discuss their relationship with their primary music teacher as affirming to their LGBTQ+ identity, this was not a common sentiment. Casey and Jordan, in particular, talked about the foundational role that their teachers had on their developing identities. Casey said that the relationship was so positive that "[teacher 1] was actually one of the people, like, I publicly, like, kind of disclosed it." Jordan discussed how the relationship that was built with the teacher became incredibly affirming and created a space where he was comfortable disclosing his identity. He said:

> With [teacher 3] it was out of this... it was... it was him showing me time and time again that he was gonna stand up for me, or stand up for trans people. I was... I was the only trans person in the room.

The final component of this theme is the concept of role modeling wherein an LGBTQ+ teacher is able to actively live their authentic self in front of students. In Chapter II, I provided a discussion of how LGBTQ+ music students need queer role models in their music learning spaces (Hansen, 2016). Morgan discussed the importance of having such a role model in their music classroom:

> I didn't know she was trans until, like, I didn't know she came out as trans until after I came out. So it felt, I mean, it was cool. It was, like, "oh wow, there's a teacher here who is like me." And it definitely makes you feel like, "oh, there is someone I can talk to,"

something that does happen... And I think it was actually is probably very good for other students to be able to see an openly trans teacher.

Jordan also talked about the importance of his music teachers living their authentic lives. When describing his orchestra teacher, he said, "My orchestra teacher is talking about how he used to drag and I was like Oh, that's kind of like that's cool like just normalizing that in the classroom" Another teacher was able to disclose his own identity to his students. Jordan recounted, "my last year in that choir, he said like, ‘yeah, you know, I am gay. I'm a gay man.’"

Because there was a queer role model in the Jordan's life, this affected his decision to disclose his trans identity. He said, "with [teacher 2], it was definitely me hearing, like, him acknowledge his partner." A teacher being able to openly acknowledge his same-sex partner made a lasting impression on Jordan's ability to disclose his identity.

In conclusion, the exploration of social dynamics and relationships within music learning environments has illuminated the multifaceted nature of interactions among participants and constituents. Through participants' narratives, we have gained insights into the profound influence of these dynamics on various aspects of their learning experiences and identity processes. From the significance of supportive networks to the complexities of teacher-student relationships, and the crucial role of role modeling, it is evident that social interactions play a pivotal role in shaping the music learning journey. By acknowledging and understanding these dynamics, educators and practitioners can foster inclusive and supportive environments that nurture not only musical growth but also personal development and well-being for all participants involved.

Overall, the four themes emerged consistently across all participant interviews. The first theme, *identity acceptance and awareness*, illustrated participant experiences of understanding and ultimately accepting their LGBTQ+ identity. The second theme, *compartmentalization and coping mechanisms*, explained how participants managed their experiences and often attempted to exert control over their identity outcomes. Many participants discussed encountering the concept of the queer apologetic within this theme. The third theme, *pedagogical practices and learning environments*, described participants' experiences of learning within their musical spaces and how these experiences influenced their understanding or feelings about their LGBTQ+ identities. Finally, the fourth theme, *social dynamics and relationships*, illustrated how various relationships (such as student-student, student-teacher, community, and sociocultural) impacted their understanding of their LGBTQ+ identity.

Connection to the Research Questions

While there has been ample research on how to create inclusive music learning spaces and why such spaces are pivotal for LGBTQ+ students, there has been a lack of literature regarding the effect of how such practices affect LGBTQ+ students' decision to disclose their identity. The purpose of this study was to make meaning of this unexplored topic in scholarly literature. To accomplish this, I developed three research questions designed to not only serve as a guideline for the inquiry but also to explore the meaningful nature of the coming out process in identity development for LGBTQ+ youth. The following section relates my findings to the research questions to describe the essence of the phenomenon of coming out by synthesizing the core themes from this study.

RQ1: What are the various ways adolescent LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments that facilitate or inhibit the coming out process?

The purpose of this question was to explore how LGBTQ+ music students perceive and understanding the practices that occur in music learning environments. In Chapter I, I defined the term *pedagogy* as "the interaction of the teacher with the physical classroom, and between the teacher and students" (Knapp, 2021, p. 17). As such, pedagogy is not just what and how a teacher chooses to teach. It is much broader, and pedagogy involves all of the teacher's interactions with the space and learner. This includes concepts such as culture building, relationships, decisions on inclusive decor, as well as LGBTQ+ representation in the classroom and curriculum.

Two themes were core to this research question: *pedagogical styles and learning environments* and *social dynamics and relationships.* In the first of these themes, participants noticed when teachers were utilizing their praxis in affirming or non-affirming ways. For example, this theme was illustrated through the performance of a piece about the suffering of trans people. A teacher chooses to use gendered versus degendered language to account for non-cisgender identities in the music space. A teacher establishes an open-door policy that builds a classroom culture of candor, transparency, and honesty. On the other hand, a teacher may create a harsh environment where the student does not feel affirmed. It was very clear that pedagogical decisions were noticed, and they had an effect on the participants. Regarding a particular pedagogical decision regarding gendered language, Jordan offered:

> Yeah, I really noticed it. I think I was very attuned to that, even though it felt very small. Like, I was like, "oh, I can see that change." Like, I, it was, it was a pretty big deal for me because it.... Before they changed that language, I actually asked my mom if I could quit

choir because at that point, all of my, like, guy best friends were leaving, and I was, like, "Wait! I'm supposed to go to," and it felt like I wasn't supposed to be there. And when it changed, it was like, "Oh, I guess I am okay to be here."

The participants described the fourth theme, *social dynamics and relationships. S*ince pedagogy also deals with how teachers build relationships with their students, all participants felt there was a relationship that was built during music instruction. Some participants described those relationships as tumultuous, others as a more middle ground, and others as incredibly influential.

The results of this question reveal that LGBTQ+ students are acutely aware of pedagogical decisions. Each participant noted multiple experiences regarding how their LGBTQ+ identity was viewed, treated, and experienced in their music learning environments. While most participants appreciated feeling affirmed by their teacher's pedagogical decisions, only three of the five specifically mentioned how those decisions directly influenced their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. Two participants said that they were positively influenced, while one said that they were negatively influenced. The remaining two participants said that their teacher's pedagogical decisions were a non-issue regarding their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity.

RQ2: What do LGBTQ+ music students report to be the role the music student-teacher relationship plays in the coming out process?

The second research question specifically delved into the relationship between the music student and the music teacher and what role that relationship played in the coming out process. The primary theme that correlates to this question is theme four: *social dynamics and*

relationships. As previously stated, certain participants depicted those relationships as turbulent, some as residing in a moderate range, and others as profoundly impactful. All discussed how these relationships may have influenced their decision to disclose their identity. Since Casey's teacher worked to build a positive relationship with her, that affected her decision to disclose. She offered:

> It just felt, like, natural. I felt, like, she didn't treat me any differently. Like, if I were to say, like, I met this guy, instead of I met this girl, I feel, like, I would... it would have been the same. And I really liked that it made me feel, like, so like, it made me feel normal from, like, my experience.

Such a positive experience highlights the effect that a positive relationship can have on the identity development and positive mental health of LGBTQ+ youth.

As a result, participants had varying degrees of meaningful relationships with their music instructors. Based on the narratives of the participants, the pedagogical decisions correlated to the quality of the relationship. The teachers who made pedagogical choices that affirmed LGBTQ+ identities tended to have more meaningful relationships with the students, which made the coming out process easier. Those participants who said that their music teacher's decisions were a non-issue had cordial relationships, but they did not describe them as necessarily influential in their coming out process. If a participant felt erased, then the relationship suffered, and the coming out process was more challenging.

RQ3: To what extent do LGBTQ+ music students believe pedagogical practices in music learning environments help support and maintain their mental health?

The goal of this question was to discern how pedagogical practices in music learning environments affected the mental well-being of the participants. All four themes were present within the context of this question. Participants talked about how, as they became more aware of their identity, their music teachers played a role. There was a mix of responses related to well-being as some participants described serious instances of self-harm, identity repression, and harassment that occurred as a result of decisions in music learning spaces. This is when participants would discuss how they would compartmentalize their identities or exploit coping mechanisms in an attempt to regain more control over their identities. Others provided many notes of affirmation or validation as they were coming into their identities and how the decisions of their music teacher affected that. Whether their mental health was challenged or maintained, all participants discussed the effects of pedagogical decisions and the student-teacher relationship in regard to their LGBTQ+ identity.

Consequently, this study's findings indicate that there are some connections between pedagogical practices in music learning environments that support and maintain the mental health of LGBTQ+ students. Some participants experienced feelings of anxiety caused by harassment due to the culture in the classroom. Others experienced the opposite effect and experienced moments of affinity and belonging. Some participants expressed how some pedagogical decisions affirmed their LGBTQ+ identity, while others experienced shame or anger when they felt their identity was erased or glossed over.

Summary

In Chapter IV, I presented findings that describe how LGBTQ+ music students perceive the pedagogical decisions in their music learning spaces and how those decisions may have

influenced their decision to disclose their identity. I provided an overview of the research design and analysis methodology. I provided a composite narrative of each participant before providing a composite description. I then outlined the emergent core themes. Those themes are *identity acceptance and awareness, compartmentalization and coping mechanisms, pedagogy and learning environments,* and *social dynamics and* relationships. I concluded this chapter by synthesizing the emergent themes with the research questions guiding this inquiry in an attempt to focus my findings wit the goal of providing an explanation of how LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical decisions in music learning spaces and how those decisions may affect a student's decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings, connecting them to the current literature and theoretic frameworks. Chapter V also provides, implication of this study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V - DISCUSSION

In this phenomenological study I aimed to explore LGBTQ+ music students' perceptions of music education pedagogical practices and how those decisions influenced their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. In this chapter I discuss the significant findings related to the literature on LGBTQ+ identity development, the coming out process, and LGBTQ+ students in music education. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations, areas of future research, and a summary.

The discussion within this chapter helps to answer the following research questions:
RQ1: What are the various ways adolescent LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments that facilitate or inhibit the coming out process?
RQ2: What do LGBTQ+ music students report to be the role the music student-teacher relationship plays in the coming out process?
RQ3: To what extent do LGBTQ+ music students believe pedagogical practices in music learning environments help support and maintain their mental health?

I found four core themes related to LGBTQ+ students' perceptions of music education pedagogical practice: *identity awareness and acceptance, compartmentalization and coping mechanisms, pedagogy and learning environments*, and *social dynamics and relationships*. These themes related to participant experiences in music learning environments and sometimes affected their decision to disclose their identity.

Interpretation of the Findings

While the participants' experiences in their music learning environments were not identical, four themes were common regarding participant decisions to disclose their LGBTQ

identity. The following sections describe each theme and connect the findings to relevant scholarly literature.

Identity Awareness & Acceptance

The first core theme in this study is *identity awareness and acceptance*, which describes participants' experiences of becoming aware of their LGBTQ+ identity and their eventual acceptance and disclosure of their expressed identity. All participants became aware of their LGBTQ+ identities at some point during their adolescence. This finding correlates to other findings in scholarly literature. D'Augelli et al. (1998) found the ages of various stages of identity awareness were as follows, "On average, study respondents were aware at age 10, labeled themselves at 14, and told someone for the first time at 16" (p. 368). All participants had completed this process and publicly disclosed their identity before or during their senior year of high school.

Kiran expressed deteriorating relationships after coming out to their family, a common notion in the scholarly literature (Bry et al., 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). They described how, after they disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity to their family, their teacher began to treat them differently. They described their suspicion that their mother disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity to their teacher, and their teacher became more critical, belligerent, and antagonistic toward them.

While Kiran did experience negative reactions from others, some participants perceived that adverse reactions would occur from their family and friends. Jordan was apprehensive about disclosing his trans identity to his private teacher due to the teacher's religious sentiments. Anticipated reactions were a considerable theme in Brumbaguh-Johnson and Hull's (2019) study

regarding the social implications of coming out as transgender. The authors said, "Expecting a negative reaction, some participants waited years to come out to certain people, whereas other participants reported a rather uneventful coming-out experience due to others' already having an assumed knowledge and acceptance of their gender identity" (p. 1162). Jordan described his private teacher's reaction as, "She wasn't really great about it, but she, she took it and I'm still playing harp with her." This sentiment correlates to Brumbaguh-Johnson and Hull's finding that an anticipated adverse reaction may affect one's decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity to an individual or group.

Research indicates a connection between the process of coming out and the well-being of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Coming out has been linked to decreased distress and increased positive emotions and satisfaction in relationships, among other benefits (Rhoads, 1994; Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999; Solomon et al., 2015). Multiple participants expressed positive emotions after disclosing their non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identities. Jordan said, "Last year I came out as trans, and it made things a lot easier. Just for other people to see that I was, like, just really see me." Morgan contributed to this theme by recalling, "I would be much happier as a woman." After disclosing her LGBTQ+ identity, Casey expressed. "It just made me feel more confident to tell others." Each of the above statements shows how participants tend to experience increased positive emotions after they choose to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity.

Taylor says she never needed to put much of a production into her disclosure process. When describing her identity as aroace, she said, "I started to publicly identify as such just like I never had to, like, officially come out to anybody and, like, my parents were, like, they both kind of already assumed that was the case." Like Casey, Morgan, and Jordan, Taylor expressed an

overall positive reaction, but she felt that most people already assumed she identified as LGBTQ+ somehow. She said:

> It was positive, and I mean, like, my whole family and all my family friends, like, again, when I say, like, I didn't really have to come out, like, I really mean it. Like, they all kind of assumed that was the case.

Scholars provide context or insight into assumptions regarding perceived sexual or gender identity. Guitar (2014) argues, "Many teens and young adults are assumed gay in certain contexts" (p. 25). The context for Taylor was that she had frequently discussed not having crushes on peers. She reflected on her experiences with such assumptions, recounting:

> Elementary school people ask you if there's any student that you have a crush on, 'cause that's just how it is. And I never did... And a lot of my classmates actually thought I was gay. Because they would ask me if there were any boys that I liked, and I would say, "no."

In conclusion, this study's first core theme revolves around identity awareness and acceptance, highlighting participants' journeys of recognizing and embracing their LGBTQ+ identities. The study aligns with scholarly literature regarding the disclosure process as each participant came out during or before their senior year of high school. The participants encountered differing experiences during the disclosure process. These experiences included strained relationships with family and teachers (Kiran), perceived adverse reactions from teachers (Jordan), and feelings of others presuming their LGBTQ+ identity, hence not creating a sense of anxiety regarding the disclosure process (Taylor). Despite challenges, many participants experienced positive emotions post-disclosure, suggesting a connection between coming out and

increased well-being, aligning with scholarly findings. These insights shed light on the nuanced processes of identity recognition, disclosure, and societal perceptions within the LGBTQ+ community.

Compartmentalization & Coping Mechanisms

The emergent theme of *compartmentalization and coping mechanism*s agrees with much of the literature on the coming-out process (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Pachankis, 2007; Solomon et al., 2015; Bry et al., 2017). The disclosure process is unique to the individual, as illustrated by each participant's unique story. As such, participants underwent differing strategies to accept, control, or influence their perceptions of their identities. While some participants described aspects of their coming out process as positive, each participant described a point where they needed to employ various coping mechanisms in order to control or understand their budding LGBTQ+ identity.

Two participants specifically discussed the notion of repression as a way to control their developing LGBTQ+ identity. However, there is a nuance difference between repression and suppression. When an individual represses feelings around their identity, there is a level of unconscious thought to block the pervasive thoughts. At the same time, suppression is a more active role where the individual is aware of pushing their thoughts aside. Kiran described their experience with coming to terms with their identity, stating it was a "combination of me not accepting and not realizing and not... and just repression." Scholars have mentioned how identity repression/suppression is a common theme for LGBTQ+ people (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010; Cayari et al., 2021).

A distinguishing example of a coping mechanism described by the participants is the notion of the *queer aplogetic*. Guitar (2013) referred to this concept, which occurs when a person chooses to reveal an identity that does not fully align with their genuine sexual orientation or gender identity, aiming to make it more acceptable to everyone involved in the coming-out process, including family, friends, and even themselves. As shown by participant responses, the phenomenon of queer apologetics can occur regarding both gender and sexual orientation. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) discussed using a transitional identity regarding gender. Among the transmen included in their survey, some participants initially found resonance in identifying as lesbians. This choice not only elucidated their attraction to women but also afforded them the latitude to express themselves conventionally masculinely, such as adopting more masculine characteristics, such as short hairstyles and wearing men's clothes.

Regarding gender, Jordan came out as non-binary before disclosing his true identity as a transman. Although Guittar does not explicitly explore this concept from a gender perspective, there are correlations. Guittar describes the purpose of the queer apolgetic as a coping mechanism when one discloses their queer identitiy to produce an identity that is more comprehensible to others. When asked why he did not correct people when they would misidentify him as non-binary, Jordan said:

> She/her hurts me a lot more than saying to them. If that makes any sense, like, that feels like being stabbed and they/them, it's like, 'Okay, you see something about me that is right. It's just not quite right.' Like, it was a stepping stone. It was easier for me to let that slide than correct him and say, 'no,' actually.

Jordan felt the pressure of societal or communal expectations. Being referred to with gender-neutral pronouns like "they/them" is seen as a validation, albeit imperfect, of their identity. Despite this, the individual acknowledges that "they/them" pronouns still fall short of fully capturing their identity, likening it to a "stepping stone" towards recognition. The reluctance to correct others and assert their preferred pronouns illustrates the pressure to conform to societal expectations and the difficulty of challenging established norms, even when harmful or invalidating.

Guittar goes on to say that occasionally, the queer apologetic is rooted in persisting heteronormative or gendernormative social conventions and attitudes. Taylor expressed that such norms influenced how her first use of a transitional bisexual identity emerged. Taylor reflected on how the norms of her sociocultural context influenced her decision to begin to consider identifying as bisexual, saying, "But it's that kind of 'you just haven't met the right person' rhetoric that I was trying to, kind of, convince myself that that was what was happening." She clarified that the common notion of "you haven't met the right person yet" is frequently used to justify her identification as bisexual, as opposed to identifying as aroace, which lacks a more widely understood societal explanation.

The literature substantiates Taylor's first identification as bisexual rather than aroace. Winer et al. (2022) conducted a study exploring the use of bisexuality as a transitional identity for those who identify as aroace. In their examination, Winer et al. reveal that almost half (47%) of individuals within the asexual spectrum have, at some juncture, labeled themselves as bisexual or pansexual. Moreover, when prompted to select an orientation label not on the aroace spectrum, 29% closely align themselves with bisexuality or pansexuality. Winer et al.

corroborates Guittar's notion regarding societal expectations, saying that "the decision to withhold outward asexual identification also appears to stem from its invisibility as a legitimate sexual identity" (p. 282).

The narratives shared by the participants underscore the complexity of the coming-out process, reflecting the diverse strategies individuals employ to navigate and reconcile their LGBTQ+ identities. While some experiences were positively marked, each participant encountered moments where coping mechanisms became essential for understanding or controlling their burgeoning identities. The distinction between repression and suppression emerged as pivotal, with participants articulating how these mechanisms shaped their journeys toward self-acceptance. Additionally, the phenomenon of queer apologetics, discussed by Guitar (2013), provided insight into the nuanced ways individuals negotiate their identities within societal expectations and norms. Participant accounts shed light on how heteronormative and gendernormative pressures influence identity formation, exemplifying the intricate interplay between personal experiences and broader social contexts. Furthermore, the research findings by Winer et al. (2022) corroborate these lived experiences, emphasizing the prevalence of transitional identities and the societal challenges faced by those within the asexual spectrum. These insights deepen our understanding of the multifaceted nature of identity development within the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting the importance of recognizing and validating diverse experiences.

Pedagogy and Learning Environments

The third emergent theme is *pedagogy and learning environments*. It illustrates how each participant experienced pedagogical practices in their music learning environments and how

those experiences shaped their coming out process and overall well-being. As discussed previously, this dissertation broadly frames *pedagogy* as "the interaction of the teacher with the physical classroom and between the teacher and students" (Knapp, 2021, p. 17). This definition does not simply involve the teacher's interaction with the curriculum and students but includes the physical space of the learning environment.

With this broad understanding of pedagogy, exploring how participants perceived the physical space within the educational environment is essential. Multiple participants discussed how aspects of the physical space represented their LGBTQ+ identity. Such pedagogical decisions include the display of rainbow flags, safe space stickers, inclusive signage, and representative decor. Four out of five participants mentioned the presence of affirming signage that promoted an inclusive atmosphere. Two participants specifically mentioned the rainbow pride flag displayed in their music learning spaces. Two participants mentioned signage indicating that the environment was a "safe space" for LGBTQ+ individuals. Multiple scholars (Berman, 2017; Cayari et al., 2021) have discussed how affirming and inclusive elements of the classroom are essential for the well-being of LGBTQ+ students.

Regarding the overt display of LGBQ+ inclusive and affirming materials in the classroom, Taylor said, "Yeah, there was a pride flag, I think, on the, like, the bulletin board, right outside of the classroom. So it was very visible." When asked how such overt displays made her feel, Morgan said, "It definitely made it feel like, oh, this is a lot safer." Jordan also made remarks about how seeing positive material affected his well-being:

> It still gives me a little bit of hope because I see that, and I say someone took that and put it on the wall. Whether or not they'll follow through is their choice, but I know that they made the choice of putting that on their wall.

He continued to describe one teacher's attitude around a teacher's use of the safe space sticker. He said, "She has, like, ally stickers everywhere, and she's not, like, wordy about it. Like, 'oh look, I'm an ally.' It's more like, 'I'm gonna put this sticker up because I want you guys to feel awesome.'" Jordan specifically mentioned how he felt affirmed because his teacher did not put up the stickers for selfish reasons. The teacher put up the stickers so that he and other LGBTQ+ students would feel substantiated.

Four out of the five participants noted some positive LGBTQ+ representation in the physical space. However, one participant expressed a contrary perspective, stating this was not the case. Kiran described the sociocultural context of their musical learning as an explanation for the lack of representation. They described the cultural context as a space where people often do not discuss LGBTQ+ issues, let alone create spaces that are affirming. They said, "There was definitely no protections against it, but also it wasn't ever explicitly talked about." They talked about how, in South Indian culture, there are traditional gender roles and misunderstandings of LGBTQ+ issues. This sentiment is similar to Munoz and D'Aniella's (2020) findings, which discuss similar elements in Latinx communities.

Another component of this theme includes including LGBTQ+ representation in the curriculum. Many scholars discussed the importance of positive LGBTQ+ representation in the curriculum (Bergonzi, 2009; Berman, 2017; Moorehead, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2022). Every participant experienced different kinds of curricula (enacted, hidden, or null) at some point

during their music education. Knapp (2021) defines enacted, hidden, and null curricula. Teachers overtly teach the enacted curriculum in the classroom. For example, explicitly performing a piece of music by an LGBTQ+ artist and discussing the role the artist's LGBTQ+ identity played when composing the piece. The hidden curriculum does not state directly, in a syllabus, for example, components of the material taught. For example, I could teach a piece about an LGBTQ+ artist in June when it correlates with Pride Month. This instance is classified as part of the hidden curriculum because when the teacher exclusively addresses LGBTQ+ issues during Pride Month, it inherently prioritizes heterosexual and cisgender artists, thereby emphasizing and privileging the dominant culture, a sentiment supported by (Hess, 2016). The null curriculum is utilized by what educators do not teach, whether purposefully or unintentionally. For example, completely ignoring the fact that an artist is LGBTQ+, even if their identity is relevant to the piece of music performed.

When teachers overtly include those representations in the curriculum, they are part of the enacted curriculum. Jordan provided an example of positive LGBTQ+ representation through a piece performed about trans people. He said:

> This is like, oh, this is dedicated to all the trans students out there who... And all the people who are fallen, like, trying to get us farther in life. And I remember reading that and be like, "Oh. I love singing this song."

When Jordan encountered a positive representation of himself in the curriculum, it fostered a sense of well-being for him. Silveira and Goff (2016) linked the inclusion of positive representations of LGBTQ+ people within the curriculum with improved feelings of safety.

Casey and Morgan described experiences with LGBTQ+ issues existing within the context of the null curriculum. While they, as LGBTQ+ people, knew that the featured artists identified as LGBTQ+ in some way, the teacher did not mention the artist's LGBTQ+ identity. Morgan mentioned performing a song by David Bowie, who identified as bisexual. She said, "I'm not sure, like, it was if anything... it was probably glossed over. We did do like David Bowie... But if that would probably be a time to talk about it." While Casey knew that David Bowie identified as LGBTQ+, the teacher did not include this information in direct instruction.

While Morgan did not actively address the issue with her teacher, Casey was very vocal about her experience learning the song "Somebody to Love" by Freddy Mercury in chorus. Explicitly describing how it upset her that the teacher actively avoided the subject of Freddy Mercury's LGBTQ+ identity and its importance in this specific song. She said:

> We did a whole entire Queen song without bringing up Freddie Mercury at all. It was… It was, oh, *Somebody to Love.* And the whole thing, we were, I was like, "[teacher 2]! [teacher 2]! Can you tell us something about this song?" And he was like, "No."... Like we talk about it like at lunch, be like, "Hey, this is kind of odd. This really famous queer man sings this song about being queer." And we're like, "Hey, let's just sing this for a chorus concert and not say anything about it." So, like, we discussed it separate from him, but nobody's, like, brought it up.

The two instances described previously highlight the importance of positive representations of LGBTQ+ people in the curriculum. In their examination of LGBTQ+ inclusive strategies used by music teachers, Garret and Spana (2017) found that teachers are generally uncomfortable with including LGBTQ+ topics and issues in their curriculum, citing a

lack of knowledge and available resources as potential sources for this discomfort. However, Palkki and Caldwell (2018) argue that the inclusion of such material can be influential, even if it is to highlight that queer people are capable of being successful, beautiful, or creative.

Even though Kiran's music learning context was different from the other participants, they did describe a representation of a potentially queer figure appearing in one song during his Carnatic vocal instruction. They said, "One, in the entire time that I learned it from the ages of 5 to 18, one song was about a queer god." The god they referenced was Ardhanarishvara, a combined representation of the deity Shiva and his wife Parvati. However, Kiran did mention that the choice of this song was not necessarily to represent a queer identity, and it had more of a logistical intent for the performance. Kiran described their thoughts around the choice to use a song featuring a non-cisgender character:

> Calling it a song, I feel is a little bit of a... too much credit to it. It was more like a Bhajan. It was, like, 4 to 5 lines long, and we've repeated like 2 of them like 6 times in different ways. So that's what really gave its length, if anything, but it was the shortest little, like, I guess, the closest thing would be a hymn. Like, she chose it, and she chose it because it was short and it fit the thematic scene she was going for, I guess."

Overall, participants have expressed noticing when LGBTQ+ are represented or erased from the curriculum. As for Jordan, the purposeful discussion of the LGBTQ+ context for the repertoire facilitated positive feelings of representation. However, when teachers actively ignore the queer context of the music, such as described by Casey, feelings of anxiety or contempt may emerge. In this study, only one of the five participants (20%) described explicitly inclusive LGBTQ+ topics in the curriculum (Jordan). The findings from this study are in congruency with

Kosciw et al.'s (2022) finding that most (71.6%) LGBTQ+ students do not see the inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in their curricula.

This theme's final central pedagogical practice involves teachers using gendered versus degendered pedagogy. Many scholars focused on trans issues in choral contexts have discussed the importance of gendered versus degendered pedagogy in music learning spaces (Palkki, 2017, 2018; Southerland, 2018; Cayari et al., 2021). Gendered pedagogy can involve many aspects of the music curriculum, including using the correct pronouns, gendered versus student-led uniforms, and naming conventions around sections of singers or ensembles. The importance of degendered language was fundamental to Jordan, who, as a transman, was finely attuned to language. He noticed decisions around ensemble naming conventions, voice part identification, and uniform requirements. He said:

> Yeah, I really noticed it. I think I was very attuned to that, even though it felt very small. Like I was like, oh, I can see that change. Like. I, it was, it was a pretty big deal for me because it. I, there's 2 times I. Well, not 2 times. That one time. Before they change that language. I actually ask my mom if I could quit choir, cause at that point all of my like guy best friends were leaving and I was like wait I'm supposed to go to and it felt like I wasn't supposed to be there. And when it changed, it was like, oh. I guess I am okay to be here.

Jordan's perception of gendered pedagogy profoundly impacts his sense of belonging and inclusion within educational spaces. He expressed a heightened awareness of even subtle changes in the pedagogical approach, emphasizing the significance of these shifts in their experience. Jordan recalls a pivotal moment when he contemplated quitting choir due to feeling

out of place, mainly as his male friends were leaving. This juncture highlights the alienation he felt within a gendered environment that did not fully recognize or accommodate his identity. However, the Jordan's attitudes changed when he observed a modification in language and practices that made him feel acknowledged and accepted. This transition suggests that inclusive pedagogy, which acknowledges diverse gender identities, can transform students' perceptions of their place within educational settings. The narrative underscores the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that validate and affirm the identities of all students.

Overall, the pedagogy and learning environment theme addressed one of the core sentiments of this research project: How do LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning spaces? Participants could speak to the effects of inclusive decisions regarding the physical space in which learning occurred. They could also discuss their perceptions of LGBTQ+ representation in the curriculum. Finally, there was a discussion about traditional gendered practices and how such conventions may affect students.

Social Dynamics & Relationships

The fourth core theme extracted from the interviews was s*ocial dynamics and relationships*. This theme encompasses the influence relationships have on LGBTQ+ identity development. Although the participants mentioned numerous relationships, this paper will focus on the relationships within music learning spaces: peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher relationships.

Peer-to-Peer Relationships

Multiple participants explained how their music learning spaces were spaces defined by affinity. Morgan described the band room as a space where those who are marginalized would

find a way to separate themselves from the rest of the school. She said, "It was one of those spaces that was very accepting because there's probably a lot of people already in there who faced that kind of, like, mistreatment." She placed the creation of such a space more on the students rather than the teacher. Adderly et al. (2003) referenced a similar finding in their study regarding musician's perceptions of the music classroom. They found:

> The social climate of these ensembles is important to each member, and provides many with an outlet that they might not have had to meet others from within the larger school setting, or to form relationships away from the home environment that assist them in negotiating the often turbulent high school year.

Both statements emphasize the significance of supportive social environments in helping individuals feel accepted, understood, and empowered to navigate difficult experiences. They suggest that spaces where people can relate to each other's struggles and offer support contribute to a sense of belonging and well-being.

Morgan continued to describe her perceptions of the student's role in creating her perception of an inclusive environment within the band classroom. She said, "I think it's mostly the students creating that space, that inclusive atmosphere." This finding agrees with other findings from the literature. Rawlings (2016) and Rawlings and Espelage (2020) found that peer-to-peer victimization occurred at higher frequencies outside the music classroom rather than inside the music classroom.

However, some participants had an opposing experience with their peers within the music learning environment. Kiran described their experience of being harassed by not only the teacher but also, in part, by the other students. They said:

> They were coming from everyone like the teacher, my mother, the students, like, the students were a lot less because they were ABCDs *[sic American-Born Confused Desis],* and they grew up here, and they understood more of American culture and what happened and just being a gay person in America, and were the most marginally more accepting."

Casey heard similar negative commentary or harassment from her peers in class. She described the experience as:

> People say hateful things when I had [teacher 1] 's class. Like, when she wasn't looking, people would say, like, awful things, like like middle school kids do.... Like, just putting down queer identities, like just, like, I don't know, like, dehumanizing it.

Jordan often had confrontational experiences with his classmates regarding his trans identity. Jordan talked about his peers' perception that he did this for attention, using the epithet "pick me girl." He depicted an interaction after he asked about where the concert uniform that did not match his sex-assigned-at-birth by saying, "Some kids were just like, 'Oh, she's being a "pick me" again.' Like, she's doing it for attention."

The experiences of participants Kiran, Casey, and Jordan correlate to the findings in the literature regarding negative interactions with peers (Kosciw et al., 2022). The experiences of the three participants highlight the challenges and nuances of acceptance and discrimination within educational contexts for LGBTQ+ students, particularly around navigating their identities amid varying degrees of understanding and peer support.

Student-to-Teacher Relationships

In each interview, the participant discussed how the relationships between the teacher and student influenced their well-being as LGBTQ+ people. The literature abundantly discusses the importance of the student-to-teacher relationship for the well-being of LGBTQ+ people (Garrett, 2012; Hendricks et al., 2014; Wimberly et al., 2015; Mayari et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2022). Multiple participants talked about how their teacher treated them after learning that they were LGBTQ+. As previously discussed, Kiran's teacher treated them with antagonism and hostility. However, this was not the case for all participants. Morgan described her experience with her band director after coming out as a transwoman:

> Just like the respect that he would show the students who were out. Like, he would, I mean, he respected my identity. He respected other people that way, in my experience. I don't want to speak for other people who were in band. In my experience, I did not have any sign that he didn't respect me. I actually... I think [band teacher] did actually pull me aside, and he was like, 'if you want to talk about it you can.'

When Casey disclosed her lesbian identity, she described how her chorus teacher affirmed her identity by stating, "I felt like she wouldn't make me feel like I'm any different than everybody else. And it, it made me feel really nice." These narratives highlight the importance of affirming relationships after a student discloses. The literature highlights the importance of affirming teacher relationships for LGBTQ+ students. Kosciw et al. (2022) found that almost all LGBTQ+ students could identify at least one member of the staff at school who would be supportive of their LGBQT+ identity were less likely to feel unsafe and miss school, and felt a greater sense of belonging with higher self-esteem.

Multiple participants discussed the concept of role modeling regarding seeing their LGBTQ+ teachers exist as their authentic selves. Hansen (2016) argues that "queer music teachers need support from heterosexual and cisgender colleagues to be out in the workplace. Without putting themselves in places of danger, teachers who are members of the sexual and gender minority need to "live out" so that queer students know who they can trust, confide in, and consider a model of success" (p. 129). Palkki and Caldwell found similar findings among their participants, saying, "For many of them, this precedent served as a form of encouragement" (p. 37). Morgan specifically discussed the benefit of seeing a trans choir teacher live as her authentic self, saying:

> I think it was actually... is probably very good for other students. To be able to see an openly trans teacher... It was like, oh wow, there's a teacher here who is like me. And it definitely makes you feel like, oh, there is someone I can talk to.

Jordan felt similar sentiments seeing his teachers present their authentic LGBTQ+ identities without reservation. One teacher discussed how he performed as a drag queen, and another would appear at school functions with his partner. The second teacher also outright disclosed his identity to his students. Jordan recounted these disclosures and said, "I was, like, Oh, that's kind of like that's cool, like, just normalizing that in the classroom." Normalizing the LGBTQ+ experience provided a positive frame of reference for participants with an educator who could teach as their authentic selves.

Overall, participants developed relationships with both peers and teachers within the contexts of their music learning environments. Regarding relationships with peers, some participants described their music spaces as places of affinity and affirmation where those who

are marginalized can come together with the common goal of music-making. Others sometimes struggled with their peers, noting homophobic or transphobic remarks. The role of the teacher was also influential for some participants, especially after disclosing their identities. An important topic discussed by several participants regarding teacher-student relationships was the influence of teachers as LGBTQ+ role models who could teach and openly identify as LGBTQ+.

Theoretical Connections

Findings from this study illuminated particular aspects of multiple theoretical ideas in developmental science. The first is Overton's (2006) process-relational metatheory. The relational metatheory establishes that although there are variational forces in play, they are not independent and are ambiguously connected. Overton explains how a relational metatheory is holistic and nonlinear and rejects the pure forms created through dualism. He champions the identity of opposites and the opposites of identity, positing that researchers must look at the dualisms as coequals and examine them inclusively. Inclusively examining coequals connects directly to the phenomenological method used in this study. According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher should consider all significant statements equally valuable.

Furthermore, the narratives examined in this study illustrate Overton's (2006) notion of the *Opposites of Identity*. The concept refers to the phenomenon where two seemingly similar or identical concepts can exhibit differences or opposition when examined more closely or in different contexts. For example, some participants explained how an opposition to surface similarity and inner conflict. On the surface, the participants would work to make their sexual orientation or gender identity match societal norms or expectations. However, there was an internal struggle to reconcile their LGBTQ+ identity. For example, Casey said, "I would not

associate with anything that was, like, queer in school because I felt, like, how awful my first situation was. I did not want to really live that ever again." This internal conflict can create tension and lead to the need to come out to harmonize their true identity with societal expectations.

Another way this study illustrates Overton's concept of the Opposites of Identity is through the diverse experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. The LGBTQ+ community encompasses many identities, experiences, and perspectives. No participant in this study had the same sexual orientation and gender identity combination, narrative, developmental process, or coming out experience as any other participant. Opposites of Identity acknowledge that within this community, individuals may have differing experiences and challenges related to their identity.

There are overlaps between Overton's theory and queer theory as both reject dualism. Overton rejects Cartesian splits, while queer theory fundamentally questions conventional divisions between sexual orientations (heterosexual vs. homosexual) and sex/gender (male vs. female). It promotes the recognition of all sexual and gender identities as fluid, open, and not rigidly defined.

Both theoretical frameworks also emphasize the role of intersectionality in the role of development. Queer theory acknowledges the intersectionality of identities, including race, class, gender, and sexuality. Opposites of Identity similarly acknowledge the interconnectedness of various aspects of identity and how they shape individuals' experiences. Both frameworks highlight the importance of considering the overlapping and intersecting factors that influence people's lives and identities.

As such, the findings of this study can also be related to dynamic systems theory (Thelen & Smith, 2006) and are a framework for understanding complex systems that change and develop over time. Dynamic systems are fundamentally opposed to early identity development models such as Cass (1979/1984) or Coleman (1982) because dynamic systems reflect on the nonlinear nature of systems. There are multiple paths that a person can develop throughout their lives. The person's context will determine how the person will develop, which correlates with other models of LGBTQ+ identity development that take such contexts into more excellent account (Troiden, 1989; Rhoads, 1997; Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999).

The findings from this study illustrated dynamic systems primarily through the narratives that the participants shared. Like the Opposites of Identity, not every narrative was the same. Each participant underwent a personal web of connections between experiences, relationships, sociocultural contexts, personal conflicts, and other variables before they were able to ultimately disclose their LGBTQ+ identities. Such intersectionality relates directly to Overton's process-relational theory and integrates seamlessly with the principles of dynamic systems theory. Overton contends that within a system, interconnected relationships exist among its components. Dynamic systems theory elucidates how these components coalesce and collaborate to foster developmental processes.

Overall, the findings from this study relate directly to two theoretical models in developmental sciences: Overton's process-relational metatheory and Thelen and Smith's dynamic systems theory. Each provides a framework for how LGBTQ+ individuals interact with their particular set of variables and how those interactions connect as the individual processes toward the moment of disclosure.

Implications of the Findings

In this study I describe how LGBTQ+ music students perceive the pedagogical practices in their music learning environments during secondary school and how those perceptions may have influenced their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. Their narratives develop a framework for understanding how LGBTQ+ musicians experience practices in music education pedagogy. It is from these narratives that I base my recommendations for practice. The conclusions from this study have relative implications for music educators, school administration, performing arts coordinators, curriculum designers, school psychologists, and music students.

Implications for Policy

The findings from this study highlight the need for more inclusive educational practices and inclusivity in secondary music education environments. The results of this study suggest a need for policies that mandate or encourage inclusivity in music learning contexts. So developments could lead to the development of guidelines that ensure all teaching materials and curricula are inclusive of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities. Additionally, policymakers could use the findings to argue for more robust training requirements regarding LGBTQ+ issues in music learning environments. The inclusion of more training in DEI and, by extension, LGBTQ+ in teacher preparation programs would contribute to ensuring that schools contribute toward more inclusive music programs.

An additional implication is the implementation of more policies that foster a supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students. Additionally, the findings from this study shed light on understanding the impact of decisions in music learning spaces on LGBTQ+ students'

mental health and well-being, implying a greater need for support systems, counseling, affinity spaces, and mental health resources within educational settings.

Implications for Practice

Music educators might take the findings of this study to reconsider how they design their curricula, ensuring the incorporation of diverse voices and perspectives in their student's music learning. Such inclusive practices may exist through curricular changes where LGBTQ+ topics and issues are included in the enacted curriculum rather than being pushed into the hidden or null curricula.

Music teachers could use the insights from this study to consider how they interact with LGBTQ+ students to create supportive spaces while implementing specific strategies in the classroom to foster respect and understanding among students. Additionally, music education can influence the disclosure process for LGBTQ+ students by nurturing a sense of belonging and acceptance within the school community. When music spaces also act as safe spaces, they may foster a sense of inclusion and affirmation that makes LGBTQ+ musicians feel more comfortable and confident about disclosing their identities. Positive experiences in music classrooms can contribute to developing supportive relationships, peer networks, and mentorship opportunities that facilitate coming out and openly embracing one's identity.

Theoretical Implications

The determinations of this study also contribute to the literature on identity development among LGBTQ+ adolescents. Implications involve exploring the role of music education in facilitating the self-discovery and disclosure processes for LGBTQ+ students. Music is a form of creative expression and emotional outlet. Thus, it holds the potential to provide a safe and

supportive space where students can explore and express their identities authentically. Therefore, music education can play a crucial role in facilitating the processes of self and public disclosure for LGBTQ+ people by providing opportunities to engage in diverse musical experiences. Through music-making, LGBTQ+ students may find avenues for self-expression, reflection, and connection with others who share similar experiences.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. The first limitation was the small number of participants in the study which was the result of the specific prerequisite criteria for participation. It is important to note that small samples are not unusual for phenomenological research because the goal is to capture a nuanced understanding of a phenomenon among a members of a group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, the experiences of LGBTQ+ music students in music learning environments offered a diversity of knowledge about how such experiences influenced individual decisions to disclose non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities. A small sample size was necessary to fully understand the specificities of individual experiences.

A second limitation in this study relates to geographic location. While the geographic locations participants represented three different areas of the United States, other regions were not represented by the participants. Expanding this study to include other geographic regions, especially regions which are currently mandated by divisive content laws, may provide further insight into the effect of music education pedagogy on the coming out process.

A final limitation in this study relates to the demographic makeup of the participants. Most participants identified as White and came from a modest socioeconomic background. Expanding this study to include other demographic criteria such as race and socioeconomic

backgrounds may provide more robust understanding of the various sociocultural contexts in which students experience music learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

Ever since Bergonzi (2009) first explicitly mentioned sexual orientation in a music education research journal, there has been a significant contribution to scholarly research in music education and LGBTQ+ topics. The current literature does discuss how LGBTQ+ students perceive pedagogical practices, and many scholars provide advice on how to foster well-being among LGBTQ+ students in music learning spaces. However, there is a void in the literature on how the perceptions of such practices may influence an LGBTQ+ student's decision to disclose their identity. As such, I recommend that future research explore how music educators can utilize their practice and spaces to create environments where LGBTQ+ students feel comfortable and confident enough to disclose their LGBTQ+ identities.

I recommend that further research expand the target population to include students who begin to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity at earlier ages. As discussed in Chapter II, the current research suggests that LGBTQ+ people are starting to disclose their identities at younger ages than previous generations. Several participants discussed how they began exploring their identity before middle school. As such, including the practices seen at elementary and middle school ages may provide insight into how LGBTQ+ people's experiences in elementary or middle school programs may affect their understanding of their LGBTQ+ identities.

I also recommend that future research explore the concept of transitional identities where LGBTQ+ people use an identity, such as bisexuality, as a stepping stone before they ultimately disclose their true identity. Of the participants who contributed to this study, 60% discussed using

transitional identities at some point during their development process. Research on this phenomenon is currently lacking, especially regarding the use of non-binary as a transitional identity to transgender. It is worthy of future exploration to more comprehensively understand the LGBTQ+ identity development process in adolescents.

I also advise that future research investigate the role of LGBTQ+ role models in school music programs. The idea of a role model goes beyond teachers developing allyship for LGBTQ+ people. Multiple participants provided commentary on how their music teachers who identified as LGBTQ+ had a beneficial influence on their understanding of their identity. Since there is a lack of literature around the role of this relationship, future research should explore how such role models influence the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ students.

Conclusion

There is a a lack of literature providing any connection between pedagogical practices in music learning environments and how those practices may influence an LGBTQ+ person's decisions to disclose their identity. As an LGBTQ+ music educator engaged in creating inclusive and supportive environments for my students, this absence of research intrigued me. To address the absence of this topic in scholarly literature, my study explored how LGBTQ+ music students perceived pedagogical practices in their music learning environments and how those perceptions influenced their decisions to disclose their identity. My study utilized a phenomenological methodology to form descriptive themes. I interviewed five participants who (a) identified as LGBTQ+, (b) participated in music instruction during secondary school, and (c) disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity during that time. Participants were selected from various parts of the United States and were either still in high school or had graduated within three years of participating in

the study. I conducted in-depth interviews via the Zoom video conferencing platform, and each participant provided rich and unique narratives that contributed to the findings.

My findings revealed four emergent themes relating to how students perceive music education pedagogy and how that pedagogy affects the coming out process: *identity awareness and acceptance, compartmentalization and coping mechanisms, pedagogy and learning environments*, and *social dynamics and relationships*. Participants all described their process of becoming aware of and eventually accepting and disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity. In their identity development, each participant underwent a form of compartmentalization or instituted coping mechanisms to control their identity. All participants discussed their perceptions of teachers' decisions in their music learning environments. All participants characterized the relationships within those spaces and how they may have contributed to their feelings about their LGBTQ+ identity.

This project has provided me with keen insight into how LGBTQ+ music students experience their music learning spaces. The project's design focused on the participant's narratives, and each participant shared insight regarding their perspectives of music teaching practices and the phenomenon of the coming out process. My study is a step toward better understanding the connections between these two seemingly unrelated topics.

Implications for practice developing from my study extend to music educators, school administration, performing arts coordinators, curriculum designers, school psychologists, and music students. Recommendations for further research include: (a) how music educators can utilize their practice and spaces to create environments where LGBTQ+ students feel comfortable and confident enough to disclose their LGBTQ+ identities, (b) extending the target

population to include students who begin to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity at earlier ages, (c) investigating the concept of transitional identities, and (d) examining the role of LGBTQ+ role models in school music programs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Part A. Interview Opening

I wanted to take a brief moment prior to beginning this interview to thank you for providing consent to participate in this research study and subsequent interview. The purpose of this study is to examine the coming out process of LGBTQ+ music students. The goal of this work is to capture your voice and understand how your experiences with coming out occurred within today's sociocultural climate.

Specifically, this qualitative study aims to investigate how you, as an LGBTQ+ music student, perceive teaching practices in your music learning environments and how these practices have influenced your ability to disclose your LGBTQ+ identity. The goal of this study is to gain insights into how music learning environments impact historically marginalized and stigmatized identities, and to identify ways in which these practices can be enhanced to create safe and supportive learning environments for individuals like yourself.

Please be assured that all the information you provide for this study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The study will not include any explicit references that could potentially reveal your identity. After each interview, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts and make any necessary clarifications, amendments, or corrections. Your personal details such as your name, school, or specific location will never be shared, and any experiences shared will be anonymized using pseudonyms. It is entirely acceptable to skip questions or omit responses if you wish throughout the duration of this study. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any point during the interview process. The interview will be recorded. Are you comfortable with these terms?

Should you experience any distress during the interview process, counseling resources will be provided to you free of charge. Should it be required, participants can receive free counseling services through The Trevor Project through their website https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/ or via phone number at 1-866-488-7386.

Part B. Interview Questions

Pathway

1. Tell me about your experiences as a musician? When did you start? How did you start?
2. How do you define your LGBTQ+ identity?

Music Learning Environments

3. Tell me about your secondary music teachers?
4. Tell me about the classrooms.
   4.1. Were their clear rules against hate speech toward LGBTQ+ people?
   4.2. Did you encounter bullying or harassment from other members of your ensembles or classes?
   4.3. If you had friend in school who was questioning their LGBTQ+ identity, would you have suggest that they speak with your music instructor?
5. What did you notice, if anything, in your classes or groups that promoted or supported LGBTQ+ identities?
   5.1. Did they encourage the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people.
   5.2. Did your teacher(s) openly acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity around students?
   5.3. Did your teacher(s) discuss the LGBTQ+ identities of the composers studied or performed?

Disclosure

6. How did you disclose your LGBTQ+ identity for the first time? To whom? Can you describe that experience?
7. Did you share your LGBTQ+ identity with at least on of your music teachers during secondary school?
8. In what ways did or did not your music teacher(s) affect your choice to publicly disclose your LGBTQ+ identity?

Part C. Interview Closing.

Being mindful of your time, I want to thank you for your willingness to speak your truth and tell your story. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not already covered? Is there anything you would like clarified?

I deeply appreciate your interest and willingness to participate in this important work. As mentioned in the recruitment documents, this interview has been recorded for the purpose of transcription. Please be assured that utmost care will be taken to ensure your confidentiality throughout this interview and study. To protect your identity, pseudonyms will be used, and appropriate data collection and storage methods will be implemented.

After the interview, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript, allowing you to provide any necessary clarifications, amendments, or corrections. Your input is valued, and this process ensures that your perspective is accurately represented.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to let me know. Once again, I genuinely thank you for your participation and contribution to this endeavor.

Appendix B - Initial Recruitment Letter

Dear Music Educator,

I am reaching out to request your assistance in identifying potential participants in a project that I am leading as a doctoral student at Lesley University. I am embarking on a study and seek to understand how music education pedagogical practices facilitate or inhibit the ability for LGBTQ+ students to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. This work is performed under the direction of my senior advisor, Dr. Ulas Kaplan. This study has received full IRB approval (IRB # 23/24-01)

Embedded in this study is the passion to understand the following questions.

1. What are the various ways adolescent LGBTQ+ music students perceive pedagogical practices in music learning environments that facilitate or inhibit the coming out process?
2. What do LGBTQ+ music students report to be the role the music student-teacher relationship plays in the coming out process?
3. To what extent do LGBTQ+ music students believe pedagogical practices in music learning environments help support and maintain their mental health?

You are being asked to help recruit participants for this project because you know your students. In order to participate, students must meet the following criteria:

1. They are a current (age 14 - 18) or recently graduated (within three years of participation in this study) high school student.
2. They participated in music instruction during secondary schooling.
3. They disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity during that time.

I will be interviewing individuals who meet the above criteria. The interviews are anticipated to take no longer than 60-90 minutes. Interviews will occur via Zoom and will be video and audio recorded to facilitate accurate transcriptions of the interviews.. The participants will be allowed to review the transcripts of the interviews, and they will be provided the opportunity to correct, amend, or clarify their statements. They will be able to withdraw their participation at any point. All participant information will be kept confidential, and recordings will be securely stored for five years before being destroyed.

If you know of any current or former student who may be interested in participating in this study, I would appreciate if you would pass along the attached letter and consent form. If they would be interested in participating, they can return the appropriate forms to me at sadams9@lesley.edu.

Sid Adams - Ph.D. Candidate - Lesley University

Appendix C - Participant Consent Form

Description and Purpose

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in this research which seeks to understand how LGBTQ+ music students perceive teaching practices in music learning environments, and if and how those perceptions influence their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. This work is performed under the direction of my senior advisor, Dr. Ulas Kaplan.

In order to participate, you must meet the three following criteria:

1. You are a current (age 14 - 18) or recently graduated (within three years of participation in this study) high school student.
2. You participated in music instruction during secondary schooling.
3. You disclosed your sexual orientation or gender identity ("came out") during that time.

Research Activities

Your participation in the research will consist of:

4. Submission of all appropriate consent forms.
5. One 60-90 minute video recorded, semi-structured and open-ended interview regarding your experiences as a musician and the process of disclosing your LGBTQ+ identity. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom and will be video and audio recorded.
6. An opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and provide any clarifications, addendums, or corrections.
7. There is no pre-work necessary prior to the interview.

Benefits

By participating in this study, you may be able to participate in a reflective conversation that allows you to analyze how your experiences have shaped you an LGBTQ+ person and musician. This process may lead to new learnings that are useful to you moving forward.

Risk

Due to the sensitive and personal nature of the topic, there could be the potential for emotional risks for some participants. You have the right to refuse to partake in this study and participation is completely voluntary. Additionally, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point should you choose. You may skip or pass on questions during the interview.

Should it be required, participants can receive free counseling services through The Trevor Project through their website https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/ or via phone number at 1-866-488-7386.

Confidentiality
All information gathered for this study will be kept completely confidential. There will be no explicit references within the study that will be made that could potentially expose your identity. All recorded data will be recorded and kept securely for five years, and then destroyed. Your name and any other identifying information will be disguised using pseudonyms.

Right to Ask Questions
Question regarding this research study should be direct to Sid Adams at sadams9@lesley.edu or to Dr. Ulas Kaplan at ukaplan@lesley.edu.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which all complaints or problems may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu

Sincerely,

Sid Adams, M.M.ed. - Ph.D. Student
-Lesley University - Educational Studies - Human Development and Learning.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Preferred Interview Date(s) _____

Location: _____ _____
city *state*

Printed Name:_____

Signature:_____
By signing above, the participant indicates that they are 18 years or older.

Date: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email:_____

Researcher's Printed Name:_____

Researcher's Signature:_____

Date: _____

Appendix D - Parental Consent Form

Description and Purpose

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is invited to participate in this research which seeks to understand how LGBTQ+ music students perceive teaching practices in music learning environments, and if and how those perceptions influence their decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. This work is performed under the direction of my senior advisor, Dr. Ulas Kaplan.

In order to participate, your child must meet the three following criteria:

1. They are a current (age 14 - 18) or recently graduated (within three years of participation in this study) high school student.
2. They participated in music instruction during secondary schooling.
3. They disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity ("came out") during that time.

Research Activities
Their participation in the research will consist of:

1. Submission of all appropriate consent forms.
2. One 60-90 minute video recorded, semi-structured and open-ended interview regarding your experiences as a musician and the process of disclosing your LGBTQ+ identity. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom and will be video and audio recorded.
3. An opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and provide any clarifications, addendums, or corrections.
4. There is no pre-work necessary prior to the interview.

Benefits
By participating in this study, your child may be able to participate in a reflective conversation that allows them to analyze how their experiences have shaped them an LGBTQ+ person and musician. This process may lead to new learnings that are useful to them moving forward.

Risk
Due to the sensitive and personal nature of the topic, there could be the potential for emotional risks for some participants. You and your child have the right to refuse to partake in this study and participation is completely voluntary. Additionally, you or child have the right to withdraw from the study at any point should you choose. They may skip or pass on questions during the interview.

Should it be required, participants can receive free counseling services through The Trevor Project through their website https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/ or via phone number at 1-866-488-7386.

Confidentiality
All information gathered for this study will be kept completely confidential. There will be no explicit references within the study that will be made that could potentially expose you child's identity. All recorded data will be recorded and kept securely for five years, and then destroyed. Their name and any other identifying information will be disguised using pseudonyms.

Right to Ask Questions
Question regarding this research study should be direct to Sid Adams at sadams9@lesley.edu or to Dr. Ulas Kaplan at ukaplan@lesley.edu.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which all complaints or problems may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu

Sincerely,

Sid Adams, M.M.ed.
Ph.D. Student - Lesley University
Educational Studies - Human Development and Learning.

Participating Child's Name:_____

Parent/Guardian Printed Name:_____

Parent/GuardianSignature:_____

Date: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email:_____

Researcher's Printed Name:_____

Researcher's Signature:_____

Date: _____

Appendix E - Participant Assent Form

Description and Purpose

Dear Participant,

We extend a warm invitation to you, as an LGBTQ+ music student, to take part in this research study. Our aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how you perceive teaching practices in music learning environments and explore whether and how these perceptions impact your decision to disclose your LGBTQ+ identity. This research is being conducted under the guidance of my senior advisor, Dr. Ulas Kaplan.

In order to participate, you must meet the three following criteria:

1. You are a current (age 14 - 18) or recently graduated (within three years of participation in this study) high school students.
2. You participated in music instruction during secondary schooling.
3. You disclosed your sexual orientation or gender identity ("came out") during that time.

Research Activities

Your participation in the research will consist of:

1. Submission of all appropriate consent forms.
2. One 60-90 minute video recorded, semi-structured and open-ended interview regarding your experiences as a musician and the process of disclosing your LGBTQ+ identity. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom and will be video and audio recorded.
3. An opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and provide any clarifications, addendums, or corrections.
4. There is no pre-work necessary prior to the interview.

Benefits

By taking part in this study, you have the opportunity to engage in a thoughtful conversation that enables you to reflect on how your experiences as an LGBTQ+ individual and musician have influenced your personal growth. Through this process, you may discover valuable insights that can be beneficial for your future journey and development

Risk

Given that the topic of this study is sensitive and personal, it is important to acknowledge that there may be emotional risks involved for some participants, including yourself. We want you to know that your well-being is our top priority. You have the absolute right to decline participating in this study if you so choose. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any obligation or explanation.

During the interview, if there are any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering, you have the option to skip or pass on them. Your comfort and emotional safety are of utmost importance. In the event that you require additional support, The Trevor Project offers free counseling services. You can access their services through their website at **https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/** or by calling them at **1-866-488-7386.** They are dedicated to providing assistance to LGBTQ+ individuals and can be a valuable resource if needed.

Please remember that your well-being and autonomy are respected and prioritized throughout this study.

Confidentiality
Rest assured that all the information collected for this study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your privacy is our utmost priority. Throughout the study, there will be no direct references made that could potentially reveal your identity.

All recorded data will be securely stored for a period of five years and then permanently destroyed. To protect your confidentiality, your real name and any other identifying information will be disguised using pseudonyms. This ensures that your personal details remain confidential and cannot be linked back to you.

We want you to feel safe and comfortable participating in this study, knowing that your privacy is safeguarded every step of the way.

Right to Ask Questions
Question regarding this research study should be direct to Sid Adams at sadams9@lesley.edu or to Dr. Ulas Kaplan at ukaplan@lesley.edu.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which all complaints or problems may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu

Sincerely,

Sid Adams, M.M.ed. - Ph.D. Student
-Lesley University - Educational Studies - Human Development and Learning.

Prior to signing your assent, parent/guardian consent must be received. This is done using a Parental Consent Form. After signing and returning the Parent Consent Form, please sign your assent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this assent form will be given to you to keep.

Preferred Interview Date(s) _____

Location: _____ _____
city *state*

☐ All participants will participate via Zoom.

Printed Name:_____

Signature:_____

Date: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email:_____

Researcher's Printed Name:_____

Researcher's Signature:_____

Date: _____