

**“Children Will Listen”: The Impacts of Inclusivity within Elementary Music Education on
Students within the LGBTQ+ Community**

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the perceived short and long term impacts of inclusivity within elementary music for people within the LGBTQ+ community. Five participants were interviewed and discussed their elementary music experiences concerning how the class, teacher, environment, and curriculum affected them. While some participants shared about their positive and inclusive experiences, others revealed that their time in elementary music was negative and gave them a negative impression. This study considers how elementary music can play a role in the formation of identity.

Keywords: elementary music, LGBTQ+, inclusion, gender identity, sexual orientation, community

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Chapter I: Introduction

Understanding, exploring, and accepting one's gender identity and sexual orientation can be a nerve wracking but empowering journey. For many people within the LGBTQ+ community, this investigation can start as early as during elementary school. Elementary music education can provide a constructive outlet for helping each student embrace who they are. Music educators, in particular, have a unique ability to honor, validate, and mirror their students' perspective. They can help honor their students' journey to finding their identity and create a foundation of safety and self compassion.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to deepen our understanding of how elementary music education can impact LGBTQ+ students on their journey to discovering their gender identity and sexual orientation. The specific research question this thesis seeks to answer is: what are the perceived short and long term impacts of elementary music education for students within the LGBTQ+ community in terms of feeling supported and finding their identity? In order to answer this question, I interviewed five people who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community and asked them about their elementary music experiences. Participants discussed how their negative or positive experiences influenced them at the time and if or how it has made a lasting impact on them today.

Importance of the Study

The information in this thesis will be of value to elementary teachers, especially music teachers, as well as guardians and administrators. This specific research topic is personal to me, and I chose it because it helps answer questions that I have about my own elementary music

experience. I am bisexual, and I did not understand my sexuality until my early 20's. While there are many reasons why it took me this long to accurately decipher my sexuality, I believe one of the main factors is because I never saw people like me represented in my life. I never met other bisexual people, learned about our history, or heard others' stories. I have always wondered if I could have understood my sexuality earlier in life if I had seen representation within my personal life or school. Since music is a uniquely inclusive subject area, it feels like an exceptional place to start the conversation.

Of course there are many administrators, teachers, and guardians who are worried that elementary school is too early to have these discussions. However, the topic I am trying to discuss is not sex education; I am referring to gender identity and sexual orientation. There are many people within the LGBTQ+ community who already knew or started to question their gender identity or sexual orientation during elementary school. If elementary students are receiving racial, gender, financial, cultural, and neurodiverse representation, why are we not including members within the LGBTQ+ community? LGBTQ+ students are part of every school population. Therefore, it is a worthwhile endeavor to strengthen our understanding of how our classroom environments, curricula, semantics, and inclusion affect members of this community. My goal for this research is to deepen our understanding of how music can be a part of gender identity and sexual orientation education for elementary students.

Definition of Terms

Within this thesis, there are many terms referring to gender identity and sexual orientation. To clarify, here are some terms that may help your understanding. In the following paragraphs, I draw from resources published by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation,

a well-regarded source of information on topics pertaining to gender and sexuality that I highly recommend for those who seek further study in this area (HRC Foundation, n.d.).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more complete the acronym LGBTQ+. Lesbian refers to a woman or someone who identifies as nonbinary who is attracted to other women romantically, sexually, or emotionally. Gay refers to a man or someone who identifies as nonbinary who is attracted to other men romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally. Bisexual refers to someone who is sexually, emotionally, and/or romantically attracted to more than one gender or sex. For people who identify as bisexual, this attraction is not necessarily the same towards each gender. Transgender or trans refers to someone who identifies or expresses their gender differently than stereotypical expectations based on their sex assigned at birth. While queer was once a derogatory word, it has since been reclaimed from many people who identify within the LGBTQ+ community. Queer is an umbrella term that refers to the wide spectrum of gender and sexual identities that may not conform to specific labels. The (+) refers to the many gender and sexual orientations that are utilized within the community.

Gender identity and sex assigned at birth are commonly misused and are two separate things. Gender identity is how one views and refers to themselves in terms of female, male, a combination of both, or neither. Sex assigned at birth is the label a doctor assigns in reference to one's external anatomy, and these labels are male, female, or intersex. Gender identity can be different from sex assigned at birth; gender expression involves how one's gender externally appears through clothes, physical characteristics, mannerisms, or demeanor. This expression may or may not conform to society's definition of masculine or feminine.

Cisgender or cis refers to someone whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. Non-binary refers to when someone's gender identity is not simply female or male and

instead can be both, somewhere in the middle, or something else entirely. People who are gender non-conforming do not typically express their gender by following the stereotypical characteristics or expectations for female and male. People who are gender non-conforming can identify as transgender, but not all do. Transitioning is the process of how trans people live more comfortably within their gender identity. Some of these processes can include changing their name, pronouns, gender expression, completing gender affirming surgery, legal transitioning, and more. Trans people can decide to complete all, some, or none of these processes. Furthermore, transphobia refers to when people are prejudiced against people who identify as trans.

Sexual orientation is the unchangeable way someone is emotionally, sexually, and romantically attracted to others. Heterosexual is when someone is attracted to people of the opposite sex. Pansexual refers to when someone can potentially feel attracted romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually to people who identify as any gender. Pansexual can sometimes be used interchangeably with bisexual. Homophobia refers to when people are prejudiced against people who are emotionally, sexually, and romantically attracted to people who identify as the same gender. D*ke is an offensive term for lesbian. While many people within the LGBTQ+ community have reclaimed the term, it can still be used harmfully. It is important to note that sexual orientation and gender identity are independent of one another and should not be confused with each other.

Questioning is when someone is exploring their understanding of their gender identity and/or sexual identity. 'In the closet' refers to when someone has not told the people in their life their gender identity and/or sexual identity. Finally, 'coming out' or being 'out' is when someone has told the people in their life about their gender identity and/or sexual identity.

Trigger Warning

Please be advised there are topics within this thesis that may be difficult to read, especially since people still experience many of the microaggressions mentioned in this paper. There are quotes from the participants discussing their experiences in elementary school in reference to understanding, exploring, and accepting their gender and sexual orientation. Some of these accounts may be disturbing, so please read with discretion.

Within this chapter, I have provided information about my thesis: the purpose of this study, my research question, the importance of the study, key terms with their definitions, and a trigger warning. Within Chapter II, I will provide pertinent research and literature related to this study.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

Through Chapter I, I introduced this study about the perceived impacts of elementary music on students within the LGBTQ+ community and gave information pertaining to the purpose and importance of this study, definition of terms, and a trigger warning. Within Chapter II, I will review the literature related to my study. Many scholars agree that inclusion is important for students in the classroom. I have organized my review of the literature into the following sections: Experiences of people within the LGBTQ+ community in schools, the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools, and how to incorporate LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools. In the first section, I will provide experiences of teachers and students within the LGBTQ+ community. In the second section, I will discuss the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools. In the third section, I will provide examples of how teachers and schools can be inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community.

Experiences of Teachers and Students

In this section, I will present information from scholars who study the experiences of people within the LGBTQ+ community in schools. This includes scholarship concerning the experiences of teachers who are ‘in the closet’ (Meyer, 2008; Natale-Abramo, 2014; McBride, 2016), scholars who have investigated the experiences of teachers who are ‘out of the closet’ (DeJean, 2005; Bartolome, 2016), as well as authors who have considered the experiences of LGBTQ+ students within schools (Kosciw et al., 2009; Nichols, 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Taylor, et al., 2020; Wikoff, et al., 2021).

McBride (2016), a well-known music teacher educator, researcher, and conductor, begins our scholarship that considers the perspective of teachers that are still “in the closet”. He investigates high school choir directors’ strategies to recruit male students and discusses

hypermasculine messages being used to counter the idea that music is a feminine or ‘gay’ activity. He interviewed two male choir teachers who were not out to their students and concluded part of their reason to remain closeted at school was because of the stigma around men joining choir. One of the interviewees said:

I think if I were not a music teacher, I would be much more receptive to that idea [of being an out LGBTQ teacher]. I think the fact that I am a music teacher has really made me consider not being out at school . . . just the stereotypes and the concern about the involvement in the program. (p. 39)

Natale-Abramo (2014), music educator and department chairperson, explored the different aspects that make up an instrumental teacher’s identity. One interviewee who identifies as gay, Chris, described how he felt the need to explore different personalities as both a student and a teacher. When he was struggling with his sexual identity as a student, he described trying out different personas as being a social “chameleon” by hanging out with many social cliques. As a teacher, he described showing personality traits in the classroom that are not authentic to his true self to hide his sexual identity from his students and coworkers:

As a teacher, I am dynamic, exciting, unpredictable, uninhibited, and empathetic, but all these traits are exhausting and less prevalent outside the classroom. As a person, I am more reserved, actually rather bookish and shy... When class ends, I feel myself retreat into myself to conserve energy for the next “performance.” (p. 63)

Meyer (2008), an awarded educator and author, analyzes the influences that either encourage or discourage teachers to act as a barrier for harassment because of gender and sexual nonconformity in secondary schools. All of the teachers interviewed articulated that feeling

marginalized themselves strongly motivated them against intervening when witnessing discriminating harassment. One closeted teacher confessed:

Eventually I told [my Principal] that I was going to tell the kids [that I'm gay]. She said, "If you come out to those kids I will not guarantee your safety at this school." I had to make a decision at this point. She was tough. I couldn't stand working for her ... She didn't like me because I was gay. That was clear. (p. 563)

DeJean (2007), a high school and collegiate literacy educator, starts our understanding of the perspective of teachers that are still "in the closet" professionally. DeJean examined the experiences of 10 out gay and lesbian teachers working in California, and discovered that the decision for teachers to be out in the classroom is an act of "radical honesty," a term coined by Brad Blanton (1996); This term refers to when someone "prefers language that reveals what is so, whether it's about someone else, the world, or himself" (p. 92). This type of honesty in the classroom can be a risk because of student and familial backlash: "Fear was the central emotion the teachers experience while teaching within the educational closet; therefore, making a commitment to radical honesty impacted them personally by freeing up energy once consumed in hiding" (DeJean, 2007, p. 65).

Bartolome (2016), a children's music specialist and professor, conducted a narrative study of a transgender music educator whom he calls Melanie, during her last year of college and two years post-graduation. Bartolome describes Melanie's experiences growing up as a transgender child and her transition during college. Although she had some trouble finding a job after graduation, most of Melanie's first year of teaching was a success. However, after telling the first grade teachers about her gender identity, the head of Human Resources (HR) came to ask her a question:

She said, “So, you told some teachers some things and a couple of parents have found out and we just want to make sure . . . there’s really only one concern. And that concern is, are you using student restrooms?” And I said, “No. I use faculty restrooms.” And she said, “Ok, well that was my only question and concern. We just wanted to make sure of that.” (pp. 40-41)

To better understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ students within schools, we will first look at a study from 2020 called the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey for 2009-2019* conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Within this study, the results show health differences for “sexual minority” students (defined in Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011): people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, people who are questioning their sexuality, or people who have had sexual experiences with people within the same gender. This study found that:

More lesbian, gay, or bisexual students used select illicit drugs in 2019 compared to those not sure of their sexual identity. More students not sure of their sexual identity reported injecting illegal drugs in 2019 than lesbian, gay, or bisexual students. In 2019, more lesbian, gay, or bisexual students and students not sure of their sexual identity had ever misused prescription opioids compared to heterosexual students. More lesbian, gay, or bisexual students and students not sure of their sexual identity misused prescription opioids during the past 30 days compared to heterosexual students. (p. 80)

Kosciw, et al. (2009), the Director of Research at GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, conducted research which concluded demographic and ecological factors can impact the experience of LGBTQ+ students. Kosciw’s study found that students in rural

communities and communities where adults had lower educational achievements may experience harsher environments. His research also found:

Community poverty levels contributed to a significant amount of the variance in LGBT youth's experiences in school, with youth in higher poverty communities reporting more victimization in school because of sexual orientation and gender expression than those in more affluent communities. (p. 984)

Taylor, et al. (2020), a music educator and researcher, examined the experiences of LGBTQ+ students within music education programs across Texas. This study found that while many LGBTQ+ students felt safe with their music peers and professors, there was a lack of discussion about sexual and gender inclusivity. One respondent said:

Just acknowledging what it would be like to be a public educator in Texas as a gay man; that's not something that I've ever been taught how to handle. And I mean I don't even know how I would go about that, you know? But I don't think the phrase LGBT had ever been used until one of my professors emailed us this survey. (Interview, November 4, 2017). (p. 19)

Nichols (2013), a music educator and researcher, noticed the importance of separating the experience of trans people from others within the LGBTQ+ community. She also highlighted how trans people are less represented within research which led her to present one gender-variant student's experiences within public school and school music. This story depicts the challenges of an unfriendly school environment. However, the interviewee found music composition to be a helpful outlet for self expression and describes music composition as a "heart-to-heart with [herself]," and a way "to get to know [herself] through [her] songwriting" (p. 270).

Since both gifted students and LGBTQ+ youth experience mental health disorders (Cross & Cross, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2018), Wikoff, et al. (2021), a National Certified Counselor and professor, researched the experiences of gifted LGBTQ+ students. After interviewing 75 students, some participants described the pressure to fit into the gifted identity rather than exploring their sexual or gender identity. When asked about coping skills for their mental health challenges, many of the students “mentioned self-harm... Some also shared less dangerous, but still harmful coping strategies such as ‘thrill-seeking,’ ‘substance abuse,’ ‘disordered eating,’ being ‘highly promiscuous,’ and ‘gambling’ to excess” (p. 282).

The Importance of Inclusivity

This section discusses literature concerning the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusivity within schools. This includes scholarship concerning the positive effects of supportive adults in schools (Murdock and Bolch, 2005; Espelage, et al., 2008; McGuire, et al., 2010; Wright, 2010; Silveira, 2019), the difference that supportive activities can make for students (Hoover, 2009; Kosciw, et al., 2013), and the valuable impact of inclusive curricula and classrooms (Bergonzi, 2014; Palkki, 2016; Hess, 2017).

To understand the importance of supportive adults in schools, we will first look at research conducted by Espelage, et al. (2008), an educational psychology professor. They surveyed more than 13,000 high school students aiming to further the understanding of mental health outcomes when lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning youth have familial and school support. This study found data which supports previously discussed research: questioning students were more likely to be teased and reported higher drug use, feelings of depression, and feelings of suicide. However, this study also found “students receiving support from parents and

schools reported significantly less depression-suicidal feelings or less alcohol-marijuana use” (p. 213).

Murdock and Bolch (2005), researchers in psychology, studied 101 high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) to learn more about the relationship between school climate and school adjustment. They created four clusters of students dependent on levels of school exclusion, personal victimization, teacher support, close friend support, and family support. Between the highly supported group and the highly vulnerable group, the students who were most supported on average had almost a point higher GPA, more than 2 times higher levels of school belonging, and showed almost half less disruptive behaviors. Murdock and Bolch stated that “simple steps (e.g., posting an LGB sticker or book, openly reprimanding derogatory comments about gay individuals, and/or integrating LGB-specific issues into class curriculum or discussion) can send messages of acceptance to often ‘invisible’ youth” (p. 170).

McGuire, et al. (2010), a professor of human development, conducted two studies to further understand the experience of transgender youth in schools, schools’ involvement pertaining to harassment, if school personnel could help to protect these students, and individuals’ responses to harassment. This study furthered previous research findings that trans students are often harassed and reinforced how school can be an unsafe environment for this community. However, multiple participants discussed the positive impact of having one school adult advocating for them. This study “found that when teachers intervene to stop harassment, when schools provide information about LGBT issues, and when classes address LGBT issues in the curricula, transgender students feel safer and report a safer environment for their gender nonconforming peers” (p. 1186).

Wright (2010), the recipient of the 2009-2010 Phi Delta Kappa Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award, conducted a study that explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ educators and what helped them to feel safe and supported within their jobs. Wright describes teachers' safety within two realms: personal safety and job safety. While these teachers feel personal and job safety differently, it was noted that there are clear steps schools can take to improve feelings of job safety. One valuable implication was, "Respondents in this study perceived a higher level of job safety when they felt supported by union contracts that provided domestic partnership benefits. These respondents also indicated a higher likelihood of outness with a higher perception of job safety" (p. 52).

Silveira (2019), a music education professor and researcher, investigated how the experiences of one gender variant person can help inform music educators. Through fourteen interviews, this study provides a narrative account of a transgender college student whom he calls Joseph. This study provides intel about his journey to finding self acceptance, experiences with internalized and externalized transphobia, lack of support from professors and college, and how he advocated for himself by proposing solutions. Towards the end of the study, Silveira shared with Joseph that he struggled with the fact that he—a straight, cis, White man—was conducting research about an experience he has never lived. Joseph responded by thanking him for conducting this type of research and explained why someone from outside of the community wanting to help meant a lot to him:

[Doing this type of research] makes me less of an angry trans person... It's really nice to have people outside of the community advocating for people in a community because they don't share the same experience... I think one thing you could do is just make clear, "Look I haven't lived this experience, but I've educated myself on it. So I can't talk about

my personal experience with it, but I know people who have” (Joseph interview, March 14, 2016). (p. 441)

Kosciw, et al. (2013) studied the impact of in-school support for LGBTQ+ students’ academic achievement and its importance. This study found that LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, supportive staff, and Gay Straight alliance (GSA) clubs all had a positive effect for students within this community:

Perhaps the strongest positive influence for LGBT students, as shown from our results, was having supportive adults at school... Not surprisingly, the number of supportive educators was associated with positive educational outcomes; specifically, students who reported having more supportive educators were likelier to report higher GPAs and less likely to have missed school. (p. 58)

Hoover (2009), a researcher who works in higher education, continues the conversation of the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusive school organizations. He analyzes literature about LGBTQ+ leadership and the different types of leadership styles. While he recognizes the importance of organizations like GSA, he explains how not all students will take advantage of them because it puts pressure on them to come out, especially when they are early in their gender or sexual identity journey. He recommends something more private or confidential like an LGBTQ+ student mentor program which will ultimately lead to a dual benefit system:

If done holistically, so that attention is paid to more than just LGBT identity development, those mentored can begin to simultaneously explore other aspects of identity, such as leadership identity. For mentees, the gains in self-confidence and comfort with one’s sexuality will make participation in other, more public LGBT activities a possibility. For those students serving as mentors, developments in leadership

and LGBT identity will manifest into serving the community in other capacities and disclosing their LGBT identity... will aid in the further development and identity synthesis for the mentors. (p. 37)

To better our understanding of the positive impact of inclusive curricula and classrooms, we will first look at Hess (2017), a music educator and researcher. She poses a question about the importance of equity and social justice in music education and considers multiple perspectives. She believes there are many ways to address the oppressions students face within the classroom, but one important example is including student experiences within the curriculum through responsive teaching. Hess states that music teachers have a unique opportunity to do this because it is “an extraordinary medium for social justice” (p. 73). The importance of responsive teaching, for Hess, is:

When we engage students’ own [interests] and experiences in the classroom, we communicate powerfully to students that their perspectives... are valued and valuable. We communicate that their experiences should be present in their education experience. When we further assist students in developing the tools to critique—to notice absences and presences in the materials they encounter inside and outside school, we simultaneously help them develop skills to challenge systems, material, and media that exclude their lived experiences. (p. 73)

Palkki (2020), a choral music educator and author, conducted interviews for a year with three transgender high school choral students. He examined the experiences of these students to find common themes through their stories. Palkki found there were upstanding policies that isolated these students from feeling comfortable within choir. Four policies that teachers may reconsider to include all students and their gender expression are:

(a) The vocal part assigned to, or chosen by, trans singers may influence and/or interact with their gender identity and expression, (b) choral teachers will need to decide how to accommodate trans and especially non-binary singers within “gendered” ensembles (e.g., men’s and women’s choruses), (c) choral teachers can reconsider the tradition of tuxedos and dresses as the standard choral uniform, and (d) choral teachers may consider language that addresses sections, not genders. (p. 140)

When some of these policies were not reconsidered to honor one students’ gender expression, it even meant the difference between staying in or leaving choir because for one participant, it did not “fit him vocally, socially, psychologically, and sociologically” (p. 138).

Bergonzi (2014), a music education professor and author, explores how heteronormativity has been the standard within music education and presents how teachers can combat this norm. He discusses heterosexual privileges for students and teachers and poses scenarios for teachers to consider. He presents examples of how to meet Music National Standards while including sexual minorities. For example, to provide historical figures within music history, he challenges teachers to include *West Side Story*; one of musical theater’s most loved boy-girl romance stories was created from four gay musicians: Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins, and Stephen Sondheim. He explains that the importance of including LGBTQ+ musicians within the music curriculum is because it provides a more accurate and valuable music education:

Influential people in art music, musical theatre, jazz, and popular music who were homosexual were of critical importance not only to the careers they had but also to the musical styles they represented or, in some cases, created. It is clear that the fact that these important musical figures were gay is not just an historical aside but an important part of the development of American concert or art music. (p. 69)

Examples of How Teachers and Schools Can Be Inclusive

This section explores literature that present examples of how teachers and schools can be inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community. This includes scholarship that presents educational opportunities schools can offer (Robertson, 2008; Lamb, et al., 2009; Luecke, 2011; Garrett and Spano, 2017), types of collaboration to make safe spaces (Weiler, 2003; Craig, et al., 2013; Higa, et al., 2014; Silveira and Goff, 2016), and different ways teachers can reframe or challenge their current understandings of the LGBTQ+ community (Houston, 1985; Palkki and Caldwell, 2018).

Luecke (2011), an education professor, will begin our scholarship to further our understanding of how schools can offer educational experiences for students and staff. She conducted a study which followed how a school district responded to the transition of one of their students whom they call Jaden. One of the most valuable aspects of their response was working closely with a support teacher for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning students. This teacher helped to create a transition plan for Jaden, her peers, the school, staff, and other students' families. This included creating an agreement that included harassment in any facet (or suspicion of such) must be reported, finding Jaden a group of "safe people," participating in staff meetings to educate teachers, and offering information sessions for students and families. For Jaden, her family, and the school faculty, they all "identified [the support teacher] as the glue that held them together throughout the process" (p. 140). Jaden's guardian said: "The biggest thing [the support teacher] does is she listens to Jaden, which even the [private] counselor has not done... We couldn't do this without [the support teacher], no way, no way, no way" (p. 144).

Robertson (2008), a psychology professor, discussed a study that helped Andy, a fifth grade boy, who was stereotypically feminine. There was a large amount of bullying and

harassment towards Andy because of his gender expression. There were sessions run by school psychology practicum students held to promote acceptance of gender and sexual inclusivity to help Andy and his peers. Ultimately, they were beneficial. One example of positive change was that in the beginning of the year, when Andy chose traditionally feminine clothes or activities, he made sure other students noticed. However, by the end of the year, his choices were similar, “but instead of checking with others, he would simply make his request without additional comments. His ‘matter-of-fact’ manner implied confidence and the other students accepted his choices without making a “big deal” of them” (p. 24).

Lamb, et al. (2009), an educational psychologist, observed elementary students between the age of 5-10 who were taught how to confront sexist comments made by their peers. One of the reasons for this study was to improve the school experience for students who may be questioning their gender. At the conclusion:

The data indicated that children who practiced using retorts were more likely to challenge their peers’ sexist remarks following the intervention program than were children who merely heard about peers’ retorts in symbolic media...—and, importantly, they were also more likely to actually challenge a peer’s sexist remarks. (p. 377)

Garrett and Spano (2017), two music education professors who study LGBTQ+ inclusion, conducted a study surveying music educators examining their LGBTQ+ inclusive strategies. Although this study found that most teachers presented strongly supportive attitudes, it is important to compare these findings with the data from the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) National School Climate Survey completed by Kosciw, et al. (2022). They found that many LGBTQ+ students reported hearing homophobic or negative comments about gender expression made by teachers or staff (p. xvi). While many teachers may feel supportive of

LGBTQ+ students, they may not follow through by advocating for their students, due to in part by lack of training or administrative support. Garrett and Spano found:

Teachers who had received in-service training expressed greater levels of comfort discussing LGBTQ issues with their students and promoting LGBTQ awareness in their schools. Further, respondents who had participated in some form of in-service training were less concerned about what teacher colleagues thought of their efforts to be inclusive and respondents expressed higher levels of confidence that school administrators and school board members would support teachers' LGBTQ inclusivity. (p. 52)

The discussion about types of collaboration that help to create safe spaces will start with Silveira and Goff (2016), two music educators who conduct research. They measured the attitudes of music teachers towards transgender students and discussed successful school strategies to support this community. Their data was similar to Garrett and Span's research in that many teachers hold strongly supportive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ students. However, this study found that music teachers, in particular, are already presenting supportive school practices. They stated:

Music teacher education programs, school administrators, and mentor teachers could benefit from understanding that many music teachers already have positive attitudes about students who do not conform to gender expectations; they can make use of this knowledge in planning courses and diversity trainings. Specifically, school districts and university programs could consider bringing in experts in issues of gender, sexuality and inclusion to help answer questions and facilitate discussion and plans for creating safe and supportive music classrooms and schools. (p. 154)

Craig, et al., (2013), a social worker, created and offered a group counseling program for sexual minority students during school to 15 urban high schools called Affirmative Supportive Safe and Empowering Talk (ASSET). The goals of this program were to create a safe space for these students and to strengthen their coping skills. 74% of the students within this study were Hispanic, 21% were Black, and 3% were White or non-hispanic. The data from this study seemed to be encouraging:

Overall, results indicated statistically significant short-term increases in self-esteem and proactive coping from baseline to posttest among the full sample of [multiethnic sexual minority youth]... Such results suggest that the intervention was effective in enhancing short term proactive coping among all youth regardless of their pretreatment levels.

Taken together, although the effect sizes were smaller than anticipated, findings support our expectations that ASSET is an appropriate and effective intervention for a heterogeneous sample of [multiethnic sexual minority youth]. (p. 99)

Weiler (2003), a certified psychologist, describes the dangers for sexual minority students within schools and offers many options for schools to help support their LGBTQ+ students. Some of these strategies include educating staff on LGBTQ+ inclusion, ensuring school safety and equity for all students, and providing safe spaces and people for these students. Weiler also encourages schools to prepare for controversy and plan how they will address it with the community. She advocates for collaboration by talking:

To principals in other schools who have successfully created safe and supportive school cultures for sexual minority students. Reiterate that your school welcomes all students for who they are, affirms diversity, and ensures a safe, healthy learning environment for everyone. (p. 13)

Higa, et al. (2014), a researcher and service fellow for HIV prevention, conducted a study to survey LGBTQ+ high schoolers to find which aspects of their lives were positive and negative for their wellbeing. Results showed that school had more negative impacts for these students, and many of them had difficulty starting GSAs because of students and staff resistance. However, when students were able to join GSAs at school, Higa found they were:

Contributing to a positive school environment by providing safe spaces for LGBTQ youth and decreasing isolation. One youth stated she felt like she was “the only one and now that there’s a GSA, it’s a lot easier because I’m not the only one.” (p. 677)

Representation throughout the student body along with having LGBTQ+ staff and faculty helped to promote a supportive environment.

Finally, Palkki and Caldwell, two music educators, will start our discussion of different ways teachers can challenge their preconceived notions towards the LGBTQ+ community. Palkki and Caldwell (2018) surveyed LGBTQ+ college students to examine their musical experiences during high school and middle school. One pivotal aspect of how teachers made their students feel included was through semantics. Inclusive language and word choice made a large positive impact on how these students felt. One student described:

One time in our select women’s choir, we were singing a love ballad and he [the teacher] was trying to get us to feel the music better. “Just imagine how you feel when you’re with that person you love,” he said. “Think about how much you feel about that guy, or girl, or whoever you love. Just imagine the emotions.” For him to not go to that automatic, [heteronormative] idea of girls liking guys almost made me cry, I felt so safe there. (p. 38)

Houston (1985), an author and researcher, furthers the conversation of how to address gender with students. In this article, she explores the complexities of “gender-free” education: when gender, gender bias, and its differentiations are disregarded. Houston argues this is a problematic attempt to help against gender bias because classrooms still are male-dominant. Male students typically get more attention from teachers, female students will wait longer for attention from teachers, and female students are less aggressive in terms of speaking in class. Ignoring these differences unconsciously reinforces gender bias in subtle forms. She argues Jane Martin’s (1981) concept of the “gender sensitive perspective” is the best way to eliminate gender bias (p. 109). Houston states, “A gender-sensitive perspective is a higher-order perspective than that involved in the gender-free strategy. It encourages one to ask constantly: Is gender operative here? How is gender operative? What other effects do our strategies for eliminating gender bias have?” (p. 368). Though this article was written almost 40 years ago, it brings up topics that are still relatable and present in classrooms today.

In conclusion, Chapter Two includes scholarship concerning the experiences of LGBTQ+ students and teachers, importance of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools, and examples of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools. To better understand the impacts of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in elementary music, it is important to research the experiences of members within the community in order to know more about how elementary music impacted their gender and sexual identities. The literature included here forms the foundation of this research because it helps to better examine my research question: what are the perceived short and long term impacts of elementary music education for students within the LGBTQ+ community in terms of feeling supported and finding a sense of self? Next, in Chapter Three, I will describe the methodology I used to address my research question and the design of the study as well as the procedures used for analysis.

Chapter III: Design and Methodology

Last chapter, I reviewed the preceding literature about the experiences of people who belong to the community of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other related gender and sexuality based identities (LGBTQ+) in schools, the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools, and how to incorporate LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools. In Chapter Three, I will explicate how I arranged this project about LGBTQ+ inclusivity in elementary music and share my methods of analysis. I have separated my writing into the following subsections for the ease and understanding of the reader: Process, Participants, Qualitative Research, Data Collection and Analysis. As I noted in Chapter One, the research question driving this study is: what are the perceived short and long term impacts of elementary music education for students within the LGBTQ+ community in terms of feeling supported and finding their identity?

Process

My interest in conducting this research began with reflecting about my music education and asking myself what I wish I had received growing up. The topic that stood out to me was the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusion through my own life and music education. Within my personal life and my education through high school, I never learned about the LGBTQ+ community or our history.

I did not fully understand that I was bisexual until I was in college. Though I remember having moments of attraction towards girls growing up, I quickly suppressed them because I had no idea what these feelings were or what being bisexual meant. I have always wondered if I could have understood my sexuality sooner if I had learned about bisexuality or met other people like me when I was younger.

While there is pre-existing research about the positive impacts of sexual and gender representation within middle school and beyond, there was a gap in literature about elementary school. I wanted to interview members of the LGBTQ+ community about their experiences with inclusion within elementary music, because I wanted a better understanding of how these experiences impacted their lives during and after elementary school. I reached out via Instagram to my network of friends who are music teachers, and I established a list of participants to reach out to through email. I found five (5) people who accepted my proposal and signed the Informed Consent form (see Appendix A). I interviewed each participant once through *Zoom*, recorded the interviews, and transcribed each meeting for examination.

Participants

My participants were selected using snowball sampling which is “created through a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other” (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, p. 151). This kind of sampling helped to identify participants through social networks who fit the desired qualifications for my research. In order to help answer questions about LGBTQ+ inclusivity in elementary music, I needed people within the community who could describe their experiences within elementary music and how those experiences impacted them. Once this information was confirmed, my pool to select from was clear, and I selected five (5) people who volunteered and fit my criteria. I reached out to these individuals through *Instagram* and continued our discussions via email. After they received and reviewed an Informed Consent form (see Appendix A), they confirmed their consent to participate in the interview.

It should be noted that within the group of individuals I interviewed, there are two people who identify as women, two who identify as gender non-conforming, and one who identifies as

transmasculine. Of these five participants, there are two people who identify as lesbians, two who identify as bisexual, and one who identifies as pansexual. I tried my best to find a group of people to interview with different identities to ensure all perspectives within the community were represented. Furthermore, while my initial goal was to find all music teachers, I happened to find a spouse of a music teacher who wanted to be interviewed. Her story was so valuable and pertinent that I welcomed her into my research. Finally, in this paper, I will refer to my participants as pseudonyms.

Qualitative Research

My study uses Qualitative Research which is mainly “concerned with meaning. That is, [qualitative researchers] are interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events. They aim to understand ‘what it is like’ to experience particular conditions... and how people manage certain situations" (Willig, 2016, p. 8). By using qualitative research, I was able to collect data regarding the experiences of people within the LGBTQ+ community within an elementary music setting. Qualitative research allowed me to dig deeper into these stories and find the importance of their impact. My qualitative research is informed by phenomenology, which simply means that my research comes from studying how people experience the world within specific contexts and times (Willig, 2016). Conducting a qualitative study allowed for me to ask further questions as I heard the interviewees’ anecdotes. Although I had a prepared list of questions that I used within all interviews, as the stories unfolded, I formed and asked different questions pertaining to what they were sharing. I was able to collect data by meeting with each interviewee once over *Zoom*. Most of these interviews were around 35 minutes long, but the longest interview lasted 75 minutes.

Data Collection

My research process required me to select people within the LGBTQ+ community who experienced elementary music. 4 of the 5 participants are currently music teachers, and 1 participant is not a music teacher. This person is married to a music educator and still actively creates music. All 5 of the people who helped with my research spoke about their experiences within the elementary music setting and how their positive or negative experiences with LGBTQ+ inclusion have impacted them today. Those who are teachers also spoke about how their experiences have impacted them as teachers.

Through our interview, I started with my prepared list of questions, but I followed the logical path of the conversation and added questions when I saw fit. I also recorded the interview to transcribe later instead of writing as they were speaking. This allowed me to actively engage with the conversation and discover more about their experiences. At the end of their interviews, I answered any questions they had and allowed them to add anything we did not cover through our discussion that they believed to be pertinent to my research.

Approach Analysis

To analyze the participant's interviews, I used *in vivo* coding. This involves reading each transcription closely multiple times and searching for common sub themes and overarching themes throughout. The first time reading through the transcripts, I made a list of the top 16 sub themes and assigned a correlating color for each. The second time reading each interview, I marked every line that alluded to a sub theme with its correlated color within all 5 transcripts. I also underlined pertinent words or phrases that accurately represented the sub themes in the correlating colors. Furthermore, I counted how many lines referenced the 16 sub themes to find the total for each. Finally, I placed the 16 sub themes within 3 larger main themes. The third time

I read the transcripts, I drew brackets around groups of lines that referenced the three overarching themes.

Through this chapter, I described how and why I created this research project. I explained why this topic is important to me, how I formed my process, and provided how I analyzed my data. In Chapter Four, I will share the findings of my research.

Chapter IV: Findings

In the first three chapters, I discussed this study about impacts of elementary music on students within the LGBTQ+ community, examined literature pertinent to this study, and an explanation of my methodology and analysis approach. Within this chapter, I will discuss the findings that emerged from the data. I used *in vivo* coding to find sub themes and overarching themes from the participants' interview transcriptions. Here are the results from the data collection.

Emergent Sub Themes

Through *in vivo* coding, there were sixteen sub themes that emerged. These include fear, exclusion, invalidation, hiding, comparison, uncertainty, validation, freedom, acceptance, trust, individuality, joy, eagerness, taking action, relief, and inspiration. These sub themes are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Sub themes

Sub theme	Number of lines in which participants mentioned sub theme
Fear	174
Exclusion	104
Invalidation	282
Hiding	173
Comparison	41
Uncertainty	123

Sub theme	Number of lines in which participants mentioned sub theme
Validation	637
Freedom	174
Acceptance	504
Trust	365
Individuality	162
Joy	289
Eagerness	148
Taking Action	372
Relief	100
Inspiration	263

Three sub themes emerged as important but were not discussed by all participants of the study: exclusion, comparison, and individuality. Exclusion was alluded to by four of the five participants, and 104 lines of the transcripts included a discussion related to exclusion. Some words and phrases that participants used to indicate exclusion were “outside, bullied, not my kid, I must be so bad that I can’t even be in a chorus,” and “made me think music was not accessible to me.” Another concept related to feeling excluded, comparison was discussed by three of the five participants and comprised 41 lines of interview transcripts overall. Participants utilized words and phrases describing how they felt by saying “different, I am not enough, I don’t fit in,” and “I was a fifth grader among like sixth and seventh graders” indicating self-comparison. In contrast to the idea of comparison of self to others, individuality was discussed by four of the five participants and encompassed 162 lines of the transcripts. Examples of words and phrases

participants used that suggested individuality included “embrace her own sexuality, diverse, claim myself, fluid,” and “explicitly myself and outwardly queer.”

The most prevalent sub themes which were discussed by all participants included: validation, acceptance, taking action, and trust. Validation was the most often discussed sub theme, and a total of 637 lines of the transcripts were composed of concepts related to validation. Some words used by the participants to represent validation were “embrace, inspiring, open-minded, inclusive efforts,” and “supportive.” Similarly, acceptance was a topic raised by all participants over 504 transcript lines. Participants used phrases and words to represent acceptance such as, “community, support system, validation, feel safe,” and “there’s nobody to prove anything to.” Taking action was alluded to in a total of 372 lines. Participants used words and phrases that describe actions they had taken or wanted to take like “find the courage, hung up a pride flag, find your community, keep going, builds the support system,” and letting students know that “I’m a safe person.” Another sub theme related to feeling safe, trust was discussed by all five participants and talked about in a total of 365 lines. Examples of phrases and words that imply trust made by the participants were “lifelong friends, safe space, no fear of repercussions, making my students feel seen,” and giving “consent.”

The next four sub themes emerged within all five interviews but each had a large range of times they were discussed within each interview: joy, freedom, inspiration, and eagerness. The concept of joy was represented by as little as 7 lines in a single interview but as many as 128 lines in another. In total, joy was discussed for a total of 289 lines. Some descriptions used by the participants that allude to joy were “shine, celebration, uplifting, we’re succeeding, breaking through” and “healing.” Another sub theme that can inspire joy is freedom. Freedom was discussed by all participants but occurred in only one line in one participant’s interview, and as

many as 86 in another. Encompassing a total of 174 lines, freedom was communicated through phrases like, “confident, out publicly, blossom, be themselves,” and “I will never let anyone silence this part of me again.” An additional sub theme that relates to the ability to see new possibilities, inspiration was expressed for as many as 130 lines by one participant, but by as little as 15 lines by another. For a total of 263 lines, inspiration was considered in remarks made by the five participants who said, “find their confidence, completely changed my life, plots the trajectory of your life, display of respect,” and “directly the reason I’m a teacher.” Finally, eagerness was acknowledged along a range from 2-64 lines and for a total of 148 lines. Statements that participants used to articulate eagerness were “wish, I’m so sick of this, impatient,” and “reckless.”

The final five sub themes were prevalent in all interviews and discussed throughout each interview: fear, hiding, doubt, invalidation, and relief. Fear was represented within 174 lines of the transcripts and showed up in words and phrases like, “divisive, deep dark depths, bigoted slander, trigger” and “sense of shame and embarrassment.” Another sub theme relating to feeling unsafe was hiding, which came up within 173 lines of the interviews. “Invisible, I’ll push that down, didn’t go home, shied away,” and “I wish that I had the safety” were all examples of how hiding was talked about by the participants. Another sub theme connected to the feeling of doubt, uncertainty was reviewed 123 lines of the interviews. Participants used terms and phrases to articulate uncertainty such as, “lost, am I doing more harm than good, fear, I don’t think I know the answer,” and “I’ll never know.” An additional sub theme that relates to the feeling of being self conscious is invalidation. It was discussed for a total of 282 lines within the interviews and showed up in expressions like “gay is a bad word, girl color, you can’t handle it, this is wrong,”

and “deal with this later.” Finally, relief was talked about for 100 lines and was displayed in statements like, “I’m so accepted, it’s much better now, the veil was gone,” and “you did it.”

Overarching Themes

Upon the second round of coding, those sixteen sub themes fell into three larger themes. These larger themes are validation, invalidation, and negotiation as shown in Table 2, below, in relationship to their related sub themes. Validation refers to descriptions of experiences in which participants felt seen and heard. Conversely, invalidation refers to descriptions of experiences in which participants felt dismissed, rejected, or insignificant. Finally, negotiation refers to experiences in which participants bargained with themselves or others to compromise how to overcome a negative situation, feeling, or experience. Participants, referred to using pseudonyms, personified these themes through the stories they shared.

Table 2.

Overarching Themes

Overarching Theme	Number of lines in which participants mentioned theme	Sub theme	Number of lines in which participants mentioned sub theme
Invalidation	897	Fear	174
		Exclusion	104
		Invalidation	282
		Hiding	173
		Comparison	41
		Uncertainty	123
Validation	2131	Validation	637

Overarching Theme	Number of lines in which participants mentioned theme	Sub theme	Number of lines in which participants mentioned sub theme
Validation	2131	Freedom	174
		Acceptance	504
		Trust	365
		Individuality	162
		Joy	289
Negotiation	883	Eagerness	148
		Taking Action	372
		Relief	100
		Inspiration	263

Invalidation

Invalidation encompasses the sub themes of fear, exclusion, hiding, comparison, uncertainty, and invalidation. This was the second most discussed theme with a total of 897 lines within all five interview transcriptions. Through these five interviews, there were two participants who described their negative experiences with LGBTQ+ inclusion in elementary music.

One of the participants, Nicole, explained she was the only person who was not accepted into the 4th grade musical. She believed it was because she did not dress like a stereotypical girl at the time:

I was the only kid that didn't even get into the chorus. And I was so devastated... I remember feeling so much shame and just feeling like I don't look like the other kids.

And I'm like, "I don't fit in. I'm not attractive, and I don't think she wanted me to be a part of this because of how I look."

She also mentioned, "It made it seem like [music] was an elite group that I wasn't going to be in... Music was just always something that other people did."

The other participant who had a negative experience with LGBTQ+ inclusion within elementary music was Samantha. Her music teacher was a lesbian who she described as, "a very angry woman" who threw instruments around the room. They did not have a close relationship, and music was not something she enjoyed during this time because of the learning environment. However, the lasting impact from her elementary music experience was how the parents and students treated this teacher. Samantha said, "everybody would call her a dyke... that she was like an angry dyke and never talked positively about her." She explained how those words changed her view of queer women overall: "It created an internalized homophobia. I was like, 'well, I will never cut my hair. I will never look like her because I don't want people to say these things about me.'"

In both of these stories, participants were detailing times in their lives when they felt invalidated during elementary music experiences. Both Nicole and Samantha felt fear, excluded, uncertain, the need to hide, and the need to compare. Their experiences had long term negative impacts expanding outside of just the music room: Nicole stopped seeing herself as a musician, and Samantha needed more time to see the truth of her sexuality. Both participants felt unsafe to follow what made them feel joy and needed to spend years repairing this invalidation.

Validation

Validation includes the sub themes of freedom, acceptance, trust, individuality, joy, and validation. Being the most discussed theme throughout the interview transcripts, validation was

discussed within a total of 2131 lines. Validation was the most discussed theme for four of the five participants.

Three of the five participants had inclusive and affirming experiences in elementary music. Although none of these experiences were explicitly about LGBTQ+ inclusion, the participants' positive learning environment gave them the freedom and space to express or discover themselves. One of the participants, Jenni, was a part of an extra-curricular auditioned girlchoir that gave this support. The conductors of this choir accepted each member of the choir and embraced their diversities. Jenni stated "[My girlchoir was] an empowering environment... where [girls] can find their voice and find their confidence to stand up for themselves and stand up for what is right or speak out against what is wrong. And that's really where I feel like I found that kind of voice." During this time, Jenni was not clear of her sexual orientation yet, but the inspiring leadership and connection through this choir made a large impact on her:

It's only helpful to be in a supportive community... It's never harmful to be in a community that just supports your growth as a person. And then to know that it was an inclusive and open-minded environment... you just get to blossom at your own pace and nobody cares because what are we all there to do? Make music... And how beautiful it is that we build such great relationships along the way.

Another participant who experienced a validating elementary music experience is Michael. In 4th grade, his instrumental teacher invited him to perform in the middle school band with 5th and 6th grade students. It was around this time when Michael was struggling to try to understand and express his gender fully and felt uncomfortable in his skin. Although he was intimidated to play in a more advanced band, his music teacher affirmed that he was a strong

player and would be a valuable addition. His teacher's support provided him a meaningful and safe environment to become the best version of himself:

I felt very much like I had a home in music. I felt so outcast everywhere else in school. And then like in band... I was an asset. I was essential... My teachers never made me feel like an alien like I felt everywhere else... which was so wonderful and so important to my growth as a musician and as a person.

The final participant who described their validating elementary music experience is Paul. Although Paul was not sure of his sexuality yet, his music teacher created a kind environment where every student was honored and respected. This teacher helped start his love of music and helped him gain a sense of accomplishment which set him up with a foundation of safety within music:

I just remember feeling like [music class was] where I should be and that's where I'm going to succeed. She fostered a really great air of like she's like a master elementary school teacher and she knows what is going on. But [she] was so ahead of her time in differentiated instruction that I felt like everybody felt successful most of the time.

All three of these participants had exceptional elementary music experiences that validated who they are. Jenni, Michael, and Paul all experienced the feelings of freedom, acceptance, trust, individuality, and joy. The positive elementary music environments gave these three participants the space and comfort to discover who they are and the path to sharing it with the world.

Negotiation

Negotiation includes the sub themes of eagerness, taking action, relief, and inspiration. Although this theme was discussed the least, it was discussed throughout all five interviews for a

total of 883 lines. All five participants described aspects of or situations related to being part of the LGBTQ+ community that created feelings of invalidation. For each of them to overcome this, they bargained to either hide or relieve the pain.

Michael, a trans man, talked about how he knew he did not feel like a girl when he was just six years old. However, he did not come out until almost 15 years later due to his mom asking him to wait. Living a life that did not feel true to himself, he described not wanting to be seen. However, he negotiated his negative feelings by allowing himself to be seen and feel better through music:

I just wanted to be invisible. Like, I didn't want people to look at me or notice me or talk to me because I just felt like if they talked to me that they were gonna be mean. So when people would talk to me and say, "you were really good in the concert," I was like, "Wow. People are nice, and it's for something that I really enjoy."

After Nicole's experience of not being accepted into the musical, she believed it was because of how she dressed. This rejection caused her to become more aware of what she looked like and the clothes she wore. Over the next few years, she negotiated how to diminish her feelings of being declined by wearing clothes that were more feminine. She wore clothes that were more stereotypical for a girl during that time: "I was more on the feminine side because I was trying to fit in more and... I had more awareness about gender and how I wanted to look and fit in."

Furthermore, after Samantha heard parents and students from her school call her music teacher an "angry d*ke," she also heard parents make comments like, "it's fine [that she is gay] if it's not my kid." This caused her to subconsciously tell herself that "gay is bad." She negotiated these negative associations by pushing down any feelings she had that would help her recognize

that she was also a lesbian.

These three participants had to negotiate to subdue the pain from their negative elementary music experiences. They were able to achieve this because of their eagerness, feeling compelled to take action, seeking or feeling relief, and being inspired. Fortunately, Michael used his bargaining to find a positive outlet while Samantha and Nicole used negotiations to disregard the pain. However, all three of these participants would have to face the consequences of these negotiations in their future.

Final Count of Sub Themes within Interview Transcripts

As mentioned in Chapter II, through *in vivo* coding, I counted how many lines each sub theme was mentioned or alluded to throughout each participant’s interview transcripts. Table 3 presents this data.

Table 3.

In Vivo Coding for Sub Themes and Overarching Themes

Overarching Themes	Sub Themes	Paul	Nicole	Jenni	Michael	Samantha
Invalidation	Fear	4	23	78	27	42
	Exclusion	2	34	40	0	28
	Invalidation	11	75	63	61	72
	Hiding	4	43	75	32	19
	Comparison	17	12	0	12	0
	Uncertainty	2	18	41	48	14

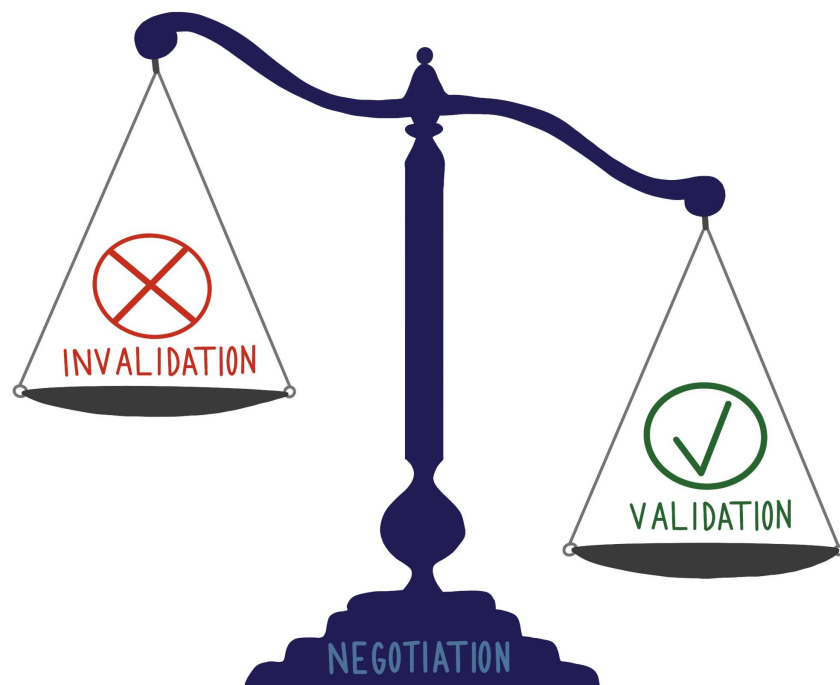
Overarching Themes	Sub Themes	Paul	Nicole	Jenni	Michael	Samantha
Validation	Validation	71	64	231	199	72
	Freedom	1	17	86	64	6
	Acceptance	45	63	197	147	52
	Trust	32	17	191	112	13
	Individuality	9	12	50	91	0
	Joy	7	41	105	128	8
	Negotiation	Eager	11	21	50	64
Taking Action		61	18	139	129	25
Relief		9	38	7	45	1
Inspiration		29	18	130	71	15

Diagram of Overarching Themes

I created the following diagram to visually display the three overarching themes. Through the interviews, the participants described situations where they experienced validation and invalidation. Each person mentioned moments where they attempted to use the validating moments as a means to overcome the invalidating feelings. The judicial scale visual below is intended to represent the negotiation these participants navigate. Though invalidation was mentioned thoroughly throughout each interview, there were more than two times the amount of lines spent describing validation overall.

Figure 1.

Diagram of Overarching Themes



In this chapter, I reviewed the findings that surfaced from the data I found through *in vivo* coding. I introduced and gave examples of the sixteen emergent sub themes, identified and provided examples for the three overarching themes, and presented a visual representation of those three key themes. In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings as well as share implications for future research.

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

Within the first four chapters, I discussed my study about the impacts of elementary music on students within the LGBTQ+ community, discussed related literature related to this topic, a description of how I conducted this study, and the findings that emerged through discussions with five participants through interviews. Through this chapter, I will discuss the ways the five participants perceived the impacts of their elementary music experiences. I will also relay the implications of this study.

Impacts of Invalidation

Making music brought joy for all five participants in this study. However, two of them discussed how they felt invalidated through experiences in elementary music regarding their LGBTQ+ identity. For both Nicole and Samantha, this invalidation had negative effects that were both short term and are still lasting into their adulthood.

After being excluded from the 4th grade musical, Nicole changed her physical appearance to attempt to fit in rather than wearing the clothes she felt best in. Two years later, her assumptions that she was excluded because of her more masculine style and the need to dress more feminine felt validated; The same teacher who excluded her from the 4th grade musical accepted Nicole into an extracurricular choir without an audition. This was also around the time Nicole started to realize she was attracted to women, but she described how this experience prolonged her willingness to explore these feelings: “I just felt so much shame. I remember feeling like I’m so wrong and like I must be so bad that I can’t even be in a chorus for the school play.”

Not only did Nicole feel like she needed to hide who she was, it made her feel like music was an unattainable experience for her. She explained this rejection damaged her musical

confidence: “I never tried out for anything ever again through junior high and through high school. That was it for me. I was done. Even now, I want to be in a play. Like, I want to sing. I love singing, but that just destroyed it for me.”

For Samantha, hearing how the community talked negatively about her music teacher who identified as a lesbian also delayed the exploration of her sexuality. She expressed how in middle school she “forced [herself] to like boys” because she did not want to be talked about in the same way as she had heard others describe her music teacher. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Samantha described how this created an “internalized homophobia” because she will never cut her hair or wear clothes that would resemble her teacher. She also described how those comments “impacted my view of queer women in general, and... it definitely impacted [me] because I’m not attracted to that type of person.”

The impacts of the invalidating experiences in elementary music for Nicole and Samantha connect to the study conducted by Kosciw, et al. (2013) about the levels of in-school support for LGBTQ+ students’ affecting academic achievement. As mentioned in Chapter II, they concluded that LGBTQ+ students with a lower number of supportive educators were more likely to have an increased incidence of victimization, lower self-esteem, lower GPAs, and more missed days of school (p. 55). Samantha and Nicole conveyed that they experienced lower self-esteem after their negative experiences. Nicole closed herself off from exploring her musical interests and both of them felt uncomfortable exploring their sexual identities until later in life.

In my own experience, I did not have a full understanding that I was bisexual until the end of college, but I had moments of questioning my sexuality in elementary school that I deeply suppressed. Through my K-12 education, the LGBTQ+ perspective was never included in the curriculum, and I never had a teacher who was publicly out. I wonder if I would have been able

to understand my sexuality earlier in my life if I had learned about people like me in school or had a teacher who felt safe and supported enough to be out publicly. Even now, sometimes I wonder if adding my perspective as a bisexual woman is insignificant or will be unwelcomed because it was intentionally excluded from my education for so long. Exposure is a vital and validating aspect of accepting your identity, and I wish I could have experienced that as a child.

Impacts of Validation

Three of the participants within this study experienced validating elementary music classes that helped shape their love of the arts. Their positive elementary music environments also provided a soft place to land when exploring their gender and/or sexual orientation. For Jenni, Michael, and Paul, elementary music became a safe haven they could rely on.

Jenni's girlchoir validated her musicianship, her views of the world, and the person she is. It gave her a chance to learn about different walks of life while holding deep respect for each of them. While being in this choir, she was questioning her sexuality when she met her first bisexual friend. This gave her a affirming example of what she was exploring:

It was so reassuring to me to know I had somebody close to me who f*cking owned their sh*t and didn't judge me for where I was in my journey of self-discovery. For her to be so confident in who she was just totally deepened our connection, which then further deepened the connection within our own choir. And just to know that option is available to me... If I wanted to, I could label and identify, but currently I choose at that time not to, and that's okay.

Jenni also revealed the lasting impacts of having such an uplifting environment. Jenni is now an elementary music teacher, and she believes this choir helped her become a teacher who embraces all of her students exactly for where and who they are:

[While being in this choir,] I was working with young women of all different backgrounds, sexual orientations, racially, culturally. It was very diverse, and... that informs my life practices, but more specifically my teaching practices. I carry this open-minded ideology. Partly because of [the girlchoir] because it was such an open-minded environment. I am now an open-minded teacher and an inclusive teacher who strives to meet all my students where they are because I want to be able to give them that same type of validation.

For Michael, when he was invited to perform with the older band, he had a trusted adult advocating for him and nudging him towards success. He commented on how even though he felt like did not deserve a place in that group, “I knew I was supposed to be there because I was invited by the teacher. [My music teacher was] on the students’ side and was really good at helping us find our place in music and find joy in it and find success in it.” He also communicated that this type of support informed him how to be a teacher himself: “I didn’t realize [at the time] how formative [that was] and so helpful for me as a music educator now.” Michael now strives to make all of his students feel seen—especially his queer students—by making sure to be open about his pronouns, interests, and establishing himself as a trustworthy teacher.

Paul’s elementary music teacher supported his love of music by ensuring every student felt heard, respected, and taken into consideration. He described the best part of her lessons was that the classroom environment was “less of a ‘I’m succeeding’ and more of a ‘we’re succeeding.’” She was able to achieve this by asking her students what they were interested in learning about and incorporating the answers into her assignments and lessons. Paul explained

how this class and teacher were the launching pad for his love of music: “I feel so strongly about my elementary school experience as a student [that's] why I teach that now.”

Furthermore, Paul was not aware of his sexual orientation within elementary school. However, he mentioned that the arts helped him through his discovery that he is pansexual, and he did not “think that that would be true if I didn't have the kind of elementary school experience that I did.” The kindness and passion that Paul found within elementary music created a path that helped him find a place to safely explore his sexual orientation and a career that he loves.

Jenni, Michael, and Paul all had positive experiences during elementary music and had the highest representation of validation through their interviews. Interestingly enough, validation was the highest theme shown through Nicole's interview even though her elementary music experience was overall more negative and caused long term pain. The final participant, Samantha, showed invalidation as her highest theme shown through her interviews, but validation was a close second. I believe this is an excellent example of how resilient each of them are and how important it is to overcome feelings of invalidation. Finding people and environments that will support who you are and your growth is essential to finding inner peace.

Jenni's experience relates closely to the study completed by Palkki and Caldwell (2018). As discussed in Chapter II, they found that acknowledging and actively choosing to include LGBTQ+ students can have many positive impacts. One of the benefits is that it can provide a safe environment to freely explore gender and sexuality. One participant in their study said, “Choir was that safe space that helped give me the courage to come out to people...I wouldn't have been able to be comfortable with who I was without the comforting atmosphere of my choir teacher and classes” (p. 36). Both Jenni and one participant from Palkki and Caldwell's study found the safety and freedom to continue their exploration journey within their music classroom.

Not only that, but they both expressed how the environment and support they received in music helped them find acceptance and love for themselves. To better understand and appreciate yourself is a gift, and these two were lucky enough to find it through their passion for music.

Jenni, Michael, and Paul's experiences all connect with the ideas presented by Hess (2017). Within Chapter II, we discussed that she believes music teachers are "uniquely positioned" to help students create deeper and meaningful connections to themselves and the world around them. To further the understanding of how this connects to this study, she continues to explain:

Music is an extraordinary medium for social justice. It facilitates personal and communal expression, storytelling, reflection, critical thinking, and creativity... In employing a social justice pedagogy for music education, we can help them challenge, critique, and shape both their world and their music in ways that help them express their ideas and tell their stories. (p. 73)

All three of the participants within this study used music as a tool to help build their confidence. Their music teachers and classroom environment became a tool to help them feel successful, honored, and at peace. Whether they were ready to come out during elementary school or not, Jenni, Michael, and Paul were all able to find an outlet and a purpose through music.

Although my experience within elementary music did not explicitly include the LGBTQ+ community, it was certainly a place where I was able to express myself, create connections, and feel success within a community. While I still wish I had more exposure to people like me at a younger age, I am still thankful for the ways my elementary music teachers supported me and my learning. Further in my music education, I developed solo performance anxiety which I still struggle with today. However, I look back on my elementary music experience and remember

never feeling subconscious while making music. Remembering my ability to make music freely without worry of judgment brings me so much joy, and I am thankful that was my musical foundation. Music later became a place where I found the safety to question and understand my sexuality, and I could not have had that without the joyful and supportive experience I had in elementary music.

Different Ways of Negotiating

All five participants in this study have negotiated to process or suppress their LGBTQ+ identity through different times of their lives. For Michael, elementary music provided a sympathetic and facilitative environment to work through this journey. However, for Nicole and Samantha, elementary music caused them to feel the need to suppress rather than explore their identity as they negotiated childhood.

Michael's journey of exploring, understanding, and accepting his gender identity and sexual orientation started in elementary school. Now living authentically as a trans man, Michael recalled a story about when he was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up at five years old, he answered with, "a boy." He also remembered picturing what his life would be like when he was older: "In those images, I was always male or masculine. If I was thinking about who I would be with in terms of a long-term partner, it was a woman. I didn't really know how to deal with these feelings." While trying to understand these feelings, music was a constant in his life where he felt seen and valuable. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Michael described wanting to feel "invisible." However, music made him "feel seen for a reason that I wanted to be seen."

When asked about what he would say if he could go back in time and talk to his younger self, he said, "you did it." Though transitioning has its challenges, Michael described how music was something that gave him comfort and safety: "It gets really hard, and you're going to feel

impatient for a lot of different reasons... but you love [music]. It helps you get through so much in your life. Don't give up on it." The validation Michael felt in elementary band was the beginning of him finding safety. He negotiated to work through the conflicting emotions about his gender because he was able to find joy in band. Music helped Michael find strength and bravery to honor his journey to discovering his gender identity and sexual orientation as he became an adult. He is now a music teacher who cares deeply about validating his students' sense of self and giving them the same support he received when he was younger.

Conversely, Nicole negotiated to ease the struggle of questioning her sexuality by being a quiet student. Nicole explained that her experience of being excluded from the elementary musical caused her to refrain from connecting with her teachers:

I was a very good student...but I never interacted with my teachers because I always really felt a sense of shame and embarrassment. It was more than just being shy, I think I always felt like I was hiding something... I just didn't ever want to say anything or have someone really see how different I was.

Nicole avoided letting teachers get to know her in fear of them discovering her sexual orientation. The invalidation she felt from her elementary music teacher was correlated with how unsafe she felt around her educators. The negotiation she made to cease these negative feelings also had deep impacts on her involvement with music through her adulthood. It was not until she was 46 years old that she felt comfortable enough again to learn an instrument.

Similarly, Samantha had negative associations with being gay because of how her school's community reacted to her elementary music teacher who identified as a lesbian. Although her sexuality was not clear to her yet, when Samantha heard parents call her teacher homophobic slurs, she interpreted that "[gay] is bad. This is wrong. Nobody else thinks this

way.” Samantha also explained how she wished there was more LGBTQ+ representation in her school’s staff or curriculum because, “if there had been [an understanding that being gay] is fine, I probably would have come out a little bit sooner.” The invalidation from her community and lack of representation made Samantha want to fit in with her peers. She negotiated to terminate these negative feelings by postponing the acceptance of her sexual orientation and trying to have feelings for boys.

Michael’s experience relates to the study conducted by Espelage, et al. (2008). As mentioned in Chapter II, they sought to deepen their understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB), and questioning youth and how family and school support can impact their mental health. After surveying over 13,000 high schoolers, they found that LGB and questioning students who received “social and institutional support” were likely to report lower levels of depression-suicidal feelings and alcohol-marijuana use, and that these types of support were “essential components of maintaining well-being in sexual minority youth” (p. 213). The validation Michael received from his band teacher in elementary school was what he needed to help him work through the challenges of discovering who he was. Without this foundation, Michael may have had a more challenging time finding a negotiation to ease his pain and help him find acceptance in who he is.

Nicole and Samantha’s experiences also relate to the aforementioned study performed by Espelage, et al. (2008):

Questioning youth who experienced homophobic teasing were also more likely to rate their school climate as negative in comparison to both heterosexual and LGB students.

One possible explanation for these findings is that LGB students are able to draw on the

support of other gay and lesbian youth in the school, which may cause them to... perceive the school environment as being more supportive. (p. 213)

While Nicole and Samantha were trying to discover their sexual identities, the lack of support they felt from their communities caused them to experience a negative environment within their schools. This invalidation caused both of them to negotiate these conflicting emotions away by suppressing the questions they had about their identities. Had Nicole and Samantha experienced more validating communities, they may have each felt safe to explore their sexuality and find acceptance at an earlier age.

While I was struggling to understand my sexuality in elementary school, I placed all of my focus on my feelings towards boys, because I did not understand my feelings for girls. Because some of my attractions matched all of the examples in my personal life and school, it was easy for me to ignore my questions about my sexual orientation and try to convince myself I was like everyone else. However, when those feelings did creep up in elementary school, the lack of bisexual or gay representation caused me to feel invalidated. I negotiated that I could feel safe with my feelings towards boys if I ignored and suppressed my feelings towards girls. This did catch up with me by college, and I was finally able to identify as bisexual. Even though my elementary music education did not further my understanding of my sexual orientation, it gave me a safe and supportive outlet. I found something that made me feel seen, helped me find joy, and comforted me through challenges.

Implications

This study has implications for music teachers, all elementary teachers, guardians, and administrators. I believe one of the largest takeaways from this study is that elementary school is not too early to discuss gender and sexual orientation. Many educators and families believe this

is not an appropriate topic for elementary students. However, we are not talking about sex education. I am talking about exposing students to people within the LGBTQ+ community to help students who may be questioning or discovering their identity to feel represented and for all students to learn empathy. Within this study alone, two of the five participants already knew they belonged to the LGBTQ+ community within elementary school, even if they did not know what this was yet. Since it is our job as educators to provide our students with representation so they can see themselves within their education, we should not shy away from scary conversations or topics we may find uncomfortable.

Conducted by Kosciw, et al., (2022), the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) 2021 National School Climate Survey concluded that having LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum and supportive staff members in schools can provide many benefits for LGBTQ+ students. They found LGBTQ+ students who received curricular and educator support were less likely to hear negative remarks about their sexuality or gender expression, less likely to feel unsafe, encountered lower levels of victimization, less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe, achieved higher GPAs, reported higher levels of belonging and support by peers, reported higher levels of self-esteem, reported lower levels of depression, and reported a lower likelihood of having seriously considered suicide in the past year (pp. xxi-xxiii).

Many adults believe discussing gender and sexuality is too political to enter the classroom. However, every choice made as a teacher is political; choosing to exclude the LGBTQ+ community from the classroom or curriculum is still a political choice. Within his foreword of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull proclaims, “There’s no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom” (Freire, et al., 2014, p. 34). Teachers have the unique ability to help students transform

and better our world, but we cannot do that if we are neglecting a large portion of our student population, our LGBTQ+ students.

All elementary teachers and administrators should reevaluate their curricula, classroom environments, rules, and semantics. The way schools choose to include or exclude the LGBTQ+ community has consequences. Simple things like performance attire, addressing students or audiences with gender neutral terms, including LGBTQ+ musicians into the curriculum, having a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) (Starting Your GSA, n.d.), or hanging a safe-space symbol (Safe Space Kit, 2019, p. 4) can have large positive impacts.

Guardians can advocate to ensure their students are receiving a well-rounded education. Currently, only seven states in the United States have signed legislation to include representation of the LGBTQ+ committees within “curricular standards for social sciences, humanities, the arts, or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)” (Inclusive Curricular Standards, 2022, p. 1). Whether guardians are voting for change or speaking out at board of education meetings, making a difference can start with the community.

While researching this topic, I was able to find a plethora of studies completed about the importance of representation and the experiences of LGBTQ+ students and teachers for middle school through college. However, there was very little research completed about LGBTQ+ in regards to elementary school or elementary music education. As discussed through this chapter, it is imperative for young students to learn about and from LGBTQ+ people. The field of music education should continue research about this to deepen our understanding of how we can support young LGBTQ+ students.

In order to extend this research, in the future I would like to create curricular materials for elementary music teachers, like me, that will help them to better support all their LGBTQ+

students, and their students who have LGBTQ+ friends. Through this thesis, I have investigated how including the LGBTQ+ community has a place in the elementary music classroom. When considering the essentiality of including the LGBTQ+ perspective into elementary school, perhaps Stephen Sondheim's lyrics from the Broadway musical, *Into the Woods* (1989), say it best:

Careful the things you say; Children will listen. Careful the things you do; Children will see and learn. Children may not obey, but children will listen. Children will look to you for which way to turn, to learn what to be. Careful before you say, "Listen to me."
Children will listen.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subjects Research

Kelly Ruggieri, a graduate student in the Music Education department at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point would appreciate your participation in a research study designed to investigate the experiences of LGBTQ+ community members when they were in elementary general music. You are being asked to participate in a confidential interview with Kelly over *Zoom* that should take up no more than 3 hours. Your participation is completely voluntary. The benefit of this study is a greater knowledge about inclusion in the elementary music classroom.

We anticipate no risk to you as a result of your participation in this study other than the inconvenience of the time to complete the interview. You could, however, experience some discomfort if you have had an uncomfortable interaction with a teacher and your participation in the interview causes you to remember this.

While there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that we may gain valuable information about LGBTQ+ inclusion for elementary music students and their students.

While this information could be obtained by surveying you, we feel that the interview is the best way to obtain this information because it will have open-ended questions. You may also choose not to participate as an alternative.

The information that you give us in the interview will be recorded as confidential. We will not release information that could identify you. All completed videos of the interviews will be kept in a locked drawer in the home of Kelly Ruggieri and will not be available to anyone not directly involved in this study. Once the interviews are transcribed, the videos will be deleted and all names will be changed to pseudonyms.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you want to withdraw from the study, at any time, you may do so without penalty or loss of benefit entitled. Only anonymous information provided will be retained. All identifiable information will be removed from the study and destroyed or deleted.

Once the study is completed, you may receive the results of the study. If you would like these results, or if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact:

Kelly Ruggieri

krugg394@uwsp.edu

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study or believe that you have been harmed in some way by your participation, please call or write:

David Barry, PhD

IRB Chair

Associate Professor, Sociology

2100 Main St.

Old Main 208

University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point and Extension

Stevens Point, WI 54481

715.346.3799

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Although Dr. Barry will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

Data collected from this study will not be used for additional research. In the event of a computer glitch, the investigator may withdraw the participant results from the gathered data. You may withdraw from the study at any time, with no consequences. Your information may be removed from the study at the request of you or the investigator. Results determined to benefit the study and you as a participant will be provided. If additional research is sought, you will be invited to participate again. The anticipated number of study participants is 5.

I have read and understand the information provided to me; that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Although I had this prepared list of questions that I used within all interviews, as the participants' stories unfolded, I formed and asked different questions pertaining to what they were sharing.

1. What state did you grow up in?
2. How old are you?
3. What are your preferred pronouns?
4. Do you define or label your gender? If so, how would you define or label your gender?
5. Do you define or label your sexuality? If so, how would you define or label your sexuality?
6. When did you know you were part of the LGBTQ+ community?
7. Have you come out publicly? Why or why not?
8. What was your experience like in elementary music?
9. Did you feel like it was positive or negative in terms of LGBTQ+ inclusion?
10. If you had a negative experience, did you tell anyone this happened?
11. How was the environment in music after that experience? Did it change how you interacted with that teacher?
12. Did you know you were a part of the LGBTQ+ community at this point? If so, how do you think this impacted your perspective of music classes before high school?
13. How do you think your music class experience impacted your education as a whole?
14. Do you think your music class experiences impacted your life today?
15. If you could go back in time, what would you want to tell your younger self?

16. What would you want me to tell elementary music teachers today about inclusivity as it relates to your experiences?
17. How do you think your experiences have impacted your choices as a teacher today?
18. What would you like to add that I haven't thought to ask you about this?