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LGBT Self-Identity and Implications in the Emerging Music Education Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

LGBT self-identity and implications in the emerging music education dialogue will explore the synthesis of a phenomenological study of four LGBT self-identified music educators. The data was collected in a series of open-ended, semi-structured interview questions. The stories of these four music educators are not intended to be generalizable to all LGBT self-identified music educators, nor to be quantifiable as definitive answers in the dialogue of LGBT issues within music education. The narratives of these four music education colleagues provide valuable insight for further consideration within the greater music education community. As potential means of empowerment for all music educators, the emerging conclusions of the analysis process indicate the participants’ efforts to meet the needs of all students.
LGBT Self-Identity and Implications in the Emerging Music Education Dialogue

We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken. (Lorde, 1982, p. 44)

The call from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA) and the University of Maryland at College Park (USA) to present in the International Symposium "Establishing Identity: LGBT Studies and Music Education" served as the primary catalyst for this study. Co-chairs Louis Bergonzi and Bruce Carter suggested an empowering range of research topics from "Heterosexual Privilege in Music Education Curricula," to "LGBT Music and Music Making in Communities and Schools."

Rationale

In order to contribute to the body of LGBTQQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, allied) research literature in music education, the researcher created a series of questions designed to explore the continually-emerging dialogue inspired by the call of the conference. While acknowledging the social constructs which indicate a spectrum of sexual fluidity (Gould, 2005; Hubbs, 2004), the author also acknowledges the continuing use of self-identifying terms for the purpose of advocacy and education (Bergonzi, 2009).

The Participants

Four music educators were recruited to participate in this study. Each music educator has taught in the public schools and three are continuing in their work as public school music educators. One has obtained a degree in student affairs and is considering continued music education work versus work in student affairs (or some combination thereof). Further details regarding the participants will be illuminated through the narrative responses of the participants themselves in the data reported below.

Methodology and Methods

This research was designed as a qualitative phenomenological case study, as case study research encompasses a wide variety of options. The term “case study” refers to both the process of conducting a case study and the product of investigation (Merriam, 2001). Grounded Theory was used to explain the phenomena of the participants in light of a theoretical framework that evolved during the research itself, as opposed to a previously-developed theory which may or may not apply (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After reviewing and signing an informed consent form (see attached appendix A), each participant was interviewed in person and/or by telephone. Detailed notes were taken during the interview process; follow-up transcriptions of the interviews were also typed out for the purposes of
further analysis and triangulation. Participants were given the opportunity to review the synthesis of the analysis process in summative form for further input and clarification.

The initial interviews were semi-structured with opportunity for dialogue. The primary questions for the interview process were:

1. With what terms do you self-identify in the LGBT spectrum?
2. To what extent do you consider yourself out to your students?
3. Do you consider coming out an integral part of your journey as a music educator?
4. To what extent do you program the works of LGBT composers?
5. How do you incorporate the LGBT self-identified status of composers in the music education classroom?
6. How do you help to mentor your students who self-identify as LGBT and/or LGBTQ?
7. Have you experienced heterosexism in your classroom/rehearsal and/or school?
8. How do you work to overcome heterosexism in your classroom/rehearsal and/or school?
9. What LGBTQ issues would you like to see the music education community research and/or research in greater detail?
10. Do you have any additional comments?

Initial Categories

Through the initial coding process, the following initial categories emerged:

- Personal identity
- Coming out
- Pedagogical implications

In order to most authentically represent the data of the initial and synthesizing conclusions, the data throughout the following are presented in their most original form: in the words of the participants themselves. With purposeful intent on the part of the researcher, the participants’ responses are not further identified or separated by the individual respondent, but are presented randomly to represent data within the emerging dialogue. The quotes used below either reflect a new participant’s response, or a new section of response from the same participant.
Personal identity

- “I am [transgender who for activist purposes identifies as] lesbian.”
- “People are attracted to people. But I understand the need for [classification] so I identify as lesbian.”
- “I am bisexual.”
- “I am gay and queer. Gay indicates that I am a man looking to exclusively date and have romantic relationships with men. And I also identify as a member of the queer community and embrace the word queer as a term for the ambiguity that says I do not need to box myself in. I can just be a member of the greater community and let that be known.”

Coming out

- “Honestly I consider coming out an integral part of being true to myself true as a person. That whole game of trying to be out in one part of your life and in in another part is just too exhausting. You either are or you are not. It is who I am; it colors every part of who I am and every breath I take.”
- “Pretty out. They know that I am married and most have met my partner. I mention [my partner] by name. I am not hiding, but [am] not formally [out] in the classroom.”
- “[Coming out] has changed my self-confidence about myself as a music teacher. I think everything I do is related to my work as a musician and a teacher.”
- “Not out to students.”

Pedagogical implications

- “If a composer has identified and it has influenced their music then I will speak about it. And in compositional discussions I am very careful to be gender neutral.”
- “I work to be gender neutral, to allow thoughts about love to be for either men or women and I often let voice parts swap and sing the same-sex love lyrics rather than just opposite gender.”
- “For me it has not been as important to focus on the composers, but to break down the assumption of heterosexuality by having women sing about women and men sing about men. Men singing women’s songs and when I am working with high school, being blatantly obvious about breaking normative assumptions about who is singing the song/telling the story.”
- “Up until today, I have not looked about music with the person’s gender
identification as part of the mix of my selection process. I look at the text and the music and how well they are wed and how deep and wide is the music. Then the technical difficulties and such [sic].”

**Secondary Coding and Emerging Conclusions**

The following represent the secondary and emerging conclusions process of this study's procedure. The data is again left in its original form for the purposes of authenticity below. The three secondary and concluding codes emerged as:

- Self-awareness as model for students
- LGBTQQA mentoring
- Student empowerment

**Self-awareness as model for students**

- “It is not something I intentionally make a part of my persona; however, for students who have asked me—especially after graduation—I allow students to assume one or another. To help empower students to feel comfortable with who they are. That was not always there for me [when I was in school].”
- “In a small school district, it is a challenge to identify [as LGBTQQA]. I try to be comfortable with who I am and I think I am comfortable talking about [LGBTQQA issues]. I think it is good for all students to know an LGBT as a positive model. K-12, I am the only one out in the district.”

**LGBTQQA mentoring**

- “During [student] teaching with high school students I had the opportunity to come out to all of them and do an educational panel talking about those issues all at once. I had felt I had to walk a fine line at the beginning of my student teaching, however, upon hearing an announcement about a gay/straight alliance meeting, I asked my cooperating teacher if I could attend and it was at that meeting that they found out they had an ally in me and asked me to be a part of that year’s educational celebration panel. I asked my cooperating teacher if I could participate. I continue to try to be open to all students to feel comfortable to speak to me on a variety of subjects.”

- “Listening is so important and linking them to resources. The most important thing for any educator who wants to be proactive in this regard isn’t becoming the complete expert on everything in the queer world, it is knowing how to speak appropriately about the issues and/or how to direct them to the answers they are looking for. So, knowing where education guides on coming out are, knowing where local resources are: LGBT youth centers or resources or websites designed for helping teachers exploring these questions.”
“Just encouraging them to explore those ideas and not try to fit what they think they are supposed to be and validating that their confusion is appropriate/ok.”

Student empowerment

“I try to be open to all students to feel comfortable to speak to me on a variety of subjects.”

“Pointing out heterosexism is so important. Why don’t we see more queer issues in music? Just helping point out some dissonance. We do not have to turn them all into crazy advocates for LGBT issues with expertise but just getting them to see [heterosexism] makes a big difference.”

“Realizing that everyone of our students have unique challenges and experiences and realizing that music is not just a class, but something personal. Music can be a powerful force.”

“My eyes have been opened a lot more to the importance of how to understand oneself and how we interact with the world. This transfers to my understanding of music education as a whole. In particularly in music education we sort of talk in these platitudes about how music unites. The world’s music connects us all with each other, is the universal language.”

"It kind of goes unspoken to say that LGBT students should feel included in the music community but we never actually talk about [when that process is not explicit enough]. What we really should be doing to respect each other as people in all the rest of our lives [including in] the concert [and rehearsal] setting as individuals coming together and having a social experience and working together as colleagues. We create inclusive spaces and respect each other so that the harmony and synergy that we look for in the performances of ensembles has that deeper level of understanding and respect.”

“Knowing how to help guide them and feel better about themselves is only going to empower their ability to contribute more of themselves into their music.”

Conclusions

In conclusion, the thick and rich answers of the four colleagues above are not generalizable to all music educators and all music educators’ teaching situations. They do, however, share a synthesizing theme of their devotion and focus on their students. For it is not their individual need for self-identification which permeates their individual and collective responses, but rather their desire to be an example for their students: a music educator who creates a space where students—all students—are celebrated and empowered to be the best musicians they can be.
As W. Otto Miessner stated in his President’s address to the 1924 Music Supervisors National Conference (the early MENC organization), “We, as Music Educators, must accept our obligation and take a definite stand to the end that, in music . . . every child shall have a fair and equal chance!” (Miessner, p. 11).

And as formalized in the 1999 Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education, the Housewright Declaration asserts that, “Music educators must join with others in providing opportunities for meaningful music instruction for all people beginning at the earliest possible age and continuing throughout life” (Housewright, 2000, p. 220).

Suggestions for Further Research

As further concluding remarks, the researcher offers the following suggestions of the research participants themselves:

- “I was a conducting major in my master’s degree and in my undergraduate music education program we did not read very much. Anything would be great.”
- “LGBT relating to students and the number of students who feel comfortable coming out after experiencing an LGBT teacher.”
- “We have often taken for granted that our music ensemble and classes are a safe space for our LGBT students. We even see that characterized in the media. We see that in shows like Glee where it is just assumed that the gay kid is going to be in show choir or at the very notion itself that the show choir is gay when that is not the experience of most of the students in it. Recognizing the incredible amount of homophobia that pervades high school culture and the way it is connected to bullying. Recognizing we have these gay students and we do kind of understand that some of them are finding solace in music but why is that? Why is music something that they do feel safer in? But also recognizing are we proactively making it that?”
- “Is [music class] good because we are making it good or is it good because it is not as bad as another experience they might have?”
- “I think some interesting phenomenological work to be done as well as some interesting survey work.”

As final synthesis and inspiration below, please find the poetry of Kazim Ali. Professor Ali’s work in general, and as exemplified in the poem below, has a number of illuminations involving music and its beautiful and complex multiple means of interpretation. As we as music educators continue to define and re-define our goals, just as a researcher codes and re-codes data in the analysis process, we continue to emerge as models of creating empowering environments for all students.
Maya or Mayaar

You will always be gone.
All matter edges itself to dust.

Sunlight a pool or flower or fountain.
Music breaking the room to shards.

But why fret? In one language maya means
"all these molecules are breaking."

Your hands, the music, the paper, are not real.
Not pieces of liquid or light, but light years.

On the other side of the world you were taught
other names for things.

Mr. William touches the surface of the water with his hand,
says: mayaar.

Water, light, light on the surface of the water
or shining from beneath the water, are all fibs and fortunes.

Music can break its fall.
Light could speak.

A year could open between maya and mayaar
That would provide perfect pitch against which you could practice.

Beyond that you're flailing, moon-licked, stunned,
Music, sunstruck, rainstorm, begun—

Works Cited


Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

LGBT self-identity and implications in the emerging music education dialogue


The purpose of this study is to encourage and disseminate discourse regarding the intersection of LGBT issues and music education. LGBT studies have become an active line of inquiry in sociology, education, musicology, and women and gender studies since the 1960s. During approximately the same time frame, musicologists examined the complex ways LGBT identities influenced the people and processes of making music and cultural life. Although numerous studies have examined influences of the LGBT community, conventional music education has yet to fully consider, to the extent colleagues in education and musicology have, relevant research, theory, and practice from an LGBT perspective. Furthermore, within music education, LGBT issues are not visible via special research groups, journals, meetings, or research. The researcher seeks to gain knowledge of the participants’ attitudes by asking them questions through one on one interviews.

2. **Benefits of the Study**

Through the process of being interviewed for this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your ideas about LGBT self-identity, LGBT issues in general, and the broader music education field.

3. **What You Will Be Asked to Do**

You will be asked to voluntarily answer questions presented by the researcher during an interview. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be audio recorded, with your permission. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher will ask your permission to call with follow-up questions, if necessary.

4. **Risks**

The physical or psychological risks of participating in this study are minimal. You will be afforded the opportunity to declare any statements made during the interview to be “off the record,” a designation that will be honored by the researcher. These remarks will not be transcribed, will not be referred to in the report, will not be attributed to the speaker in the report nor made reference to in any public presentation of the report. Comments made off the record will be treated as background information for purposes of clarification only.
5. If You Would Like More Information about the Study

For further information regarding this study you may contact the researcher directly via phone or email.

6. Withdraw from the Study

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, and to decline answering questions that you feel uncomfortable answering during the interview.

7. How the Data will be Maintained

Interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device and files will be transcribed by the interviewer. Once transcribed, your remarks will be identified only by ID code. Any information you choose to share will be saved as electronic files and identified only by ID code. You will not be identified by name in any publicly presented results. Files of audio-recorded interviews will be archived in a password-protected college server, and deleted in August 2011.

I have read the above and I understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

_______________________________________________________________
Print Name

________________________________________________________________
Signature Date

I give my consent to be audio recorded and to allow that recording to be used for evaluation purposes.

_______________________________________________________________
Signature Date