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## Challenges in the workplace pertaining to sexual orientation: narratives of two music teachers

Tyler J. Trepanier  
*Eastern Washington University*

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CHALLENGES IN THE WORKPLACE PERTAINING TO SEXUAL  
ORIENTATION: NARRATIVES OF TWO MUSIC TEACHERS

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A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Music

with Emphasis in Music Education

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By

Tyler J. Trepanier

August 2018

THESIS OF TYLER J. TREPANIER APPROVED BY

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE\_\_\_\_\_

DR. SHEILA WOODWARD, GRADUATE STUDY COMMITTEE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE\_\_\_\_\_

DR. PETER SHELLEY, GRADUATE STUDY COMMITTEE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE\_\_\_\_\_

DR. KELLEY CULLEN, GRADUATE STUDY COMMITTEE

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all LGBTQ music educators.

### **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank the participants of this study. Without their contribution, this thesis wouldn't have been possible. I'd also like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sheila Woodward for her dedication and guidance throughout this entire process and also to the other members of the committee reviewing this thesis, Dr. Peter Shelley and Dr. Kelley Cullen. Lastly, I'd like to thank my family and friends for their continued love and support.

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### **Abstract**

Despite laws protecting employees and the prevalence of Title IX training for administrators, staff, and faculty at many institutions, LGBTQ music teachers may still face difficulties in the workplace based on their identity. This investigation involves two case studies exploring the perceptions of music teachers in the USA regarding the challenges faced in the workplace pertaining to their sexual orientation. This empirical, descriptive study used interview technique, with the report written in a narrative style. Both teachers reported discrimination from administrators in the early stages of their careers. The first was bullied by a student spreading rumors, despite not being open about his status. Being at a Catholic school that used behavioral contracts to justify dismissals, he experienced “fear, loneliness, anger, and frustration.” Following this, both participants chose career paths in more liberal parts of the country, minimizing possibilities of discrimination. The one who had hidden his status came “out” and both reported mostly positive experiences over the course of their careers. The second faced vocal protest by a student in the classroom and used the experience to hold discussions in the class about acceptance. Both participants still find a need to guard their conversations in the workplace, based on the professional colleagues with whom they’re interacting. By giving voice to LGBTQ music teachers through this study, it is anticipated that greater awareness might lead to increased sensitivity and eradication of practices and attitudes that compromise the experience of music teachers based on their sexual orientation.

## **Preface**

As a music collegiate student, and later as a teacher in the public school setting, the researcher independently observed peer students and colleagues from the LGBTQ community experiencing discrimination and various other difficulties pertaining to their sexual orientation. Furthermore, through personal discussions with music teaching colleagues across the USA, he learned more detail of the challenges they experience in the workplace. However, he also found this topic of discussion to be largely taboo in conversations he tried to hold outside of the LGBTQ communities. It is the researcher's personal concern for social justice in the music teaching profession and for equity pertaining to members of the LGBTQ community that has led to this study.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

In recent years, respect for sexual orientation diversity has increasingly been addressed in music education professional publications and conference settings both nationally and internationally. Gamson (2000) proposes that research investigating homosexual lives until the early part of this century had been sparse due to severe social stigma surrounding the topic. The rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer (LGBTQ) music teachers are now protected by law (Human Rights Campaign, 2016), but their daily realities in the workplace still need attention. A review of the literature in the field provides a background of research pertaining to LGBTQ teachers in the workplace, particularly as this relates to matters of identity. A theoretical basis of promoting principles of social justice in the classroom provides the context for the study.

Much research pertaining to LGBTQ issues in the classroom centers around students, rather than teachers, and focuses on creating safe spaces in which learning can occur (Griffiths et al., 2006; Blom, 2001; Allsup & Shieh, 2012). However, the importance of teachers having a safe space in which to work is just as critical. Despite advances in recognizing LGBTQ rights in education, some teachers are still fearful of revealing their sexual identity in classroom (Abramo, 2014). A key area of research examining the disclosure (or nondisclosure) of sexual orientation in the workplace suggests that LGBTQ people need to use a variety of strategies for

managing and coping with non-visible aspects of their identity (Anderson, Croteau, DiStefano, and Chung, 2001). Connell (2014) emphasizes the numerous social and cultural obstacles being faced by many LGBTQ educators in today's world. She explores the legal, cultural, and embodied considerations of 'coming out' in the classroom environment, as well as disclosures of homophobia and the study of "homonormativity". Many teachers still face challenges with divulging their sexual identity and it appears that the community plays a vital role in how successful teachers are in forming a positive connection with students and the workplace (Bergonzi, 2016). DeLeon and Brunner (2013) claim that some LGBTQ educational leaders have had little support in their personal and professional lives, and not all educational settings allow for freedom in open discussion of LGBTQ issues (Palkki and Caldwell, 2018). However, Allsup (2016) considers improving sense of self identity to be critical, advocating that it not only helps the teacher, staff, and administration, but the students themselves.

Particularly in rural conservative areas, LGBTQ teachers continue to struggle with revealing their sexual orientation (Endo, Reece-Miller & Santavicca, 2010). Gould (2013) found that, while many educational institutions have promoted the acceptance of LGBTQ teachers, there is still a perceived lack of equity and respect amongst colleagues when it comes to serious academic matters, such as giving input on curriculum or school affairs. Mayo (2008) explains that administrators should be the ultimate advocates for LGBTQ teachers within their schools, setting an example

for not only students, but for faculty, staff, and the community at large. Renn (2010) states that, while there have been many studies on LGBTQ students, there is a still a lack of research on LGBTQ teachers in education. With the relative sparsity of literature in the field, many questions currently remain unanswered.

### **Theoretical Basis**

The theoretical basis for this study lies within social justice theories expounded in the literature. While many definitions exist, the term “social justice” within this study is deemed as denoting ideals of all individuals being worthy of equity, respect, and dignity (Bell, Joshi & Zuniga, 2007). Allsup and Shieh (2012) highlight that social justice in the music classroom requires valuing diversity, endorsing equity and fairness across society, and challenging injustice. Elliott and Silverman (2015) state there is a need for understanding of holistic personhood in the music classroom. Woodward (2018) promotes concern for social justice issues in the music classroom through collaborative learning environments; facilitating critical thinking; nurturing the student voice; and developing pedagogies of inclusion. Whyte (2009), discusses the power music education has in playing a leading role “as the heart of a core curriculum, as an opportunity for students and teachers to develop their compassion, tolerance, mindfulness, and empowerment” (p. 324). A key element of social justice theory is the need to provide a voice for groups and individuals in society that may have been marginalized or disenfranchised (Endo, 2014). Gamson (2000) emphasizes the importance of research that conveys the voices and experiences of

individuals who may have been suppressed. It is from this broad theoretical basis of promoting social justice in the classroom and giving voice to the disempowered that the question of LGBTQ music teachers' experiences in the workplace are addressed in this study.

### **Problem Statement**

While laws protect the rights of LGBTQ employees in the USA, we do not know the extent to which discrimination and other related challenges continue to be experienced by LGBTQ individuals in the workplace, in particular, those in the music teaching profession.

### **Need for the Study**

Little exists in the literature of detailed personal experiences pertaining to the settings, nature, prevalence and severity of discrimination against (LGBTQ) music teachers in the workplace, including public school and higher education institutions in the USA. There needs to be increased awareness within the music education profession, and within educational institutions as a whole, of the challenges being experienced by LGBTQ music teachers based on sexual orientation. Exploring personal accounts of the nature and contexts of these experiences is needed to support determining ways to meaningfully impact the improvement of working conditions for LGBTQ music teachers.

**Significance of the Study**

It is anticipated that dissemination of music teachers' personal accounts of challenges in the workplace pertaining to sexual orientation will open doors to more detailed and widespread investigations. Furthermore, when combined with other case study reports in the field, these narratives will collectively provide a more composite picture of experiences within the music teaching profession. Furthermore, it is hoped that this report might inspire future studies investigating roots and causes of any discrimination against LGBTQ music teachers and ways of impacting the eradication of any challenges still being faced in the workplace.

**Purpose Statement**

This study seeks to investigate the perceptions of individual LGBTQ music educators regarding challenges faced in the workplace pertaining to their sexual orientation.

**Research Question**

This study aims to answer the following research question: What challenges do LGBTQ music teachers perceive in the workplace due to their sexual orientation?

**Research Design**

This research project involves investigations of two LGBTQ music teachers providing their personal accounts collected through individual interviews, with results reported in narrative style. The legitimization of people's stories as valuable

sources of empirical knowledge has been increasingly recognized in the literature (Hyvarinen, 2010).

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument was an oral interview script with predetermined open-ended questions pertaining to any challenges related to sexual orientation in the professional teaching workplace. However, it was anticipated that further questions would arise during each of the interviews.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

This study followed a methodological assumption with a developing design, which Creswell (2013) defines as being “shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data.” In this case, each interview was based on the same selected questions, leading to further questions that evolved during the interview. Furthermore, analysis of data was not predetermined and themes were allowed to emerge as responses were analyzed. There was also an ontological assumption that each participant would present different meanings and understandings of their situations. Creswell (2013) defines ontological assumption as how the “issue relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics.” It was expected that all teacher responses in terms of perceptions, attitudes, and experiences would vary. The author also took care to include all points emerging from the interviews in the report and reflect them accurately.



## **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher approached this investigation through the lens of Queer Theory as it pertains to music teachers facing challenges in the workplace related to their sexual orientation. According to research scholar John W. Creswell, theoretical perspectives may be integrated with the philosophical assumptions that construct a picture of the issue being examined, the people being studied, and the changes that are needed (Creswell, 2003). Queer Theory focuses on individuals calling themselves lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered, and more recently includes those who might be questioning their sexual identity.

## **Sample Population**

This investigation involves a sample of convenience. While the participants were not prior acquaintances of the researcher, he was made aware of these individuals through professional contacts as being music teachers who openly identify themselves as LGBTQ. It is recognized that there are interweaving systems of power that impact marginalized communities. Any study of an LGBTQ individual may be intertwined with aspects of class, race, age, disability and gender that are an inextricable part of that individual's experience. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that one subgroup of a minority does not represent the larger group. While this study does not delve into matters of intersectionality, it is noted that both participants present as white, middle class, gay males.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher examined the responses from the participants and wrote a narrative report, highlighting critical features of the participants' reported experiences. He looked for major themes described by each participant that might indicate a need for further research in these areas on broader population groups.

### **Limitations**

This results of this study are limited to the perceptions of two individuals within the USA who agreed to participate in the study and are not generalizable to any broader population. Limitations also exist in term of the participants' articulation skills and accuracy of reporting on their demographics and experiences. Furthermore, this study aims only to determine narratives of the nature and contexts of their perceived experiences and not to question the causes of those experiences.

### **Definitions**

**LGBTQ** – This acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer and is commonly used worldwide to depict the community of individuals that fall within this wide diversity of sexual orientations.

**Being "Out"** – This is a metaphor commonly used for LGBTQ people's self-disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity. "Outing" is the disclosure of an LBGTQ person's sexual orientation or gender identity, with or without their consent.

## Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

### Introduction

The Human Rights Campaign (2016) provides a description of the U.S. Employment Non-Discrimination Act that protects LGBTQ educators from discrimination in the work place. It includes each guideline by which employers must abide in relation to LGBTQ employees. Nevertheless, in the education realm, and specifically music education, the challenges faced by LGBTQ music teachers in the workplace continue to be a matter of concern. Gamson (2000) proposes that research investigating homosexual lives until the early part of this century has been sparse due to severe social stigma surrounding the topic. However, since that time, there has been increasing interest in professional meetings and publications on LGBTQ issues in education, including those specific to music education.

The topic is addressed in this literature review on a theoretical basis of social justice in music education, a field that has become a major area of research interest in recent decades. Whyte (2009), discusses the need for music education to play a leading role “as the heart of a core curriculum, as an opportunity for students and teachers to develop their compassion, tolerance, mindfulness, and empowerment” (p. 324). Exploring the experiences of the LGBTQ community in educational settings, Palkki and Caldwell (2018) state “LGBTQ issues are present inherently in all educational settings as students and adult faculty/ staff negotiate their gender–sexual diversity within the educational context” (p. 42). Much research in the field of social

justice in music education centers on the role of teachers and administrators in creating safe spaces in which students of all diversities can thrive (Griffiths et al., 2006; Blom, 2011; Allsup & Shieh, 2012). However, the rights of LGBTQ music teachers in the workplace and *their* need to feel safe has been less of a focus in the literature. Pertinent literature, although limited, is examined in this review, providing a context for the direction of this research. The review opens with a presentation of the theoretical basis of social justice in music education. This follows with the main body of text pertaining to LGBTQ employee sense of identity in the workplace. A short closing section proposes the creation of inclusive, safe spaces in educational settings and leads to a statement of need for the current study.

### **Social Justice in Music Education – a Theoretical Basis**

The theoretical basis for this study lies within the area of social justice, particularly as it applies in music education. The term ‘social justice’ has been applied to multiple meanings in education around the world, with “situational, contextual, individual, and cultural factors impacting perceptions of what it might represent at any given moment” (Woodward, 2018). In this document, it is used to denote ideals of all individuals being worthy of equity, respect, and dignity (Bell, Joshi & Zuniga, 2007). Elliott and Silverman (2015) refer to the need in music classrooms for an understanding of holistic personhood. They describe this as being

“fundamental to grasping how all forms of positive music engagements, creativity, and educative music experiences contribute to our students’ full flourishing, or what Aristoteles called *Eudaimonia*, which includes a good life of happiness, meaningfulness, fellowship, well-being, joy, personal

significance, self-knowledge, and the care of oneself, others and one's community." (p. 190)

Allsup and Shieh (2012) suggest that LGBTQ injustices may seem too far beyond the scope of music education, making music educators hesitant to address these issues within their lessons. They warn that attempting to address these injustices might result in a feeling of powerlessness, deterring music educators from examining social justice issues in research or within the classroom. They explain that social justice in education requires addressing economic disparities, issues in policy, and social rights that affect our students. Furthermore, it requires valuing diversity, endorsing equity and fairness across society, and challenging injustice. Allsup and Shieh go on to declare that social justice is "understood as a principled, even public, response to a perceived hurt or act of injustice" (p. 48), requiring critical reflection and awareness of injustices taking place. Woodward (2018) promotes concern for social justice issues in the music classroom through collaborative learning environments; facilitating critical thinking; nurturing the student voice; and developing pedagogies of inclusion. Mantie (2008) emphasized the importance of teachers facilitating a "sense of dignity, self-worth and empowerment" in music classrooms (p. 473). Providing a voice for groups and individuals in society that may have been marginalized or disenfranchised is a key element of social justice theory (Endo, 2014). Research that conveys the voices and experiences of individuals who may have been suppressed is critical (Gamson, 2000). A theoretical basis of promoting social justice in the classroom and giving voice to the disempowered

provide a context for the exploration of LGBTQ music teachers' experiences in the workplace in this study.

### **LGBTQ Employee Identity Issues in the Workplace**

Social justice is inextricably linked with issues of individual and social identity: "As a social, political, and pedagogical practice, transformative social justice learning will take place when people reach a deeper, richer, and more textured and nuanced understanding of themselves and their world." (Torres, 2007 p. 244). A key area of research examining the disclosure (or nondisclosure) of sexual orientation in the workplace suggests that LGBTQ people use a variety of strategies for managing and coping with non-visible aspects of their identity (Anderson, et al., 2001).

The difficulties of assessing this field were highlighted by Anderson et al. (2001) who explained that "Research concerning sexual identity management has been dampened by an inadequate definition and measurement." They claimed that the initial development of the *Workplace Sexual Identity Management Measure* (WSIMM), based on a conceptual model of lesbian and gay identity management, was supported by prior qualitative research. In their study, aspects of that measure were examined for a sample of 172 student affairs professionals. Their results suggest that the WSIMM successfully assesses identity management strategies and lends partial support for individual scales. Their data supported the usefulness of the revised WSIMM for measuring sexual identity management. Additionally, they state

that further research is needed to improve measurement of strategies and to examine dimensionality of sexual identity management. Their measure has been cited in numerous research investigations since that time, such as those of Moradi, 2009; Velez and Moradi, 2012; and Velez, Moradi and Brewster, 2013, all discussing sexual identity issues in the workplace.

In one of the few books available on this specific topic in education, Connell (2014) explores the social and cultural obstacles that many LGBTQ educators encounter in today's world. She describes the current professional state of LGBTQ educators and what dilemmas they face, stating

“The clashing expectations of pride and professionalism force gay and lesbian teachers into a no-win struggle between their political and professional obligations. Some teachers respond to these clashing expectations by attempting to maintain a strict distinction between their identities as teachers and as gay or lesbian adults, in effect splitting into different selves whose emergence depends on their proximity to the classroom. Others try to knit together these identities into a cohesive whole. Neither strategy fully resolves the fundamental pride/professionalism dialectic, with the result that some quit teaching altogether.” (p. 5)

Connell's book traces these paths and their consequences with an argument that “teachers will not be able to reconcile their political and professional selves until we systematically challenge the ideology that upholds the tension between pride and professionalism” (p. 5). She offers a brief history of LGBTQ members in the teaching profession, outlining the challenges they have faced regarding stigmas and lack of social acceptance from the 1969 Stonewall Riots to the present day. Connell suggests that these historical stigmas include the belief in some social communities

that LGBTQ people are pedophiles, impacting a lack of acceptance in certain places for their working with children in the education profession. Connell also explores the legal, cultural, and embodied considerations of ‘coming out’; the discourses of homophobia; and the study of “homonormativity” in the classroom environment. The significance of the act of coming out reached primary and secondary school teachers in 1978, when the Briggs Initiative, or Proposition 6, threatened to ban gay and lesbian teachers from working in California public schools. "No on 6 Campaign" was the LGBTQ response to defeat the discriminatory proposition. The most important of these chapters is Connell’s discussion of heterosexual and homosexual teaching alliances and advocacy possibilities for the future. Her key points focus on gay/straight alliance groups in schools that involve student, faculty, staff, and administration participation.

Allsup (2016) is a self-identifying gay male teacher who explored the role of LGBTQ teachers in the classroom and how they negotiate their identity. He exhorts teachers to “know they self” and to embrace transformation within the realm of LGBTQ studies (p. 50). By examining his own teaching experiences, along with those of his colleagues, Allsup gives a narrative of how teachers can transform into better educators who are more self-aware of their actions. Many of his experiences describe how improving sense of self-identity not only helps the teacher, staff, and administration, but the students themselves.



Allsup and Shieh (2012) point out that LGBTQ-related injustices may seem to be too far beyond the scope of music education, making music educators hesitant to address these issues within their lessons. They suggest that facing these injustices might result in a feeling of powerlessness, deterring music educators from examining social justice issues and taking steps to address these within the classroom. They advocate that achieving social justice in education requires addressing economic disparities, issues in policy, and social rights that affect our students. Valuing diversity, endorsing equity and fairness across society, and challenging injustice are also necessary. Allsup and Shieh further state that social justice is “understood as a principled, even public, response to a perceived hurt or act of injustice” (p. 48). This definition requires an awareness that injustices are indeed taking place.

Abramo’s (2014) qualitative case study examines discourses within teachers’ identity construction. By using a narrative analysis, she explores a variety of discourses that have shaped the identity of the participants. Her narrative touches upon themes of race, music as a discipline, and social class. In relation to sexual identity, Abramo found that many teachers still have difficulties with divulging their sexual orientation to students and fellow teachers. However, she points out that many of these experiences are dependent upon the teaching location of the school. Her finding indicated that even though there have been advances in recognized LGBTQ rights, some teachers are still fearful of revealing their sexual identity in the classroom.

Bergonzi's (2014) research gives an overview of sexual orientation in music education, specifically focusing on how heterosexuality teaching has been dominant within the USA. In addition, Bergonzi explores instances of heterosexual privilege related to music students, music teachers, and the curriculum presented in the classroom. His findings indicate that a number of teachers are not willing to address their heterosexual privilege and that teachers are less willing to view it as a privilege at all. However, he did find that some teachers are able to understand the importance of addressing privilege with heterosexual teachers. He claims that discussions on the topic are maturing slowly amongst educators, but growing nevertheless. Furthermore, his results indicate the need for a clearer understanding of privilege amongst teachers in order for them to be better role models for students.

Bergonzi, Carter, and Garrett (2016) explore challenges with establishing LGBTQ identity within the classroom and community, as well as the importance of embracing the concept of fluidity in sexual orientation. They found that teachers who were more accepted for being LGBTQ within a community were also more confident in their identity. While many teachers are still faced with the challenges of divulging their sexual identity (coming out), the results showed that community plays a vital role in how successful teachers are in forming a positive connection with students and the workplace.

Caldwell and Palkki (2017) present data from a large-scale cross-sectional survey of LGBTQ college students reflecting on their internship experiences of

teaching choral music in middle and high schools. The quantitative data indicate that the internship students felt safer teaching in high schools than in middle schools and that a small majority of the employed high school teachers voiced support for LGBTQ students. The open-ended responses examined themes including transgender students who faced difficulty navigating their gender identities in the choral environment and the importance of non-discrimination policies. The gender issue in choirs is particularly critical, as choral activities involve the assignment of vocal parts to what are often recognized as gender-related voice parts, such as soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The students discussed helpful and hurtful words and/or policies that influenced their choral experiences. The main theme was the encouragement of open acknowledgement of LGBTQ identities and issues in the choral classroom in regarding harassment.

Palkki and Caldwell (2018) highlight the main theme in their review of college student teacher responses as including a need for “recognition of their [LGBTQ] identity within the choral context.” Based on these data, they suggest that teachers should be more vocal in demonstrating support for LGBTQ individuals while readily considering any LGBTQ issues that might arise in the secondary choral setting. While they recognize that not all educational settings allow for freedom in open discussion of LGBTQ issues, they advocate at least providing a safe space for all, including LGBTQ youth.

DeLeon and Brunner (2013) conducted a national qualitative study that

generated an important model for understanding how society's actions and attitudes affect and inform the lived experiences of lesbian and gay leaders in education. Queer legal theory, critical phenomenology, and post-structural hermeneutics are the three main frameworks of their study. Seventeen volunteers participated in the study. They designed a virtual laboratory, allowing participants to interact anonymously through the use of focus groups, interviews, written responses, and private/public messaging tools in a virtual world. Their findings were categorized in five sections, resulting in the 'Cycles of Fear' model. DeLeon and Brunner (2013) claim that the conclusions drawn from this study may benefit LGBTQ educational leaders who've had little support in their personal and professional lives.

DeMitchell, Eckes, and Fossey (2010) explored the different political and social aspects of teachers who have been discriminated against in the school setting. Their reports claim that professional educators serve as role models for students. They explain that school officials have often justified their discrimination against LGBT teachers by arguing that LGBT teachers do not serve as proper role models for students. They explore the legal status of non-heterosexual teachers as it has evolved since the early twentieth century. They also review the history of the standard for evaluating a teacher's sexual status, the development of alternative legal theory, and how these apply to gay and lesbian teachers. Lastly, the article addresses legal protections for gay and lesbian teachers provided by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Protection Clause, privacy under the Fourteenth

Amendment, and state anti-discrimination statutes.

Endo's (2014) *Research in Queer Studies* is a collection of memoirs and narrative essays in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex or queer PK-12 teachers and/or administrators (either 'out' or 'not out') recount their personal experiences as LGBTQ teachers in public and private schools. The questions guided the teachers to discuss their identities as LGBTQ teachers; how their identities influenced their decision to become teachers; any significant moments regarding their experience as teachers; and their hopes as LGBTQ educators. The study provides detailed personal reports, showing that there were many instances of discrimination perceived by LGBTQ teachers. These instances involve students, faculty, staff, and administration.

Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca's (2010) narrative inquiry examined the experiences of six lesbian and gay teachers working in primary and secondary schools in the Midwest region of the USA. They describe how the heteronormative society in which we live has led these individuals to keeping their sexual identity separate from their identity as a teacher. In addition to exploring these issues, their study aimed to understand what it's like to be a LGBTQ teacher in the Midwest, by focusing on how they maintain their own identities. Overall, they found that many of these educators still lived in fear of losing their positions, especially within private schools. Furthermore, many of these LGBTQ educators still appeared to be dealing with discrimination based on their sexual orientation to that day. The researchers

deduced, that due to the rural conservative areas in which these schools were located, a majority of LGBTQ teachers continued to struggle with revealing their sexual orientation.

Freire's (1968/2002) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes the traditional teacher-student relationship as inherently hierarchical, where the education revolves around the teacher. The teacher is viewed as the "narrator" and students as "listening subjects," promoting passive oppression by prioritizing passive engagement (p. 71). Given the product-driven nature of music courses (e.g., quarter/semester performances, festival assessments, and competitions), Friere suggests that a music teacher must be able to adopt a facilitator role. He states that teachers must allow students the opportunity to arrive at their own answers. He warns, however, that this socially-constructed approach might become problematic as some students' experiences and identities may be ignored or seen as invalid.

Gould (2013) examines the 'coming out' of LGBTQ studies in music education and what it means for the profession. His pedagogy-based narrative discusses the relationship between heterosexual and LGBTQ teachers within the school setting. Gould's results found that, while many educational institutions have promoted the acceptance of LGBTQ teachers, there is still a lack of creating a mutual respect with faculty attitudes. For example, many LGBTQ teachers reported having been treated unfairly when it came to their input on curriculum or school affairs. They were not taken seriously by administration, even though many of the administrative staff

claimed they had no issue with LGBTQ teachers.

In an earlier publication, Gould (2007) discusses democracy in music education as favoring a majority of individuals and subsequently oppressing those in the minority. While democracy is seen as generally positive, the community aspects are seen as more problematic. On a macro level, Gould claims that the majority rules out women, minorities, and differently-abled persons. On a micro level, she states that minority communities may be in a position to marginalize other marginalized groups, based on which is the dominant minority group. She further explains that the extent to which the dominant minority group experiences inter- and intragroup discrimination affects the likelihood of outward discrimination toward other minority groups.

Garrett and Spano's (2017) research examined LGBTQ inclusive strategies used by practicing music educators in the United States. Participants commented on their comfort level using LGBTQ-inclusive strategies in a school music class, their perceptions of barriers to LGBTQ inclusion, and whether they had received training related to LGBTQ issues. Furthermore, self-identified heterosexual respondents were asked questions regarding their attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Overall, the sample population held generally positive attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals. Garrett and Spano describe the general positivity of respondents as somewhat surprising, given the large percentage of participation by teachers living in the Midwest and the South, where residents have historically reflected greater negative

attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals.

Haywood (2011) states that only a small number of studies in the music education literature have explored gay identity disclosure at school. She examined the experiences of LGBTQ teachers and their 'open' identity in the workplace, finding that many LGBTQ teachers still face scrutiny and intolerance for not being heterosexual. She found that many teachers still hide their sexual identity for fear of losing their job or not being accepted by the community. While many areas of the country, specifically rural conservative areas, exclude or discriminate against LGBTQ teachers, Haywood suggests that a more common view of acceptance exists in liberal urban areas.

Hooker's 2010 study aimed to determine how gay and lesbian teachers negotiate their identities. The investigation focused on their relationships in a school setting, as well as the effect their sexual orientation plays on their professional roles. Four gay and lesbian teachers and two gay administrators were interviewed about their experiences in their schools and communities. The study also included a focus group consisting of five gay and lesbian Catholic school educators. Each of the five participants in the focus group negotiated his/her identity differently. There were some differences between rural, suburban, and Catholic school environment educators, as the urban educators seemed more at ease with being 'out'. It was apparent that LGBTQ educators who negotiated their sexual identity did in fact have to deal with the effects of any knowledge about their sexual orientation amongst



students, faculty, staff, and administration. The teachers who felt more guarded about their sexual identity were less likely to be open to other members of the school community and might only be ‘open’ with a few close and trusted colleagues.

Jackson (2007) investigated how gay and lesbian teachers express their identities in an environment that has not always been accepting of the LGBTQ community. Rural and urban participants in the study were found to make connections between their experiences as LGBTQ educators and their classroom practices. Several contributing factors, including community atmosphere, school culture, and family status were explored. Jackson also explored the oppression of identity related to certain theoretical understandings of LGBTQ issues. Results indicated that many LGBTQ educators find it difficult to bridge their personal lives with their chosen profession. Furthermore, rural teachers find it especially difficult to blend into the school and community culture, due to their sexual orientation. However, LGBTQ teachers teaching in more urban areas appeared generally accepted by the school and community. In their classroom practices, a number of teachers were shown to face challenges for having revealed their sexual identity and also for promoting LGBTQ advocacy and education with their students.

Jennings (2015) states, “Perhaps no profession is as challenging for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people than teaching, while also working under constant suspicion arising from the long-held stereotype of LGBT people as pedophiles who are after your kids” (p. 4). Having reported that teachers who are

LGBTQ face enormous challenges of ignorance and prejudice, Jensen's 2015 article "One Teacher in Ten" allows LGBTQ educators to speak out about their experiences. This journal edition in which it was published also includes experiences from LGBTQ teachers who are transgender, of color, and from outside the US, giving a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences of LGBT educators. For example, Jennings (2015) reports that, while there have been many advancements for gay and lesbian teachers, there is still ongoing controversy over transgender teachers. Unlike gay and lesbian teachers, transgender educators deal with a multitude of factors when revealing their identities to schools and communities. It is reported that there needs to be more studies on transgender teacher identity, especially in more rural areas of the country.

Lineback (2015) proposes a framework for understanding the hardships and experiences faced by lesbian and gay teachers. The study involved two separate group interviews with 11 teachers who identified as lesbian or gay. Lineback assigned their reported experiences into three categories; minority stress; the transactional model of stress, and coping strategies. The types of demands and resources that are unique to LGBTQ individuals were investigated. Specific interactions between sexual identity management and the workplace were explored, including how some elements of identity do not directly relate to the ability to teach effectively.

Mayo (2008) examines the complex relationships between LGBTQ teachers

and their students and colleagues at school. They claim that research has shown LGBTQ teachers as often failing to advocate for gay and questioning youth because they fear that, by supporting these students, it may place their employment in jeopardy. However, in Mayo's 2008 study, LGBTQ teachers were, indeed, shown to be responding to gay students' educational and emotional needs. Relationships between LGBTQ teachers and their heterosexual colleagues at school were also discussed. Results indicated that LGBTQ teachers often gauge each interaction and make decisions about revealing their sexual orientation accordingly. The author provides recommendations for school administrator training, advocating more emphasis on LGBTQ rights and acceptance. Furthermore, Mayo (2008) explains that administrators should be the ultimate advocates for LGBTQ teachers within their schools, setting an example for not only students, but faculty, staff, and the community at large.

McBride (2016) examines the notion of "masculinity" in the choral music classroom, stating that little is known about gender-norming narratives and how they influence gay male teachers. This study explored two self-identified gay male choral teachers who were not 'out' to the schools where they taught at. Results determined that, while many teachers are socially open as a result of today's progressive stances regarding LGBTQ issues, there is still a common fear of experiencing discrimination within the classroom. McBride found that the participants were pressured to appear more "masculine" within the teaching setting in order to hide their sexual orientation

from being known.

Meyer, Carlson, and Dennis (2014) explore how gender and sexuality identities are constructed through the process of education. They see educators playing an important role in "normalizing" gender and sexuality differences. Gender and sexuality identities are described and categorized (man-woman, straight-gay), along with each binary (man, straight), and "other" identity (woman, gay).

Palkki (2015) discusses the significant part of identity negotiation for gay teachers surrounding decisions about 'coming out' in the workplace. Through structured interviews, this qualitative case study of two vocal and general music educators explored factors influencing disclosure decisions and what tools or strategies participants used in regards to LGBTQ issues. The results indicated that these individuals sought support, mentorship, and the influence of having someone they could disclose their identity to. The emergent themes that arose from the data included negotiating the 'closet door', LGBTQ issues and music teacher education, privilege, and mentorship. Participants stated the importance of having a significant other (colleague) to help facilitate an easier disclosure process. Through open-ended dialogue, the participants revealed that the secrecy surrounding their LGBTQ identity was important in building stronger relationships with students, faculty, staff, and administration.

Paparo and Sweet (2014) examine the experiences of gay and lesbian preservice music teachers and how they negotiate their sexual identity as developing

teachers. Each student teacher participated in three interviews and provided weekly journal entries during a 16-week period. The study revealed that LGBTQ teachers face specific dilemmas when coming out to their students, faculty, staff, and administration. The results showed that the participants faced challenges with the stress of coming out to faculty and students and there were reports of isolated incidents of discrimination. Overall, the student teacher experiences were positive.

Pohan's (2001) study describes LGBTQ educators' personal and professional beliefs about diversity. In many of these cases, LGBTQ educators describe how teaching has affected their personal lives and vice versa. Furthermore, Pohan explores the diverse views of many LGBTQ members and their experience with intolerant work environments. Her report resulted in promising support and data for LGBTQ teachers and their right to teach within a safe and accepting work environment.

Renn (2010) provides an overview of existing literature addressing LGBTQ issues in higher education. She states that, although colleges and universities supply a vast amount of scholarly writing on LGBTQ topics, there is sparse literature on LGBTQ teachers and organizations in higher education. Renn also discusses the existing research approaches and theoretical stances of higher education practices and suggests areas in which there is more needed, specifically between students, faculty, and administration. Renn reports that while higher education is typically more accepting than primary or secondary schools, there should still be more focus

on higher education LGBTQ advocacy. While there have been many studies on LGBTQ students in higher education, she suggests that there is still a lack of studies on LGBTQ teachers in higher education.

Taylor's (2018) study examined what LGBTQ student teachers in the music classroom might learn from LGBTQ music teachers who served as external mentors outside the classroom setting. Three LGBTQ student teachers were each paired with a music teacher whose LGBTQ identity matched their own and who taught near the geographical region where students teachers hoped to teach. Their results showed that student teachers who are LGBTQ found better approaches to disclosing their sexual identity in the workplace with the guidance of experienced LGBTQ teachers.

Wald (1996) describes ongoing political and social challenges faced by many LGBTQ individuals. While he claims there has been substantial progress since the 1969 Stonewall riots, he proposes that there's still a discerning amount of prejudice that many LGBTQ people experience. His 1996 study assesses the state and local policies protecting LGBTQ members and the place of morality within politics. His study examines the scope of conflict within individual LGBTQ cases and presents options for relevant LGBTQ legal resources.

### **Creating inclusive, safe spaces in educational settings**

Research into creating safe spaces in music education classrooms pertains mostly to meeting the needs of students, not the teachers. However, the capacity for music education programs to provide a means for addressing discrimination and

injustice issues, offering an environment of respect and safety for both students and teachers deserves attention. The topic of bullying has widely become a major focus in the public news media, as parents speak out against cruel actions that have led to children committing suicide (Quakenbush, 2018). Furthermore, Garrett (2012) proposes that music is important to the development of multidimensional future adults. Music educators, therefore, have a unique opportunity to create inclusive learning environments. Logically, any activities focused on inclusion, equity, and social justice may apply as much to creating an environment of respect for teachers as it does for students.

Music learning objectives are often rooted in development of rehearsal techniques and performance skills. However, teachers also impart personal values to students in the classroom. Garrett's 2012 study addressed diversity in the classroom setting as represented by a variety of characteristics, including sexual orientation. Her analysis of the survey data indicated that a large percentage of LGBTQ students are verbally and physically harassed at school. Garrett suggests that teachers are often the first line of defense in these situations, and should be open with students about LGBTQ issues in the classroom and advocate for their LGBTQ students.

Palkki and Caldwell (2018) warn that "the power of the choral classroom may be much stronger than most people realize" (p. 43). From a survey of student choral members, one response was highlighted: "There was one time where another student in the choir bullied me for being gay, and throughout the year, would

constantly pick on me, and threw my stuff on the floor. Every once in a while, people would crack a gay joke about me too. My choral teacher got upset when he saw this ... I never felt threatened in my choir. I didn't enjoy middle school or high school a whole lot because many of the kids were truly nasty, but choir was my saving grace" (p. 43). However, once again, the focus in the literature is on students, rather than on the teacher being bullied.

Reed & Johnson (2010) discuss the power of administrators to be agents of change when they "step outside their comfort zones and challenge the beliefs that make up their individual core dispositions about equity" (p. 402). They advocate administrators seeking guidelines the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) guidelines for school leaders in serving as LGBT allies.

The literature explores the role of music teachers in creating collaborative learning environments that offer students safe places to address their own struggles (Blom, 2011). While there is a need for teachers to create safe spaces in which students may learn to express their voice (Griffiths et al., 2006; Allsup & Shieh, 2012), the literature says less on educational environments needing to be safe for teachers.

### **Need for Research**

A review of related literature has been presented above, providing a background context for research in the field of LGBTQ teachers in the workplace. In particular, the sparsity of detailed examples of the experiences of LGBTQ music



teachers in the literature indicates the need for case studies that would provide researchers with more specific understanding of issues in the field. It is anticipated that, while such case studies would not be representative, the reports would alert researchers to issues being experienced by these LGBTQ music educators. Furthermore, it is hoped that the reports might inspire researchers to investigate any emergent issues within larger populations, possibly using phenomenological approaches appropriate to broader populations. Thus, by eliciting detailed descriptions of music educator experiences as members of the LGBTQ community in the workplace, this study aims to contribute towards filling an important gap in literature.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study. It provides details of the procedures for human subjects approval, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Recruitment**

Subsequent to approval from the Eastern Washington University Institutional Review Board, recruitment commenced to establish a sample of convenience for two case study interviews. Self-identified LGBTQ music teachers were recruited for this study who were known to be currently working in public school or higher education settings in different states across the USA. While these individuals were not prior acquaintances of the researcher, the researcher was aware of them through professional contacts. A recruitment script was used, providing essential information to the individuals who were informed on the nature and purpose of the study and emphasizing anonymity. It had been predetermined that the first two recruited individuals who gave signed, informed consent would be included in the study. As it turned out, the first two recruitment attempts were successful and both provided signed consent forms electronically. Dates and times of interviews were scheduled by mutual consent.

### **Data Collection and Storage**

Interviews were completed through the medium of Skype, a video conferencing application, with the participant and researcher each located in private, quiet settings where disturbances would be unlikely. The research instrument was a script that served as a starting point for the interview, which led to more questions that arose. Interviews were audio recorded only. Recordings were stored on a password-protected computer under file titles that used pseudonyms, so that no identifying names would be apparent. Recorded interviews were later transcribed using the same pseudonyms. Audio recordings were stored only until the transcriptions were completed and then deleted. Data will be retained for up to five years on a password-protected computer.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher approached the analysis of the data with an open mind, having no predetermined themes or emerged categories. Emergent themes were determined during analysis. The researcher wrote up the report in a narrative style, highlighting the key elements of the participants' experiences and recording their perspectives on those. In both the data analysis and reporting, the researcher did not omit any points reported by the participants. The meanings presented by the participants were carefully sought and quotations used when expressions were especially expressive.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of two case studies, providing a narrative report on the perspectives of music teacher participants on their experiences of workplace challenges pertaining to their sexual orientation. The report on the results indicate answers to the following research question: What challenges do LGBTQ music teachers perceive in the workplace due to their sexual orientation? In a sample of convenience, two openly LGBTQ music teachers, who were made known to the researcher through professional contacts, participated in the study. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their identities.

### **Participant 1 - Michael**

Michael's story begins around 1996, as a young choral teacher preparing students for a holiday choral concert in collaboration with another choir program across town. Michael recounted, "A student in the other choral program started throwing out rumors about me. I was not 'out' to my students or the community at that time. I was a very private person." As Michael explained, stories were spread about him that he had AIDs, due to his weight loss at the time. Rumors were also started that he was having affairs with the boys in his choir. After being confronted about these rumors by another educator, Michael immediately went to report this to the school's administration. Despite meeting with the Vice Principal, he claimed there was no serious investigation into the incident. Michael described how "He

looked at me and said (mockingly), ‘Oh there’s nothing serious about this. It’s just kids talking.’” At the time, Michael didn’t do anything because of fear and not knowing what course of action he should take.

After a number of weeks, the rumors increased and Michael’s students never said anything to him about it. After going back to the Vice Principal, whom he had known since he was a child, the Principal explained, “We’ve told the students to stop spreading the rumors.” Michael felt that that was not enough. So, he went to his union representative and, consequently, the district suspended the student who had been initiating the rumors for a couple of days. The student was also asked to provide a letter of apology. Michael stated “In retrospect, I should have demanded more.” Agitated that the school district had not responded right away, he recounted feeling that the recurring incidents were laughed off as a joke and that the serious nature of the incident, particularly related to the AIDs rumor, was not dealt with properly. Taking time to reflect, Michael recounted that he felt discriminated against in terms of how he was perceived and what he could reveal. He felt restricted in how free he could be to express who he was “as a gay man.” He added, “I felt like I needed to be secretive about who I am.”

About a year later, Michael left that teaching position. In recounting the challenges he had experienced, he stated that fear, loneliness, anger, and frustration were all a part of his experience at that particular school. “The number one feeling was fear. It was a small Christian town and if word had gotten out about me being

gay, it would have caused huge problems for my ability to work and be an effective professional and recruit to the program.” He added, “I received definite discriminatory undertones from the Vice Principal and Principal who refused to take the matter seriously. My guess is they knew better than I that there was a major lawsuit potential with all this, especially upon their inaction.” Michael claims that he was too afraid and frustrated to know what to do until his teachers’ union stepped in and took care of the situation. He stated, “I was not dealt with on a serious level at all in this matter.”

Reflecting back over his career, working in both public and private K-12 schools and also in universities, Michael claimed that not all of his workplace experiences had been negative. He explained that there were instances where the schools at which he taught at were very open and accepting of gay teachers. Apart from the situation described earlier, he claimed that he’d not experienced outright discriminatory practices in the workplace and that it was only in the private sector that he felt truly discriminated against. However, in discussing his work in Catholic schools, Michael recalled that “I had to keep everything under wraps in Catholic schools. I have friends who have been fired from their positions for either getting married to their partner; revealing their homosexuality; or discussing it in an open sense, within the classroom. They cloak themselves under that idea that they’re a private entity with specific religious beliefs and are allowed to do that if it happens.” According to Michael, when teaching at Catholic schools, teachers are required to

sign a behavioral contract informing you that any part of your behavior running contrary to the Catholic belief system may lead to removal from your position.

Michael explained “I’ve been a teacher for 32 years and every educator, at some point in time, feels that they are being mistreated in some way. In my experience, do I always know if it’s because I’m a gay man? It’s not always easy to tell. I just don’t know.”

Michael shared his view that it’s harder to be an LGBTQ educator than a straight educator. He clarified, “In all the situations where there are faculty, there are certain subjects dear to the LGBTQ community that can sometimes be approached with other faculty members and sometimes cannot. My perspective is that the straight education world doesn’t ever have to worry about mixing with the gay educational world. Anything that they want to say about themselves or any perspectives they want to share (other than anti-gay) they can feel free to share, but if you’re LGBTQ in the educational world, in my experience, you have to be observant of the person that you’re relating to.” He explained that, before becoming a music educator, at the age of 17, when many LGBTQ rights were still being fought and LGBTQ people were thought to be “perverts” or “pedophiles”, he recalled thinking, “Oh, my god, I can’t be a teacher because if I am, everyone’s going to think that I have ulterior motives other than just trying to educate and help people.” Eventually, the impact of music in his life and his passion for teaching drove him to become a teacher, regardless of those fears. As he says to all of his students, “My job is to

develop your singing voice in the classroom so that your personal voice will have more room in the world. Because those of us who are more confident about our singing voices in here will be more confident in other aspects of their lives.”

In expressing his view on the progression of LGBTQ rights for music teachers in the workplace, Michael suggested that “The progression hasn’t been equal in all areas of the country, but I think there’s a greater knowledge about the LGBTQ community for sure. Also, a greater understanding that we are much more profound than what is typically shown in movies and television, but whether or not there is a progression in acceptance, that I cannot tell you. Where I live in California, yes, but in other places in this country, no.” One of the ways Michael explained dealing with the sense of being discriminated against, along with anything else negative, was by focusing on the need to excel. “To just do my job and work with the students, develop relationships, and get them to be the best that they can be so that nothing else matters other than that.” It was through doing this that Michael said he held to his belief that the human condition outweighs how we feel about each other or whatever biases we may have.

### **Participant 2 - Thomas**

Thomas’s story begins in 1989, in Oregon, when he was fresh out of graduate school. He recalled his early experience: “I taught in a studio that received students from various high schools. One of the high schools had a director that was homophobic.” According to Thomas, a woman who owned the studio told him that a



local high school principal didn't want his male students to be "studying with a gay guy." He explained further, "I didn't know if that affected my enrollment because I couldn't really tell whether anybody actually didn't come to me because of that, but that is what he said. I just remember thinking that was mean and harsh, but I didn't really feel like I could do anything about it." Although Thomas never came in direct contact with the high school director, his experience working at the studio left him feeling discriminated against.

Aside from that specific encounter, Thomas affirmed, "I feel pretty lucky that I've lived in pretty liberal places." Teaching in more liberal schools and universities in progressive cities on the East and West Coast, Thomas reported having no other negative experience or discrimination with administration as a result of his sexual orientation. However, Thomas recalled a specific incident where a student had a grievance with his homosexuality. "I was pretty 'out', I would say, but I had a student who would push back about me being gay. He would say that it was wrong. He even brought it up during class." Thomas used the situation as an opportunity for students to have an open discussion forum about the topic. The students had a chance to talk about topics such as not judging people for who they are, marriage equality, and even Thomas' husband. As he recalled, "I was pretty calm and strong in myself so I was able to just say 'I understand if you were taught a certain thing from your religion and you may have feelings that are negative towards certain types of people,

but this is the way and I am and I was born this way. I like who I am and that's just what it is.”

Even though Thomas described his experience as positive overall, he admitted that “Sometimes I feel a little funny when I think there might be some students who are really religious and might be prejudiced for that reason. It's only religion. I don't think that if you're a particular economic status or nationality that you're naturally going to be prejudiced. It's mainly fundamentalist religions that make me think ‘Oh, should I say anything?’”

When the topic of sexual orientation had come up amongst faculty, Thomas explained that his experience had largely been positive. In addition, he reported having worked with a number of other LGBTQ educators. Teaching predominantly in liberal schools, Thomas explained that “Being gay doesn't phase people very much at my school. In my life here, there is very little questioning about that topic. Nobody has ever pushed back. It's kind of amazing. I feel lucky.” Being an LGBTQ educator, Thomas discussed his personal insecurities with certain situations. As he explained, “So much of it is internal. Sometimes I would think, ‘Did I not act the way I would normally want to act? Was I masculine enough?’ But I think that was all coming from those inner voices inside my own head.” In reviewing his teaching experience, Thomas identified his classroom as always being about having fun while learning and performing music. He reported how, by doing that, the topic rarely came up.

At one point in his career, Thomas described being offered two teaching positions with universities, one in New York and one in a Southern state. Through speaking with a friend who worked at the particular university in the Southern state, Thomas was made aware of the conservative prejudices that were apparent in that specific geographical area. Subsequently, he chose the teaching profession in New York, which as he stated, “was a more accepting place for him and his husband to relocate.”

### **Summary of Results**

In summary, the two participants described varying experiences of challenges in the workplace pertaining to their sexual orientation. Each of them expressed the view that their experiences were tied to working in liberal or conservative regions of the country and that some areas were more progressive than others. Both of them reported experiencing at least one instance of discrimination by school administrators for being LGBTQ. Both participants described challenges emanating from students, the one spreading rumors amongst other students and the other openly objecting in the classroom. The first participant, Michael, reported being very careful when working at a Catholic school, explaining that the administrators used behavioral contracts to justify the dismissal of employees. Some of his friends had endured such dismissal for behaviors betraying their sexual orientation, such as marrying a partner. He described the on-going challenges at that institution, feeling fear, loneliness, anger, and frustration. He also talked about constantly worrying

whether he needed to limit his conversation or not, depending on whom he was with. He explained that this latter concern remained as an on-going issue to this day. The second participant, Thomas, also described the internal challenges of double-guessing one's actions as an LGBTQ music teacher.

## **Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This section provides a summary of the study's purpose, research design, research questions, and outcomes. This is followed by a discussion of the outcomes, implications for the profession, ideas for future research, and conclusion.

### **Summary**

This investigation involved two case studies that aimed to explore music teacher perceptions of their challenges in the workplace related to their sexual orientation. The study used interview techniques with a predetermined script that led to additional questions arising. The study aimed to answer the research question "What challenges do LGBTQ music teachers perceive in the workplace due to their sexual orientation?" In a sample of convenience, two openly LGBTQ music teachers of whom the researcher was aware through professional contacts were recruited for the interview.

Both participants described various challenges in the workplace pertaining to their sexual orientation. Both of them reported experiencing at least one instance of discrimination by school administrators for being LGBTQ. The first participant, Michael, complained how student administrators mishandled a student spreading rumors about him being gay and his complaints to administration that resulted in minimal action. Only with the help of the teachers' union did he receive further assistance. The second participant, Thomas, identified a time when he was a studio

music teacher and was told by the studio owner that a local high school principal had vocalized how he did not want his male students “studying with a gay guy”.

Both participants described challenges emanating from students. The first recounted a student spreading rumors about him (the music teacher) having AIDs, and having affairs with some of the students. The second described a student openly protesting his (the teacher’s) sexual orientation during class and saying that it was wrong.

The first participant reported how careful he was when working in Catholic schools. He explained that teachers are required to sign a behavioral contract indicating that any behavior running contrary to the Catholic belief system might lead to dismissal. He said that that friends of his had been dismissed in such circumstances for behaviors that revealed their being gay, such as marrying a partner.

Both participants alluded to the challenges they had experienced internally within the mind. The one participant described the on-going problems at his earlier place of employment of feeling fear, loneliness, anger, and frustration. He also talked about constantly worrying whether he needed to limit his conversation or not, depending on whom he was with. He explained that this latter concern remained on-going to this day. The second participant described the internal challenges of double-guessing one’s day-to-day actions as an LGBTQ teacher and wondering if one was acting naturally enough.

Each expressed a view that their largely positive experiences related to their mostly working in liberal or conservative regions of the country and believed that some areas of the country are more progressive than others.

### **Discussion of Procedures**

The *Skype* platform was an important factor when interviewing because the researcher was able to see the faces and evidence of emotional responses to each question, which helped define the gravity of the situation being presented by the participant. It also helped in developing a more personal connection with the participants with whom he had not been previously acquainted. Both participants were forthcoming with their experiences and it was not difficult to elicit responses. The main challenge presented in the interviews involved the participants' recollection of detail from each situation, as some reported instances happened earlier in their careers. Nevertheless, each was able to describe the key aspects of their experiences.

The researcher found the analysis of the narratives to be challenging at times, especially when the participants would go from one experience to another that had taken place several years apart. However, he was able to arrange the various comments into relevant sections of the report by using emergent rather than predetermined themes. The researcher found categories and themes in the responses fairly easy to recognize.

## Discussion of Results

**Discrimination by administrators.** Discrimination from administrators was reportedly experienced by both participants. The problems they faced in these circumstances align with research by Pohan (2001) who explains that there are still personal challenges experienced by LGBTQ teachers in divulging their sexual orientation in the professional context. Palkki (2015) expounds upon these ideas, stating that it can often times be difficult for LGBTQ teachers to negotiate their sexual identity in the workplace. In Michael's case, he was not yet publicly open about his LGBTQ status and feared it might become known. DeLeon and Brunner (2013) refer to this denial response by LGBTQ individuals as the *Cycle of Fear*, outlining the negative emotional responses experienced by homosexual teachers who have been discriminated against. Despite lodging a complaint with his Principal and Vice Principal after learning of a student spreading rumors, Michael claimed that there was no serious investigation taken into these discriminatory incidents. He felt that the limited subsequent response of a two-day suspension for the student (taken after intervention by the teachers' union) was not substantial enough to quell such activities, leading to his anger and frustration at that time. Michael appears to have felt disempowered to take anything further with the administration, because of his fear and not knowing what course of action he should take. This disempowerment, as described by the participant, is explained by DeMitchell, Eckes & Fossey (2010) who stated that "LGBTQ teachers are often judged by different standards than those that



apply to other teachers” (p. 65-66). It is interesting to note that this first participant’s greatest fear was having his sexual orientation discovered and how such a discovery might affect his employment position at the school. His only defense at the time appears to have been focusing on the student spreading false rumors, rather than admitting his status. This is reminiscent of McBride’s (2016) discussion of dilemmas pertaining to identity revelation. Considering the earlier time period in which this happened, one can recognize that the LGBTQ status of teachers was not as widely socially accepted or respected as it is today. Garrett and Spano (2017) advocate that music educators and school personnel should be well-informed and proactive in promoting inclusivity in the classroom. They state,

“Music educators play an essential role in the development of an increasingly diverse student population participating in school music programs. On a fundamental level, school personnel need to have basic knowledge of personal and legal issues associated with the LGBTQ community and an understanding of heterosexual privilege in order to provide an inclusive learning environment for all students.” (p. 39)

Particularly when it comes to the profession of teaching, parents may previously have been overall less accepting of their children being influenced by a teacher who was LGBTQ than they might be in more progressive parts of the country today. Furthermore, administrators may have been more intolerant of LGBTQ teachers on their staff, in fear of complaints from parents. However, daily news reports indicate that prejudice is still rampant in many parts of the country and one wonders whether the progress of time and legal protections for minorities has had any impact amongst certain communities. The relevant administrators appear to

have been either unwilling or ill-equipped to handle a case of bullying from a student through the apparent malicious spread of rumors. As advocated by Reed & Johnson (2010), administrators need to be agents of change, serving as LGBTQ allies.

Considering widespread media coverage of the tragedy of student suicide and legal consequences of neglecting bullying, it appears that many current administrators in the USA might be better acquainted with the urgency of dealing head-on with bullying and might be better trained in dealing with such matters than in previous years. Mayo (2008) explains that administration should be the ultimate advocate for LGBTQ teachers. By doing this, they set an example not only for students, but for faculty, staff, and the community.

In the case of the second participant, the reported discrimination was not the action of his own administrator, but of the administrator at a local school that was referring its students to the music studio where he taught. While he was 'out' at the time, the participant feared that his LGBTQ status may have affected enrollment with students in his classroom. As explained by Endo & Santavicca (2010), this fear is compounded by the pressures of not only the school setting, but the community as well, saying "Over time, these strategies have shifted and adapted to meet the contextual nature of specific environments" (p. 1024).

**Discrimination by students.** Both participants experienced discrimination by students, one in the classroom and the other outside of the classroom. Michael described finding out about false rumors that had been perpetuated by students, that

he had AIDs and was having inappropriate relationships with male students. Since 2000, the issue of bullying in schools through the spreading of rumors is increasingly addressed by public news media (Dart, 2018). The issue also appears in conversations on social media and amongst parents, school administrators, teachers, and students themselves. Furthermore, many bullying tactics have affected anti-discrimination ordinances and policies within the social climate (Wald, 1996). However, the major focus appears to have been on students bullying other students, with less focus on students bullying teachers. The literature supports the view that discrimination against LGBTQ teachers occurs not only from faculty and administration, but also from students in the classroom (Endo, 2014).

In the case of the second participant, there was an in-class provocation by an individual student, related to his (the teacher's) sexual orientation. Thomas used the situation as a chance for students to have an open discussion forum about the topic. As explained by Taylor (2018), these types of discussion are important for students because they promote mentoring between the students and teacher. The students had the opportunity to talk about LGBTQ topics, such as not judging people for who they are. Considering the resolution Thomas's actions achieved, this practice aligns with Spradley's (2010) suggestion that social justice can be achieved in the music classroom by 'developing a forum in which to critically analyze and reflect upon the thinking process before, during, and after the teaching moment' (p.7). By negotiating his sexual identity with his students, he was able to open up to his students, as well

as hear their point of view. The experience supports the view of Allsup (2016) that improving sense of self-identity not only helps the teacher, staff, and administration, but the students themselves. Furthermore, the outcome achieved is reminiscent of what Paparo and Sweet (2014) describe as the relationship between teacher and student becoming more accepting. Thomas's actions are a prime example of success regarding Palkki and Caldwell's (2018) claim that teachers should be readily considering any LGBTQ issues that may arise in the secondary choral setting.

**Policies at religious teaching institutions.** Hooker (2010) states that the discrimination against LGBTQ teachers in religious institutions has had a negative impact on professional teaching practices, roles, and responsibilities. An example of such discrimination was experienced by one of the participants in this study who referred to the broader discrimination against the LGBTQ community within religious institutions. He viewed this as characteristic of similar Catholic educational institutions using behavior contracts as the means to justify their actions. By signing a behavioral contract with the school, teachers were forewarned that their employment was subject to termination based on sexual orientation. Since the time of the reported experience, it has become public knowledge that many US churches have made substantial changes in their attitudes and now accept LGBTQ individuals. However, other churches are believed to still hold those prejudices and many LGBTQ music teachers are likely still facing the threat of dismissal from religious institutions of numerous different faiths, not just those that are Catholic.

**Emotional and cognitive challenges.** Turino (2008) states that there has been oppression happening in the social components of music education for a number of years. However, “Research specifically examining LGBTQ issues in United States music education classrooms began less than a decade ago” (Bergonzi, 2009, p. 21). Due to this, there has been a lack of discussion on the emotional and cognitive challenges pertaining to oppression experienced by LGBTQ teachers. Both participants in this study discussed the struggles faced within their own minds, related to their sexual orientation.

The first participant initially thought he would never be able to be a teacher, convinced that, as a gay person, he’d be rejected by the academic and parent community and viewed as a pedophile seeking to abuse students. These fears were apparently not unfounded and this widespread social view was confirmed by Connell (2014) and Jennings (2015). The first teacher expressed his view that being an LGBTQ teacher is more difficult than being a heterosexual teacher. On the one hand, he found that having to keep his sexual identity a secret resulted in fear, anger, resentment, and frustration with the school. On the other, he was scared of the repercussions of coming out.

The second participant’s reports of feeling helpless after hearing that a school principal would not send his students to a “gay” teacher; indicates internal emotional and cognitive challenges. It suggested that it may have been a combination of the more conservative social attitudes of those early years and Thomas’s own youthful

lack of confidence that led to his feelings of helplessness to respond when faced with discrimination in his early career. Being an 'open' LGBTQ educator, Thomas identified personal insecurities that still arise with certain situations. He appears to frequently worry that he might have to face students with fundamental religious views about him. More recently, his continuing to question whether he is compensating or being true to himself in daily actions is reminiscent of the statement by Connell (2014) that "teachers will not be able to reconcile their political and professional selves until we systematically challenge the ideology that upholds the tension between pride and professionalism" (p. 5). Furthermore, this constant "second-guessing" of Thomas's daily actions indicates that he continues to teach with an awareness of his LGBTQ status. In contrast, Bergonzi & Garrett (2016) suggest that heterosexual music teachers likely do not consciously think about their heterosexual status on a daily basis. The long-term fears described by both participants (the first about his identity being revealed and the second about students judging him), might be considered in light of Jennings' (2015) claim that this type of fear has a major impact on the daily stress faced by teachers. The researcher suggests that long-term stress arising from daily threat of discrimination might impact LGBTQ teachers in the way that the daily threat of discrimination is seen to impact the ongoing stress experienced by many blacks in the USA (Fingar et al. 2017).

**Career decisions based on characteristic regional attitudes.** Both participants referred to their having made career choices for being employed in more

liberal parts of the country where populations were more open to diverse sexual orientation. This ties in with the research by Abrama (2014) who found that LGBTQ teachers struggle with identity issues dependent on school location. Haywood (2011) suggests that self-identity implications will continue to emerge in the music education dialogue based on geographical location. While both participants considered the urbanized areas of the country as more LGBTQ accepting, they described their opinions that the more rural areas of the county are still less progressive. These views are supported by the research of Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca (2010) and Jackson (2007) who found that LGBTQ teachers in rural areas face major on-going struggles. Similarly, Lineback (2015) found LGBTQ teachers to be dealing with stress related to being a minority in more conservative areas of the country. The researcher questions whether, had they not chosen to teach in more progressive cities, they might have faced many more serious challenges with discrimination. While results of these case studies are not generalizable, the researcher wonders whether many LGBTQ teachers might tend to be more drawn to liberal, urban areas of the country that are more accepting of LGBTQ rights. The researchers suggest that the participants' steering of their career paths toward open-minded population regions likely was a major contributing factor in their having experienced few major workplace challenges pertaining to their LGBTQ status.

### **Implications for Field**

These two case studies provide awareness of workplace challenges experienced by two LGBTQ music teachers. It is important for the music teaching profession to recognize the challenges LGBTQ teachers might be facing in the workplace. Studying personal narratives such as those reported in this study will improve our perceptions. Doing so, our profession might work towards eradicating negative attitudes and actions and taking action toward fostering environments that offer equity, access and stability for all music teachers, regardless of their sexual orientation. It is the responsibility of professionals at each teaching institution to be aware of LGBTQ rights and cognizant of the challenges individuals might face everyday, not only the LGBTQ teachers, but the entire LGBTQ community.

### **Ideas for Future Research**

By consistently working towards the elimination of stigma toward LGBTQ community members in every aspect of society, there is hope that positive social change might increasingly be impacted in every workplace. Particularly, in music education, future research might focus on administrator, staff and teacher training and practice in addressing diversity issues and incorporating LGBTQ awareness programs into school programs for the benefit of all. Furthermore, research is needed on pedagogies for classroom activities that help students deal with the challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals (including teachers) and ways to address issues of equity for all. Larger scale phenomenological studies might determine conditions and



experiences of LGBTQ music teachers in different regions of the country, specifically in both rural and urban areas.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, participants in both these case studies described various challenges in the workplace pertaining to their sexual orientation. Both reported facing at least one experience of discrimination related to their LGBTQ status from school administrators in the workplace. Both of these occurred in the early stages of their careers. Furthermore, both participants described challenges pertaining to their interactions with students, faculty, and administration. Despite protections of the law, and increasing training for administrators, staff and faculty at many institutions, these two examples show that an individual might still experience challenges in the music teaching workplace relating to sexual orientation. Both participants chose to teach mostly in more liberal urban areas of the USA, acknowledging that this decision is likely responsible for their largely positive experiences as LGBTQ music teachers. The challenges reported by these two LGBTQ music teachers serve as a reminder to us of the need for promoting on-going awareness of diversity issues in music education through conducting research investigations in the field and in ensuring active respect for all music teachers in the workplace, regardless of their sexual orientation.

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**VITA**

Author: Tyler J. Trepanier

Place of Birth: Yakima, WA

Undergraduate Schools Attended: Eastern Washington University

Degrees Awarded: Bachelor of Arts in Music Performance and Bachelor of Arts in Music Education, 2010

Professional Experience: Teacher, Yakima Valley School District, Yakima, WA, 2010

## **Appendix A: CONSENT FORM**

**Principal Investigator:** Tyler Trepanier, Graduate Student, Music Department, Eastern Washington University, Ph 509-961-5506

**Responsible Project Investigator:** Dr. Sheila C. Woodward, Professor of Music, Music Department, Eastern Washington University, Ph (509) 359 7073

### **Researcher Statement**

#### **Purpose and Benefits**

My name is Tyler Trepanier. I'm currently a graduate student at Eastern Washington University in the Department of Music and this research study fulfills the thesis requirement of the MM with emphasis in Music Education. The aim of the study is to investigate the perceptions of individual LGBTQ music educators regarding sexual orientation discrimination they have faced as employees in US public schools and/or in higher education. The study involves up to three case studies of LGBTQ music teachers with their personal accounts of discrimination collected through individual interviews and reported in a narrative style. The study might be valuable in providing information to those in the music profession who seek to remove discrimination from the music teaching profession. If you wish to ask me any questions, please contact me by phone on 509-961-5506 or email: [tylerjo503@gmail.com](mailto:tylerjo503@gmail.com).

#### **Procedures**

During this study, you will participate in an interview of approximately one hour, either in person, through Skype, or through phone at a mutually-agreed time and date. Interviews will be audio recorded only. "Washington State law provides that private conversations may not be recorded, intercepted, or divulged without permission of the individual(s) involved." Interviews will be transcribed using pseudonyms. Audio recordings will be stored only until the transcriptions are completed and will be stored with the same pseudonyms so that no identifying names will be stored. Data will be retained for up to five years on a password protected computer. The researcher will conduct the analysis of the data and will write up the report, highlighting key elements of the participants' experiences. Each individual participant will be allowed to view the report on their interview, adding any additional information they wish to share and correcting misperception prior to finalizing. You will be free to chose not to answer any question. Examples of questions are as follows:

- What challenges, if any, have you perceived for being an LGBTQ teacher?

### **Risk, Stress or Discomfort**

Reasonable risks include possible emotional responses of participants during the interview and possible invasion of privacy. Participants are free to not answer one or more questions if preferred. Should participants feel the need to pause the interview or reschedule, that request will be accommodated.

### **Other Information**

To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used on the recordings, transcripts, notes, analysis and report. Real names will not be used. Participants may withdraw at any time without penalty. There is no fee or direct benefit for participation in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator Date

### **Participant Statement**

The study described above has been explained to me, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this research interview. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I give permission to audio record the interview. I understand that by signing this form I am not waiving my legal rights. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject Date

NOTE: Both the Investigator and each subject must receive a copy of the signed consent form.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this research or any complaints you wish to make, you may contact Ruth Galm, Human Protections Administrator, at (509) 359-7971 or [rgalm@ewu.edu](mailto:rgalm@ewu.edu).