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Lived experiences of transgender and gender expansive college marching band members

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Dissertation

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER AND
GENDER EXPANSIVE COLLEGE MARCHING BAND MEMBERS**

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DEDICATION

For all those struggling to live the best, most authentic, and beautiful versions of themselves, I dedicate this work to you. May you find the courage, strength, joy, and resilience to live a life of peace.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I did not quite understand the words “this is a journey” when I began my doctoral studies, but now look back fondly at the ways I have changed and grown as a person throughout this process. First, to Dr. Bruce Carter, my incredible advisor who supported, challenged, and mentored me every step of the way. My life has been changed from his guidance. A huge word of gratitude to Dr. Vu for lending a steady hand and deep repertoire of knowledge to the editing and revisions process, and for being a learning partner from my very first semester at BU. To Dr. André de Quadros and Dr. Gareth Smith for offering so much insight into creative, scholarly thinking. Finally, to the entire BU Music Education faculty for changing my entire perspective on who, how, and why we make music.

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**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER AND
GENDER EXPANSIVE COLLEGE MARCHING BAND MEMBERS**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how transgender and gender expansive (TGE) former college marching band members navigated their band membership. Transgender and gender expansive college students often experience greater levels of harassment, isolation, and discrimination than their cisgender peers (James et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2021). TGE students are more likely to benefit from positive interactions with peers, staff, and faculty through “high-impact” practices such as extracurricular and social activities (Renn, 2020). Marching bands are often the most visible musical, social, and cultural organizations on college campuses (Healey, 2016; Madsen et al., 2007) and may be attractive potential sites of welcome, affirmation, and community (Matthews, 2017) for TGE college musicians. However, the marching band medium may also reinforce traditionally gendered social, musical, and cultural practices (Disney, 2018; Marshall, 2009).

In this dissertation, I utilized the metaphor of wayfinding (Page-Reeves et al., 2019) to craft individual narratives around each participant’s experiences, and then employed collective case study to build within-case and cross-case analyses. Primary themes that emerged in the cross-case analysis included: impact of high school band

directors, visibility and collective action, impact of staff, social connectivity, leadership as empowerment, self-confidence, and representation. Participant narratives focused heavily on their journeys of coming out and living their gender identities within the social and musical norms and contexts of their respective programs. Although the concept of the safe space has arisen in scholarly literature, Siegel (2019) argued that there are many spaces on college campuses which offer varying levels of safety and affirmation. Likewise, participants in this study found various structures, practices, and people to be supportive of or antagonistic to their band membership. Through the data and results of this dissertation, my aim is to encourage thoughtful and genuine reflection and discussion among music educators around issues related to transgender and gender expansive individuals. Rather than being tolerated and forced to create their own spaces of affirmation and courage, educators may instead partner with TGE students to build a more caring and compassionate musical experience.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The experiences of transgender and gender expansive (TGE) individuals have received increased attention in media, politics, and academia, but have historically been silenced, contested, or hidden within a larger discourse of sexuality and gender. Positive attitudes toward LGBTQIA+¹ people in the United States have risen throughout the 2010s, although at a slower rate for gender minority individuals, particularly those who identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming (Lewis et al., 2017). Greater representation for trans and gender expansive individuals has fostered positive and negative outcomes, normalizing trans identities and stories but also reinforcing stereotypes and creating singular narratives (Brewer et al., 2018; Rooke, 2010).

Despite a greater awareness of and focus on TGE issues in college classrooms, “research communities have lagged far behind, often promoting archaic and strictly binary (dichotomous male/female) conceptualizations of gender identity” (Fiani & Han, 2019). However, researchers in the field of music education have lagged even further behind than their counterparts in musicology. Louis Bergonzi’s 2009 article, “Sexual Orientation and Music Education: Continuing a Tradition,” was an important piece of literature through which the author challenged educators to interrogate practices that may be harmful or exclusionary to LGBT students. Musicologists in the 1990s had been arguing for queer readings of music and musical practices, highlighted by Brett et al.’s

¹ Although many forms of this acronym exist, the use of LGBTQIA+ is referenced in the seventh edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association in reference to sexual and gender minority identities. In this context, LGBTQIA+ refers to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, or asexual, in addition to other terms related to gender or sexual orientation not covered by acronym itself (American Psychological Association, 2020, pp. 145–147).

(1994) collection of lesbian and gay musicological essays. Brett et al. (1994) argued that their work would “doubtless upset the more conservative elements whose primary business is to gather and interpret historical facts or to exercise judgment upon the canon of Western music according to certain well-established principles” which comprised the “academic priesthood” (p. vii). Increased transgender and gender expansive representation cannot be taken as indicative of a singular national shift in tone toward or treatment of TGE individuals, nor is any statistic or graph capable of representing their lived experiences. Quantitative representations may be useful in advocating for additional resources, assets, and policies, but may also negate or depress TGE individuals’ agency (Blackburn, 2007).

The increase in research highlighting the voices and perspectives of transgender and gender expansive individuals may indicate an emergent goal: for TGE people to have greater access and agency in sharing their own stories. Jones (2019) argued that after many years, the author had “come to terms with my sexual and gender journeys being just that—a journey, a process without a clearly defined endpoint” (p. 28). The undercurrent of fluidity that underscores gender and sexuality also flows through music-making practices and participation. Although ensemble music-making may be popular among and empowering for many trans and queer youth (Kosciw et al., 2014), Bowman (1998) argued that “a musical education is not an unconditional good, because it does nothing automatically” (p. 13). Reports of affirmation and empowerment from music-making do not insulate that music-making from critique, inspection, or analysis. Enjoyment drawn from experiences within hegemonic or potentially harmful structures

does mitigate enjoyment, but also does not parlay the need to interrogate the structures. Therefore, the need for continued conversation and understanding of how TGE students participate in music, interact with musical practices, and engage in social learning communities served as the inspiration for this dissertation.

TGE Students and the University

Despite social and cultural gains throughout the 2010s, many transgender and gender expansive individuals still report “significantly lower employment rates, lower household incomes, higher rates of poverty, and lower rates of having excellent or very good self-rated health” than their cisgender² peers (Carpenter et al., 2020, p. 594). While many trans and gender expansive youth recognize the value of a post-secondary education in building their social support networks and increasing the likelihood of future earnings, TGE high school students are consistently less likely to attend post-secondary institutions (Kosciw et al., 2021). University campuses are sometimes considered progressive environments but may also present what Siegel (2019) referred to as “bigoted strongholds” (p. 8) largely hidden from public scrutiny. TGE college students may still face myriad forms of discrimination, transphobia, and isolation in environments that may appear initially accepting and familial (Walker-Payne, 2019). Thus, the tension between the desired and valued experience of a college education and social elements that present barriers for TGE students served as the foundation for this dissertation.

For members of marginalized, oppressed, and underrepresented populations, a

² The term cisgender is, “meant to mark the typically unstated or assumed privilege of being non-transgender” (Stryker, 2017, p. 13).

university education may play a more critical role in attaining social capital, cultural resources, and opportunities for economic advancement that their majority peers may more easily acquire (Jack, 2015b; Stuber, 2011). For transgender and gender expansive individuals, a post-secondary degree may “[provide] a layer of protections against the triple threat of family rejection, being restricted to low-skill, low-wage, and benefit-exempt labor, and subsequent health and economic stability deficits” (Marine, 2017, p. 220).

Post-secondary institutions have long fostered tension between deference to and rejection of traditional educational practices, what Rudolph (1990) referred to as “a battle between certainty and uncertainty, between absolutism and relativism, between revealed truth and science” (p. 481). Although disagreements over how universities teach and operate persist, reification of societal values through “cultural reproduction” (Bourdieu, 1973) as well as discipline and surveillance (Foucault, 1976/1978) have remained consistent characteristics. Post-secondary institutions seemingly offer fertile ground for discussion and thought which challenges norms, but often do so within the very framework of those norms. Within these institutions, music and arts organizations may create pathways for transgender and gender expansive students to flourish and thrive. However, the hegemonic, gendered, and collectivist characteristics of marching band structures may threaten to erase the individualism important to many young people as they explore and express their gender identity.

The multitude of spaces within any one university campus create numerous “microclimates” (Siegel, 2019) within which students face various levels of support,

harassment, safety, and discrimination. While colleges and universities offer opportunities for students to establish social relationships with their peers (Walker-Payne, 2019) and engage with support communities (Cochran, 2019), numerous challenges persist. Institutional practices and policies centered on residential campus culture, gendered athletic teams, constant microaggressions, and insufficient mental health and counseling resources responsive to trans students' needs may make the university experience more difficult (Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2017; Legg et al., 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016). Colleges and universities have begun to include additional programs and services for LGBTQIA+ students but may also conflate and oversimplify distinctions between gender identity and sexual orientation (Mckendry & Lawrence, 2020).

Due to the limited number of spaces that offer feelings of safety and community, “trans-spectrum and queer-spectrum students may participate more in high-impact practices that increase their interactions” (Renn, 2020, p. 190) with supportive peers and instructors. As iterations of high-impact practices, campus organizations and activities may provide important support and access to relationships for TGE students (Walker-Payne, 2019). Among the most visible and celebrated student organizations on a university or college campus is its marching band (Cumberledge, 2016; Healey, 2016). TGE students may experience tensions between a marching band's supportive and affirming environment (Matthews, 2017), gendered practices (Disney, 2018; Marshall, 2009), and potential for hazing and harassment (Reid, 2020; Silveira & Goff, 2015). Educators and student participants at all levels may benefit from better understanding the experiences of their transgender and gender expansive pupils and peers. As readers,

teachers, researchers, and colleagues, we are each on our own journey to better understand gender, gender performance, and gender expression. Thus, this dissertation may serve as an important component of our “conceptual toolkit” in understanding ourselves, each other, and how music-making changes from person to person, situating itself according to that person’s needs and place in life.

My Story

In this section, I present a brief personal history and context as to how I arrived at this dissertation. My intention is not to overtake the richness and complexity of the participants’ experiences, but rather provide personal context. I was born in Korea but lived there only a few months until being adopted by my family in the northeastern United States. I remained in the same community for my entire adolescence and much of my early adulthood, attending college in the same state in which I grew up. In elementary and middle school, I was one of only a few students of color and to my knowledge the only one who had been adopted. Navigating my own racial, adopted, and social identities was challenging as I sought to blend into my surroundings while simultaneously finding my own voice. Early on, I was aware of my own social awkwardness, and seemingly could never find the “right words” to make friends with my peers. After learning xylophone and recorder in the third and fourth grade, I was drawn to music for its ability to let me “hide out” among my peers while making noise. I had found an activity through which I could sense continuous improvement and reveled in the chance to finally “be good” at something.

At the same time, I became aware of gendered expectations within music making

and the challenges of navigating the social periphery. I was one of only three male students in the choir, often prompting snickers from my peers during my morning walks to rehearsals in the gymnasium, clutching my music folder to my chest as I passed the rows of fourth and fifth graders lining the hallways before the first bell. In band, I was the only male clarinetist, and our section was often addressed “ladies and Justin.” In retrospect, I presume that the previous comments were made innocently but more fully understand their implications for students who may escape to the band room for the safety they find there, only to be cornered. I continued playing clarinet through middle and high school, and eventually became the drum major of my high school’s marching band. Wearing the all-white uniform made me feel powerful, affirmed, and confident in a manner I had not experienced elsewhere during school. My parents and sister remained entirely supportive throughout my journey, regular fixtures at every band concert, parade, and fundraiser. Still, I felt unsettled and at odds with myself as I entered college.

As an undergraduate, I played the sousaphone for three years, served as a student manager for a year, and then became drum major for my final year. My college marching band experience was largely positive, but also raised significant questions about the complexities of its members’ experiences, and whose voices were not always being heard or asked for. I was an active member of our band sorority³, and it was during my time as a university student that I began to truly struggle with and question my own sexuality. At

³ Fraternities and sororities commonly share the use of Greek letters in identifying their organization and local chapter. However, DeSantis (2020) noted that the single-gendered *social fraternities/sororities* are “organizations that are commonly associated with big parties, pledging and hazing, and communal housing” (p. 174). In addition to social Greek organizations, professional, service, and honorary fraternities and sororities exist as well, and are more commonly coeducational in membership.

times, I felt that I had failed to check many of the boxes that would affirm the expectations of masculinity I had placed upon myself from interactions with school peers, church members, and family; coming to terms with my gay identity would only complicate my life further. I had found success hiding previously, why not continue? During college, I experienced my marching band as a site in tension with itself. Wonderful social relationships and positive shared memories, but also opportunities for intimidation and exclusion. Vested with more authority than in other performing ensembles, student leaders had the power to protect or decimate members of their sections. It became clear that while band *could* be a safe space, it was not necessarily *inherently* a safe space. Recognition that environments and the people that inhabit them are constantly changing and evolving necessitates the realization that “safety” as a terminal designation for *any* space is a false and potentially dangerous notion (Arao & Clemens, 2013).

I was invited to join the band sorority, and proudly claimed the title of “mister sister,” a phrase colloquially used to in reference to all male-presenting members of the sorority. The service sorority and its peer service fraternity were both coeducational, a phenomenon foreign to many members of the school’s single gender, “traditional” social Greek organizations. Witnessing varied expressions of masculinity and femininity, gender expressions, and sexualities was incredibly eye-opening and empowering, but equally as frightening when I saw how students of marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds were sometimes socially isolated.

A few years ago, I received an email during the summer from a student who was

submitting a new name on the annual registration forms in preparation for the fall marching band season. The student proudly stated that he was coming back to campus as a transgender man and requested that band members and staff refer to him with he/him pronouns. I was deeply touched that this student felt comfortable coming out to me, but I was also forced to reckon with my own privilege in not having to think about or disclose my gender identity in order to take care of routine business.

In the weeks that followed, my eyes were opened to the potential obstacles facing transgender and gender expansive students as they participate in a collegiate marching band program. Our facility was relatively small compared to other academic spaces on campus, with very limited bathroom access and only one gender-neutral restroom. As a religiously affiliated institution, there were specific guidelines about hotel rooming assignments on overnight trips that prohibited students from sleeping in a room with roommates who did not align with their own expressed gender identity from matriculation. Despite the numerous ways in which hetero- and cisnormativity were enforced on an institutional level, the band member was welcomed with open arms by his section-mates. He was routinely invited to “guys’ nights,” and his pronouns were immediately taken up by his peers without question or fanfare.

The dichotomy and paradoxical relationship between structural systems created without transgender people in mind, and a social system that seemed to have provided a sense of warmth and family provided the spark for this study. In a conversation some years later with a student who had come out gradually to her section-mates while in school, she told me that many of her peers were initially hesitant and were not sure how

to approach or address her. The band member described feeling frustrated by her experiences in the school's single sex dorms and was now unsure of her future in what she had thought was a safe organization: the band. On Friday afternoons prior to weekend football games, the female members of this student's section would wear colored bows in their hair. Before the student's final march across campus, her section leaders presented her with her own bow to wear in solidarity with other female musicians. While the incident underscored the potential issues with the student leadership-heavy model inherent to many marching bands (e.g., students "deputized" to formally and informally lead their peers away from the potential protections of professional staff), it also reinforced the possibilities for affirmation and protection. That one's sense of security and affirmation may be held hostage by their peers, possibly changing on a whim, is potentially dangerous and necessitates further interrogation. While this individual was not a participant in this study, other narratives related to the complex relationship student leaders have with their peers are explored in greater detail.

Years later during my first doctoral course, the instructor, Kính T. Vũ, asked a seemingly simple question: Who gets to tell the story of music and music education? While in the short term that inquiry guided a specific discussion around Bennett Reimer's and David Elliott's philosophies of music education, those 11 words have stayed with me since then. At the beginning of this research project, my dissertation supervisor Bruce Carter asked a similar question: Which voices are missing in the literature? Both questions swirled in my head, and I thought back to that email I had received several summers ago in which a band member came out as trans and asked for their name and

pronouns to be edited on band documents. Throughout my search of the literature, I found that while there was a limited but consistently updated body of literature focused on LGBTQIA+ issues in music education broadly, there was very limited research on trans issues specifically. My aim with this study is to use my position as a band director to honor, shared, and better understand the narratives of transgender and gender expansive college band members and reflect on the community (e.g., familial aspects of programs) that may create complicated experiences for these students. I am deeply honored and grateful to have the opportunity to speak with and share the stories of these immensely courageous individuals.

Statement of Positionality

In qualitative research generally, and narrative inquiry specifically, the researcher's role as a co-creator of research data and their responsibility in establishing relationships with participants requires an awareness of their position at each stage of the project (Caine et al, 2013). As non-transgender or gender expansive person, I wrestled deeply with my role, responsibility, and privilege in undertaking a study with trans and gender expansive participants. Although the acronym LGBTQIA+ is often used to reference any sexual or gender minority identity, conflating sexuality and gender may be a harmful and potentially dangerous practice. Additionally, individuals whose life experiences have not included considering the nuanced differences between sexual and gender orientations may express confusion or frustration.

In short, my position as a gay cisgender man gives me no greater insight, license, or ability in understanding and engaging in a research project with TGE people. Palkki

(2016) addressed the concern of representation and his role as an outsider, writing: “I believe that it is possible for cisgender researchers—remaining ever aware of their cisgender privilege—to use their position in a positive way to bring attention and respect to trans experiences and trans issues” (p. 83). I approach this study with a great deal of privilege and acknowledge that this research involved much personal reflection and addressing of my own biases and “blind spots” as an educator.

Having been raised Catholic in a conservative, northeastern region of the United States, my early views in relation to gender and sexuality were deeply colored by my family’s faith tradition. While I have engaged in deep introspection as I grappled (and continue to grapple) with the intersection of my belief system and my own sexuality, I understand that I may still hold a great number of unconscious biases and views shaped by my religious upbringing and development. My biases may have always been shaped by the essentialist and binary ways in which members of my community have understood and discussed gender roles, gender identity, and sexuality. In my personal life, I have worked and formed relationships with several transgender and gender expansive individuals, many of whom are former students or classmates. To my knowledge, none of my family members are openly transgender or gender expansive.

Engaging in any qualitative research is not a researcher’s right, but a product of the participants’ generosity. I approach this project as an educator wishing to understand the participants’ experiences to better serve my students and provide greater insight to my colleagues within the field of music education. My goal with this study was to use my role and resources to collaborate with, and where appropriate, to amplify the voices of

students who are not currently being heard.

Key Terms and Operational Definitions

While conceptual language will be continuously defined throughout the body of this document, I present a list of terms that must be defined and contextualized in order to best understand the aim of the study.

Transgender and Gender Expansive

I preface the following section with the understanding that words on their own may be insufficient or incompatible with the participants' lived experiences. As is the case with many terms used to describe one's identity in part or whole, the meanings and perceptions of individual words may change over time. To align the language of this dissertation with the work of scholars across a variety of disciplines, I chose to use the terms *transgender* and *gender expansive*. Specifically, transgender refers to "the widest imaginable range of gender-variant practices and identities" (Stryker, 2017, p. 38). To allow for the greatest amount of flexibility and inclusion of participant experiences, and with the acknowledgment that no term or terms may be fully adequate, the term gender expansive refers to individuals who:

Broaden commonly held definitions of gender, including its expression, associated identities, and/or other perceived gender norms in one or more aspects of their life. Groups of people that may be included within this larger umbrella category may include persons that identify as genderqueer, gender nonconforming, agender, two spirit, bigender, nonbinary, and so on. (Goodrich et al., 2017, p. 204)

In my initial communications and throughout the duration of the study, I invited participants to use any, all, or none of the above terms in telling their stories, and were invited to edit, change, add, or remove any such terms throughout the process.

College/University

For the purposes of this study, the terms *college* and *university* will be used interchangeably to describe any four-year degree-granting, regionally accredited institution of higher education. While I acknowledge that colleges and universities—by nature of their histories and current iterations—may practice different governance structures and organizational philosophies (Rudolph, 1990), the general reference to any post-secondary student pursuing a bachelor’s degree will include the terms *college* and *university*. For example, the phrase “collegiate marching band” will refer to organizations at either a four-year college or university.

The Carnegie Classification, a service from the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, categorizes U.S. institutions of higher education into designated groupings (e.g., very high research; residential/commuter campus; publicly engaged). Researchers from the Carnegie Classification (2001) distinguished between Associate’s Colleges, Baccalaureate Colleges, Master’s Colleges and Universities, and Doctoral/Research Universities. Associate’s Colleges—institutions from which the highest associate’s degrees and certificate programs are the primary or sole outcomes of study—including two-year “community, junior, and technical colleges” (Carnegie Classification, 2001, p. 1). In this dissertation, I focused on four-year institutions to align my work with other researchers who have explored the experiences of transgender and

gender expansive students in relation to campus structures which may be more present at these schools such as on-campus residential housing, collegiate athletics, and fraternities and sororities (e.g., Bennett, 2018; Cochran, 2019; Lewis, 2016; Meacham, 2020). Two-year institutions provide myriad opportunities for underrepresented, marginalized, and first-generation students to receive a post-secondary education and have been positively correlated with increased wages and competitiveness in the labor market over one's lifetime (Garvey et al., 2015; Marcotte et al., 2005). The higher likelihood that students attending two-year institutions reside in the local community also offers the potential for familiar support networks and social connectivity (Pitcher & Simmons, 2020).

Collegiate Marching Band

A collegiate marching band will refer to an ensemble of student musicians enrolled at a four-year, degree-granting institution of higher education (i.e., a college or university) wherein students play woodwind/brass instruments, percussion instruments, and often color guard members⁴ or baton twirlers in the pursuit of collective, organized bodily movement(s) in time with the performance of musical selections. I acknowledge that there may be ensembles that possess characteristics similar to marching bands, such as dance organizations or fife and drum corps. However, these groups are outside the scope of this study.

The band's popularity as a medium for both the school and community rose

⁴ The indoor color guard activity, having existed for some time in many parts of the United States, had evolved from the military honor guard tradition (presenting the US flag at ceremonies and public events) into something that in some ways resembled marching band, but with flags and rifles choreographed to prerecorded music... various regions of the United States stressed different performance elements of the activity, such as equipment spinning skills (flags, sabres, rifles), dance, or drill. (Morgan, 2018, p. 2)

greatly in the early and mid-20th century (Humphreys, 1989), with myriad factors cementing its place as a cultural institution following the second World War. In its role as community music organization, the band was viewed as existing “*of the people and for the people*” (Mantie 2012a, p. 69, emphasis in original). The move beyond performance venues and into town squares reinforced the idyllic notion of a musical commodity perceived as more accessible than the orchestra and its concert hall setting (Hansen 2004; Mantie, 2012b).

The rise of college football and return of military musicians to the United States after World War II prompted an increase in college marching band enrollment as ensembles shifted from military training and ceremonial functions toward entertainment. School and university marching bands have maintained a somewhat labored relationship with other traditional school ensemble programs that have become mainstays in the United States, namely the symphonic wind band, string orchestra, and choir. Mantie (2012a) noted that:

Due to existing conceptions of musical legitimacy linked to the values of existing music faculty members (those possessing “high status,” that is, classical music, knowledge), bands were inevitably considered, thanks in large measure to repertoire viewed as inferior to that of the symphonic tradition, to be on a lower rung of the musical status ladder and often of dubious artistic and educational value. (p. 70)

As wind bands evolved to perform music deemed more acceptable by the musical academy, marching bands maintained their role as entertainment and social outlets.

Although collegiate marching bands broke in some ways from the institutional expectations of music schools and conservatories through their more unorthodox repertoire selections, they continued to embrace their role as institutional representatives in other ways.

Lived Experience

The term *lived experience*, while commonly associated with phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007; Hourigan & Edgar, 2014), is still highly applicable to narrative inquiry. Although at first glance there may be little distinction between the concepts of *experience* and *lived experience*, it is vital to distinguish between the two terms. An experience may be defined most simply as a “physical action and the consequences of that action, combined with the judgment of the consequences of that action (motivations)” (Glassman, 2001, p. 8). Further, “to experience” may be viewed as “merely being present when something happens” (Stark, 2020, p. 121). Lived experience invokes a more contextualized understanding of one’s interaction with their world, and:

How their experiences are shaped by subjective factors of their identity including race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, political associations, and other roles and characteristics that determine how people live their daily lives. Lived experience, then, leads to a self-awareness that acknowledges the integrity of an individual life and how separate life experiences can resemble and respond to larger public and social themes, creating a space for storytelling, interpretation, and meaning making. (Boylorn, 2012, p. 490)

Additionally, Dilthey (as cited in van Manen, 2011) argued that an understanding of one's lived experiences requires "self-given awareness that inheres in the temporality of consciousness of life as we live it" (p. 580). The inclusion of temporality as a key component of lived experience also aligns with the temporal nature of narrative inquiry generally and may be a useful aid in structuring and communicating individual stories.

Navigate

In this qualitative inquiry, the term *navigate* refers not only to the practice of traversing physical environments, although it will certainly include the ways in which participants move about, conceptualize, and experience their physical surroundings. Rather, navigation will refer to "the development of flexible knowledge and dispositions...across varied settings and tasks" (Nasir et al., 2006, p. 490). The ways in which one navigates through time, space, and physical location will be highly individualistic, and may be described using different language or terminology between participants. Navigating may be one means of conceptualizing how a person utilizes "cultural wisdom and [develops] new tools in order to chart one's path. A path that is both shaped by the individual and simultaneously connected to community" (Page-Reeves et al., 2017, p. 185).

Problem Statement

Although the body of research literature related to sexual and gender minority students in the field of music education has expanded in recent years (for examples, see Aguirre, 2018; Bartolome & Stanford, 2017; Hansen, 2016; Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020), much of the available scholarship is rooted in the choral ensemble context. Within choral

music education scholarship, researchers have focused much of their work on primary and secondary student experiences and perspectives. While some scholars have addressed the experiences of sexual minority (e.g., lesbian, gay, and bisexual) musicians at the college level, very little scholarship examining the experiences of transgender and gender expansive college student musicians exists (Roseth, 2019), especially in a collegiate band environment.

For TGE students, joining campus organizations and participating in extracurricular activities may be an important aspect of their college experience (Walker-Payne, 2019) and may play a role in the process of “[adapting] to the culture of the campus environment” (Meacham, 2020, p. 9). A campus activity or organization may serve as a “powerful instrument” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 464) through which a college or university inscribes institutional and societal values upon its students. One such organization on a college campus is the marching band.

Marching bands are often among the most visible student organizations within a college community and are cited for their social support systems and other non-musical benefits (e.g., leadership development and pedagogical skills) for student participants (Cumberledge, 2016). University administrators may use marching bands in their recruitment efforts, promoting membership in the ensemble as a means of becoming immersed in campus culture and meeting new friends (Healey, 2016; Madsen et al., 2007). For students who are members of minority groups, band membership and the opportunity to form a relationship with band directors may provide access to valuable social capital (Barnes, 2016) as part of a “high-impact” practice (Renn, 2020).

Many college marching band members may report feelings of belonging, welcome, and affirmation in their participation (Matthews, 2017). Musical enjoyment and, for some students, a more relaxed music-making environment that contrasts with more competitively focused high school marching bands are also reported factors (Cumberledge & Acklin, 2019). While marching bands do in some ways represent the traditional performance paradigm of band, orchestra, and choir (Williams, 2019), the greater likelihood of performing popular music may make them more approachable than other ensembles (Whitesides, 2017).

Marching bands may also reinforce hetero-normative social roles and cultural practices (Disney, 2018; Marshall, 2009) that, while affirming and beneficial to some participants, may also create challenges and barriers for TGE students. Gendered instrument performance (for example, Eros, 2008 and Harrison & O'Neill, 2000), rigid uniformity in bodily movement (Broslawsky, 2017), and attire (e.g., the band uniform) are examples of structures facing a student with a non-dominant gender or gender expression. Additionally, historical ties to American college football and the military (Hansen, 2004) may superimpose elements of competition into a band's culture, and concepts of membership akin to fraternity and sorority culture may lend themselves more easily to hazing (Reid, 2020; Silveira & Hudson, 2015) which further separate the marching band from related ensembles (e.g., concert bands).

The combination of gendered musical production, embodied practices and values, and formal and informal social structures situate the marching band as a site for inquiry with potential for future research. The ensemble model presents myriad opportunities for

increased inclusion and support for TGE students in select areas while simultaneously presenting challenges to their gender identity in others. TGE students may have access to valuable social interactions through peer mentoring networks (Goodrich, 2020) and utilize the music making experience as a means of “[being] heard” (Nichols, 2013, p. 274). However, ensemble directors may reinforce cisnormative and heteronormative language in their teaching techniques and repertoire (Bergonzi, 2009). The ensemble tradition of uniform attire may be traumatic for students whose gender identity and expression do not align with the mandated dress code (Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020). I present a further exploration of the tensions between the affirming and isolating potentials of ensemble participation in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

If university communities continue to place a high level of value on their marching band programs as musical and social vehicles of welcoming and inclusion, voices currently lacking in the literature may be centered. Rather than simply being tolerated or observed, TGE persons and their experiences could be celebrated and honored. A study is needed to better understand the lived experiences of transgender and gender expansive collegiate marching band members, providing music educators and current participants information and context in providing a more inclusive, uplifting experience for TGE students.

Philosophical and Conceptual Assumptions

Defining the “philosophical assumptions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15) upon which a qualitative study is based may help to clarify the researcher’s ability to better understand participants’ lived experiences. According to Moon and Blackman (2014), “ontology is

concerned with what exists for people to know about and epistemology is concerned with how people create knowledge and what is possible to know” (p. 4). Situating the ontological and epistemological foundations of this study will guide the theoretical and methodological sections to follow.

An ontology refers to a “theory of existence,” and is concerned with “the nature of reality and that of human beings” (Lee, 2012, p. 406). I utilized a relativist ontology, a position which “holds that reality is constructed within the human mind, such that no one true reality exists; instead, reality is relative according to each individual who experiences it at a given time and place” (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 1170). Similarly, Creswell (2007) noted that qualitative research “[embraces] the idea of multiple realities” (p. 16). A relativist ontology rejects a single, objective truth about the state of the world outside of an individual’s experience (Drummond, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A relativist approach allowed me to better understand the contradictions between the importance of separate lived experiences and the militaristic, uniform approach often expected of band directors and conductors. For example, Jagow (2007) argued that “every great musical composition has an established worth, and it is their responsibility to communicate this worth to the players” (p. 114). There is therefore a tension between the opportunity for self-expression and the limited conditions under which the self may be expressed.

I embraced a relativist stance to better understand the experiences of transgender and gender expansive people, for whom biologically essentialist views of gender and sexual identity may be oppressive and constricting (Stryker, 2017). In music education,

Bowman (1998) argued, “the profound multiplicity of human musical practices [makes] the need for some form of relativism inescapable” (pp. 11–12). The numerous ways in which music and musical practices are performed, embodied, and experienced within the marching band setting combined with individual aspects of a trans student’s college experience make a relativist ontology compatible with the present research topic.

In addition to proposing an ontological position which informs how a researcher views the existence of knowledge, it is critical to append an epistemological stance to understand *how* that knowledge is sought. According to Lee (2012), epistemology refers to “a theory of knowledge that explores the relationships between the inquirer and the knowable, or between the knower and the respondent” (p. 407). Aligned with a relativist ontological position, the present study was informed by a subjectivist epistemology. Interpreted through a subjectivist lens, “meaning does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject” (Crotty, 2003, p. 9). Rather than a social constructionist view, a relativist ontology paired with a subjectivist epistemology creates the “constructivist paradigm” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13) within which this qualitative inquiry was conducted.

I conceived of a structure that would allow me to honor participants’ voices while providing a coherent organizational scope. In his critique of some researchers’ tendency to homogenize the experiences of sexual and gender minority participants, Monro (2020) discussed the ongoing and occasionally contradictory nature of developments in literature related to TGE individuals. Similarly, Catalano (2016) argued that some members of the academic community may have rushed their attempts to theorize TGE experiences:

I began to question whether the building of a theoretical model of trans* men's identity development might only serve to encourage assimilation into masculine hegemony, enhance already existing notions of 'authenticity' about trans*ness or 'real' men, or influence alignment with whatever theory I developed. Finally, I tried to find connections to current research, but the nascence of research on trans* men and trans* men in higher education could not support theorization about trans* men's identities. The virtual absence of research on trans* men, as well as rapid evolution within trans* communities, movements, and discourses, leaves little work to build off and too many questions untested and unanswered.

(p. 238)

Catalano's (2016) unease at the potential for over-theorization of participants' lived experiences guided my decision to stray from superimposing a theoretical framework over individual stories, pre-determining their outcomes or misrepresenting their words. Thus, I elected to reject a theoretical framework for this dissertation. Rather, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advocated for "fluid inquiry, a way of thinking in which inquiry is not clearly governed by theories, methodological tactics, and strategies" (p. 121). In his qualitative dissertation involving three transgender high school students, Palkki (2016) similarly struggled with his position as a cisgender researcher and desire not to theorize (and therefore reduce) participants' lives and stories.

Postmodernism

Perhaps a reflection of its own skepticism of fixed meanings and structures, the term "postmodernism" has been defined and reinterpreted numerous times. Postmodern

thought can be traced to a field of scholars from the mid-20th century, including the likes of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari, who rejected “the Enlightenment belief in the unity of reason and progress” and the modernist idea that “science and technology can rationally control and develop the natural and social worlds” (Gabardi, 2001, p. 5).

Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard was the first author to use the term in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, referring to the postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (1984, p. xxiv). The relationship between an individual subject and the[ir] world has remained a source of tension between modern and postmodern academics.

Commonly regarded as a key philosopher of modern thought, René Descartes conceived of the subject as “a unitary, absolute master who constitutes truth through the process of abstract reality” (Hekman, 1991, p. 53). The Cartesian subject’s ability to act upon and shape their world from a neutral standpoint contrasts with the postmodern subject, constituted and acted upon by *external* forces. Scheurich (1995) argued:

[The] modernist perspective situates the researcher as a kind of god who consciously knows what she or he is doing, who (if properly trained) can clearly communicate meanings to another person, and who can derive the hidden but recoverable meanings within the interview to support an abstract generalization...From a postmodernist perspective, this severe modernist reduction of the exquisiteness of each lived moment borders on a kind of violence. (p. 242)

The concept of objective reality and truths knowable to an independent subject is

therefore exchanged for subjective and constantly evolving meanings and relationships (Delamont & Atkinson, 2004).

Although some early-2000s scholars posited that “the postmodern may well be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past” (Hutcheon, 2002, p. 165), researchers have not abandoned postmodernism as a valuable means of examining the world and experiences of its inhabitants. An assumption that had long been viewed as rational and rooted in biology was the understanding of gender as fixed, binary, and inherently connected to sex (Butler, 1999/1990). Ishii (2018) highlighted the transition from premodern views on sex as an attribute of one’s identity to the modernist stance that, while less sure of sex as an entirely fixed identity, still held firm lines between masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality. Ishii (2018) went on to argue that “[postmodern] discourses deconstruct essential origins, relativize modern Western assumptions, and encourage individuals to recognize their gender and sexual identity as unique” (p. 76).

The postmodern acknowledgement of gender fluidity also opened spaces for the many ways in which that fluidity is expressed and intersects with an individual’s multiple identities and experiences, “[departing] from the concept of a unitary transgender identity to recognise that difference cuts across and between a diversity of transgender subjectivities” (Hines, 2007, p. 23). A postmodern perspective returns agency to the subject in describing and placing import on their world, allowing them to [re]claim or reject categories, labels, and identities. Some transgender and gender expansive individuals hold differing views on the existence, value, and importance of socially

accepted categories and characteristics in their own lives (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). The postmodern researcher rejects “privileged access to ‘one true account’” of an event or experience in favor of “an intertextual dialogue about the meaning” of that event or experience (Sconiers & Rosiek, as cited in Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 30).

Within the field of music education, the multitude of social interactions common in large ensemble rehearsal and performance may contribute to what Locke (2008) described as the “grand narrative of performance” (p. 79), within the model of Lyotard’s (1984) commentary on metanarratives. The application of a postmodern lens on student experiences in an ensemble context is not intended to serve as a critique on the institution, but rather as a means of carving out space for individual student narratives. A tendency toward binary dispositions presented as positive/negative or affirming/oppressing gives way toward more nuanced and rich explorations of participants’ stories.

Critiques of Postmodernism

Despite the liberating power of postmodernism in deconstructing hierarchies and challenging power structures, some scholars are critical of its practicality in *changing* systems rather than simply providing commentary. Thomas (1993) offered a criticism of the postmodern and its inclination toward inaction, arguing that “postmodernists tend to be ‘armchair radicals’ in that their critiques focus on changing ways of thinking rather than calling for action based on these changes” (p. 6). Additionally, Hutcheon (2002) posited that “the postmodern is seemingly not so much a concept as a problematic” (p. 15) and may be used by scholars to dismantle systems without offering alternatives or

solutions.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) noted that some qualitative researchers view postmodernism as “naive humanism” (p. 50) which may allow for moral relativism through its critique of truth as subjective and reality as constructed. Bordo (1992) added that postmodernism may sometimes function as a signaling mechanism, indicating membership in elitist cliques: “Sometimes, the appellation of ‘postmodern’ appears to be used simply to advertise or indicate work or attitudes that are believed to manifest such qualities, to mark membership in an exclusive club of the brilliant and subversive” (p. 160).

While postmodernism is often admonished for its inability to provide tangible, concrete solutions to the problems it aids in identifying, I posit that tangible, concrete solutions are not the focus of the present study. May (2017) offered that “education research seems to be staking out a limited array of methodologies and measurements to tackle the swirls of non-definitive subject positions related to gender and sexuality” (p. 535), limiting the avenues through which we can better understand issues related to TGE individuals. For transgender and gender expansive individuals for whom current methodologies are insufficient in recognizing their perspectives (Nicholas, 2019), a postmodern approach to qualitative inquiry and its fluid array of methods, approaches, and foundations may allow greater room for TGE individuals to tell their stories (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how transgender and gender expansive (TGE) former college marching band members navigated their band membership. Specifically, I was interested in exploring how and in what ways participants navigated their collegiate marching band experience as transgender and gender expansive individuals.

Research Question

The following research question guided the present study: What are transgender and gender expansive students' lived experiences of navigating their collegiate marching band membership?

Rationale

Professional

Although the available scholarship related to transgender musicians in school contexts continues to grow, music educators have called for additional inquiry into the experiences of and best practices for working with transgender students (Cayari, 2019; Garrett & Spano, 2017). At the conclusion of his study regarding the perceptions of LGBTQ college musicians toward the support systems at their respective universities, Roseth (2019) argued, “absent from [the] study's findings and its discussion and underexplored in music education in general are issues surrounding transgender students broadly and their well-being specifically” (p. 189). Further, Silveira and Goff (2016) found that while many music educators expressed support for transgender students in their classes and ensembles, numerous practitioners cited a desire for additional research

that would inform inclusive classroom practices and techniques.

Research involving TGE students has expanded within the field of music education, however much of the available literature has grown in the secondary and post-secondary choral environments (e.g., Cates, 2019; Sauerland, 2018), leaving sparse literature examining the band medium. Trans and gender expansive students may physically participate in band programs but then face epistemological and/or ontological disappearance (Gould, 2012) within their own ensembles. This dissertation is specific to the collegiate marching band context, but research involving the experiences of TGE students in an ensemble setting may provide valuable insights for educators wishing to better support their transgender and gender expansive students in instrumental ensembles in many settings.

Student leadership may be understood as a natural feature of many student organizations on college campuses, and the relationship of a marching band director to their student leadership is unique. Section leaders (Warfield, 2013) and drum majors (Brewer, 2009) function as social leaders, music teachers, choreographers, and disciplinarians on behalf of a marching band director. While the director generally retains broad administrative authority over the organization, student leaders are often charged with tasks and responsibilities that are “outsourced” from the top of the leadership chain. It may be reasonable to assume that most band directors genuinely care about the wellbeing of their students, however the hierarchical chain of command inherent to student leadership models puts a social distance between the director and their students that may make understanding individual experiences more difficult than in other

ensemble settings.

Additionally, students selected for leadership positions may sacrifice aspects of their identity or identities, especially if those aspects are not in alignment with the cultural norms and expectations of a particular program (Abril, 2012). By the time a student leader ascends to a position of greater contact with their band director, they may not feel comfortable engaging in a genuine discussion of their experiences with challenges or barriers within the program. This study may be useful in highlighting how aspects of a band's musical and social culture impact the experiences of trans members from whom they may not otherwise hear.

Theoretical

Although postmodernism is recognized as a useful and legitimate lens for qualitative research (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Creswell, 2007), the argument that “a unified canon of knowledge is thus replaced with a diverse array of cultural processes” (Delamont & Atkinson, 2004, p. 11) implies that postmodern research is constantly evolving. As postmodernism and its conceptual implications for research continue to develop, a study rooted in what may have been deemed postmodernism several decades ago may appear quite different in present day. The postmodern recognition of gender and sexual identities as unique and fluid (Ishii, 2018) implies that each individual story and every experience add to a body of work that creates a better understanding of how social, cultural, and political institutions and structures impact and influence participants' worlds.

As societal institutions rooted in tradition and the reproduction of cultural norms,

educational institutions and their gatekeepers have maintained a precarious relationship with postmodernism critiques:

Education commonly is not incorporated effortlessly into postmodernity, nor can it adjust conveniently to the postmodern frame of mind. Postmodernism indicates that autonomy cannot be achieved meanly, but interactively, via an identifying dissimilarity where the latter is not construed as deficit. (Popescu, 2018, p. 1479)

Since organizations may reflect elements of the educational institutions of which they are a part (Hansen, 2004; Madsen et al., 2007), the unitary and essentialist nature of marching band rehearsal and performance make them sites of inquiry through a postmodern lens highlighted by tension and contradiction. Further, Bowman (1998) argued that “musics and instructional practices are human behaviors embedded in social contexts and practices. Their natures and values are plural, malleable, unstable, and ever changing” (p. 15). Data from this study may add to the project of compatibility between postmodernism and research in [music] education.

Methodology

In keeping with the subjective nature of a postmodern perspective and desire to explore participants’ lived experiences, I utilized a qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (as cited in Creswell, 2007) define qualitative research as “an interpretive naturalist approach to the world” through which researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 36). Creswell (2007) noted that a postmodern approach is well-situated within the qualitative research tradition and allowed me to better understand

participants' experiences.

Within the qualitative research tradition, I utilized the concept of wayfinding as a metaphor for better understanding participants' experiences. Wayfinding is a term often associated with one's navigation of a physical location or region, "*finding* or having to *determine* one's way between or to a place" (Symonds, 2017, p. 35, emphasis in original). Postmodern qualitative research often involves a collaboration between the researcher and participant, decentering power and giving the participant greater agency and authority throughout the process and data reporting (Brinkmann, 2018; Delamont & Atkinson, 2004). For the present study, I used the conceptual language of wayfinding to position a narrative inquiry and collective case study approach to represent how the five participants understood their journey, and a within- and cross-case analysis to represent how I as the researcher understood their journey.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry allows participants and researchers to understand experiences within multiple contexts and across time (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Since storytelling involves the recall and interpretation of past events, "narrative inquirers do not describe an event, person, or object as such, but rather describe them with a past, a present, and a future" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479) and situate their work within the concepts of time, social context, and place. Stauffer (2014) noted that "narrative inquiry in music education is scholarly engagement with stories of experience as a means of interrogating critical matters in education, in music, in the world" (p. 180).

In contrast with other forms of qualitative research, for example phenomenology, narrative inquiry through a postmodern lens involves the establishment and maintenance of a relationship between the researcher and participant (Delamont & Atkinson, 2004) wherein the researcher acknowledges their own positionality and biases (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Therefore, constant reflexivity (Creswell, 2007) throughout the study was critical.

Case Study Research

While maintaining distinct characteristics, case study and narrative research overlap in several areas. Riessman (2008) argued that narrative inquiry is itself a “case-based” (p. 13) approach to understanding participants’ lived experiences, and Simons (2009) added that “narrative may predominate or constitute the case itself” (p. 75). According to Stake (1995), “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Cases may consist of people, systems, programs, structures, and events, among other phenomena. Creswell (2007) wrote that “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (p. 73). Barrett (2014) contended that case study research is popular in the field of music education and that music education researchers “[look] to case studies for multiple accounts of concrete, context-based knowledge, crucial in forming collective expertise and professional knowledge to inform teaching and learning” (p. 120).

Data Collection

After Institutional Review Board approval, I recruited participants utilizing snowball sampling, also referred to as chain referral, to create “a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know one another” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 151). I emailed former students and current colleagues to assist with forwarding my recruitment flyer and form and posted to several public and private groups on social media. After the recruitment period, I selected five former collegiate marching band members. Three participants were members of the same program, and the remaining two attended different institutions. Each participant persisted to the conclusion of the data collection and reporting process.

I collected many of the data for this study through a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews through a secure video conferencing platform. In qualitative research, interviews can be an important method of data collection as researchers and participants collaborate in the storytelling process (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2007). I held three interviews with each participant, approximately two weeks apart. In narrative inquiry, it is important to “create relational and conversational conditions that invite participants’ stories” (Stauffer, 2014, p. 16). Interviews routinely exceeded the one-hour timeframe I had initially planned, with several crossing the two-hour mark. Between interviews, participants and I remained in communication through emails and collaboration on Google Document transcripts and outlines. In addition to reviewing transcripts for accuracy, participants wrote comments, notes, and questions. I also sent participants numerous pages of follow-up questions, emergent themes, and

comments. Participants routinely shared documents and media outside of our interviews, including photographs, video links, and blog pages. Following the data collection, our communications continued as I created narratives, and participants regularly contributed to multiple narrative drafts.

I treated each individual narrative as a case (Riessman, 2008), allowing for individual stories to stand on their own before subsequent analysis. Stake (1995) recommended that case study researchers create conditions between themselves and participants that allow for their “unique experiences” and “special stories” (p. 65) to emerge, which may then be presented as narratives. In addition to interview sessions, I invited participants to send me journal articles, videos, pictures, links to websites, or other artifacts to supplement and further explore their experiences.

Data Analysis

I transcribed interviews verbatim within 96 hours of completion, reviewed for accuracy and formatting, and emailed to participants. Additionally, I utilized member checking (Creswell, 2007) to ensure credibility and trustworthiness throughout the process. After transcription, data were coded and organized in two ways, in line with narrative and case study approaches. Creswell (2007) noted that “data collected in a narrative study need to be analyzed for the story [participants] have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies” (p. 155). I used eclectic and in vivo coding to guide the structure and sequence of each story through the narrative lens. For example, a temporally structured narrative highlighted certain epiphanies (Creswell, 2007; Denzin, 2014) or turning points in a participant’s experience (e.g., “coming out”

and “joining the band”). A separate and additional round of process and thematic coding allowed me to organize the same interview data for the within- and cross-case analyses.

Limitations

Several limitations of this research must be addressed before continuing. I included a limited number of participants who were recruited through purposeful, non-randomized sampling strategies. Snowball sampling, while useful for locating participants and developing rapport through mutual contacts, may limit the diversity in the final participant pool and negate attempts to generalize the findings to any large segment of the population. The frequency of interview sessions may not have allowed me to establish as strong of a rapport as might have been possible with more or in-person sessions. The malleable nature of narrative inquiry and position of the researcher as a co-creator of knowledge with the participant risked the researcher’s biases influencing the final text.

Delimitations

The criteria for participant selection created several issues for consideration. Selecting participants who were no longer enrolled as students may have meant that their recollection of certain events or people may have changed with time and are different than at other stages in their lives. Utilizing the words transgender and gender expansive may not have fully accounted for potential participants’ experiences and limited their ability to express their stories. Methodologically, the use of videoconferencing software, while useful in limiting expenses and expanding the ability of the researcher and participant to interact across time zones and regions, may not have allowed for the most

comprehensive interview environment. Important cues such as facial expression and body language may have appeared differently or lessened over video conferencing software, impacting the results.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how transgender and gender expansive (TGE) former college marching band members navigated their band membership. It is my hope that the results of this research will provide students and practitioners valuable insight into individual participant stories. I selected Narrative inquiry and case study approaches to allow for the greatest amount of flexibility in hearing, understanding, and reporting individual lived experiences. I wrote and revised Chapter Two of this dissertation, the review of relevant literature, throughout the data collection and analysis process. An organic literature review process allowed me to synthesize the most current scholarly writing. Chapter Three consists of a discussion of the qualitative methodological foundation of the study, as well as data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter Four features the individual narratives of each participant, organized by individual to allow for each story to be presented in its totality. Chapters Five and Six present the within-and cross-case analyses, respectively. Chapter Seven features analysis and a summary of the study's findings as well as implications and recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how transgender and gender expansive (TGE) former college marching band members navigated their band membership. Drawing from the qualitative research tradition, I entered this process welcoming the fluidity in interpretation and meaning-making that each participant brought to our conversations. Just as an individual's memories, values, and attributions may change over time (Ellingson, 2011), so do meanings and implications from research literature; scholars are not immune to recontextualization and reconstruction of their work. Therefore, it was important to revisit resources throughout the research process as new information arose.

It is not within the purview of this dissertation to provide an exhaustive history of gender, sexuality, and language. However, it is important to provide a historical context upon which current discourse and debate are founded. As I utilized a postmodern framing of gender identity and lived experience, the subsequent chapter begins with a review of modern and postmodern social, cultural, and clinical developments in the area of gender identity. Next, I examine research involving TGE students and educational practices in K–12 and collegiate environments and conclude with a review of literature related to gender identity and expression in music education.

Gender from the Modern to Postmodern

Before continuing with a discussion of gender and its meanings and implications across time, it is important to acknowledge that the terms *transgender* and *gender expansive* are recent developments in the history of gender-related discourse (Westbrook,

2010; Stryker, 2017). Although the word transgender has been widely accepted as an “umbrella” term which “describes individuals that broaden commonly held definitions of gender, including its expression, associated identities, and/or other perceived gender norms in one or more aspects of their life” (Goodrich et al., 2017, p. 204), some scholars have challenged the ability of any singular word, term, or phrase to fully represent the breadth of [non]gendered identities and experiences:

There are limits: transgender itself is interpreted by some in terms of two binary genders that one is traveling between or else not conforming to. For others (especially transsexuals), being transgender implies a sense of conflict between one’s inner gender identity and birth sex as male or female. In this way, transgender often unintentionally reinforced and reified the same binary of sexes and genders that makes outcasts of trans people in the first place. (Wilchins, 2019, p. xii)

The numerous ways in which language proves insufficient and, in many cases, harmful may reflect the turbulent and challenging evolution of terms, concepts, and ideas from modern through postmodern notions of gender and sexuality.

Modernity, Sexuality, and Gender

To discuss gender’s place within postmodernity, it is crucial to understand the “post” and the ways in which societal and cultural forces shaped the concept of gender identity through modernity. For the purposes of this dissertation, I utilized Gabardi’s (2001) definition of modernity:

The Enlightenment was the high point of modernity...it crystallized the modernist belief in human perfectibility through rationality. The Enlightenment ideal of the free rational individual living in a free rational society reflects an optimistic view of human nature and the prospects of human emancipation. (p. 3)

Gabardi (2001) added that in modernist thinking, “the individual is a free and rational agent capable of self-conscious reflection, that science and technology can rationally control and develop the natural and social worlds, and that liberty, equality, and democracy rest upon universal humanistic foundations” (p. 5). Ishii (2018) further argued that “class and gender tended to be ascribed at birth” (p. 71) in the modern era, and while one’s gender, sexuality, or class could be shaped throughout their life, “there were still quite rigid normative rules about what you had to do to achieve the proper attributes of masculinity/femininity/heterosexuality” (p. 72).

The modernist favoritism of empiricism and positivist research contributed to an environment in which “science [was] seen as the way to get at truth, to understand the world well enough so that it might be predicted and controlled” (Krauss, 2005, p. 760). The concept of gender identity as unbound from one’s sex[uality] is a relatively new idea in cultural, social, and legal discourses (Kirkup, 2018), thus many modernist discussions failed to create space for one without implicating the other (Valentine, 2007).

The normalization of *man* and *woman* as synonymous with *masculine* and *feminine* was a result of the “compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, 1999, p. 44) in the modern era, stemming from a belief in a biologically essentialist view of gender and reproduction. DeCecco and Elia (1993) defined biological essentialism as a “biological

imperative for reproduction” which “anchors sexual and gender expression in anatomy” (p. 2). DeCecco and Elia (1993) added that “the motor of sex is believed to be assembled before birth and steers us through a lifetime of sexual experience” (p. 2), and culturally non-normative sexual and gender expressions and desires were deemed pathological conditions.

While medical discourse served to clearly define what normative gender and sexual practices and expression *were*, they also outlined what they were *not*:

Central to the medical profession’s burgeoning interest in matters sexual was the attempt to classify all acts of non-procreative sex. Alongside homosexuality, practices that we now discuss as transgendered were classified as separate categories of sexual behaviour. (Hines, 2007, p. 10)

Although sex, gender, and sexuality were still intertwined, scholars began to offer new vocabulary for identities and practices considered non-normative at the time. Sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1910/1991) was among the first to extract gender identity and expression from sex and sexual orientation, coining the phrase “transvestism” to describe practices and expressions such as cross-dressing which deviated from the gender to which one was assigned at birth. Hirschfeld notably separated gender-divergent practices from sexual attraction, laying the groundwork for future scholars to explore gender identity and sexual orientation as related, but uniquely distinct characteristics.

Postmodern Movements in Terminology and Theory

Just as the modern era is difficult to bookend with precise dates, so is that which came after: the postmodern. Bordo (1992) located the postmodern era as beginning in the

mid-20th century at the intersection of a post-Holocaust “unhealable wound to Enlightenment notions of human perfectibility and rationality” (p. 160), a growing skepticism of scientific objectivity, and explosion of capitalist machinations and rampant Western consumerism. Hekman (1991) argued that a growing chorus of postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers had begun to reject the rational, independent subject that had taken shape during the modern era:

Derrida claims that the assumption of the constituting subject fails to describe the play of meaning in language. Lacan criticizes a fixed, transcendental subject as inadequate to explain the psychological process by which a “self” is created. The most powerful critique, however, comes from Foucault. Foucault argues that the transcendental, constituting subject of the Cartesian tradition is inadequate to describe the condition of subjects in the contemporary world, subjects who are constituted by the powerful forces of modern life. (p. 45)

The postmodern turn gave rise to a notion of gender and sexuality as socially constructed rather than biologically fixed. Lincoln et al. (2018) posited that postmodern academic inquiry shifted from an effort to attain objective truths about the self and the world to “social construction of social reality, fluid as opposed to fixed identities of the self, and the partiality of all truths” (p. 238).

Transvestism and Transgenderism

Hirschfeld’s (1910/1991) concept of transvestism had awakened a normalization of gender practices and expressions beyond those ascribed at birth. However, it was Christine Jorgensen who became “the first transgender person to receive significant

attention who happened to be from the United States” (Stryker, 2017, p. 66) by virtue of her gender-affirming surgery in 1952 and signaled a change in public perception and media attention. Jorgensen served as a public advocate for the work Hirschfeld had done to dismantle essentialist positions. Harry Benjamin (1954) built on Hirschfeld’s work, drawing a clearer distinction between the transvestite and more recently identified *transsexual*: “While the male transvestite enacts the role of a woman, the transsexualist wants to be one and function as one, wishing to assume as many of her characteristics as possible, physical, mental and sexual” (p. 220). Robert Stoller’s (1964) use of the term *gender identity* further softened essentialist ideations of biological sex as determinant of one’s gender. Stoller (1964) wrote:

Gender identity is the sense of knowing to which sex one belongs, that is, the awareness “I am a male” or “I am a female”...The advantage of the phrase “gender identity” lies in the fact that it clearly refers to one’s self-image as regards belonging to a specific sex. (p. 220)

Notably, Stoller argued for a relationship *between* gender and sex rather than gender *as* sex, and offered social, cultural, and familial forces as shaping one’s concept of their gender in addition to biology and physiology.

Postmodern and poststructural theorist Michel Foucault heavily critiqued modernist, Western deference to power structures and their categorization of marginalized members of society with the intent of classifying and explaining aberrant behaviors and identities:

For Foucault, the truth of sex and sexuality in modern Western societies was constructed through a discourse that established a binary categorization (man and woman, heterosexuality and homosexuality), and which created the myth that the entire human population could be distributed across just these categories. (Ishii, 2018, p. 72)

Hekman (1991) added to Foucault's criticism of the binary categories, describing the modern project of applying sweeping labels as a "dichotomous epistemology" (p. 48).

The Shift from the Pathological

The terms *transvestite* and *transsexual* came to represent their own binary factions, the former referencing individuals who engaged in non-normative gender practices and the latter to those who medically transitioned to the opposite gender. The classification of gender dysphoria⁵ as a symptom of *Gender Identity Disorder* by the American Psychiatric Association further targeted non-normative gender expressions and presentations as pathological and requiring surgical intervention or a "cure." Although Gender Identity Disorder was eventually dropped by the APA, gender dysphoria remains a divisive topic for its "locked...in the wrong body" implications (Hines, 2007, p. 92) and expectation of medical transition or therapy. Trans activist Virginia Prince sought to find a compromise between the two camps, coining the term *transgenderist* in the 1970s in reference to individuals who "lived full time in a gender other than that to which they were ascribed at birth, but without surgical intervention" (Valentine, 2007, p. 24).

⁵ Gender dysphoria is defined by Stryker (2017) as "incongruence between how one subjectively understands one's experience of gender and how one's gender is perceived by others" (p. 17).

However, even with new vocabulary to open pathways for gender variance, many expressions and presentations were still viewed as conditions for which treatment or management were desired outcomes.

Events in the broader LGBTQ movement—such as the Stonewall Riots—coupled with greater legal protections and social awareness of gender marginalization from the feminist movement amplified the voices of gender and sexual minority groups in the 1970s and 1980s (Hines, 2007; Styer, 2017). Trans individuals, while benefiting from some gains of other marginalized communities, still faced widespread harassment and a public that viewed their lived experiences as illnesses or disorders. Individuals within the trans community were often pressured to choose between silence or medical transition in order to conform to social expectations, with many individuals asking if they were “trans enough” (Koonce, 2019) if they did not ultimately end up living, or passing as, a member of a binary gender group.

Transgender Terminology

A more recent understanding of *transgender* as an umbrella term under which many gender experiences, expressions, and identities fall came after activist Leslie Feinberg posited that, “transgender [had come] to mean something else entirely—an adjective rather than a noun” (Stryker, 2006, p. 4). Notably, Feinberg (1992) acknowledged that while individuals whose experiences fell outside traditionally reinforced notions of binary gender had always been around, new language that also allowed *transgender* to include individuals who did not align with *any* gender:

Transgender often unintentionally reinforced and reified the same binary of sexes and genders that makes outcasts of trans people in the first place. But what if one is not traveling anywhere? Or is entirely off the map of intelligible binary genders? Familiar transgender concerns get scrambled quickly. (Wilchins, 2019, p. xii)

Feinberg's reimagining of *transgender* as applying to a greater pool of individuals beyond those who wished to transition to or live within the expectations of another binary gender also created space for those who identified as "genderqueer, gender non-conforming, agender, two spirit, bigender, nonbinary, and so on" (Goodrich et al., 2017, p. 204). Later in the decade, theorist Theresa de Lauretis prompted the rise of what would become the field of queer theory, re-establishing the term *queer* to refer to, "nonnormative gendered and sexual identities, actions, stances, practices, subject positions, linguistic operations, and theoretical stances, both within and beyond the academy" (Fryer, 2012, p. 4). Trans issues and the fluid ways in which individuals experienced sexuality and gender as social and cultural construction had found a foothold in academia, building a foundation of legitimacy for a growing movement.

Gender as Performance

Butler's (1999) *Gender Trouble*, originally released in 1990, was a highly influential commentary on the social constitution of gender and its relationship to and separation from the notion of biological sex. Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity upended years of conventional thought which had tied socially and culturally accepted gender roles and practices to anatomical generalizations, instead

offering: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 34). To Butler (1999), the rules of gender must be understood and [en]acted to an audience who then affirm or contradict the performance. Individuals who refuse to perform to the cultural expectations of masculinity or femininity or fail their performance are sanctioned for not aligning. Whereas previous scholars sought to place the concepts of *transsexuality* and *transgenderism* as normal, Butler challenged the construction of “normal” altogether. Butler’s (2015) argument about production as potentially subversive also opened avenues for transgender and gender expansive individuals whose performances actively upended existing norms and reified new ones:

The “appearance” of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms that demand that we become one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame); the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that in the course of its repeated enactments risks undoing or redoing the norms in unexpected ways, opening up the possibility of remaking gendered reality along new lines. (p. 32)

Although Butler’s (1999) original work was labeled as poststructural feminism, their deconstruction of gender from biological sex and assertion of gender as performed strengthened the argument of multiple transgender subjectivities:

An understanding of gender as separate from sex holds the potential for a greater diversity of masculinities and femininities and is important for a sociology of

transgender that takes account of a multiplicity of gendered identities and expressions which are unfixed to the “sexed” body. (Hines, 2006, p. 49)

However, Kopelson (2002) warned that just as cultural norms and social rules change over time, so do the characteristics of a performance: “Repeated and reified over time, the specific *acts* of gender and sexuality become (mis)perceived as the general *facts* of gender and sexuality” (p. 18, emphasis in original).

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association published its fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Having previously identified Gender Identity Disorder in reference to individuals who experienced an incongruence between their lived experiences and the gender they were assigned at birth (Beemyn, 2003), the fifth and most recent edition of the DSM changed the language to *gender dysphoria* to lessen social stigmas around expansive concepts and expressions of gender identity (Beek et al., 2016). However, Johnson (2015) noted that “transgender activists and advocates consider the medical model of transgender identity to be at once empowering and also pathologizing” and that while some individuals utilize a diagnosis of gender dysphoria en route to gender affirming therapies and surgeries, “the medical model operates as a normative standard to which transgender people’s interactional experiences of gender are held accountable in medical, legal, and social interactions” (p. 803).

The Development of “Queer”

In recent years, the term *transgender* has encompassed multiple means of expressing and experiencing gender, including *transsexuality* which has accumulated

more negative connotations for its strictly pathological and surgical implications (Styker, 2017). *Transgender* is still understood and accepted by many—but not all—as an “umbrella” under which many variations of gender identity and expression fall (Valentine, 2019). However, individuals whose identities do not signal a transition from one spot along a binary continuum to another have utilized terms such as *non-binary*, *gender-nonconforming*, *agender*, or *genderqueer* (among others), each with their own nuances and manifestations (Barbee & Schrock, 2019). Functioning similarly to how *transgender* initially served in response to souring within the community toward the term *transsexual*, the term *queer* has emerged as both a form of resistance after years of its use as a slur (Schreuder, 2021) and a new umbrella under which non-cisgender or binary identities and expressions fall (Eley, 2019; Hines, 2010). It is important to note that while someone who identifies as non-binary or queer may also identify as transgender, they also may identify as one, both, or neither.

While numerous terms referring to gender identity and sexual orientation arose throughout the 2010s, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) coined the term *gender-expansive* following their 2012 survey of LGBTQIA+ youth in the United States.

Researchers from the HRC found that:

Among transgender-identified youth, some indicated having transitioned from male to female, others from female to male and still some indicated “neither” or “other” when asked about a transition. Some of these youth expressed a transgender identity that falls within the binary (male or female) gender framework. Others appear to reject the binary terms of male and female and want

to use different terms to describe their gender. And others refuse to be defined by gender entirely. The clearest example of the diversity within this group comes from examining the responses submitted by youth who chose to specify their own gender. These youth wrote a wide array of gender identities, the three most often cited being “genderqueer,” “gender fluid” and “androgynous.” (Human Rights Campaign, 2012, p. 2)

Scholars in recent years have included *transgender* and *gender expansive* to include the widest possible array of gender and sexual identities (for examples, see Farley & Leonardi, 2021; Goodrich et al., 2017; Jenkins et al., 2020), although with the understanding that any word or phrase may be insufficient to fully encapsulate an individual’s lived experience. The word *queer* has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community to disrupt its use as a slur and as a means of blurring the lines between sexuality and gender, especially among young people:

Over 75% of LGBTQ college students polled in the study [$n = 199$] felt positive about using the term queer for self-identification. By restoring and transforming derogatory speech, people who identify as LGBTQ are creating new forms of valued capital as an act of resistance to old homophobic terminologies.

(Schreuder, 2021, p. 13)

Given the evolution of the terminology of *transgender* to include individuals who may or may not seek gender-affirming therapies and procedures and *gender expansive* in reference to individuals who may or may not identify or express themselves outside of the gender binary, the two terms will be used in concert throughout this document.

I presented the first section of this literature review to provide an overview of historical developments in TGE scholarship. Specifically, I utilized the evolution of language and terminology as important markers for evolutions in the social, political, legal environments for TGE persons in the United States. Although gender and sex-based research introduced a wider conceptual vocabulary for TGE and non-TGE individuals, the propensity of singular medical narratives threatened to homogenize TGE peoples' experiences (Hines, 2007). The medical community's wariness to engage with TGE people may continue to inform the skepticism some transgender and gender expansive people hold toward the modern medical industrial complex.

Butler's (1999; 2015) theory of gender performativity and proposition that gender itself is a fluid concept has continued to contradict the concreteness with which societal power structures—such as schools—treat gender expression and identity. It may therefore be of little surprise that TGE people who live and work *within* those structures experience isolation, harassment, and distress. Finally, the language of “queer” among young adults and school-aged youth is a tangible sign of how terms and concepts are constantly claimed and reclaimed. I interrogated this word in the preceding section to indicate that in the years and decades following this dissertation's publication, that word and many others will be in various stages of redefinition and reclamation.

Transgender and Gender Expansive Students in K–12 Education

Although the focus of this study remains participants' experiences during their college years, it is reasonable to assume that there are certain differences between an individual's K–12 and post-secondary schooling. Further, students generally are required

to progress through the K–12 system prior to beginning a post-secondary education. Therefore, I begin this section with a brief introduction to issues relevant to TGE students in K–12 education before more thoroughly examining literature related to post-secondary institutions specifically.

Attempting to survey any category or subcategory of a given population may prove challenging but is especially the case for researchers working with transgender and gender expansive individuals (Elias & Colvin, 2020; Glick, 2018). However, statistical data outlining the breadth in the number of TGE survey respondents may be useful for advocates and policymakers in expanding access to services and creating resources (Doan, 2016). In 2021, the Gallup organization released poll results indicating that 0.6% of the adult population may identify as transgender, with a proportional increase among younger respondents.

In a 2019 study of nine U.S. states and 10 urban school districts, researchers with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that approximately 1.8% of school-aged survey respondents ($n = 131,901$) identified as transgender in data collected during the 2017 academic year. It is important to note that the survey question regarding gender identity did not explicitly identify other gender identities or expressions (e.g., non-binary, agender, or genderfluid) and thus may not accurately reflect a totality of student responses: “Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender” (Johns et al., 2019, p. 68).

Nationally, LGBTQIA+ elementary, middle, and high school students face increased incidents of bullying and harassment (Earnshaw et al., 2019; Myers et al.,

2020) and are more likely to engage in substance use and abuse than their peers (Coulter et al., 2018; Gower et al., 2018; Rosario et al., 2014). LGBTQIA+ students may be faced with limited school resources and hostile peer environments, resulting in higher rates of depression and suicidality (Gnan et al., 2019; Hatchel et al., 2018). Kosciw et al. (2020) reported that transgender and gender expansive students felt less safe and experienced higher levels of victimization than their cisgender and heterosexual peers. Additionally, Kosciw et al. found that 77.3% of transgender and 69.1% of non-binary students experienced discrimination because of their gender identity, and 22.2% of LGBTQIA+ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted because of their gender identity or expression.

Day et al. (2018) argued that studies often fail to disaggregate data for sexual minority students from gender minority students, and found that “compared to non-transgender youth, transgender youth had over three times greater odds of missing school because they felt unsafe and because of engaging in substance use” (p. 1739). Supportive teachers, administrators, staff, and student peers may be especially important for TGE students in the face of their increased scrutiny and harassment (Gower et al., 2018; Martín-Castillo et al., 2020). However, Day et al. (2019) found that while many schools have recently adopted pro-LGBTQIA+ policies, TGE students experienced fewer benefits and interventions by school staff than their sexual minority peers. The disparate treatment TGE and LGB students face reinforces the need to examine policies that may be too broadly stated or intended for too large of a population, diluting the impact of individual interventions or enforcement.

The Bathroom Debate

In recent years, conversations around transgender and gender expansive students' ability to use school restrooms which aligned with their gender identity and/or expression rather than those to which they were assigned at birth has dominated news coverage and become a proxy for larger societal debates on trans issues (Farley & Leonardi, 2021; Journell, 2017). While the 2016 North Carolina House Bill 2 served as an infamous catalyst for national discussions around restroom use, state legislatures, school boards, and judges at every level have wrestled with the issue, producing a patchwork of inconsistent policies and procedures. As of the writing of this dissertation, the "bathroom bill" debate was still present in state houses across the country (see for example Gruber-Miller, 2021).

School bathroom debates are often characterized by a "sexual predator" narrative with the proposed goal of protecting innocent young girls from the unwanted advances of vicious, older male assailants (Crissman et al., 2020). While some advocates for trans students have argued that TGE youth should be allowed to use restrooms which align with their gender identity, Farley and Leonardi (2021) argued that "the public discourse regarding bathrooms has largely played out regarding the legality, ethicality, and appropriateness of binary inclusion models" (p. 279) and often fail to accommodate the needs of non-binary individuals for whom either space may present an issue (Barbee & Shrock, 2019).

Teachers and Heteronormativity/Cisnormativity

As social and cultural institutions, schools are environments in which heteronormative⁶ and cisnormative⁷ approaches to gender identity, gender roles, and gender performance are surveilled and reinforced (Foucault, 1976/1978). Many students experience schools as highly gendered institutions from a young age, subjected to “trajectories of heteronormativity” (Gunn, 2011, p. 281) which reinforce traditional notions of gender presentation (e.g., attire) and relationships (e.g., male/female nuclear family arrangements), and a hesitancy towards discussing sexuality and gender diversity under the guise of maintaining youthful “innocence” (p. 285).

Allen et al. (2008) found that while some primary school educators expressed a desire to normalize sexual and gender diverse topics and literature in their classrooms, fear of public and parent backlash at discussing “forbidden” materials and themes often pressured teachers to remain silent. However, Ryan et al. (2013) discovered that while many elementary school students may lack vocabulary to differentiate gender identity from sexuality, some students may be willing to interrogate their own beliefs around gender roles and performances when TGE narratives are normalized and included regularly in classroom discussions.

Classrooms may also be hostile environments for some transgender and gender expansive students who endure acts of aggression or, conversely, erasure through an

⁶ *Heteronormativity* refers to “the social norm of heterosexuality which has become embodied and is lived without question” (Fee, 2010, p. 213).

⁷ *Cisnormativity* refers to “the expectation that all people are cisgender; that is, that all people assigned male at birth should identify as male and all those assigned female at birth as female” (Bradford & Syed, 2019, p. 307).

exclusion of trans-related topics from peers and teachers (Dinkins & Englert, 2015). Teachers often fail to intervene on behalf of TGE students who face discriminatory remarks and misgendering from fellow students, and TGE students themselves are often burdened with correcting and educating classmates and school staff (McBride & Neary, 2021). Lewis (2019) found that while many middle and high school teachers reported feeling more comfortable with gender diverse terms and concepts after professional development training, pre-service coursework often left new teachers feeling unprepared to work with TGE students. Transgender and gender expansive students wishing to participate in school activities may be forced to choose between binarily gendered options for events such as school proms and dances, field trips, or in locker rooms for sports or physical education classes (Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

Supportive school staff may be especially important in the lives of TGE students attempting to navigate barriers and challenges that their peers do not face. However, Kull et al. (2019) found that among school mental health professionals (SMHP)—defined by the researchers as counselors, social workers, and psychologists—80.5% received “little or no competency training” to work with TGE students (p. 23). Additionally, Kull et al. (2019) reported that 64.7% of SMHP were “not at all confident” or “not very confident” in their abilities to adequately meet the needs of TGE students. In their comparison of transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNG) students and their cisgender peers’ utilization of school medical services, Rider et al. (2018) found that “students who are TGNC reported significantly poorer health status, lower rates of preventive health checkups, and more visits to the nurse’s office than their cisgender peers” (p. 7).

School Spaces and Safety

Although LGBTQIA+ students may generally be subjected to more incidents of harassment and discrimination than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, TGE students are at greater risk for physical harm and poorer mental health outcomes than their LGB peers in K–12 school environments (Myers et al., 2020). Despite the numerous aforementioned challenges, new resources and organizations for TGE students have become more common. Many high schools and some middle schools offer Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) organizations, through which LGBTQIA+ students socialize, discuss topical issues and policy, and plan community events (Ernandes, 2020). Kosciw et al. (2020) found that LGBTQIA+ students who attend schools with GSAs—or clubs with similar missions—report lower rates of school absenteeism and feeling safer than students at schools without the organizations. However, transgender and gender expansive students often report feeling left out of GSA programming focused on issues of sexual orientation rather than gender identity and expression (Rehm, 2021), and some schools have renamed their organizations “Gender-Sexuality Alliances” to “balance continuity through maintaining or anchoring past culture symbols (e.g., GSA acronym) while simultaneously fostering change” (Sutherland, 2019, p. 5). While some students report the presence of “Safe Space” stickers or posters throughout their school as being useful in identifying supportive school staff members, the trend is more common among high school than elementary or middle school employees, providing fewer visible cues for younger students (Kosciw et al., 2020).

Some K–12 educators have also incorporated recommendations for creating

inclusive classrooms for transgender and gender expansive students such as allowing students to submit their own names and pronouns on documents and rosters (Farley & Leonardi, 2021; McQuillan, 2019), limiting binary practices such as organizing students by gender (Meyer & Leonardi, 2018), and actively intervening to combat transphobic comments or actions (Kosciw et al., 2020; Lewis, 2019). Additionally, some researchers have reiterated calls for greater inclusion of TGE issues in pre-service teacher education programs to address a “lack of understanding” among educators toward their students (Blair & Deckman, 2019).

Transgender and Gender Expansive Students in Higher Education

It has long been asserted that a post-secondary education may provide numerous benefits over the span of one’s lifetime compared to an individual without a degree, including increased earnings (Perna, 2003) and better health outcomes (Zajacova et al., 2012). Transgender and gender expansive individuals are less likely to attain the same levels of post-secondary education as their cisgender peers, and as a result may experience lower earnings, higher rates of poverty, and report worse health outcomes (Carpenter et al., 2020). Kosciw et al. (2020) reported that LGBTQIA+ students who experienced bullying, harassment, or victimization during their K–12 education were less likely to pursue a post-secondary degree. In their national survey of LGBTQ youth ($n = 11,327$), Feldman et al. (2020) found that TGE students were less likely than their cisgender LGB peers to attend post-secondary institutions.

For TGE students who ultimately decide to apply to a college or university, numerous obstacles remain. Marine (2017) noted that TGE students often face confusing

or unhelpful interactions with high school guidance counselors who may otherwise provide valuable advice and access to resources for cisgender students and are forced to select a binary gender option on application forms. Upon admission, students may be asked to complete documents for university housing or medical services which also require the choice of binary gender markers (Feldman et al., 2020). Individuals who are required to submit state-issued identification (e.g., a driver's license) which list an incorrect gender marker may be subject to a patchwork of laws by state and region (Elias & Colvin, 2020), causing further delays and difficulties in accessing resources.

Campus Climates and Microclimates

Numerous researchers have explored the experiences of transgender and gender expansive students through the lens of *campus climate*, which Rankin (2005) defined as “the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (p. 17). James et al. (2016) found that 24% of TGE college students reported being “verbally, physically, or sexually harassed” (p. 136). In a survey of students attending a mid-sized midwestern U.S. university ($n = 1848$), Thompson et al. (2021) reported that TGE students indicated a more negative campus climate than their cisgender peers. Additionally, TGE students were more likely to experience acts of discrimination but were less likely to report those experiences to school staff due to “not [receiving] the proper institutional support” (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 177). Garvey et al. (2019) contended that “historically, campus climate scholars have identified trans students’ perceptions through dominant LGBTQ narratives, thus rendering trans experiences

ambivalent” (p. 230).

While gauging TGE students’ attitudes and experiences on an institutional level is valuable in identifying challenges and barriers (Rankin et al., 2019), scholars have also shown interest in interrogating specific spaces and environments *within* a campus community. Ackelsberg et al. (2008) used the term *microclimate* to refer to a “small, relatively self-contained environment” such as “a department, a committee, an interdisciplinary program, a reading group, or a purely social configuration” (p. 84). Siegel (2019) asserted that the numerous spaces spread throughout college campuses often cause “institutional policies and local gender practices [to] conflict, creating disparate microclimates on a single campus” (p. 8). Although a student may report a generally safe campus environment due to certain policies, individual organizations, departments, and physical environments may function differently. Additionally, Preston and Hoffman (2015) found that universities sometimes function as “traditionally heterogendered institutions” (p. 65) and provide LGBTQIA+ resources to shelter students from the rest of campus rather than actively challenging heteronormative and cisnormative expectations or standards. It is therefore important to examine how particular locations and entities on a post-secondary institution’s campus impact a TGE student’s experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. Nicolazzo (2016) asserted that universities may function as sites of “compulsory heterogenderism” (p. 77), forcing TGE students to translate their experiences, appearance, and expressions to fit their peers’ expectations and vocabulary (e.g., being read and labeled as a lesbian woman rather than trans because it more closely aligns with dominant narratives of sexual orientation).

Housing Practices

Although housing and residential life policies differ between institutions, many colleges and universities require students to live in on-campus residence halls or apartments for at least part of their enrollment and often tout the academic and social benefits to living in communal environments (Graham et al., 2018; Turley & Wodtke, 2010). Incoming students may be forced to “out” themselves on school documents on which they must choose between “male” or “female” housing options (Meacham, 2020).

Once assigned to a room, TGE students may face hostile or unsupportive roommates, a lack of privacy, and more limited options for changing or restroom facilities than their cisgender peers (Goldberg et al., 2019; Pryor et al., 2016). Kortegast (2017) found that gender and sexual minority students perceived their resident hall staff as poorly trained and ill-equipped to deal with LGBTQIA+ issues and were less likely to intervene against harassment or bullying. Kortegast (2017) also asserted that while TGE students may be more likely to move off campus to escape negative interactions and oppressive conditions within residence hall environments, they acknowledge the possibility of feeling more isolated and less connected to their peers.

In their examination of four post-secondary institutions’ housing policies, Nicolazzo et al. (2018) found that while some universities allowed students to indicate a preference for gender-inclusive housing (GIH), “not only were these policies hard to locate, but many of them were ambiguous, leading to confusion regarding what GIH meant at each campus” (p. 229). Study participants also reported that housing officials were difficult to reach for clarification on GIH policies, and communication of specific

accommodations was often inconsistent even within the context of a single university. In a study involving four TGE college students' experiences, Cochran (2019) found that students living in gender-inclusive and queer-inclusive housing environments felt supported and affirmed with their pronouns and romantic partners.

TGE students who wish to transition during their college years may face additional obstacles. Pryor et al. (2016) found that institutions often did not have policies to address or support transitioning students, often forcing transitioning students to choose between isolation or off-campus housing options away from their social networks. Students who are not out to their peers or for whom transitioning is not a goal may experience the additional stress of constantly passing to their dorm-mates for fear of being outed, misgendered, or facing additional harassment (Meacham, 2020; Pitcher & Simmons, 2020). While on-campus residential life may provide numerous benefits to on-campus students in their academic and social experiences during college, transgender and gender expansive students face obstacles and stressors that their cisgender peers and university officials may be unequipped to address or face active resistance.

Official Documents and Forms

In addition to housing-related forms and applications, universities often require students to complete documents in a wide range of administrative areas on campus. In a study of an urban public university's name change policy, Lieberth (2020) found that while students expressed appreciation for the existence of a policy through which they change their name, the results were often inconsistent and impacted how they experienced campus. For example, Lieberth (2020) reported that students had varying

levels of success applying for and receiving new ID cards, which impacted their ability to utilize resources such as the on-campus fitness center. Additionally, electronic databases did not always universally reflect the name change entries, often resulting in email addresses or class rosters registered to a student's dead name,⁸ causing some students to experience anxiety wondering if their correct name would be read aloud by a professor or instructor during class.

Goldberg et al. (2019) found that a significant stressor for many non-binary or transitioning students was the need for names and gender markers to be changed on legal documents before being edited in university systems. Individuals wishing to change their name and/or gender marker on government-issued documents must often navigate confusing and onerous state government systems, and in some states are forced to publish their name change request in local newspapers (Wentling, 2020). In their analysis of seven U.S. jurisdictions' gender marker policies, Elias and Colvin (2020) discovered that each required different approval times, fees, medical documentation and proof of surgical intervention, and had different approaches to non-binary identifiers (e.g., "X" or "N"). In some states, non-binary students who do not wish to undergo gender-related surgeries or therapies have no option to change or edit gender markers. Students who successfully change their identification documents in one state may face additional hurdles if they attend school or change their residency to another state. In addition to housing and name/gender-change documents, Dockendorff (2019) identified academic advising,

⁸ A *dead name* refers to the name an individual was assigned at birth and no longer wishes to use. Being referred to by a dead name may be a significant source of stress and harm (Lieberth, 2020).

career services, and financial aid as significant sources of stress for TGE students who often grapple with restrictive policies and uninformed staff. Students may also struggle with governmental policies around their universities. Throughout the United States, there are currently nine separate policies across seven jurisdictions which allow citizens to designate or change their gender markers; as of 2018, only three (Washington State, Oregon, and the District of Columbia) allowed a non-binary marker (Elias & Colvin, 2020). Although to my knowledge there has not been a study since Elias's and Colvin's (2020) to examine national statistics on gender markers, the United States State Department announced in 2021 the addition of an "X" designation for "non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming persons applying for a U.S. passport or [Consular Report of Birth Abroad]" (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Healthcare and Access to Resources

For TGE youth and young adults, access to physical and mental health care is often a challenge and source of stress (Chang, 2019; Jenkins et al., 2020). Although many colleges and universities offer health services through on-campus clinics, students may face access issues or healthcare providers who are unable to fully support them. TGE students may not have access to certain gender-affirming services such as surgeries or hormone replacement therapies (HRT) through school-offered insurance or may face issues accessing university clinics with external coverage through a parent or guardian's insurance policy (Cochran, 2010; Seelman, 2014). In their study with 11 TGE students at a large public university, Santos et al. (2021) found that while the university health insurance policy did cover HRT, "there were no providers on campus formally trained to

administer it” (p. 63). Participants also reported seeking off-campus healthcare after being dead named or misgendered, being asked offensive questions, and pressured into choosing binarily gendered rooms or spaces.

TGE students often face higher levels of depression and anxiety (Bennett, 2018) and experience traumatic events, higher rates of suicidal thoughts, and are subject to greater levels of harassment than their cisgender peers (Kosciw et al., 2020; Woodford, 2018). Becker et al. (2017) found that while TGE university students were statistically more likely than their cisgender and LGB peers to seek support at university counseling centers, they reported relationships with friends and family as being the most common form of support.

In a study with 10 students at a large, public university in the midwestern United States, Humiston (2017) found that while several students noted positive experiences with supportive on-campus mental health providers, students were often forced to educate their counselors on trans-specific issues before proceeding with care. Lewis (2016) found that students experienced vastly different outcomes with mental health providers, some of whom were very willing and enthusiastic to work with TGE students while others seemed uninterested or uninformed. Garvey et al. (2019) added that some students may express hesitancy toward meeting with campus counselors who “often serve as gatekeepers to support services, and trans students worry these gatekeepers will label them as having gender dysmorphia disorder” (p. 232).

Academic Experiences

University faculty members often play an important role in the lives of their students, impacting multiple facets of their collegiate experience:

Sustained contact allows professors—who serve as gatekeepers to internships, fellowships, graduate school, jobs, summer travel, and many other opportunities (publicized and unpublicized)—to get to know undergraduates and their personal stories, interests, and qualifications. Not only are undergraduates who faculty know well more likely to receive greater favor and access to opportunities, but they are also more likely to procure stronger recommendation letters than students whom faculty know on a more cursory level. (Jack, 2015a, p. 14)

High-impact practices (HIPs) such as internships, seminars, learning communities, community engagements, and capstone projects may be important aspects of retention, engagement, and success for college students generally (Kuh, 2008). As previously noted, TGE students may encounter more obstacles on campus than their cisgender peers, thus limiting their access to HIPs. In their analysis of data from the 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement ($n = 376,076$), BrckaLorenz et al. (2017) found that while cisgender and TGE students were equally as likely to engage in HIPs, there was “a significant relationship between student–faculty interaction and participation in HIPs for gender-variant students” (p. 361). The researchers suggest an outsized role for professors in directing their TGE students to activities, opportunities, and resources.

Given the importance of the TGE student/faculty relationship, it may be important to examine the numerous ways in which faculty members interact with their students in

and outside of the classroom. In a study with 20 undergraduate college students, Forbes (2020) found that participants differentiated fields of study as “warm” or “chilly” to LGBTQIA+ discourse, associating the former with the humanities and social sciences and the latter with STEM subjects. Participants also noted that faculty members in the “chilly” content areas often ignored discussions of queer issues and were more likely to misgender TGE students, while instructors in “warm” content areas invited queer perspectives and incorporated LGBTQIA+ content into their curricular offerings (Forbes, 2020).

Linley et al. (2016) reported that TGE students felt safest in college classrooms in which faculty members “confronted homophobic language, challenged normative heterosexist/cisgender discourses within the curriculum, and utilized inclusive language within the classroom” (p. 37), and actively sought out students’ names and pronouns on class documents. Several participants in Humiston’s (2017) study also found that choosing where to sit in a classroom, naming activities (e.g., class introductions), and feeling the need to educate instructors and peers about their TGE identity and pronouns were sources of stress. Lieberth (2020) found that even for students who changed their names in university databases, many were tasked with individually emailing professors about the change and encountered faculty members unwilling to use their correct name and/or pronouns. Renn (2020) added:

Regardless of the course topic, instructors can model respect for transgender students by providing a confidential opportunity to correct their names on a course roster, using their pronouns (as identified by the student), and avoiding

“outing” students by using incorrect names. (p. 193)

Lewis (2016) asserted that while several of the 10 participants in her study reported positive interactions with professors, students also indicated negative or hostile actions or comments such as failing to intervene against transphobic or cisnormative statements and misgendering or incorrectly naming students. In their study of 34 college faculty members’ attitudes and perceptions on preferred name and gender identity policies, McEntarfer and Iovannone (2020) found that “none objected to policies concerning chosen names, and only two expressed opposition to the idea of a policy allowing students to indicate chosen pronouns” (p. 13). Participants also expressed more willingness to use another binary pronoun (i.e., male or female) than non-binary pronouns (e.g., “they/them”), citing a “difficult” amount of effort (McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020, p. 13).

Extracurricular Activities and Organizations

Participation in extracurricular activities and campus organizations may be especially important for TGE students, for whom “the provision of basic recognition and acceptance of these students’ identities is critical to their feeling of safety, in turn allowing them to thrive academically (Walker-Payne, 2019, p. 48). LGBTQIA+ resource centers and student organizations are often viewed by TGE students as generally safer than other areas of campus, offering valuable programming, social opportunities, and workspaces (Ashton, 2013; Pryor, 2015). However, Nicolazzo and Marine (2014) found that while each of the 19 centers they surveyed offered trans-inclusive programming, only two out of 200 programs specifically addressed TGE issues. Additionally,

programming often focused on negative narratives of TGE student experiences (e.g., memorial days of remembrance) rather than celebrating transgender and gender expansive students' positive experiences.

Goldberg and Kovalanka (2018) found that while several of the participants ($n = 7$) in their study at a large public university expressed dismay that many of their LGBTQ center's resources were focused on sexual—rather than gender—minority experiences, they recognized the benefits of collective action as a single community in advocating for policy changes. Non-binary and gender non-conforming students reported that they “had to work hard to prove their transness, particularly when around other binary trans people” (p. 124), often creating a rift between groups at the center. Still, Flint et al. (2019) found that non-binary and agender students at one public university in the southeastern United States expressed feelings of support from the on-campus LGBTQ center, and that students were able to expand the center's “bubble” of affirmation and safety to other physical spaces on campus. In addition to participation in LGBTQIA+ specific groups and activities, Nicolazzo (2015) explored TGE students' broader campus involvement and discovered that students often found support and affirmation in multiple on-campus groups which also provided opportunities for student leadership.

Garvey et al. (2019) found that a TGE college student's “outness” was positively correlated with more positive feelings toward their campus and college experiences. However, the researchers also noted that students' perceptions of safety changed depending on context; some students felt safer and more comfortable being out in one group or organization but felt less safe around fraternities or athletic teams (Garvey et al.,

2019, p. 240). Importantly, Goldberg et al. (2019) examined the attitudes and perceptions of 510 TGE college students and reported that in general, “greater involvement in campus activities was related to more negative perceptions of campus climate” (p. 60). Goldberg et al. (2019) and Garvey et al. (2019) suggested that participating in *any* group, organization, or activity may not positively impact a TGE student’s experience, but rather the *type* of organization should be considered. Therefore, it may be useful to better understand student experiences within different student organizations and activities for the roles they play in creating safe, affirming environments and fostering positive social relationships.

Examining the ways in which LGBTQIA+ students in general and transgender students specifically interact with educational institutions can aid in disaggregating how educational institutions define, police, and reinforce gender norms and expectations. An example might be the concept of the “safe space” that appears often throughout educational discourse. While attempts to create physical and emotional spaces in which LGBTQIA+ students are protected from harassment and discrimination, an important consideration arises: From what are we protecting students, and what about educational structures requires specific spaces to be labeled as “safe” in the first place?

LGBTQIA+ Students in Music Education

Although researchers in the field of music education have included issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in their work for several decades, the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ issues as a focus of interest rather than peripheral component marks a recent development. Bergonzi’s (2009) article titled “Sexual Orientation and Music Education:

Continuing a Tradition” in the *Music Educators Journal* was the first to explicitly address aspects of heteronormativity and cisnormativity in music education and call for additional research in LGBTQIA+ studies. Additionally, Carter and Bergonzi (2009) called for scholars to present at the inaugural symposium specifically focused on LGBTQIA+ issues in the field of music education:

Although numerous disciplines have examined influences of the LGBT community, conventional music education has yet to consider as fully as colleagues in education and musicology relevant research, theory, and practice from a LGBT perspective. Furthermore, within music education, LGBT issues are not visible via special research groups, journals, meetings, or research. So, like many LGBT music educators and students, sexual orientation is hidden from most music education’s professional consciousness—without identity. (p. 94)

Since the 2010 summit at the University of Illinois, three additional symposia have taken place: at the University of Illinois in 2012 and 2016, and virtually through the University of Oregon in 2020.

It should be noted that while attention to sexual orientation and gender identity has increased in recent years, the call for inquiry into the experiences of students and educators of “marginalized positionalities” (Gould, 1994, p. 96) and the power dynamics located in the act of teaching and learning music is not new. According to Bowman (1998), “musics and instructional practices are human behaviors embedded in social contexts and practices. Their natures and values are plural, malleable, unstable, and ever changing” (p. 15). It may be reasonable to assume that social and cultural developments

in the area of sexual orientation and gender identity may therefore also impact the field of music education and its constituents. In the following section, I address broader developments in LGBTQIA+ issues and topics in music education and then present research specific to transgender and gender expansive music students and educators.

Teacher’s Role in Supporting LGBTQIA+ Students

In the last national survey of LGBT youth ($n = 7,898$) to gauge music ensemble participation (defined by the authors as membership in a band, choir, or orchestra), Kosciw et al. (2014) found that 47.9% of respondents—the most of any surveyed extracurricular activity—participated in at least one ensemble, and 14.3% served in a leadership role. Despite the propensity of LGBT students to participate in music ensembles, 10% of respondents to the *2019 National School Climate Survey* ($n = 16,713$) identified experiencing “gender separation” practices such as male/female choir robes (Kosciw et al., 2020, p. 43) in music ensembles. In their study of 1,232 middle and high school students from California, Snap et al. (2015) discovered that “mathematics/science, music/art/drama and PE were the least likely classes to include LGBTQ-inclusive lessons (15–16%)” (p. 585). Further, Kosciw et al. (2020) found that only 2.2% of all respondents noted positive representations of LGBTQ topics in music classes.

Although there is a lack of research in the area of LGBTQIA+ inclusive content in elementary music classrooms, participants in Grasso’s (2016) study of elementary school educators’ experiences—not limited to music—with LGBTQ content ($n = 100$) indicated fear of parental backlash (45%), lack of training (40%) and unsupportive administrators (30%) as the most common reasons for not including themes of sexual orientation or

gender identity in their classroom lessons. In their study of LGBTQ-inclusive teaching strategies among music educators ($n = 300$), Garrett and Spano (2017) reported that “91.3% ($n = 274$) of the respondents indicated they did not receive any pre-service training relevant to LGBTQ inclusion, and 87.3% ($n = 262$) of them indicated they did not receive any in-service training on these topics” (p. 44).

Music educators often play an important role in supporting students and their feelings of belonging. In a study of high school band students’ perceptions of their band directors ($n = 663$), Graves (2019) found that the teachers significantly impacted “whether students feel a sense of belonging, feel cared for, and feel connected to others” (p. 90). Similarly, Sichivitsa (2007) examined the perceptions of 130 university choir members and found that supportive choir directors positively impacted participants’ social connectedness and self-concept. Given the influence that music educators have in shaping their students’ attitudes and perceptions, their reported lack of training and comfort in addressing LGBTQIA+ issues may have an outsized impact.

Music Teacher Preparation Programs

Although music education researchers have called for greater inclusion of LGBTQIA+ topics in music teacher education programs (e.g., Garrett, 2012; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Minette, 2018; Paparo & Sweet, 2014), roadblocks may still exist. Salvador and Kelly-McHale (2017) surveyed music teacher educators ($n = 285$) from across the country and found mixed reactions to social justice issues in music teacher preparation programs. While 40% of respondents indicated they felt satisfied by the amount of social justice content in their programs, 5.6% challenged the need for the inclusion of social

justice topics at all. One participant wrote:

I do not believe that we as music educators need to teach lengthy units on social justice. For example, LGBTQ is none of our business and has NOTHING to do with one's education. This being the case, to teach a course or even a lengthy unit on such a topic is essentially a waste of time for undergraduates, and rather should be reserved for masters or doctoral coursework...I just saved myself a week of time to talk about more important topics such as music selection, instructional behaviors, and curricular issues. (Salvador & Kelly-McHale, 2017, p.15, emphasis in original)

Similarly, Taylor et al. (2020) examined the perceptions of LGBTQIA+ music education majors in Texas ($n = 134$) and found that while 86% of participants felt prepared to create inclusive classrooms and 65% were ready to speak about social justice topics with their students, only 44% felt prepared to “be a resource to students who have questions about gender expression or sexual orientation” (p. 18). Further, Taylor et al. (2020) reported that “interviewees explained that any information concerning LGBTQ+ topics was gleaned through courses and experiences outside the music education curriculum” (p. 19) and many LGBTQIA+ specific topics were included in broad statements about social justice.

McBride and Palkki (2020) analyzed and coded collegiate choral methods materials over a decade (2008–2018) and found that texts often reinforced hegemonic masculinity and traditional gender roles explicitly and implicitly. Additionally, the authors found that despite appeals to overtly masculine topics (e.g., athletic competition)

in attempts to recruit more male-presenting students, the gender balance has remained consistent. McBride and Palkki (2020) argued that many choral methods resources “reinforce outdated patriarchal and heteronormative stereotypes” (p. 415), disparaging and degrading expressions of femininity as inferior. Bartolome (2016) examined the experiences of a transgender music educator named Melanie, and noted that student teaching placements, licensure and testing, and navigating the job application process were barriers to finding a full-time position. Melanie also described how she actively monitored her voice to pass as female, often leading to “vocal fatigue” (p. 40) and planning lessons around the amount of time she would need to vocalize.

Music Classrooms and Safe[r] Spaces

Researchers have noted the tension between music classrooms as safe[r] spaces for LGBTQIA+ students, but also as spaces in which heteronormativity is enforced and defended. Congruent with Acklesberg et al. (2008) and Siegel’s (2019) microclimates model, students may generally feel safe or accepted in a program or classroom yet identify smaller social groups, physical spaces, or power structures *within* those larger environments in which they feel varying levels of safety and affirmation. In their survey of LGBTQ vocalists who were members of middle and/or high school choral ensembles ($n = 1,123$), Palkki and Caldwell (2018) found that:

While many of the respondents’ choral music educators made their support for LGBTQ people explicitly known, most of the non-heteronormative and trans respondents did not feel safe disclosing their gender and/or sexual identity in the context of the school choral program. (p. 41)

Participants also reported that while they felt physically safe, the lack of teacher intervention in harassment or bullying, lack of topics related to LGBTQIA+ issues, lack of performances of pieces by or discussion of LGBTQIA+ composers, and use of heteronormative analogies (e.g., a choir director asking students to think of their opposite-sex partner) negatively impacted their experiences and perceptions (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). Similarly, Hess (2016) observed that LGBTQIA+ music students are often forced to “translate” language, themes, and concepts in relation to their own lived experiences, and argued that “when students have to continually translate teacher discourse to apply to their own lives, being obliged to enact that process is a microaggression—a cumulative harm that wears over time” (p. 87).

Hansen (2016) explored the experiences of seven high school musicians who identified as LGBTQIA+ and found that school music participation offered participants a haven from more hostile spaces within their school environments and provided them opportunities to build confidence in musical abilities to complement aspects of their lived experiences with which they struggled. Hansen (2016) noted that for one participant, Emily, “making a spot in the all-state band validated her work as a trumpet player and helped her feel less lost as she questioned another aspect of her identity” (p. 108). Several participants also commented on the importance of leadership in school organizations, noting LGBTQIA+ groups as well as music ensembles are important sites of leadership development. Goodrich (2020) posited that peer mentorship among LGBTQIA+ students may positively impact their leadership skills, building confidence and resilience. Additionally, Fisher (2020) examined the experiences of TGE participants in a gay men’s

chorus and found that peer mentorship in LGBTQIA+ ensembles may provide representation for members whose identities are otherwise not widely recognized or celebrated. Ensembles such as marching bands (Fisher, 2021; Warfield, 2013), choirs (Harris, 2017), and orchestras (Webb, 2015) may allow for numerous peer mentoring opportunities, increasing the breadth of experiences for LGBTQIA+ students to attain leadership positions.

One participant in Dagaz's (2010) study of two midwestern U.S. high school marching band programs, Addie, expressed that band members often had multiple, intersected marginalized identities (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation) which created a shared sense of community and camaraderie:

There are so many gay or bisexual kids in the band. It's kind of a joke between the band directors themselves. They've never said anything to me about it but other people have said they've been talking to each other about it. About how many there are in the band program and in a school in the middle of nowhere you think it would be a big deal to even have one openly gay person, but I think the reason everybody is so accepting is because they know somebody or they are. Pretty much that's the way it is. You either know somebody and like them, or you are. There are very few people who are unaccepting of any sort of minority group. We all know people who are like that and maybe we don't respect their choices or the way they feel or live but we do understand them and we do love them. (p. 105)

Carter (2013) examined the experiences of four gay men who were members of a

Historically Black College or University (HBCU) marching band and reported that “for all participants, an identity as a band member and self-identification as a gay male were intertwined—they were in band to find sanctuary from the pressures they felt from society as a whole” (p. 37). Respondents also repeatedly identified “dissonances” (p. 32) between aspects of their band membership which were affirming (e.g., supportive friends, playing instruments that made them feel strong or powerful) and restricting (e.g., fear of rejection, inability to openly talk about their sexual orientation), and did not identify the band director as an important role model or mentor.

Garrett and Spano (2017) found that respondents “were most comfortable being supportive of LGBTQ individuals in their classrooms and disapproving homophobic verbal expressions such as ‘faggot,’ ‘dyke,’ or comments like ‘that’s so gay!’” (p. 51). However, Bergonzi (2015) cautioned that while interventions toward overtly hostile or aggressive comments or actions may provide short-term relief for LGBTQIA+ students:

Rather than constituting anti-oppressive acts, responses like this, especially as called for by a school’s “anti-bullying” program, do little more than sustain heterosexual privilege by “straightening up” classroom discourse within a framework of classroom management. (p. 228)

Researchers have indicated tensions between actions teachers perceive as constituting a safe classroom, and students’ needs being only partially met. Additionally, scholars have challenged previous notions of safety. Self and Hudson (2015) labeled physical spaces in which college students were not subject to direct physical harm or violence but still surrounded by heteronormative and cisnormative practice as *marginally safe* (p. 228).

Arao and Clemens (2013) have advocated for a shift from the conventional “safe space” to a “brave space” in which they “emphasize the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety” (p. 141) in addressing uncomfortable topics around justice rather than avoiding them to mitigate conflict. For LGBTQIA+ students in K–12 and collegiate music programs, there may be varying feelings of safety and a desire to move beyond marginally safe environments. I turn next to LGBTQIA+ students in music education environments specifically, and the structures and practices that are affirming or restrictive in music education spaces.

Transgender and Gender Expansive Students in Music Education

Although in some instances it may be useful to include issues related to transgender and gender expansive students into broader discussion of gender and sexuality within education generally (Mckendry & Lawrence, 2020) and music education (Bergonzi et al., 2016), TGE students’ specific perceptions and concerns may be lost in the discourse. Within the field of music education, Silveira and Goff (2016) wrote:

Although many researchers have nominally included the “T” for “transgender” when listing sexual minorities studied (LGBT persons), many fewer have examined the particular experiences of transgender individuals, independent from gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, especially in education and music education. (p. 141)

Non-binary or gender non-conforming individuals may be even further excluded from dialogue, as some individuals who identify as transgender wish to align with a binary gender while others do not (Barbee & Shrock, 2019; Flint et al., 2019). For example, one

participant in Cates's (2019) study of choral directors' experiences with gender-inclusive teaching practices acknowledged that "non-binary students sometimes felt left out of the process, especially since many of our trans students wanted to 'pass' and were very concerned with fitting into a gender binary" (p. 141). Therefore, it is important to more closely examine the experiences of TGE students as distinctly separate from those of sexual minority students as to not silence their perspectives.

Gendered Instrument Practices

Music students may face different gendered practices depending on the environment in which they practice and perform. The intersection of musical instrument selection and gender/sex stereotypes has long been a subject of investigation and discussion among researchers in the field of music education. Abeles and Porter (1978) produced a highly influential collection of four studies in their examination of gender associations and musical instruments. The researchers found that among 58 college students, clarinet, flute, and violin were rated as most feminine, and drums, trumpet, and trombone were labeled masculine. The designations corresponded to the results of another study in which parents ($n = 149$) were more likely to associate the three feminine instruments with hypothetical daughters, and three masculine instruments with hypothetical sons. Finally, Abeles and Porter noted that the way instruments are presented (e.g., recordings or demonstrations) may impact the extent to which young students develop gendered stereotypes. Lipton's (1987) study of orchestral musicians' perceptions of instrument families yielded associations of introversion and femininity with string and woodwind instruments, and extroversion and masculinity with brass and

percussion.

Delzell and Leppla (1992) examined the preferences of 526 fourth grade students and found that boys listed fewer instruments as preferable than girls, and that while some stereotypes had lessened due to more students of the opposite gender playing a given instrument, drums remained stereotyped as the most masculine and flute as the most feminine. Zervoudakes and Tanur (1994) discovered that male and female respondents became more likely to play instruments stereotyped to their corresponding gender (e.g., a male-identifying respondent playing a male-associated instrument) over a 30-year span, and that “the increasing participation of young women in high school and college bands seems to have served to perpetuate gender-based stereotypes of appropriate instruments (p. 67).

O’Neill and Boulton (1996) interviewed 153 young children in the UK about their perceptions of musical instruments and reported that in addition to associating certain instruments with sex (e.g., “trumpet” with “boy”), participants also viewed another child playing an instrument outside of their assigned stereotype as “inappropriate” and transgressing gender boundaries. Cramer et al. (2002) surveyed 98 undergraduates at Canadian universities about instrument gender stereotypes and found that participants labeled female musicians as stronger leaders than male musicians and associated feminine instruments with traits such as warmth and caring. However, the researchers also noted that “males playing feminine instruments were perceived as less dominant and active and had less leadership skills than females playing identical instruments” (p. 171). Wrape et al. (2016) more recently examined instrument stereotypes among middle school

band students ($n = 99$) and discovered that while many of the gender-instrument stereotypes persisted (e.g., “flute” and “girl”), “the younger the student, the more open to counter-stereotypical gender/instrument associations” (p. 45). The researchers also confirmed numerous previous findings that an instrument’s sound and timbre were among the most important aspects of gender stereotyping and selection. Of note is that in each of the preceding studies, only the male/female binary categories—or similar terms such as “boy” and “girl”—were employed. Students who may have identified as non-binary or gender non-conforming would have been left with no other choice than to answer according to the options listed, possibly further reinforcing stereotypes within a binary system.

Instrument gender and sex stereotypes may impact students’ experiences beyond instrument selection itself. In a study of gender and marching band students in New Orleans, Broslawsky (2017) found that marching band sections often reified the gendered characteristics of their instrument (e.g., the trumpet section or clarinet section), and section members who did not align with those characteristics were sanctioned:

Linking gendered stereotypes to specific instruments makes certain sections inequality regimes, as defined by Joan Acker, meaning that within each section there are different levels of power based on gender so membership is not equal within the section. Within these male-dominated sections, such as the trumpet section, girls and people who do not embody hegemonic masculinity are seen as subordinate within the section, regardless of their playing ability, because hypermasculinity, associated with ‘cockiness’ is the standard. This results in girls

choosing to play in a female-dominated section where they will be viewed as an equal or deciding not to continue playing music at all. (p. 60)

Marshall (2009) studied the experiences of four female college marching band members and found that choosing instruments outside of their assigned stereotype (e.g., feminine instruments) allowed them to perform archetypal roles in an empowering way, transgressing stereotypes and reclaiming the perception of their gender by other band members:

The move of more women to brass and percussion sections can be directly related to their desire to be heard as musicians. Brass and percussion sections are the higher-prestige sections of the band, precisely because they can be heard across a football field and their sound can be heard best (and even felt) in the stands of a football arena. A drumline on a practice field can set off the alarms of cars parked too close; a feat no flute section will ever achieve. (p. 30)

Disney (2018) interviewed 17 percussion students and two directors of a high school band and found that tacit customs, rules, stereotypes, and norms reinforced gender roles and expectations, dividing students into gendered “zones” within the percussion section. Participants reported that musical characteristics such as the melodic focus of keyboard percussion (e.g., marimbas) and the rhythmic focus of the snare and tenor drums, as well as loud volume and aggressive timbre, functioned as organizing mechanisms through which students were separated into masculine or feminine zones. Although female students were performing and rehearsing in a traditionally male-dominant section, their placement into feminine “zones” reinforced the masculine

predisposition of the percussion section while also cementing feminine predispositions (p. 113).

TGE Students and Musical Practices

Jeananne Nichols's (2013) narrative work with Rie/Ryan was one of the earliest pieces of scholarly literature to specifically address the trans experience within the field of music education. Although Rie made friends in the context of the ensembles of which she was a part, her teachers and school administrators were largely "unprepared" (p. 264) to accommodate her needs and address challenges facing a trans student. However, Ryan enjoyed songwriting and singing as an outlet, and a theme that recurred throughout Nichols's study was Rie's desire to be heard by others use music as a medium for self-expression: "'Being heard' after years of being misunderstood was profoundly transforming for Rie. She credits the positive reception of her music as the impetus to begin moving past her disappointment and bitterness to become a more open and caring person" (p. 274). For some TGE students, the ability to utilize musical instruments in a way that transgresses stereotypes or reaffirms one's identity may be a valuable method of being heard. However, being forced to assimilate to gender stereotypes as a condition of playing an instrument may be harmful and oppressive to TGE music students. Further, there may be spaces outside of individual classrooms—such as on field trips—that extend the musical space beyond the classroom. Educators may account for in-school spaces and practices, but neglect performances, rehearsals, and social gathering which happen outside of school hours (Garrett & Palkki, 2021).

Vocal Pedagogy and Part Assignments

Choral ensembles have been a central focus of music education scholars studying trans issues in recent years. Participants who attended the Transgender Singing Voice Conference identified “issues of voice change from hormone therapy, discovering new voices, and vocal part classification” as among the most salient (p. 123). Palkki (2016) was one of the first scholars to address transgender vocalists in school settings, and found that gendered rehearsal language (e.g., “ladies and gentlemen”), voice part assignments (e.g., “women” on soprano and alto parts, “men” on tenor and bass parts), and gendered uniforms/attire were salient aspects of participants’ choral experiences. One participant, Jon, felt so strongly about aligning his vocal part with his gender identity that he may have experienced physical harm:

[Jon] said that he may not sing at all if he could not sing the “guy parts” that fit him—vocally, socially, psychologically, and sociologically. Jon spent many years trying to alter his voice to fit his gender identity, which eventually caused vocal damage that can be difficult to overcome—especially for someone who planned to pursue a future in performance. (p. 270)

Of note is that a non-binary participant felt concerned that there was “no societally accepted blueprint” for how non-binary or gender non-conforming individuals should speak or sound, thus leaving them to the stereotype of the sex to which they were assigned at birth.

Silveira (2019) examined the experiences of a transgender undergraduate music major who reported difficulty adapting to sight-singing in his aural skills classes but was

supported by his studio teacher who adjusted the key signatures to better suit his voice during his hormone replacement therapy. Bergonzi (2015) and Palkki (2017) noted that gendered ensemble names (e.g., women's choirs) may reinforce cisnormative practices and stereotypes and limit students' possible avenue to participation. Aguirre (2018) recommended that music educators use gender-neutral language when addressing students in large groups or for the first time. Repertoire selections and lyrics may also be of import to TGE vocalists.

Shane (2020) employed a narrative inquiry design with three former high school singers and discovered that participants experienced a disconnect with sacred music and texts which "were treated as part of the standard choral canon and to be sung without question" (p. 197). However, participants also identified certain ensemble and solo works as mediums for self-expression and as a cathartic escape from other areas of their lives, and some lyrics allowed the students to navigate and reflect on their identities. Shane (2020) also reported that the student vocalists sometimes experienced intense dysphoria when they were forced to sing in vocal styles or parts which did not align with their gender. Additionally, some participants experienced hoarseness, strain, and other physical discomfort when asked to vocalize in ways not congruent with their gender identity or expression. Shane's (2020) work may indicate layers of harm that TGE students experience when pressured to make and perform music outside of their authentic self.

Attire and Uniforms

Clothing, attire, accessories, and hair are important means of self-expression and communication for transgender and gender expansive people (Valcore, 2019; Valentine, 2007). For students in music ensembles, gendered attire may produce feelings of dysphoria, restriction, or empowerment. While the concept of the uniform is pervasive throughout musical ensembles, the manner, style, and function vary. Military-style marching band uniforms and traditional tuxedos and gowns are two manifestations of such attire. Gould (2010) articulated the marching band uniform's function in limiting her necessary performance of gender, allowing her freedom to move around the world as a member of a larger entity:

Even as our uniforms masked individuality, they enabled me to assert mine. Required to wear heterosexual hegemonic masculinity, I was instantly free of performing heterosexual hegemonic femininity, for the uniform coded me as neither a woman nor as a body that could desire men. Like all girls in the “boys” band, my very presence destabilized heterosexual hegemonic masculinity, but similar to pants roles in opera, my femininity remained undisturbed by the uniform as a function of heterosexual complacency. That I confounded the coding of heterosexual femininity by desiring women literally was not “code-able” and did not register. Cloaked in a uniform that disallowed me, I walked freely in school—for the first time in my life—as part of a community that engaged me based on my contributions to our common activities, with all the usual adolescent squabbles and crises. (p. 11)

A participant in Carter's (2013) study of gay HBCU marching band members, Ken, stated that the uniform provided a sense of comfort and space amidst other difficulties: "For me, the band uniform was a disguise; it helped make me noticed and remain invisible at the same time" (p. 36). Broslawsky (2017) added that while marching band uniforms may reinforce hegemonic masculinity by hiding feminine physical characteristics beneath the fabric and being used in rigid collective movement, members of marginalized identities may be able to transgress dominant conceptions of masculinity through their participation.

Morgan (2020) examined the experiences of 22 former high school marching band members in Georgia and found that while the band uniform occasionally exacerbated participants' self-consciousness individually, there was a general feeling of "strength in numbers" and protection when many band members were gathered in uniform. Marching bands originated from and have maintained connections with the military (Hansen, 2004; Mantie, 2012), and elements of the band uniform retain some characteristics between the organizations. Parco et al. (2015) found that for some transgender members of the military, wearing the uniform was affirming to or had little impact on one's gender identity and confidence. For others, "wearing articles inconsistent with their gender identity caused nearly debilitating distress" (p. 229).

Attire selections for indoor ensembles such as wind bands, choirs, and orchestras are typically more gendered than marching band uniforms, although exceptions do exist. Expectations for men to wear suits or tuxedos and women to wear gowns, dresses, or blouses remain at the K-12 and collegiate level (Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020; Silveira,

2019). Scholars and students alike have advocated for allowing musicians to either select which gendered article they wish to wear (e.g., tuxedo or dress), or remove the requirement of standardized concert attire altogether (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Sauerland, 2018). Cates (2019) surveyed 227 secondary school choir directors and found that 58% of participants did not assign attire by gender identity. Of the 132 who indicated they did not take gender into consideration when assigning performance attire:

Eighteen percent of this group ($n = 30$) said that their choral ensembles wore choir robes, 26% of participants ($n = 43$) said that their choirs wore tuxedos or dresses and their singers could choose the option with which they were most comfortable, 41% percent of participants ($n = 69$) reported that their choirs wore gender-neutral concert attire, and 15% ($n = 26$) reported that their ensembles wore some other attire not assigned by gender. (p. 61)

For students who do not wish to identify within the binary, being forced to choose between two gendered options may be stressful. Additionally, students who may be transitioning may not wish to identify with one article of clothing over the other for a performance or find difficulties in fit or wear.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a review of relevant literature related to changes in modern and postmodern conceptions of gender, changes in terminology, TGE students in education and music education, and wayfinding as a metaphor for storytelling in qualitative research. Although acronyms such as LGBTQIA+ are often used to describe the experiences of subgroups of marginalized individuals quickly and easily, it should be

noted that transgender and gender expansive voices are often further silenced or left unheard. Hines (2010) argued that “there is a history of exclusion of trans people within lesbian and gay cultures” (p. 7), to which Lewis (2016) added, “gender non-conforming people had always been beneath the shadow of history's rainbow arch” (p. 84). It is almost certain that by the time this document is published there will have (hopefully) been numerous studies and articles advocating for more representative and liberative language, terminology, and research foci. Fluidity of expression and experience should be celebrated and embraced, and the way those concepts manifested in the present study continues in the next section.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology and procedures for the present qualitative study. Following a discussion of qualitative research, I will turn to the application of narrative inquiry and case study research. Next, I present steps for participant selection, validity and trustworthiness, data collection, and data analysis. I conclude by describing the procedures for data presentation through individual narratives and case analyses.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how transgender and gender expansive (TGE) former college marching band members navigated their band membership. The individuals who participated in this study were each former members of their college marching band programs and had separated from their institution within the past three years at the time of data collection. The following research question guided the present study: What are transgender and gender expansive students' lived experiences of navigating their collegiate marching band membership?

Qualitative Research

To better understand participants' lived experiences, I selected a qualitative approach. Matsunobu and Bresler (2014) noted that “qualitative research epistemologies presuppose that knowledge is neither inside a person nor outside in the world but exists in the relationship between them because humans are not mere repositories of knowledge but active constructors of meaning” (p. 3). Collaboration with participants about the meanings they construct aligns with the constructivist paradigm proposed by Denzin and

Lincoln (2011, p. 13). A qualitative approach also created additional space for participants to speak about and respond to the research question with greater agency, in contrast to quantitative methodological stances which may “[homogenize] according to gender categories pre-established by the authors” (Nicholas, 2019, p. 171).

Qualitative Research in Music Education

According to Bresler (2020), research in the field of music education has long been situated within a quantitative paradigm and music education scholars have only begun to utilize qualitative inquiry over the past three decades (p. 152). Speaking to the importance of qualitative research in music education—particularly those which involve participants who may belong to marginalized or underrepresented groups—Carter (2014) argued:

Utilizing qualitative methodologies to examine musical experiences of underrepresented populations can inform curricula, public issues, and the educational institution in evocative and nuanced ways. In this way, researchers can invite contestation, contradiction, and philosophical tension into the music education discourse, not to haphazardly invite discord, but instead to promote a critical dialogue for growth and development for *all* members of the educative community. (p. 3, emphasis in original)

Carter’s (2014) position aligns with Bowman’s (1998) assertion that music, music teaching, and music learning are constantly evolving and highly dependent on social context and individual perception.

Postmodernism and Qualitative Inquiry

Having selected qualitative research as a general methodological stance, it is important to underscore the vast landscape of qualitative inquiry and possible approaches. Creswell (2007) identified several “interpretive communities” which “provide a pervasive lens or perspective on all aspects of a qualitative research project” (pp. 23–24), and include postmodernism, feminism, critical theory, critical race theory, queer theory, and disability theories (p. 24). Although different approaches to qualitative research are generally connected through their respect for the individual participant’s voice (Allsup, 2017), the ways in which experiences are remembered, re-told, situated, and understood vary between interpretive communities and perspectives. Additionally, certain interpretive perspectives may align more easily with a given method or set of procedures.

A postmodern approach to qualitative inquiry not only destabilizes traditional power relations between researcher and participant (Scheurich, 1995), but also the ways in which the subject views, remembers, and understands their world (Hekman, 1991), and requires the researcher to acknowledge their own biases, presuppositions, and worldviews (Lincoln et al., 2018). A qualitative study rooted in a postmodern perspective may allow space to “depart from the concept of a unitary transgender identity to recognise that difference cuts across and between a diversity of transgender subjectivities” (Hines, 2007, p. 23).

Wayfinding as a Metaphor for Qualitative Inquiry

In this study, I utilized the concept of wayfinding as a metaphor for mapping and interpreting the data for the participants, the author, and the readers. Originally

conceptualized to describe how people traverse, navigate, remember, and describe their physical environment, Symonds (2017) summarized the term as “an interpretive craft that is the *finding* or having to *determine* one’s way between or to a place” (p. 35, emphasis in original). Wayfinding is often used in architecture and design contexts to organize structures, signs, maps, and other helpful tools and signifiers for travelers and pedestrians seeking to find their way through a space to an endpoint (Passini, 1999; Peponis et al., 1990).

Wayfinding is closely related to navigation, a word used often in research studies with broader application than the ways in which individuals move through physical space. Scholars working with transgender and gender expansive individuals have used the term “navigation” in reference to processes such as coming out (e.g., Sugarman, 2020), institutional policies (e.g., Lieberth, 2020), and relationships (e.g., Ashton, 2013). In their study of how Native American participants ($n = 21$) found success in predominantly White STEM professions, Page-Reeves et al. (2019) broadened the concept of wayfinding beyond the physical, incorporating social and cultural elements of consideration:

Wayfinding [is] a process of transformation that involves using contextual cues in the environmental and experiential field to agentively weave the fabric of one’s life and to create one’s own path in a way that connects with culturally defined values and relationships. Within this context, wayfinding is a complementary/communal practice of integrating emergent life narratives with experience in a manner that aligns with culturally defined values. (p. 184)

The researchers found that wayfinding served as “a mechanism for interviewees to interweave accumulated experience” (p. 189) through their narratives and was well-suited for qualitative research. Alexander et al. (2020) used wayfinding as a metaphor to better understand how writers develop and master their literacy processes and argued that “wayfinding highlights the potential transience of the contexts in which people write and focuses on participants’ fluid ability to not only move among those contexts, but also to create their own niches” (p. 124). The present study’s research question through which I ask how participants navigated their experiences was a useful medium for wayfinding as a metaphor for human experience and storytelling.

The impetus for using wayfinding as a metaphor to structure the qualitative inquiry for this study came about after a careful and sometimes fraught consideration of the word “navigate” in the research question. From that reflection, I pondered not only *what* individuals navigated during their experiences, but *how* they did so. Which people, events, places, and experiences served as signposts and guides as they journeyed through their collegiate band experience? O’Connor’s (2019) summary of wayfinding and its potential applications provided a backdrop for this project:

For us, navigation is not pure intuition, but a process. When we move through space, we perceive the environment and direct our attention to its characteristics, collecting information or, as some would describe it, building internal representations or maps of space that are “placed” in our memory. Out of the stream of information generated by our movement we create origins, sequences, paths, routes, and destinations that make up narratives with starting points,

middles, and arrivals. It's this ability to organize and remember our journeys that gives us the ability to find our way back. More so, we mold the discoveries we make along the way into insights and knowledge that guide and orient us in our next explorations. (p. 6)

O'Connor's (2019) analysis provides several applications to qualitative research and the potential of wayfinding to aid in organizing and understanding data. As such, I selected a narrative inquiry model to present participants' stories in their own words, organizing data through in vivo codes and presenting to the reader how each individual participant identified and detailed aspects of their experiences. I then re-examined each person's story through a collective case study lens to better draw comparisons where appropriate and glean specific insights.

Carter (2008) similarly employed both narrative and case study approaches in his study of college students' compositional identities and noted that utilizing a case study model following a narrative presentation of data allowed him to "present and reinforce themes that were embedded within the previously presented narratives" and provided space "for a succinct presentation of significant themes" (p. 185). Palkki (2016) and Shane (2020) used elements of narrative inquiry and case study approaches to simultaneously honor their participants' voices as non-transgender researchers, while providing readers with emergent themes, similarities, and points of departure between participants' experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

Stauffer's (2014) definition of narrative research provides the most succinct and approachable starting point for a study based in narrative inquiry, writing that "a narrative is a story one tells of one's lived experience" (p. 165). Taken at face value, the preceding statement may seem rather simplistic. However, a careful review of the terms *story* and *lived experience* provide important context for the following analysis. What separates a story from a statement? From a declaration? How might *lived* experience differ from experience alone?

(Re)story(ing)

The word "story" may immediately imply certain specific, colloquial understandings and definitions that imply similar, albeit nuanced processes. People may casually speak of a book they read to a child before bedtime, a piece they heard on a news broadcast, or a memory narrated by a friend at a social gathering. For the purposes of the present study, a story based in narrative inquiry can best be understood as:

A portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomena studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477)

Narratives as stories, or stories as narratives, are used to make meaning of one's experience, may change over time, and are highly dependent on the audience to or with whom the story is being told (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Storying as a means of making

sense of [an] experience requires a participant to remember, recall, and re-articulate a memory or memories. How and in what ways a participant recalls memories—and similarly, the ways in which the researcher builds a relationship with the participant—influence both the storying process and final report (Linde, 2015).

Lived Experience

Having identified the story as the vehicle for remembering, giving meaning to, and communicating one's lived experiences, I now conceptualize and discuss the importance of lived experience as a starting point. Barrett and Stauffer (2012) provided a distinction between experience and lived experience through a Deweyan lens, arguing that:

Experience, which is fundamental, is both continuous and interactive—both temporal and transactional. Dewey described experience as a continuous whole of an individual's actions and interactions unfolding over time, and he distinguished this whole *lived* experience from *an* experience—a single event that might be named and labelled, and marked with boundaries including the temporal boundaries of beginning, middle, and end. (p. 4, emphasis in original)

Within a narrative context, no event, relationship, emotion, or interaction exists without context, perspective, or bias. A participant alongside a researcher will remember and give meaning to those moments and feelings through a highly contextual lens (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Meaning and context are catalysts that transform a single, nameable event as *an* experience into an ongoing, negotiated remembrance and expression of one's *lived* experience. An individual's lived experience is then crafted through storytelling into a

narrative.

Narrative in Music Education

Narrative research in the field of music education has been increasingly utilized to better understand individual participant stories, with the First International Conference on Narrative Inquiry in Music Education (NIME) taking place at Arizona State University⁹ in 2006. As of the writing of this dissertation, the NIME conference is in its eighth iteration with the 2022 gathering scheduled to be held at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. Arguing for narrative inquiry's relevance to the field of music education, Nichols and Brewer (2016/2017) asserted that “not only does the art of storying ring in sympathetic vibration with the art of music, narrative inquiry as a means of music education scholarship echoes back to us our lived experienced as teachers and learners” (p. 7). Likewise, within a postmodern framing the researcher's position as a co-creator of knowledge and collaborator—rather than modernist notion of the researcher as “a kind of god” (Scheurich, 1995, p. 242)—allows for the researcher to engage in self-reflection and reflexivity, critically examining their own beliefs, biases, and pedagogies (Bowman, 1998; Jorgensen, 2009). If music is understood as more than a collection of standalone sonic units and rather as a set of processes and relationships (Odendaal et al., 2014; Small, 1998), it may be helpful for music educators to better understand those processes and relationships through students' lived experiences. Narrative inquiry, with

⁹ The stated goals of the first NIME international conference were to, “consider the current and potential contributions of narrative inquiry in music education, and to advance the philosophical, theoretical and practical bases of narrative inquiry in music education” (Narrative soundings, 2005, p. 102).

its deep focus and attention to the individual rather than collective, may therefore benefit music education and its multitude of musical practices.

Although narrative inquiry's reach began to expand in the mid-2000s, Jeananne Nichols's 2013 study of a transgender student's musical experiences was one of the first to break ground in a narrative movement that had included transgender and gender expansive individuals' voices. Since Nichols's study, other scholars have included the stories of TGE students in their narrative work (e.g., Hansen, 2016; Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020) or TGE individuals in ensembles generally (e.g., Brent, 2020). However, little narrative research with transgender and gender expansive individuals in the area of bands—in particular, collegiate bands—has been undertaken.

I selected narrative inquiry to give participants space to frame their stories and agency in co-constructing the final document with me as researcher. As an outsider speaking with individuals whose gender and/or gender expression may have been (or is being) essentialized or reduced (Hines, 2007), narrative may give power back to the participants in ways other methods fail to do. As scholarship in the area of trans experiences is still developing (Catalano, 2016; May, 2017), narrative inquiry as storytelling may offer the greatest amount of flexibility for the researcher and participants. Put simply, narrative inquiry might allow a participant to serve “as the guide to [their worlds], not as the object of my gaze” (Nichols, 2016, p. 444).

Narrative Structure

Of the three pathways for narrative inquiry in music education that Stauffer (2014) highlights, the present study will utilize Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly's

criteria for narrative research. Stauffer (2014) noted that “the inseparability of experience and relationship is fundamental in Clandinin and Connelly’s perspective on narrative” (p. 170) and that individual stories are irreducible, complex, and “part of a complex, continuous experiential and relational whole” (p. 171). In narrative research, the whole story rather than a singular part or section is the unit of analysis (i.e., the case).

The Deweyan concept of experience as ongoing and contextualized by one’s social relationships and environment provides the foundation for Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) three-dimensional narrative space consisting of temporality, sociality, and place (p. 479). Each dimension contributes to the “narrative coherence” (Caine et al., 2013) of the storytelling process, positioning the narrator in time, in relation to others, and in space. Utilizing such an approach guided by the metaphor of wayfinding allows the researcher, the participant, and the reader as a guest to the participant’s world to better understand how an individual “[relies] on cultural wisdom and [develops] new tools to chart [their] path. A path that is both shaped by the individual and simultaneously connected to community” (Page-Reeves et al., 2019, p. 185).

Temporality

Narratives are made of stories, stories are compiled from memories, and memories occur in and at a given time. The temporal distance from an experience influences the ways in which a person remembers, relives, and (re)tells memories of their experiences. The temporal dimension influences not only *what* a person remembers, but *how* and *to whom* it is being remembered. Linde (2015) argued that “some stories about past events are no longer retold if they become contradictory to a person’s current

understanding of who they are. Other past events come to be seen as relevant and even predictive of the speaker's current situation” (p. 4). Stories may also be critical to how a participant interprets and applies meaning and value to the “possible plotlines for [their] futures” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). Understanding a story as occurring within a time frame also allows the participant and researcher to situate an experience in the cultural, social, political, and economic conditions of its moment, providing a valuable backdrop against which that story is viewed (Wells, 2011).

Sociality

The importance of sociality in a narrative space is reflected in the postmodern view of the subject's constitution within and relationship to the social world. Hekman (1991) asserted that the move away from the modernist, Cartesian subject has resulted in an individual who “is a product of social forces” (p. 45). If that same subject and their stories are the focus of narrative inquiry, the inclusion of sociality as a key aspect of narrative inquiry might be seen as quite logical. Sociality in the context of a narrative study refers to “the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual's context” (Clandinin et al., 2007). The social dimension in narrative research provides space for one to consider both how social forces and relationships shape the subject on a personal level in addition to the ways in which that subject interacts in social settings. Additionally, sociality attends to the social relationship between the researcher and participant and its impact on the inquiry itself (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Place

The third dimension of Clandinin & Connelly's narrative inquiry model consists of places in which experiences take place, or "the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (2000, p. 51). The environment in which an experience occurs is itself imbued with social and cultural influences which interact with the individual's understanding and memory of that event (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Importantly, place also refers to not only the environments in which a participant's experiences took place, but those in which the participant and researcher interact during the remembering and telling of those experiences (Clandinin, 2006).

Case Study Research

According to Simon (2009), case study research is defined as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme, or system in a 'real life' context" (p. 21). While a researcher may utilize a case study approach to investigate several foci (e.g., people or events), Stake (1994) argued that "case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used" (p. 236). In other words, once a "case" is identified, the researcher may choose to use one of several available methods to explore the phenomenon of interest. As such, multiple qualitative traditions may align with a case study approach (e.g., narrative inquiry or phenomenology). For the purposes of this dissertation, each narrative was treated as a discrete case.

Stake (1995) also identified three types of case studies: *intrinsic*, *instrumental*, and *collective*. An intrinsic case study addresses a specific problem inherent to the case

itself (e.g., a student struggling with coursework), instrumental case studies examine a specific issue in order to understand a broader problem, and collective case studies combine multiple instrumental case studies to provide greater breadth and depth of a particular topic's relationship to a larger concern (Stake, 1995, pp. 3–4). Due to my collaboration with five participants and desire to better understand their experiences as collegiate marching band members, a collective case study best represents the current project. Case studies are quite common in the field of qualitative music education research. Barrett (2014) noted that the ubiquity of case study research in related fields (e.g., sociology, anthropology), their ability to draw from multiple qualitative research methods, and the appeal to “broad readership” (p. 3) allow both the researcher and reader to quickly assess a case's applicability to a broader concern or issue.

Critiques of Qualitative Research

Some scholars view qualitative inquiry and its relativist/subjectivist foundations with suspicion, especially the notion that the results derived from a qualitative study may not be generalized to a larger population (Lincoln et al., 2018). Additionally, even scholars within the broad umbrella of qualitative research argue for distinct and conflicting methodological and philosophical beliefs and approaches. Some academics view qualitative research in a postmodern framing as “naïve humanism” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 50) which “undermines the value of traditional qualitative inquiry” (p. 51) by challenging a sense of shared reality from which decisive conclusions may be drawn. Further, researchers in the social sciences disagree over the notion of lived experience and celebration of the participant through story as compatible with

postmodern and poststructural philosophies that view the use of language to communicate meaning with skepticism (Delamont & Atkinson, 2004).

Although the power dynamics between researcher and participant as co-producers of knowledge in narrative research upend the hierarchical tenets of traditional positivist, postpositivist, and even some qualitative inquiry, the researcher as final reporter still wields significant influence. Scheurich (1995) asked, “whose definition of a story gets to be essentialized? Who is permitted to define what a story or storytelling is?” (p. 245). Even a well-intentioned narrative researcher may inadvertently silence stories in part or their entirety. Finally, the fluidity in process and philosophical approach requires a greater level of “methodological commitment” (Caine et al., 2013) to ensure participants’ voices become narratives rather than simply a collection of statements.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

The fluid nature of qualitative inquiry and desire to honor the participants’ voice and perspective situates the researcher alongside rather than above the participant. Because the positivist wall of rational, objective, empirical research separating the two parties is not present in a qualitative study, the researcher’s biases, beliefs, perceptions, and philosophical priorities play a role at every step of the process. The concepts of *positionality* and *reflexivity* are therefore important to understanding how the researcher’s worldviews and assumptions influence the study’s direction and attend to participants’ voices. Positionality requires a researcher to “[bring] their histories, social standing, and cultural background with them to all their involvements, including the research process” (Charmaz et al., 2018, p. 735).

Kezar (2002) conceived positionality as the “multiple overlapping identities” (p. 96) that a researcher acknowledges in their work with participants. As a gay, adopted, Korean American, non-transgender man, I belong to a broad group of sexual and gender identities broadly labeled as LGBTQIA+, but I am still an outsider (Shaw, 2020) in my relationship to transgender and gender expansive individuals. Further, my other social positions—including those as doctoral candidate researcher and band director—and the privilege they afford were accounted for at every step.

Whereas positionality involves a researcher’s disclosure of their multiple identities in relation to a study’s participants, the notion of reflexivity refers to “the process of a *continual internal dialogue* and *critical self-evaluation* of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015, p. 220, emphasis added). As a researcher situates their identities in the context of their relationship to each participant, it is important for them to reflexively account for how those identities interact with the participant, the framing of the study, the data collection and analysis, and writing of the narrative(s). In addition to reflecting upon how one’s position influences the research process, reflexivity:

Demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives. We must question ourselves, too, regarding how those binaries and paradoxes shape not only the identities called forth in the field and later in the discovery processes of writing, but also our interactions with

respondents, in who we become to them in the process of becoming to ourselves.

(Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 247)

Constant reflexivity and the researcher's interrogation of their own biases aligns with the postmodern tradition of questioning reality, truths, assumptions, and anything taken as fact or commonly accepted. Engaged in appropriately reflexive practices, the narrative inquirer may find themselves "researching 'in anguish'" (Nichols, 2016, p. 441) with feelings of discomfort, guilt, and anxiety. For someone with an outsider status, this sense of unease and distress, while painful, may indicate the breakdown of static, preconceived biases and prejudices.

Research Design

I begin this section with a discussion of validity and trustworthiness related to qualitative research. Next, I detail participant selection and the criteria for inclusion in the study. During the following section, I describe the data collection process through interviewing, journaling, and artifact collection. Finally, I discuss the coding process and presentation of narrative data.

Validity and Trustworthiness

The concept of validity in qualitative research has been contested in recent years (Lincoln et al., 2018). Matsonobu and Bresler (2014) argue that validity in qualitative research "has less to do with the replicability of research than the plausibility of interpretation" (p. 9). In order to attain a plausible interpretation, many researchers have turned to the notion of *triangulation*, or the inclusion of multiple data sources to corroborate and add depth to a participant's responses and more authentically align a

final report's text to a participant's intentions, memories, and experiences (Creswell, 2007).

A study's *trustworthiness* arises from its rigor, credibility, and validity (Lietz et al., 2006). Barrett and Stauffer (2012) note that "trustworthiness emphasizes the need for 'responsibility' (both to and for) in our conduct and our relationships with others in every phase of the research process, from planning, through implementation, to publication, and beyond" (p. 10). Elements that may be important to establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study are statements of researcher reflexivity (Berger, 2015), member-checking (Creswell, 2007), and the use of thick description (Jorgensen, 2009; Nichols, 2016).

Participant Selection

Narrative inquiry allows participants and researchers to understand experiences within multiple contexts and across time (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In case study research, Creswell (2007) recommended no more than four or five individual cases to mitigate "[diluting] the overall analysis" (p. 76). I selected participants purposefully, which Creswell (2007) explained is the process of "intentionally sampling a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (p. 118).

Data gleaned from qualitative research generally (Matsunobu & Bresler, 2014), narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and case studies (Stake, 1995) are not intended for application to a broader population, but rather to provide rich perspective and new knowledge related to ideas and concepts. Therefore, I did not attempt to recruit

participants through large-scale, randomized sampling techniques. Rather, I utilized snowball sampling—also referred to as chain referral—to create “a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know one another” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 151).

Snowball Sampling

According to Browne (2005), snowball sampling is often useful in finding participants who are marginalized or otherwise underrepresented, especially in the context of a study during which sensitive and personal information may arise. The snowball sampling procedure allowed me to populate a candidate pool from which participants were selected purposively. Purposive sampling occurs when researchers wish to “seek out groups, settings, and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 553). Yin (2011) posited that snowball sampling is used when a “purposive reason” (p. 89) is presented, clearly outlining the criteria and accompanying justification. Thus, I used snowball sampling as the recruitment technique, and purposive selection to set candidate parameters and select the final group of participants.

In preparation for this dissertation, I began a discussion with a student with whom I had worked during my graduate assistantship. Sam (pseudonym) came out as genderqueer during my final year of graduate school and has remained in contact with many transgender and gender expansive individuals who are or were part of marching band or drum corps organizations. After communicating over social media messaging and e-mail about my reasoning for the study and an expression of my own positionality and

privilege, we spoke about potential avenues for participant selection. Sam offered to connect me with several online social media groups whose members were transgender and gender expansive band members of varying ages and musical backgrounds. Sam was crucial as I reflected on my own biases, beliefs, and rationales behind the study, questioning me about my use of terminology in ways that may appear demeaning to a transgender or gender expansive person and challenging me to think through the potential impact this study may have on participants' lives. Additionally, I forwarded my recruitment statement and accompanying form to previous students and colleagues. Two participants who ultimately joined the study came from referrals, and the remaining three from social media advertisements.

Having no previous relationship with members of the participant pool and approaching this project as an outsider may necessitate a deeper level of trust-building and rapport. May (2017) noted that when research participants “are not certain the researcher fully understands them, whether because the choice of terms seems wrong or the purpose behind the research is unclear, they may be less interested in participating” (p. 534).

Recruitment

Using my Boston University email account, I drafted a message template explaining the purpose of the study, my background, role as a band director and graduate student, and rationale for engaging with a community as an outsider (see Appendix A). After receiving Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix B), I posted the email message and web links to several social media groups and forwarded the email to

numerous colleagues. I also sent a message to an email list of band directors on a College Band Directors National Association listserv. Prospective participants were asked to fill out a Qualtrics (see Appendix C) form to be considered for the study, and I received no identifying information prior to an individual's submission. The recruitment period ran for four calendar weeks (i.e., 28 calendar days), and I reviewed submissions on a rolling basis.

Selection Criteria

My goal during the selection process was to recruit a pool from which five participants would be selected, with the understanding that one or more individuals may cease participation during the data collection phase. Participants were not actively enrolled as undergraduate or graduate marching band members. To allow for the greatest diversity during the selection process while acknowledging the notion that it may be more difficult to recall certain memories over time, I sought participants who had separated from their institution within the last one to four years and who played a woodwind, brass, or percussion instrument in their collegiate marching band. Although my initial recruitment criteria excluded non-wind or percussion players, I later expanded my search to include color guard or other non-instrumental participants after reflecting on the richness those participants may bring to the study.

The only criterion related to gender was that the participant identified as transgender and/or gender expansive at the time of response to the recruitment materials. At the conclusion of the recruitment period, a total of 23 individuals responded to and fully completed the recruitment form. Of the 23 respondents, 16 were currently enrolled

as undergraduate students, and one had been separated from his institution for more than four years. I contacted the remaining six prospective participants, of whom five confirmed their continued interest in participating. All five participants persisted throughout the course of the interview and write-up process.

Data Collection

In narrative and case study research, interviews are an important method of data collection as the researcher and participant collaborate in the data collection and analysis processes (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Brinkmann (2018) noted that while the commonly accepted range of interview formats range from fully structured to unstructured, “there is also no such thing as a *completely* unstructured interview, since the interviewer will have an idea about what should take place in the conversation” (p. 1001, emphasis added). I selected the semi-structured interview format for the present study, which Roulston (2014) described as a method “in which researchers use a topical guide to generate talk. Semi-structured interviews provide freedom for interviewers to pursue further detail concerning topics that arise in discussions with individual participants” (p. 2). Although I referred to questions from an IRB-approved list during each interview (see Appendix D), the focus of the interactions was a dialogue between participant and researcher under the umbrella of the broader research question. I remained available to challenges and questions from the participant and allowed individuals to retain control over the direction of each session (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

I held a total of three interviews with each participant, each approximately two weeks apart. Although I had anticipated an average interview time of between 45 minutes

and one hour, interviews ranged from an hour and a half to just over two hours; no interview lasted for less than one hour. The first session began with an explanation of the study, benefits, and risks of participation, reviewing consent documents, and conversation to build rapport before introducing questions from the approved list. Building rapport in qualitative studies is important due to the relationships inherent to the participant and researcher (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Nichols, 2016). Each interview contributed to the goal of “re-storying” (Creswell, 2007, p. 56) experiences into final narrative presentations and case analyses.

Interview Procedures

Although I conducted semi-structured interviews, I borrowed components of conversational philosophy from what Roulston (2014) described as *unstructured interviews*, during which “talk is more likely to be symmetrical, in that both [interviewer] and [interviewee] are free to generate topics of discussion and ask one another questions” (p. 2). During interviews, it is important to “create relational and conversational conditions that invite participants’ stories” (Roulston, 2014, p. 16). I designed the question lists with the understanding that all, any, or none of them may be used with a particular participant during a particular session, and that “the goal of narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). In case study research, in-depth interviews allow for the participant to provide rich descriptions of events and experiences, “[allowing] the reader to come close to lived situations, feel their pulse and tensions, and weigh how they might extend to other settings and situations” (p. 3).

Due to local, state, and federal restrictions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the fluid nature of travel and in-person meeting options, I utilized the Zoom online video conferencing platform for each interview session. Online video interviews reduce geographic restraints, generally reduce travel costs, may allow for greater flexibility in scheduling, and may grant the participant greater comfort in speaking from a space of their choosing while allowing the researcher access to important visual cues such as facial expression (Archibald et al., 2019; Irani, 2019). Despite numerous important benefits, issues such as incomplete visual and body language cues, technical issues, and interruptions in internet connection are potential challenges for video interviewers. Although I would have preferred to meet with participants in-person, video conferencing software provided a functional method of communication during an uncertain public health emergency. I did feel as though I established a positive, warm relationship with each participant throughout the process.

Additional Data Collection

In addition to interview sessions, I invited participants to submit additional documents and media as they felt comfortable. Multiple forms of data may increase a study's validity, which "ensures comprehensiveness of the topic and domain and includes different data types and data sets" (Morse, 2018, p. 1385). Interpreting validity through a postmodern lens allowed for the interpretation and application of these data types and data sets to change over time, weaving meaning and new understandings throughout each story (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018). Journaling and artifacts served as avenues for building depth in participant narratives throughout the data collection process.

Journaling

Creswell (2007) described journaling as a potentially rich source of information in the narrative inquiry process, from which “stories and epiphanies will emerge” (p. 158). I encouraged and invited participants to keep a journal throughout the study—either handwritten, voice memo, or in word processing software—reflecting on the interview and data collection processes. Each participant engaged with the journaling process separately. A few participants submitted pre-written documents with reflections on specific prompts, while others contributed comments directly to the interview transcripts and coding documents I sent them between interview sessions. Additionally, I maintained individual journals for each participant, reflecting on my own positionality, thoughts, feelings, and emotions regarding the data collection process, as well as any memories I recalled as a result of our discussions. Journaling during the narrative interviewing process may facilitate new ways of thinking, challenge preconceived notions, and serve as a “transformative” experience for both researcher and participant (McBride & Minette, 2020).

Artifacts

Documents, files, recordings, videos, pictures, or other items beyond the interview protocols may provide additional depth to the data collection process and are regularly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Saldaña, 2013). Artifacts may be useful as participants remember, explain, or connect experiences and stories from the past. As Linde (2015) noted, artifacts “are not themselves memories, but resources for remembering” (p. 7). Each participant provided numerous artifacts throughout the

process, such as pictures, links to videos, journal entries from previous experiences, and links to websites they found important and relevant to our conversations. During one interview, a participant and I watched several marching band performance videos together and discussed why they enjoyed aspects of each.

Data Storage and Security

I stored interview video and audio files, artifacts, and journal records securely in my Boston University Google Drive with two-factor authentication enabled. I initiated video interviews from my private residence, over an encrypted Wi-Fi home network. I did not access files outside of my private residence. In order to maintain the important relationship between participant and researcher in narrative research (Stauffer, 2014), I encouraged participants to communicate with me outside of the interviews according to their comfort level and made my personal phone number available to each participant.

Data Analysis

I engaged in analysis at each step of the data collection process in consultation with participants. In the following section, I address the transcription process and participants' involvement. Next, I discuss coding of the data for both narrative and case study presentation, including interview transcripts and artifacts. Finally, I highlight the process of creating and structuring each narrative as well as the within-case and cross-case analyses.

Interview Transcription and Member Checks

I transcribed interviews verbatim within 96 hours of each session. Following several read-throughs to make grammatical corrections and clean formatting (e.g.,

ensuring the speakers' initials were in the correct locations), I emailed Google Document links to each participant. I then invited participants to review transcripts for accuracy, and were able to rescind, change, add, or redact contents at any time during the process. The process of sending interview transcripts to participants for review and correction is known as "member-checking" (Creswell, 2007) and contributes to a qualitative study's validity and trustworthiness. I randomly generated and assigned alphanumeric codes to each participant in addition to giving each participant a pseudonym.

After several rounds of in vivo, process, and descriptive coding, I sent a second document with emergent themes, questions, comments, and direct quotations to each participant. Each participant contributed comments to the coding documents, adding suggestions, raising questions and concerns, and identifying areas of discussions for the following interview sessions. The second and third interviews often began with a discussion of themes or points of clarification from the coding documents and allowed both participant and researcher to begin each discussion with a common point of departure. In the next section, I detail the ways in which narrative analysis was used to present each participants' story as a self-contained unit in their own words, and the use of within-case and cross-case analysis to relatedly, but separately glean emergent themes and points of comparison among and between each case.

Narrative Analysis

In narrative inquiry, an individual's stories and experiences are the units of analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Polkinghorne (1995) distinguished between two types of data analysis related to narrative research: *analysis of*

narratives and *narrative analysis*. Put simply, Polkinghorne (1995) wrote, “analysis of narrative moves from stories to common elements, and narrative analysis moves from elements to stories” (p. 12). It is the latter concept, narrative analysis, which was used for the present study. Within narrative analysis, Riessman (2008) identifies four methods: thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual. Acknowledging that each approach carries several advantages and weaknesses, I selected narrative thematic analysis. While other forms of qualitative research similarly place value on the participant’s voice and experiences, narrative thematic analysis distinctly allows the researcher to “keep a story ‘intact’” while gleaning information “from the *case* rather than from component themes (categories) *across* cases” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53, emphasis added). Perspective is therefore gained from stories organized using themes, not from theory developed from the themes themselves (Chase, 2018).

As Catalano (2016) and May (2017) argued, theorizing transgender and gender expansive individuals’ experiences may not only be academically limiting, but potentially inappropriate and unethical. Krauss (2005) wrote that “the investigator is expected not to have an a priori, well-delineated conceptualization of the phenomenon; rather, this conceptualization is to emerge from the interaction between participants and investigator” (p. 764). Each narrative stands on its own and was carefully built with participants in order to most fully honor their voices. Following the in-depth narrative presentations, I turned to a case study format as another medium for organizing and presenting participant data to the reader.

Within-Case and Cross-Case Analysis

Data from multiple or collective case studies are often presented in varied ways, honoring the rich data from each case while comparing data between and across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles et al., 2014). According to Creswell (2007), a within-case analysis consists of “a detailed description of each case and themes within the case” (p. 75). However, while detailed descriptions may contain narrative elements, “case study reporting generally is not storytelling” (Stake, 1995, p. 127). Thus, I present complete narratives first to allow participants’ voices to maintain centrality prior to case presentations. Eisenhardt (1989) argued that while there is “no standard format” (p. 540) for a within-case analysis, the process of coding, theming and organizing data within the bounds of the case itself may help the researcher to better understand the phenomenon of interest. Exploring emergent and recurring themes within the context of each individual case may allow the researcher to explore commonalities or points of diversion among the collection of cases taken in totality: “Analysis of individual cases enables the researcher to understand those aspects of experience that occur not as individual ‘units of meaning’ but as part of the pattern formed by the confluence of meanings within individual” (Ayres et al., 2003). Following a careful presentation of the individual case, a researcher may then choose to present a cross-case analysis.

Patton (2002) asserted that after each case is written and organized, “cross-case analysis can begin in search of patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences” (p. 57). According to Stake (2006), a cross-case analysis allows for an “understanding of the aggregate” (p. 39) from which researchers may make specific

assertions about themes and patterns. Stake (2006) also cautioned that while many researchers prefer to present similarities between participants' experiences along a particular theme, it is important to present differences or omissions. While the aim of qualitative research is not—and cannot be—to assert wide generalizations to an entire population, Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that an analysis across several cases bounded by a phenomenon of interest and set of like characteristics may “enhance” (p. 173) generalizability.

Coding

In qualitative research, a code is “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Assigning codes to research data may be useful in organizing text, audio recordings, and artifacts as both the researcher and participant attempt to make meaning and construct the final document. Coding within the context of narrative inquiry requires researchers to carefully and intentionally balance organization with essentializing an individual's experience or stifling a participant's stories (Stauffer, 2014). However, approached carefully and reflexively, “category-centered models of research (such as inductive thematic coding, grounded theory, ethnography, and other qualitative strategies) can be combined with close analysis of individual cases” (Riessman, 2008, p. 12). Coding is common in case study research (Ayres et al., 2003; Stake, 1995), allowing researchers to organize data within cases and provide assertions and explore comparisons across cases.

Before beginning the coding process, I re-read each transcript multiple times.

During the first cycle of coding for the narrative presentations, I utilized initial and in vivo coding processes. The use of participants' own words through in vivo coding was especially important, because it helped to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). In vivo codes allowed me to organize and explore participants' experiences as I examined data and assembled each narrative. Collaborating with participants between interviews was crucial during this process, and discussions often centered around language choices (e.g., "support system" versus "support network"). Between interviews, I organized large chunks of interview data by in vivo headings and subheadings, sharing my narrative organization with each participant to ensure they agreed with the analysis.

During the first cycle of case analysis, I returned to the transcripts and utilized process and descriptive coding. Process coding allows the researcher to identify both discrete activities as well as more conceptual actions (Saldaña, 2013, p. 94), while descriptive coding "summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 88). Process coding was particularly important in acknowledging the fluid nature of participants' experiences and how meanings derived from those experiences may change over time. Process and descriptive coding yielded discrete sets of phrases, words, and concepts that assisted in the clustering and sorting of data into themes within the context of the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I also maintained analytic memos (Creswell, 2007) to organize my thoughts, reflections, and descriptions of codes throughout the process. Keeping memos allowed

provided me a space to make sense of themes, patterns, contradictions, and tensions within the participants' interview data. These memos resulted in *interim texts*, or "texts situated in the spaces between field texts and final, published research texts...most of them designed to be shared and negotiated with participants" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). Journal files and artifacts were coded separately utilizing the same four processes and then added to each participant's master coding document.

Narrative and Case Study Presentation

Data are first presented in the form of individual participant stories, organized by important moments, experiences, and people selected by both participant and researcher. Referring to the structural elements of temporality, sociality, and place in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) model, Saldaña (2013) acknowledged that "the write-up requires rich descriptive detail and a three-dimensional rendering of the participant's life, with emphasis on how participant transformation progresses through time" (p. 134).

Thick description is an important aspect of a narrative document, allowing the text to delve beneath superficial, surface-level discussion and provide context and meaning in a way that is meaningful to the participant and representative of their expressions (Jorgensen, 2009). Participants' stories are presented as discrete units, focusing entirely on that individual's experiences and our conversations. Following the presentation of participants' stories through narrative inquiry, I offer within-case and cross-case analyses of participants' experiences. The breadth of data presentation allowed me to explore numerous "unarticulated meanings" (Krauss, 2005, p. 766) which were implicitly stated but negotiated between researcher and participant (e.g., a participant's

description of wearing a band uniform within their narrative, and an examination of the uniform's possible meanings and value within the case analyses).

In some instances, I opted to omit certain filler words (e.g., “like” or “um”) when I determined they did not impact the meaning of the participants' stories or comments.

Poland (1995) argued that while verbatim presentation of quotations is preferable:

Tidying of quotations may be appropriate when writing up qualitative research for publication, but this occurs after the analysis has taken place and should be done by the researcher when it is clear that what is removed does not appreciably affect the interpretation of the text. (p. 307)

In certain situations, I chose to leave filler words or moments of hesitation (e.g., words that denote unease, uncertainty, or reflection). For narrative inquirers, it may be useful to include filler words when their inclusion provides additional context to the presented quotes (Lingard, 2019). However, Lingard (2019) also noted that omitting certain filler words may be a component of honoring participants' words, and that “ethical issues include the desire not to do a disservice to participants by representing the um's and ah's of their natural speech” (p. 361).

Summary

With an eye toward honoring the individual voices of each participant with whom I worked, narrative inquiry allowed me to better hear “voices seldom heard” (Smith & Hendricks, 2020). Utilizing Riessman's (2008) model of narrative thematic analysis, Saldaña's (2013) coding methods and sequence, Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) three-dimensional narrative space, and Stake's (1995, 2006) case study model for case analysis,

I attempted to present stories that honor each participant while opening their valuable perspectives to those in and beyond the field of music education who need to hear them.

Chapter Four: Participant Narratives

In Chapter Four, I present each participant's narrative to provide the fullest possible context to their lived experiences. After I read and re-read interview transcripts, I used a combination of eclectic and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013) to organize information while using participants' own words to shape their stories. Narratives are generally presented chronologically, beginning with family, home, and school life from childhood and continuing through the end of their collegiate experiences. Each heading consists of a phrase or concept important to that section, describing an event, or memory that was particularly important to the participant's journey.

“If You Lose the Individual, You Don't Have Anything”: Jack's Story

“Jack” was the first person with whom I spoke for this project. As I sat at an old green folding card table on the second floor of my family home, I nervously opened the videoconferencing program on my laptop with two minutes until our meeting, hands shaking with the same intensity I felt moments before walking out on stage to conduct at a band concert. As the seconds ticked down, I took another sip of water and started tapping my toes against the carpeted floor, eager but nervous to begin our conversation. At the bottom of the hour, the screen changed before me, and Jack's smiling face appeared. He was seated in what appeared to be a comfortable armchair at home, nestled in the corner of a room adorned with numerous framed photographs affixed to maroon walls. A beige reading lamp next to his chair accentuated his dark brown hair and warm grin, and I immediately felt at ease. As a non-TGE person, I feared the potential for intruding into a world with which I had no experience or crossing a boundary through my

own lack of understanding. I began our conversation by asking Jack if he had any questions after reading over the IRB documentation, outlined the proposed sequence of interviews and transcripts, and invited him to message me with any supplemental information as he saw fit. After politely declining the need for any further explanation of the study's details, we dove into an open discussion.

Jack was 23 years old, having graduated in the class of 2020 from a large, public university in a midwestern U.S. state hereafter referred to as BSU ("Big State University"). Jack majored in graphic design and completed a five-year program of study which involved co-op internships at several design firms. Jack described his race as White and noted that he used he/him pronouns as a trans man. About his experience as a trans person, Jack later noted that:

I feel like it's such a minimal part of who I am...even being queer is more important part of my identity. It's like being trans is very much on the back burner. When I'm trans it's like "hmm." It doesn't mean much to me, it's just a circumstance that I have, I guess.

Following his commencement, Jack continued to live near campus in an apartment with several friends whom he met through his marching band experience. At the time of our interviews, Jack was working at a small print shop with several branches throughout the surrounding area.

“It Was Pretty Fine, It Was Interesting”: Growing Up and Family Relationships

Jack grew up with his mother, father, and younger brother in a suburb of approximately 40,000¹⁰ residents. Despite moments of tension, Jack had a “good relationship” with his parents. Jack described his extended family as generally conservative, and recalled specific moments from his childhood that bore greater meaning later in his life:

I think they are always just a couple steps behind the zeitgeist. So I remember when the “it gets better commercial” comes out and Woody [from *Toy Story*] was in it, they’re like, “how could they do that to Woody?” It’s like, “ok parents.” Or when Caitlyn Jenner came out I remember my aunt said something weird but I just like, “I don’t know.” And no one in my family was LGBT at all, they’re all very conservative.

Jack referred to himself as a “soft atheist,” noting that he was open to new ideas but did not ascribe to a particular faith tradition despite growing up “generically Christian.” Jack’s father had previously served in the military, and after playing softball and wrestling during his own college years was “really invested” in both Jack and his brother playing sports: “My relationship with my dad is interesting because I think he always wanted a son to share interests with him, and I ended up fitting a lot more of those than my brother did.”

Jack’s mother was a schoolteacher whom he described as “easier to talk to,” but

¹⁰ Population data for each participant’s locale are taken from the most recently available data from the 2019 United States Census Bureau. To protect participants’ confidentiality, city and town names are omitted from this report.

occasionally “a little [judgmental].” Whereas Jack’s sports and outdoor interests aligned closely with his father’s desire for a traditional father/son relationship, Jack’s mother’s eagerness for a conventional mother/daughter relationship manifested in ways that occasionally made Jack feel highly uncomfortable and often felt “very forced and performative.” Jack recalled a decade of dance lessons and performances that impacted a significant portion of his adolescence:

I liked doing most of it, but I hated the costumes, me and my mom would fight every time we had like a recital or pictures. There were, I had to put on makeup, I would fight with my mom and it was a terrible experience and, they're just, I didn't want to cooperate and I didn't like it, and she didn't know how to make me cooperate so [I] had to and, wasn't a blast.

Jack acknowledged the trappings of the dance environment (e.g., costuming, hair, makeup) as natural elements of the studio and did not “put that entirely” on his mother. Still, a significant part of Jack’s relationship with his mother arose from his mother “expecting me to grow out of being masculine when I got older and was kinda waiting it out but obviously it didn’t happen.” Later in our conversations, Jack stated that his childhood interests were split evenly between “some girly things and some masculine things,” and did not align with media narratives featuring transgender children.

“I’m Very Good at Structure”: Navigating Early School Experiences

Jack’s elementary school experience was “pretty good” and rather unremarkable until he reached the third grade, during which he began a “gifted program” which he for valued its structure and consistency. However, both were unsettled during his fifth-grade

year:

And we had a new reading teacher and she made us glue all of our assignments in this notebook, and she was really bad at communicating with us, who got pulled to the other school once a week. And I was just so stressed and I didn't know what was happening. And I was so good at school and so like organized and had like never had an issue before, and suddenly it was having an issue and I didn't know how to handle it.

Jack began to develop anxiety which came with waves of nausea, recalling, "when I get anxious, I feel like I'm gonna throw up, and so every day for weeks I was like, 'I'm gonna throw up. I have to go home.'"

"This is the One I Was Best at, This is Only For Me": Musical Beginnings

Although he enjoyed his general music classroom prior to sixth grade, it was during that final year of elementary school in which Jack more fully engaged in his musical pursuits. He recalled the instrument selection process and the ultimate reason why he selected clarinet:

Jack: I knew I wanted to do band, and I knew that I wanted to play the trumpet, but I cannot buzz at all, brass was just not for me and I wasn't good at flute either. The only ones I could like make sounds on were clarinet and saxophone, but my childhood friend already played the saxophone. I was like "well I don't want [my friend] to be better than me at the saxophone" so I guess I'm going to play the clarinet.

Justin: So you knew that night, this is where we're going with?

Jack: Yeah, I was just like, yeah, I don't, I feel like I've never liked not being good at things. So I feel I was like, "okay this is the one I was best at, this is only for me"

Jack switched to the bass clarinet in seventh grade, and despite generally enjoying the instrument felt uncomfortable playing the noticeably lower part. Throughout his musical career, Jack "really [didn't] like being the center of attention" and playing by himself:

I have always had a lot of playing anxiety, I don't like playing by myself for people. And then you're in a clarinet sectional and the octave lowers so everyone can hear everything, and there was two of us those two years, so. It was pretty easy to tell if I was wrong and I was not into that.

Jack's middle school band director's relaxed attitude and his enjoyment at playing in a larger group lessened the stress of playing alone, commenting that "the community aspect was more important" than the act of performing music in isolation.

"Everyone's Weird and Awkward": Middle School and Starting to Explore

Jack's anxiety lessened in middle school, a time during which he "was weird and awkward...but I don't think I was sad yet." It was during these middle years when Jack began to explore gender norms and expression:

I just remember in middle school, because I think that's when I started having some more say over what I wore even though I still had hand-me-downs but I get to pick them out now. I remember in the sixth grade being like, "cool people are tomboys, I'm gonna be super masculine, it's gonna be super cool, that's what cool

people do.”

Recalling his fraught relationship with gendered costuming and makeup during dance lessons, Jack’s experience of affirmation through experimenting with masculine clothing contrasted with the gendered clothing expectations he experienced at school dances.

While he began to feel more comfortable challenging and subverting gender expectations, Jack had not yet considered how his experiences and the concept of a trans identity might align. Jack recalled watching the television show *Degrassi*, seeing a trans male character for the first time but not connecting with his story:

The first time I heard of trans people was watching *Degrassi* in middle school where there was a trans guy character. [Character Name] was very much boiled down into someone “born in the [wrong] body” and was a “guy between the ears” which isn’t necessarily wrong but is a very simplified version. It really didn’t [connect] with me because I [didn’t] even know what that means.

As Jack entered high school, the jarring “back and forth” of conforming to, and then quickly rejecting gender norms manifested as an even more present and tense aspect of his life.

“I Was More Anxiety Than I Was Person”: A High School Sea Change and Big Waves

When I asked Jack which of the three sets of experiences—elementary, middle, and high school—were the worst, he quickly responded that “high school kind of sucked.” During the early months of his high school career, Jack entered what would become a “questionably abusive” relationship. Whenever this relationship came up in our

conversations, I could sense Jack's unease. As our conversations continued, Jack noted, "I don't think I've ever hated the gender roles that were imposed on me as much as I hated them being in a 'straight relationship.'" After the relationship ended, Jack thought, "I don't want to date anyone. I think I'm not attracted [to] anyone." It was during the first year of high school that Jack also realized he was "some kind of queer."

As Jack moved on from his previous relationship, the tension between the forced gender norms which had been imposed on him and his desire to feel attractive clashed internally:

I had an interesting shift [during] junior, senior year of high school where I was like, "I want to be attractive." These are the, and so I did this 180 where I started trying to wear girly things kind of unsuccessfully. Because I'm like, "I want people to think I'm attractive."

Jack noted that his post-relationship expressions of femininity made him feel as though he "was sort of in a costume" and "was performing a part that just didn't quite sit right."

Jack began looking toward the future and the freedom of post-high school life:

I remember in high school, not really jokingly, now it's another one of those clues, but I was like "before college I'm gonna cut off all my hair and do these things, it'll be so cool. I'm gonna be a new person." But and I think it took a second to settle into that. And then, I did do those things and started figuring stuff out.

“It’s Band, More Than Music”: Finding [Musical] Community

Much of Jack’s sense of self came from his participation in high school band. Jack’s high school director ran a “pretty tight ship” with the marching band, making students run laps as a regular part of her instruction. Although more relaxed in the concert band setting, Jack’s high school director “played favorites” with students who performed at a higher technical level in the ensemble. Jack also served as a band librarian for two years, igniting his passion for “behind-the-scenes” leadership roles.

Jack’s high school music experiences served as a catalyst for his love of the social and community aspects of band membership: “I remember when I started high school and my section leader is very openly gay and I was like ‘Oh! I don’t know if I’ve ever met someone who was gay before.’” The emphasis on social relationships turned negative turn during Jack’s junior and senior years:

Most of my friends were guys in my [clarinet] section and we were close. And I, but they would hang out a lot all together. And I was like, if it was a big group event I would be invited, but if it was just the guys are hanging out, I was not invited. And I did not know how, know why that was such a big pain point. It was like, “I’m not invited because I’m not one of the guys.” And looking back, I think that affected my friendship with guys now because they feel weird about it.

Jack’s pain at being excluded from valuable social relationships with other members of his section had been exacerbated by the realization that it was due to his gender identity.

“It Was Having Like, A Brand New Like Social Space”: Starting Over at BSU

As Jack began exploring college options, he considered the two universities that were within an hour drive from his home in opposite directions. Jack chose BSU, located an hour south from where he grew up for both its close relative proximity to his family and its unique graphic design co-op program. According to the official BSU website, student enrollment at the predominantly White institution (PWI) for the 2020–21 academic year totaled just under 47,000. Approximately 75% of BSU’s students come from the midwestern U.S. state, and more than 80% of first year students choose to live in university-sponsored housing. Jack lived on campus for his first year, residing in a triple with two other roommates. Jack moved into an off-campus house with several of his friends from the marching band the following year and remained there for the remainder of his time at BSU. Jack had carried over his more feminine presentation from high school, and remembered that “freshman year and I’d say all semester, nothing happened. Wasn’t very self-aware, kind of still in high school mode.”

Despite having only lived in on-campus housing for a single year, the move to an off-campus location was not due to safety concerns. Jack felt as though campus in general was “pretty fine,” although he later added that the substantial amount of time he spent in the more inclusive fine arts environment may have influenced his positive feelings. During his first few years of college, Jack spent most of his social time with marching band friends. As he progressed through his degree program, he established stronger social relationships with other students in his major. The art school building also provided valuable privacy, featuring numerous single stall restrooms. The band hall, in

contrast, had no single stall bathrooms.

The marching band at BSU had fluctuated between 250 and 300 members in recent years, combining styles from other area bands:

We're an interesting mix of things, especially because based on the bands that are around us. Because [Other State School] is obviously a big staple marching band and having that really strong like "[Conference Name] look" and then like, [Large University] is in the state and I love [Large University]. I love their marching band, that's the kind of marching my high school band did, so they're fun. That's more of a show/dance, they do squads of four. And then we live somewhere weird, because, one of our directors has a lot of, did a lot of drum corps and there's a little bit of that feeding into it. And there's a little bit of the show band vibe. So we're just a very weird amalgamation of the styles of band that kind of surround us. I'm like, I don't care if you're a quarter step off your dot...I get to do a cool move with my clarinet, sounds awesome. I love all that stuff.

At BSU, Jack was heavily involved in most facets of the band program. He served on the band council as an officer, vice president of membership for the band sorority, and played in the basketball pep band and concert band. During Jack's first and second years at BSU, the band's director (hereafter referred to as "Prof") was finishing a lengthy career highlighted by his efforts to save the marching band program. Due to pressure placed on Prof to turn around the band in a limited amount of time, the enthusiastic director turned to his student leaders:

Student leadership held too much power in Prof's band, not in the sense that they

did anything bad, but it was like an overwhelming experience. And too much was put onto the students, but it was like Prof...he's very eccentric.

What Jack described as Prof's "us against the world" mentality and empowerment of student leaders made him highly popular among the students and provided a foundation for Jack to become involved in behind-the-scenes work.

Built into the side of a parking garage, the band facility provided a small but cozy home for the several hundred members. Administrative offices, storage lockers, rehearsal halls, and a music library occupied most of the space, offering little room for personal privacy. Jack particularly enjoyed performing in his band performance attire, saying that "there's nothing less gendered than the marching band uniform." At the time of our interviews, Jack would pull up pictures of himself in uniform without experiencing the same dysphoric feelings he felt viewing photographs taken before starting college. The only problem, Jack argued, was the lack of privacy and available changing space within the band facility itself:

The only issue there is the changing room situation. It was like, "oh, I gotta go" because...you don't change in the band room. So I was like, "oh, I gotta go put it on" but I always enjoyed wearing it.

The bathroom situation in the band hall remained an issue long after Jack came out. Jack felt otherwise accepted and affirmed by his peers, but often had to walk several minutes away from the facility to use a single stall restroom in another building.

BSU is an institution at which the national band service sorority, Tau Beta

Sigma¹¹, has a presence. National guidelines broadly govern the membership process for prospective students, however individual chapters are given flexibility in how band members are recruited and selected. At BSU, candidates did not participate in a traditional rush¹² process, but are selected from the band's entire membership each year. After foregoing sorority-related events during the fall semester, Jack was surprised to receive his invitation:

One of my friends from high school is in [the sorority], and she was like, "Jack, I went home and your mom asked me to bring you this," and it's like, "okay, that sounds like something that could happen." I went downstairs in my pajamas, and I was covered in sawdust because I was doing a project, and then they were just all there. They're like, "here's the rose, here's your card." I'm like, "okay." So, that was a time, then we had, we have a, we have an initial info meeting where it's like, "here are the basics. If you're interested, come to the second meeting at the beginning of the spring semester, and that's where you decide if you want to do it or not." I was like "okay, whatever. I'll go."

¹¹ Chartered in 1946 at Oklahoma A&M University (now known as Oklahoma State University), Tau Beta Sigma (TBS) is one of two co-educational national band service Greek organizations, the other being the Kappa Kappa Psi band service fraternity. The mission of Tau Beta Sigma is to "provide exceptional service to collegiate bands and promote equality and diversity, including empowering women in the band profession" and to "cultivate leadership, educational achievement, music appreciation and community development." (Tau Beta Sigma, 2019).

¹² Although the term "rushing" is not used by either Tau Beta Sigma or Kappa Kappa Psi, it is often linked to any pre-candidacy recruitment process for a Greek lettered organization, during which prospective members indicate their interest in joining the fraternity or sorority: "The term rush refers to the historical practice where students would hurry to join fraternities at the beginning of the school year, in a large part to find housing. Rush usually is followed by pledging, or committing." (Rankin et al., 2013)

“Oh, Things Are Happening”: A Summer of Firsts

During the spring semester of his first year, Jack experienced greater discomfort with the feminine presentation he had assumed in an attempt to feel more attractive. Recalling his earlier promise to change his hair as a way of “starting fresh,” Jack supplemented his new haircut with a new wardrobe:

But then spring semester I was kind of, I think that's the first time I bought, I learned how to shop online and I bought my first men's clothes, and I was like, “oohh,” and I cut my hair off. I think I was like, “something's happening.”

With newfound confidence and sense of self, Jack continued exploring his masculinity and chose to purchase a binder¹³ that summer. After shipping the binder to his family home, Jack decided to wear the compression garment around his parents; at the time of our interviews, he was unsure whether they had noticed. During a fundraising event at a Major League Baseball game that summer, Jack experienced the joy of passing as male for the first time:

We did a fundraiser where you had to go work at [Major League Baseball Team] game in the concession [stands] and [the fundraisers] sucked. But I remember it was wearing, you have to wear these like giant t-shirts and they gave you these giant aprons, and I had my hair cut short at that point. And I remember one of the ladies was like, “you two young men go carry these things.” And I was like,

¹³ Some individuals who wish to appear less feminine or more masculine may choose to wear a piece of compression clothing called a “binder.” The role of the binder is to “compress the breasts” so the wearer “appears to have the flatter shape” (Lessley, 2017, p. 28). For some wearers, the binder may also present health complications such as intense pressure on the chest area and difficulty breathing.

“me?” [laughter] I was like, “oh, I liked that.” That stirred something for me. During the summer between his first and second years at BSU, Jack took advantage of his time off to explore his gender identity. Specifically, Jack recalled that he “watched a lot of people on YouTube and kind of saw especially trans men specifically, because I feel like it’s a little bit harder to find stuff about them.” The greater exposure to trans lives was eye-opening and played an important role in normalizing LGBTQIA+ experiences.

“Actively Making a Choice”: The Walk

Although the combination of YouTube videos, masculine clothing, and his first passing experience at the baseball fundraiser had shifted Jack’s worldview, he had not yet put words to his feelings. Jack’s many commitments provided a daily flurry of activity, making it difficult to “be really intentional about self-reflecting.” Driving in his car in silence or walking around his neighborhood without headphones provided valuable opportunities for Jack to “kind of [dig] deep into what I was feeling and just kind of [wallow] in it.” Without the burden of classes or constant work commitments, Jack left his house and went on a walk that changed his life.

As he strolled around his neighborhood without distraction, Jack returned time and again to a single idea:

I think before that, I was like, “I think I might be this thing.” But the more I talk about it, the more I feel like the name thing is a thing for me. I felt that was very much a turning point for when I would come out to people, but I wasn't ready to tell them the name yet because it had already been picked out. I felt that was kind of a similar thing, when I started thinking about that, it felt more real. Because

that's kind of, it had been floating around and hadn't really thought about it and I started thinking about it walking. I'm like, "but what would my name be?" and I think that kind of, yeah, I feel like this is a through line, that kind of connects flipping the switch from passively thinking or doing it to actively doing it because then you're actively making a change.

“It Was Still Fairly Internal”: A Busy Second Year at BSU

By the time Jack started his second year at BSU, he was “wearing like 80% men's clothes and binding like 60% of the time” on campus and around friends. Despite changes to his outward appearance, Jack's feelings about his gender identity were “mostly still fairly internal because you do have more, there's more flexibility for being like a gender non-conforming woman as opposed to a man.” Despite his excitement over new possibilities and experiences, Jack described a tension between wanting to more actively explore his gender and his desire to not “want to make waves”:

I like when things are easy and simple, and you don't have to explain them. And so I think that was a big hurdle for me to get through that. Coming out wasn't going to be able to be like that because that's what coming out is.

Jack now lived in an off-campus house with two friends from the marching band, “Crystal” and “Sarah,” who also played clarinet. While he initially was not close friends with the pair, who at the time were attempting to fill an open spot in the house, Crystal and Sarah became his two best friends and confidants during his time at BSU. Jack described his initial appearance changes as “subtle” at the beginning of his second year, although friends—including Crystal and Sarah—later took note of his more visible

wardrobe choices. As Jack started to present a more masculine version of himself to the world, he “didn’t feel uncomfortable” or that he was “trying to perform a stereotype.” Rather, Jack was “able to exist comfortably and in a way that felt natural.”

During his second marching band season, Jack observed the nuances of how others in band expressed their sexualities, noting that:

Everyone was a little bi[sexual], that in, the generic way just felt like so many people in the BSU band identified as bi, and so I think that was a good space of, when you know people are trying, gay or bi people, you have better odds they will be okay with trans people.

Later that season, Jack recalled a bonding experience from a band-wide trip to another large university for a football game:

I don't know if tornado warning or watch is the less bad one. Whichever one, the less bad one was, it was one of those. And they're like, “you should probably go to your rooms,” but instead we ran across the highway to get McDonald's, like you do. And we have the whole clarinet section in one person's hotel room. I feel like that's when I started, second year was when I was closer friends with my whole section. And we have a really terrible selfie that's like, “if we all die in the hotel room, at least we have this cool selfie of the whole clarinet section.”

The experience of being included in an exciting moment was in stark contrast to the “guys’ nights” exclusion Jack experienced in high school.

“I Just Needed to Tell Someone First”: Dinner and Discussion

During the spring semester of his second year, Jack decided to ask a close friend and member of his sorority class, “Will,” to dinner at a nearby fast food restaurant before a TBS gathering. Jack had been mentally and emotionally preparing to come out to his sorority-mates, but wanted to speak with someone individually first:

Jack: I mean I, talked about my candidate class a lot, I think they're great, but Will was another person in my candidate class. We also briefly dated, but that's okay, we're still friends, but he was the first person I came out to actually, it was the day before that thing I told you about, our like ceremony. We were at a [fast food restaurant] and I'm like, we were not dating yet and I was just like, “test run, I’m just going to tell you in this [restaurant].” And it was a time.

Justin: How did, how did he respond?

Jack: He was just kind of like, “okay, that's, that's fine.” It was another one of those, it was like, “I'm trans, I don't know what to do about it. I don't want you to do anything about it, I just need to tell someone.” I think he was just kinda like, “that's fine, do you want to talk through anything?” And it's like, “not right now, thanks though.”

Will’s gentle acceptance of Jack’s coming out statement provided Jack with a sense of assurance. The following evening, the group of 15 class members gathered in a room on campus to talk. Jack described the moment he came out to his candidate class as largely positive:

It's kind of like a very [pause] blank safe space to just be like, “this is something I

either am dealing with or have dealt with.” So you do that during your process as a candidate and then classes get together every year, usually while you’re undergrad, the same night the candidates do it to do it together again so that [pause] I want to say the first one, I think, so my sophomore year would’ve been the first one after my candidate one was when I, it was in a dark empty room where they were not going to say anything to me. I was like, “I’m trans, I have no other information, thank you.”

The ceremony brought Jack closer to Crystal, one of the roommates. Although some members of Jack’s cohort took time to process his statement, everyone eventually became more familiar and agile with his pronouns. Jack was initially concerned about a more “traditionally conservative” member of his class who later expressed his support: “I remember someone else telling me, he was like, ‘oh Jack, he’s my favorite dude, ahh’ [in] that very bro-y way, so I don’t think anyone in TBS took it badly.”

In addition to Jack’s membership candidacy, his passion for service and behind-the-scenes work was recognized through his election to the marching band council as media coordinator. Jack was invited on the group’s annual retreat with several older band members. On the overnight trip, Jack experienced the same belonging he had felt among his fellow sorority candidates:

And “Josh,” who was the president then, who I talked about before, had been in the Kappa Kappa Psi chapter and was very involved. And he took us and we got to see, they have this big rock we used to carve all our names into, and he’d take us to all the stuff that they did, so that was a kind of cool crossover experience for

me. I think that was fun, and then it's funny because we have this super fun retreat and we were all hanging out and then we all had, we were working so hard through the fall that we were like, “are we friends?” And then we had a really fun time hanging out.

Jack’s excitement over his new position was equaled by hesitation over his newfound visibility and how he would be perceived. Jack later labeled this moment as “ripping off the band-aid” and decided to come out to more of peers before leaving for the summer:

I remember talking to my friend, he's very pragmatic, he’s not very emotional. He's like, “well, you probably want to come out before band camp [starts]. I think that's gonna make this the smoothest transition.”

Jack then began what he called his “coming out tour” which culminated in an important dinner conversation that summer.

“Okay, I Have to Tell You Something”: Coming Out and Family

Throughout his second year at BSU, Jack grew more distant from his family as he navigated his gender identity after coming out to himself and his friends. When he returned home during intermittent school breaks, Jack’s anxiety and feelings of being constricted returned. The freedom Jack experience at school contrasted with pressure to perform an inauthentic version of himself at home, prompting him to express to his parents that “this isn't anything about you, but just being here makes me feel icky and weird.”

Over Mother’s Day weekend of his second year, Jack’s family traveled to his grandmother’s farm. Jack expressed a sense of unease when his mother approached him

to discuss his masculine appearance:

I was walking around taking pictures and my mom looked at me, she's like, "why do you dress like a man?" And I was like, "I'm not ready to talk to you about this." I was just like, "bye. I'm going to go walk away."

Experiencing mounting internal pressure between his burgeoning confidence and the discomfort he experienced at home, Jack made the decision that summer to invite his parents to dinner for a conversation.

Over a meal, Jack engaged his parents in small talk without directly approaching the topic about which he had called them. Jack felt "super weird" throughout most of dinner, but finally blurt out "okay, I have to tell you something":

I think they knew, but I was weird with my parents and so I was just like, "oh, this is the thing." And it's really funny because my mom's like a schoolteacher, and my dad was in the military, and they took it exactly opposite how you think. My dad said, "oh, yes, I had a sensitivity training on this once." And my mom's like "what?" And so, it was interesting. I feel like I don't know if my dad ever got it all the way, but has always been very like, "oh no, you do you." And whereas my mom took some like coaxing, it very much felt like, I wouldn't say that she didn't believe me, but...I think she thought I was wrong for a while.

After coming out to his parents, Jack felt an immediate sense of relief. However, Jack recalled, "I was ready to tell people I was trans, but I was not ready to tell people my name." The next day, Jack resolved to complete the process and during a phone conversation confidently announced, "okay, my name is Jack, we're doing this right

now.”

Later that summer, it was clear that Jack’s mother had not shown the acceptance and warmth for which he had hoped. Growing increasingly frustrated, Jack called his mother in tears and plead, “I don't know why you're not taking [this] seriously, and it took a lot of effort for me to come and tell you this, and I wouldn't have told you if I wasn't sure.” From that moment, Jack felt his mother’s attitude change, now acutely aware of his struggles and emotions.

The week after Jack came out to his parents over dinner, he invited his brother to a nearby fast food restaurant. Commenting that his brother’s autism influenced how he processed life events, Jack’s younger sibling was immediately accepting and took Jack’s new pronouns as a tangible way to delineate right from wrong: “He likes to be right, and he wants things to be correct, and he, at first he would correct my parents on pronouns and stuff.” Despite several tense and combative moments from his childhood, Jack’s relationships with his parents and brother improved after he left for school. That July, Jack came out in a Facebook post discussing his gender identity and name, excitedly preparing for his third year at BSU.

“And So Then Fall, I Was Out”: Junior Year and New Beginnings

Now out to his friends and immediate family, Jack returned to BSU having been elected to a position on the executive board of the band council and confirmed as a sister of TBS. At band rehearsals, Jack held a visible position as the media coordinator. Jack’s presence in multiple facets of the band’s organizational and leadership structure provided a protective net of social support, stating that “a lot of people got corrected on my behalf

so I didn't have to.”

Despite the support and sense of community Jack received from his band friends, he also faced several challenges in navigating band-related physical and administrative spaces. Jack remembered the fall of his third year as “the only year that I would say I was ‘visibly trans’” which left him in “a kind of limbo in gendered spaces, especially in the band center.” Jack’s anxiety over bathroom usage in the band facility prompted him to leave the building and use single stall restrooms in other spaces whenever possible.

At social events with friends, Jack was amused by his peers’ well-intentioned attempts to include him despite their disjointed approach:

When you transition, people really try to tiptoe around your sexuality. It's really funny, people, I'd be at a party, and I'd be like “lol I'm so single” and they're like you'll find a great...man, woman?” Because they don't know, and they want to make you straight and they aren't sure. It's really funny, I just think it's hilarious.

Jack’s amusement turned to frustration as he watched other members of the band transition and come out at different paces and in different ways than he had. He recounts “ripping off the band-aid” as facilitating the kind of tangible, sudden change that his cisgender peers could understand. Other students who chose to explore their gender identity differently were met with gossip and suspicion, and Jack reflected that “instead of just letting them slowly change how they were presenting, the people around them (me included) were like, ‘okay but are you X or Y?’” Jack also identified section culture as a possible factor in how accepting and affirming band members were toward their transitioning peers. As a member of the clarinet section, Jack stated that his section mates

were “pretty chill” during his coming out and transition process. The trombone section, typified by what Jack observed as “nerdy gamer people” were equally as warm toward a trans member of that group.

“It Was a Little Messy”: Trans[ition] and the Band Staff

BSU’s longtime and beloved band director, Prof, made the difficult decision to retire at the end of Jack’s second year at school. The university’s search for Prof’s replacement and appointment of a new director coincided with Jack’s coming out and return to school at the start of his third year. When Jack arrived on campus that fall, he e-mailed the new director to inform him of his transition and name:

I don't know how much this actually affects this, but [he] an open gay man so I felt like it was going to go better. So he had met me once before I came out and then at, before band camp. I just emailed him. I'm like, “hey, I'm trans. Here's the name.” He's like, “okay, cool. Congrats.” I’m like “cool, thanks.” So I never had issues with him.

The other staff members to whom Jack came out were generally supportive, although discernibly unfamiliar with working with trans students and addressing issues they might face. Overall, Jack asserted that “no one was actively malicious, just maybe a little unknowledgeable” and recalled that staff would often ask him about his name and pronouns only to forget shortly after.

The biggest hurdle Jack faced with band administration was ensuring his name was changed on band documentation. Although he acknowledged that certain band documents required a name that had not yet been changed through the court system, he

requested that whenever possible, his name be changed on forms and rosters. Jack recalled needing to “poke and prod” band staff to make the name change several times and was painfully forced to sign into an old email account using his deadname to send a band-wide message due to the slow-moving changes.

Jack’s third year in band also presented him with numerous other considerations that he had not needed to previously navigate. Worried about rooming assignment on band trips, Jack was relieved when the new director relaxed the rooming policy. Jack’s high school band experiences of being left out of “guys’ nights” had impacted his relationships with male peers:

[The band director] was like “I know you all just sign up as couples and then switch rooms. I'd rather just know where you are.” So he was like “I don't care, make smart choices on the trips, whatever.” And that was great. It was like, “sounds good.” Especially because at that point, that would have been a very interesting shift because I have, like most, I have a lot of very close female friends...I’m not friends with as many men.

On bus trips, Jack was without the security of single stall restrooms or the band library in which to change. Although he recalled not being “really [affected]” by changing on the bus in single-gender rotations, he noted that other trans students in the band may have been impacted and made to feel uncomfortable.

Jack’s passion for marching band as a “fun” space in which he and his peers could work toward a common goal was solidified during preparations for that fall’s homecoming festivities:

One of my favorite things about marching band is when you're like "I don't know about this song," practice it in sectionals, you're like "hm, I don't know about this one." And then you go to full band, and you're like, "oh, oh, it's good"...it was that fun marching band mix of not that hard to play and fun music. And I really appreciate that because I didn't want to try that hard, but it was a good time.

The playing anxiety Jack had experienced in being singled out as a young bass clarinet player and general discomfort of being isolated for his gender identity seemed to melt away during marching band performances, giving him a musical and social voice that was his own.

“She Was Very in My Corner”: The Importance of Supportive Staff

When Jack returned to campus for his third year, he resolved to change his name through as many university offices as possible despite not having gone through the court system. With his deadname still stamped on multiple required band documents, he sought out help from his co-op advisor, Megan. Jack's systematic name change was important both for his ability to traverse campus in a safer, affirming way, but also because while he had not been out at his first internship, he intended to start his second internship with his new documents in place. BSU's policies prohibited name changes, but Megan found a way:

She got my email changed. We couldn't, she got it changed, because there's some portal or whatever that our co-op program, it's like you go and apply through, she got it all changed there. Because I was switching jobs, at my old job I was not out. And I was, [I] needed to be at my next job. And she was like, "we're gonna get

this all set up” like, “don't worry about it.” She was great. She jumped on it. Megan proved to be a welcome partner during Jack’s transition, and “she was always very, interested in how things went because she was kind of along the way with my transition.” Megan showed visible concern when Jack had to choose between co-op experiences that were close enough to campus to allow him to continue participating in the marching band but were not friendly toward trans employees, and those further away but prohibitive to remaining in band. While Megan worked on processing Jack’s name change through the university system, it seemed as though the only place in which his documentation remained an issue was the marching band. At the beginning of the fall of that third year, Jack emailed his remaining classroom professors without resistance, noting that “I would email them at the beginning, they would write in ‘Jack’, and it was never an issue.”

“I Had Socially Transitioned”: Balancing Past and Present

Jack began hormone replacement therapy during his sixth semester at BSU, aligning the “shifts” in his “social roles” with physiological changes that allowed him to pass more often in public. Jack reflected that “everyone's experience is different, but I prefer when people can't tell, and I can just go about my business,” further negating the need to explain or justify his identity in public spaces.

Jack’s rise in leadership positions continued that semester, as he was appointed to chair the membership committee of the sorority. As a committee head, he was tasked with advising and assisting the new class of candidates in collaboration with his supervising vice president. Jack’s new position allowed him to advocate for changes he

felt would make the chapter more welcoming to trans and gender-expansive candidates in the future:

The VPM¹⁴ and I found us a new site for our retreat because the one we had [been] going to for years explicitly told us we had to have separate cabins for men and women. This was a big thing for us and the class below us because historically at retreat, each class gets their own room to bunk in and it's a very important time to bond together without any expectations (learning info, organizing projects, etc.).

The retreat was an important component of each member's experience, and it was during these getaways when the entire chapter would participate in a larger version of the candle-lit ceremony during which Jack had come out. Jack recalled that many of his peers used the ceremony as an opportunity to discuss their sexual identities, and during one retreat "six people came out and one of them is like 'man, the chapter just keeps getting gay. What, what is it about marching band?'"

"It's Not Like, 'Roughing It' Camping": Continued Family Tension

It had been several years since Jack attended his father's family's annual camping trip, with his design summer co-op program and persistent hesitation about his family's reactions keeping him separate from the outing. Jack decided to return home for a few days to attend part of the trip, using his uncle John's reaction as a "barometer" before venturing out with 40 relatives for several days of boating and fishing. Uncle John was

¹⁴ Per Tau Beta Sigma's National Constitution, "while each chapter can elect to have more than one vice president, the first vice president should be the Vice President of Membership" or "VPM" (Tau Beta Sigma, 2018, p. 10).

“super on board,” boosting Jack’s confidence about the family gathering. Jack’s determination to returning for the camping trip after several absent years prompted him to speak with his parents: “I’m like, ‘if you don’t commit to doing the right name and pronouns, no one else is going to. They’re going to follow your lead.’ So I was like ‘gotta do it.’ It went very well.” Jack recalled the trip as having gone “mostly well,” grappling primarily with his mother’s propensity to misgender him in conversation.

Another notable source of discomfort was Jack’s internship. Jack’s desire to obtain positive recommendations from his co-op supervisors and hesitation toward making his gender the focus of workplace conversation forced him to carefully adjust stories from his past to align with his present identity. Although he did not recall feeling unsafe, Jack’s placement in a conservative town influenced his decision to and alter certain details of his past such as the genders of his previous roommates.

“People Just Didn’t Think About It”: Year Four and Passing

When Jack returned to BSU, he was excited to start the year as fully passing and stated that “people who joined did not know that I was trans beforehand.” However, the split between returning members who knew Jack was trans and new band members who would not have known unless they were told put the senior in a difficult position. Jack noted that “things were easier” in not needing to explain his transition to fellow band members but recalled that “I still never know if people know, even people I’m good friends with, and it’s a really uncomfortable experience.” Jack sometimes felt betrayed by peers who shared his transition with new members, unable to convey that information on his own. When speaking with band friends, Jack was unsure whether he needed to adjust

pre-transition stories with post-transition language.

Where Jack did feel a great deal of agency was finalizing his name change, which he completed on the first day of classes that fall. After a lengthy process involving a doctor's note, court petitions, and publishing a notice of his name change in the newspaper, Jack had finally received an official state-issued ID with his correct name. To his dismay, Jack's ID retained the incorrect gender marker, leaving him with a constant fear of being outed in public places such as restaurants or bars. As of the writing of this narrative, Jack was still hoping that his state's supreme court would rule in favor of allowing trans individuals to change their gender marker on state-issued ID cards.

“I Just Avoid the Directors at This Point”: Tensions with Staff Rise

Jack's initial positive interactions with the BSU band's new director upon coming out during his third year gave way to frustration during his fourth season. The freedom and ownership student leaders felt during the Prof era had “swung far back the other way,” causing a growing rift between staff and students. Jack posited that “absolutely no one feels comfortable like going to talk to [the directors] because it's very hit or miss how well it will go.” The uncertainty caused band students to stay away from the band facility and prompted distrust between members and “the office.”

Drifting further from professional staff, Jack leaned more heavily into his service roles. Jack remembered an instance during his junior year when the BSU marching band purchased staging from a drum corps, and reflected on the importance of service as a unifying activity:

And it's hilarious now, and even kind of then it was like “this is terrible, we're

pushing this enormous stage up the street because we can't get it into the stadium unless we go off campus into traffic, around, and back in.” And I feel that's just a big part of my BSU band experiences.

Although Jack chose to take his fourth year off from leadership in the sorority, he remained active as a member and retained his position on the band council. Jack was “so deeply involved in so many facets of band that people had a lot of faith in me, which continued to build my confidence in myself.”

“Okay, That’s Fine”: Coming Out to Adam

One of Jack’s favorite aspects of marching band was the pregame performance. It was during pregame rehearsals that Jack noticed a first year mellophone player named Adam, whose regular field position was nearby. As the season progressed, Jack and Adam developed a close friendship and later went on several dates. Jack decided to come out to Adam at dinner one evening:

I was like, “oh, I have to tell you that I'm trans.” He was like, “okay, that's fine.” Then he was like, “oh yeah, someone,” it was so weird. I don't know how he did this, but it was someone had told him off hand at some point which I was frustrated about, but he went “uh” and like “nah.” And just didn't retain that in his brain or believe them. And then I told him, he’s like “oh really, okay.”

Jack’s relief at Adam’s immediate and unconditional acceptance was muted slightly by frustration at his peers who had already outed him to his new partner. However, Jack described the evening as a success overall, remarking that Adam’s response was “I think my personal best reaction because I feel like it's such a minimal part of who I am.”

Although Adam was not out yet himself, the two continued to see each other and provide valuable support throughout the year. It was Jack's relationship that finally moved his mother to realize the potential consequences of misgendering her son in front of his partner's family:

I had to give my parents an ultimatum. Like, "if you want to meet my boyfriend's family, you have to get up to par. Because if you misgender me in places, that's potentially outing me, and that's potentially dangerous and can affect my life." I think that kind of helped her be like "oh, this is something that can actually happen."

"Everyone Thinks You Know Everything, and Sometimes You Do": The Victory

Lap

Jack's five-year program meant that he returned to BSU in the fall as an older and more experienced member than a majority of his peers. After navigating difficult university procedures, rocky conversations with family members, and divergent internship experiences, Jack entered his final season as a member of the BSU marching band with a clear sense of purpose and confidence in his leadership abilities. He wrote, "I've felt for a couple years now that I have *transitioned* as opposed to being someone who is *transitioning*."

Jack had also been elected to serve as his TBS chapter's vice president of membership and oversaw the group's membership process. By this time, most of Jack's friends were either former or present members of the council or in the sorority, drawn together by their communal passion for service:

There was definitely a core group of people who put a lot of extra work in off the field and were in those positions and who are interested in those things, and I think towards the end most of my friends ended up being in that group.

During the spring semester, Jack's recruited 17 sorority candidates. As Jack shepherded the candidates through the membership process, he worked with other leaders to overhaul the group's membership education program (MEP). Jack went line by line through the lengthy document, changing gendered passages to more inclusive language (e.g., "he/she" to "they"). Prior to Jack taking office, "active members used to be called 'Mr./Ms. Full Name' in these settings." As VPM, Jack removed titles and rewrote the policy with active members referred to by only their full names and candidates similarly addressed without gendered language.

At the conclusion of the semester, each of the candidates wrote Jack letters thanking him for the work he had done on their behalf. Each note reaffirmed the feelings of purpose and accomplishment Jack had gained and "instilled a lot of confidence" as a leader. The disappointment felt by hundreds of thousands of college students across the country as their school's closed to in-person attendance due to pandemic-related protocols was not lost on Jack, who mourned the loss of his commencement ceremony:

Losing my graduation and all of the celebration around it really sucked for me because it's hard for me to look back on my high school graduation/photos/etc., because it makes me really dysphoric. I was excited to have new memories that I didn't get to make.

“It’s Still Very Much My Social Circle”: Life After BSU

Following commencement, Jack remained close to school and continued to live with friends he had made during his time in the marching band. Jack found a position at a local graphic design firm and while he found the work enjoyable, he was again forced to adjust his backstory to align with the political and social nuances of his workplace:

It's interesting at work, because I am not out as in a gay relationship at work, so that's doing its own whole thing, me and my boyfriend were finding apartments to live next year. And I was like, “oh, they might call you. Just so you know, to like confirm that I have a job.” He's like, “oh, who are you living with, like where are you looking?” I'm like “oh I'm still by BSU, somebody who hasn't graduated.” He's like “oh, you, do, do you need to save money? Is that why you're living with someone?” I said “no” and I just didn't expand.

Jack was also still highly active in the sorority and was trying to balance his desire to play clarinet again with the understanding that no post-college ensemble experience could emulate the social connectivity of marching band membership:

And it's an interesting thing about, especially college marching band because you graduate and there's not really another avenue to take that you join a community band and there's a bunch of different places you can play, but there isn't, you're never going to have that many people perform who see each other all that much and perform that frequently.

I asked Jack what advice he would give a first-year version of himself, to which he responded, “I think I could have had more opportunities to get involved with some other

organizations on campus or get more involved in my art school, more of those social groups and stuff.”

As we wrapped up our last conversation, I was struck by the breadth of Jack’s experiences at BSU. Jack’s passion for service had permeated his band membership at every level, providing valuable social and musical opportunities that allowed him to come out and feel the affirmation he lacked earlier in life. I asked Jack what he thought about how the strict uniformity of moving and playing in time intersected with his ability to experiment and explore. His response served as a summation of his entire marching band experience:

A lot of it I think in my brain isn't so much a loss of identity as much as it is putting yourself and your identity into something bigger. I think, just community is so integral to my band experience, and I think it is that communal experience, or it's coming together and being like more than the sum of its parts. I think, Prof used to be like, “what would a marching band be with one person. We can each do our drill on the field. And that wouldn't look very cool, right?” But I think it's true...And in a performance space, if you're watching, it's a very, whatever the opposite of an individual is, a big group thing. You can't see one person from another, but when you're marching, you think about people constantly...it's a very group-centric activity where you can't lose the individuals because that's all the pieces. If you lose the individual, you don't have anything.

I was deeply honored that Jack served as a guide to his world during our conversations, providing me insights into experiences I could have never imagined. His resilience

through moments of adversity and joyful celebration of what affirmation of one's identity looks like reinvigorated my own understanding of the power of an individual voice.

Summary

Jack's story focused heavily on the importance of social connectivity and leadership as a source of empowerment in the face of uncertain familial support and constantly changing work environments. Growing up, Jack was never entirely sure how his parents and extended family would react to his ever-growing feelings of unease in the gendered roles he felt forced to play. Jack's mother's desire for a traditional mother/daughter relationship colored their relationships for many years, resulting in tension and disbelief even after he came out. Although Jack's family ultimately showed signs of acceptance after coming out, he felt greater freedom to experiment with gender expression and presentation at school where fewer people questioned his identity and rationale. Role models were important to Jack, observing the possibility of normalized LGBTQIA+ lives and relationships first during high school, and then online and at BSU. From a young age, Jack was inclined to participating in activities in meaningful ways without being singled out, from his discomfort at wearing dresses and makeup at dance recitals to the joy he felt at moving equipment with his bandmates and wearing a de-gendered uniform at band performances. Megan, Jack's co-op advisor at BSU, demonstrated the importance of supportive staff for students navigating uncharted territory in their own lives. Leadership opportunities in the BSU band allowed Jack to see himself in roles he had not envisioned as possible earlier in his life, and the band's many positions provided him valuable options; there was now more than a single way to

contribute and feel celebrated. Jack's story highlights the importance of agency, empowerment, and social relationships in choosing one's developmental path.

“Music is a Vehicle for You to Be a Better Human”: Robyn’s Story

Robyn logged onto our first video call from their kitchen, sunlight reflecting gently against the stainless-steel refrigerator and dark wood cabinets in the background. Robyn appeared on my laptop screen with an enthusiastic wave and smile, briefly adjusting their turquoise-accented glasses with one hand while setting a steaming mug down with the other. Conversation flowed easily from the start of our discussion, turning first to a snowstorm that had recently gone through the area and then to the Facebook group through which Robyn had seen my recruiting documents. Robyn was the first person who had signed up, and I was excited to finally meet them after waiting for what seemed like an eternity from my initial post on social media to finalizing the participant list. After reviewing the IRB documents and asking if they had any questions, Robyn shook their head with another smile and a quick “nope, I’m good.” I offered that I was still growing and learning, likely to make mistakes and incorrect assumptions. Robyn replied, “same here! Me too. I’m learning too.” We momentarily reminisced about childhood cartoons before diving into Robyn’s background.

“It’s Just a Completely Different Climate”: Background and Growing Up

At the time of our interviews, Robyn, 23, was living in a large Midwestern city and enrolled in a PhD program at “Private Midwestern University” (PMU) majoring in sound studies. Robyn was in their second year as a doctoral student, having completed a master’s degree at the same institution. Robyn previously attended “Southwestern¹⁵ State

¹⁵ Although there remains debate over this state’s regional classification, for the purposes of this report I utilize the designation from the United States Department of Labor as Southwestern. (United

University,” (SSU) a large, public university located approximately 45 minutes northwest of a major city for their undergraduate education and finished their music theory degree in three years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent local shutdowns, Robyn was actively involved in a HONK!¹⁶ Band in their city and often performed at bars, restaurants, and public demonstrations with musicians of marginalized genders; Robyn identified as non-binary. Robyn was also actively involved in several teaching roles, working with a local Catholic high school marching band and Open Class drum and bugle corps in New England.

“Music’s Always Been There”: Early Years, Family, and Trombone

Robyn was born and raised until first grade in a small town of approximately 5,000 residents located 30 minutes south from the capital of a state in the southern United States. Robyn recalled their childhood as largely unremarkable, recalling that “my brother and I were doing gymnastics and like running around, like very active kids.” Mid-way through first grade, Robyn’s family moved to the eastern side of the state. Robyn recalled the advantages they experienced after moving to a largely White, upper middle-class neighborhood:

The opportunities that were afforded to me because I lived on the White side of town. We had after school chess club and we had, we [could] have piano lessons

States Department of Labor, n.d.)

¹⁶ HONK! bands are decentralized and not dependent on a central leadership structure, in contrast to traditional school marching bands. According to Garafalo (2011), HONK! bands are brass bands of roughly 10–40 musicians which are “community-oriented, politically active or civically engaged” (p. 223) and which value “inclusion, mobility, community, creativity, fun, feeling, chaos, anarchy and spectacle” (p. 226) as primary aims of participants’ music-making. HONK! bands from across the country gather at festivals each year

after school with the choir director at the high school if you wanted to learn piano. All these different after school programs for students of like working class families, because most of our parents didn't finish work until five o'clock, and we were getting out of school at like, two.

The abundance of musical opportunities prompted Robyn and their brother to join the elementary school's choir and begin piano lessons.

Robyn noted that there was “really no alternative to being hardcore into religion” growing up. Both of Robyn's parents were heavily involved in the church community, and they expressed that their father's attendance at Christian counseling sessions may have exacerbated his feelings of inadequacy at home:

[The counseling] is very much like “you're the man of the family, be in charge and be the role model for your children.” And he internalizes so much of that pressure as he's got to be this perfect person.

Despite family tensions, Robyn found joy in their musical community at school and began to build supportive social networks outside of the church.

When Robyn reached the fifth grade, they were excited by the opportunity to learn an instrument:

I mean, I was like, “I definitely want to play trombone. It looks like the easiest instrument because there are no buttons.” And I was like, “it just looks cool, it's sliding,” and so there I was nine years old, trying to play trombone in band, and not being able to reach past third position, it was adorable.

Robyn recalled that their elementary school band's seating process was highly competitive, and the highlight of their year was an invitation to attend and perform at the Midwest Clinic, an annual gathering of orchestra and band teachers in Chicago, IL.

“The Problem with Me Is Like, Others’ Perceptions of Me”: Family, Agency, and Band

Robyn's participation in the school band was an important social lifeline as they struggled with peer relationships. Robyn's mother “would make me wear these really long, these like dresses and knee-high socks until I was like old enough to be like, ‘I hate this. I'm not wearing this anymore.’” Robyn recalled feeling discomfort not simply at being read as feminine but being read as feminine out of lack of choice. Feeling isolated, Robyn's primary source of social engagement came through band:

Other kids would be like “you're that weird dress kid, I don't want to be your friend.” And I did a lot of reading and imaginative, I would just go on the playground and do my own thing. I didn't really have a ton of friends until, band is the thing that combined, you got to meet all of the kids in your grade beyond just the class that you were in, so I got to meet a bunch of different people and have a larger friend group through band.

For Robyn, making music with students outside their immediate classroom provided a valuable sense of connection and camaraderie.

As Robyn prepared to leave elementary school and begin sixth grade, their parents filed for divorce. Soon after, Robyn began to assert more control over the clothes their mother tried to make them wear:

In sixth grade, I was like, “you have to give me pants. I want to wear pants,” just losing my mind, like “I’m tired of wearing dresses.” Because I think again, she had this idea of, “oh, you’re such a cute little girl, I want to put your hair in pigtails, and never cut your hair” and I was not about that at all.

When Robyn started sixth grade, they were given the opportunity to learn a new instrument. Robyn remained on trombone, having enjoyed learning the instrument’s technical aspects and feeling validated by the section’s social environment:

I really came into myself more when I was allowed to wear pants [laughter]. And making more friends in the trombone section which is a very boy, tomboy section and just getting to hang out with the dudes, and you know, yeah. That was helpful and gender affirming for me as well.

Throughout middle and high school, Robyn’s mother continued to impress her own conceptions of femininity and womanhood, and was “very controlling of, ‘this is my understanding of what it is to be a woman, and you have to fit within that.’” As of our conversations, Robyn had not spoken with their mother since starting their undergraduate studies. Robyn also added, “I’m not really super close with any members of my family beyond my aunt.” Robyn’s aunt shared a similar skepticism of religion, and they noted that “she’s great, I’m out to her and she’s the kind of aunt that’s like, ‘free mom hugs’ at the [City Name] gay pride parade so she’s all about it, loves it.”

Running and athletics connected Robyn to their brother from childhood, providing a common bond as the pair grew older:

My brother, the way that I was invested with music is the way he's invested in his fitness and running. So, it takes up a lot of his time, he's really hard to get ahold of because of that, especially, he's in college now so...I think we're on good terms, it's just something that's, you know, we see each other at family holidays at my dad's and have pleasant conversation and then just go off.

“Okay, I’m Definitely Like, Not Straight”: High School and Turning Points

High schools in Robyn's home state were not accredited at the time of their graduation, making the college application process more difficult. Students routinely were pressured to perform at a higher level on standardized tests (e.g., the SAT) to account for the lack of accreditation. Additionally, students' course schedules were highly customizable, allowing Robyn to spend more time with their band program. Robyn enjoyed the intimacy of the smaller high school band, which created “a competitive space, but like a healthy, friendly competition with my friends.”

“I Can Speak About This”: Giraffes, Lady Gaga, and High School GSA

Robyn's membership in their school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) served as a catalyst in thinking about their gender identity. GSA members organized a “gay prom” for LGBTQIA+ students and volunteered at local churches and food banks. Robyn reflected on their frustration that there had been a need for a separate prom at all, commenting that “this is crazy because this is 2015, this isn't [the] 90s, 2000s. This is like the year gay marriage got legalized, that's the environment I grew up in.”

Robyn recalled that they were not aware of any openly LGBTQIA+ teachers at their high school. Although some faculty sponsors were invested in the GSA's success,

Robyn noted that “they would get bullied by other faculty” and would frequently rotate club leadership. Robyn recalled that “meeting locations would change, it was just the threat of violence was always in the background in a way that I haven't really since then experienced.”

During their sophomore year, Robyn was elected president of the GSA. As Robyn took a more active role in the organization:

Yeah, I'm like, “really, I support Gay/Straight Alliance, I really want to be a part of that” and not realizing that I feel, “oh my gosh, I feel so much camaraderie with the gay community because I'm in the gay community.”

Robyn's involvement with the GSA prompted them to reflect, “well, I'm not straight, don't really know where I am at on that.”

Robyn also began exploring gender through online spaces, most notably coinciding with a celebrity's coming out in 2015:

Yeah, I remember [Singer Name] coming out as genderfluid. And of course, being from [State Name], [Singer Name] is the pinnacle. She's a cultural icon for all [State Name Residents], so I was like, “oh hell yeah.” That's when I really, I think started to try to find the words to describe what I was feeling.

Reading social media posts and comments reacting to the vocalist's coming out served as a “reality check” for Robyn, who noted that “seeing how the world deals with [celebrities coming out]” could be harmful and triggering for some individuals, but was also helpful in realizing, “okay, the outside world isn't as friendly and inclusive as like, when I open up my phone and speak to my friends.”

“Put on Hold”: High School Band and Leadership

Robyn marched for one season at their high school, assuming the role of drum major for their sophomore year. In addition to running marching band rehearsals, Robyn recalled the numerous roles the drum majors filled within the program: “It's very hands off, [the directors] will go in the office and plan stuff...for a 90-minute class block we're teaching the brass, and there's three drum majors going around and...so I was just very much in this managerial role.”

Robyn's visibility in the small, connected community created a feeling of being constantly surveilled. Robyn reflected, “you don't get to deviate from that and understand yourself versus the role that you just inhabit one day a week during fall football season.” Robyn described what they termed a “parasocial”¹⁷ relationship with community members as “unhelpful,” and leaving little room for self-reflection:

It was tough, because you're just worried about other people, and that can kind of delay your ability to self-reflect and think about yourself and how you fit into that piece and that social piece because there's an appearance and my hometown is so small that I, I'll be walking around the mall and people will be like, “that's the drum major, we saw her on this on screen Friday night when they showed the football game.”

Robyn added, “my personal development and progression toward my identity that I have

¹⁷ The concept of a *parasocial relationship* comes from social psychology and media studies, and most often refers to the one-sided relationship a viewer of a television show or other medium might form with a character (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). In Robyn's public role as their band's drum major, members of the community may have similarly formed a one-sided relationship with them through that role without Robyn being in a position to engage with or navigate that relationship.

now today was put on hold because I was trying to manage so many different parts of the band.”

“It’s One of Those Really Unique Ways of Performing”: Taking Back the Color Guard

Robyn’s director made the decision to reinstate the school’s dormant color guard program as Robyn was preparing to become drum major. Robyn’s director recruited students from outside of the band, many of whom did not read music or play instruments. Robyn recalled, “the guard was the small section, they were getting bullied by the band.” Frustrated by the hostility they witnessed toward the color guard, Robyn leveraged their leadership position:

I was like, “I will join the winter guard¹⁸ so that everyone will have to respect the color guard” because they’re, and I got a couple other section leaders who were like, “sure, I’ll dance around on the floor like, whatever” to show them that it’s guard isn’t bad, guard is actually really fun and difficult, it’s actually, it’s crazy hard actually. So I ended up doing that, winter season my junior and senior year, and I don’t know if that actually changed the attitude of the program, but the winter guard at my high school is now very competitive for its region.

As a performer, Robyn grew to enjoy the connectivity they felt with the audience at winter guard shows, as well as the expressivity and fluidity of bodily movement and

¹⁸ Color guards and winter guards are closely related, but separate entities. Color guards often accompany wind and percussion musicians in marching band settings, but winter guards rehearse and perform primarily indoors with little or no live performed music.

facial expression that the art form permitted.

“Something Ridiculous”: Navigating the College Application Process

Robyn expressed mixed feelings about their high school’s unstructured course offerings. While Robyn was able to select courses based on interest and availability—leaving extended periods of time free for band-related responsibilities—they also acknowledged challenges in applying to college programs. Deciding on SSU for its renowned music school and affordable in-state tuition, Robyn independently studied for and passed several Advanced Placement tests which allowed them to bypass several introductory college courses.

While filling out SSU’s application form for prospective music majors, Robyn accidentally checked the music theory option; Robyn only discovered they had made a mistake at the audition itself:

So, I auditioned on trombone, and I walked into the audition room, they’re like “music theory major, we haven’t had one of those in a decade,” I was like “oh, what?” could not, at that point I could not tell you the difference between a major and a minor chord. I had absolutely no idea, anything about music theory. So I just auditioned and kind of went with it and it ended up working out.

Despite the mistake, Robyn was accepted to and ultimately attended SSU for music theory rather than performance while performing in several ensembles.

“We Just Had a Lot of Wholesome Conversations”: Jacob and Drum Corps

After an intense audition process during the spring of their senior year, Robyn was accepted to a World Class drum corps¹⁹ for the summer before college. Robyn was excited to perform at a high level and returned to their low brass roots. Robyn auditioned on baritone horn and became a corps member at age 17. Robyn recalled thinking, “I’m going to be quiet; I’m going to be unnoticeable. I’m just doing my job. No one’s gonna call me out. It’s fine. All I have to do is not be the worst. That’s all I have to do.”

Surrounded by older musicians from across the country, Robyn recalled that “you get to see people in rehearsal, and you get to see the way that they express themselves through their clothing, through their actions, the way they move and speak.” Working with visibly queer musicians was pivotal for Robyn, but no individual was more influential than “Jacob.” Jacob was 21 years old and on the verge of “aging out” of the corps. Robyn had never had a close friendship with an older trans person and had built many of their perceptions of trans identity from what they observed in “media representations.”

Between the hurried group meals, nights sleeping on high school gym floors, and

¹⁹ Drum corps are non-profit, private organizations which operate separate from educational institutions. Vance (2014) described drum corps organizations as:

Comprising brass and percussion instruments, along with a color guard or auxiliary unit. The largest of these groups have 150 members, mostly ranging in age from 17 to 21. They are usually comprised of approximately 30 percussionists, 45 members of the color guard, and 70 members of the brass section. In addition, two to three drum majors conduct the corps, and a few others operate electronic equipment. (p. 6).

Drum corps activities take place during the summer months, advancing through several rounds of judged competition at public performance and exhibitions. Drum corps membership is often characterized by intense rehearsal environments, high standards of technical performance, and exclusive audition processes.

repetitions of show material, Robyn found time to speak with Jacob:

I think it was definitely more me just kind of not knowing how to, just being like “you’re a role model to me” and not knowing how to articulate that because I was 17. I had never had a trans elder...so I just didn’t know how to be not have this weird parasocial relationship where I’m like, “you’re so cool” ...so I was just trying to play it cool socially. And being like, “oh, that’s cool.” And just sneak in a question here or there, like “how did you know you were trans?” and being like, “oh, I’ve always known.” I was like, “okay, that’s cool.”

Robyn reflected, “just getting [to] have conversations with him was super valuable and really helpful for me to understand, it’s like, ‘well, maybe I’m not cisgender.’”

Robyn also witnessed the normalization of and advocacy for trans and queer individuals. At the beginning of the season, Robyn’s corps director gathered the members to discuss Jacob’s situation and the organization’s participation in Pride events that year.

Robyn reported that Jacob felt affirmed and supported:

Our director just sat us down, was like “this is Jacob. Jacob uses ‘he’ pronouns. If you misgender Jacob, I will send you home. Jacob is going to wear a sports bra on the field, no more questions. Jacob is going to shower with the girls, no more questions about that if you have a problem, leave. Also, this Friday we’re marching in the [City Name] Gay Pride Parade.”

Shortly after the organization’s Pride performance, the result of the landmark Supreme Court case *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) legalizing same-sex marriage was announced.

Robyn added that “it was nice to have [a pride shirt] and see other people wearing pride

shirts on the day that the ruling came out.” Noting that they still “just didn't have the vocabulary” of non-binary identity but firmly aware of their queerness, Robyn recalled their peers’ support of LGBTQIA+ issues and people as deeply impactful and transformative.

“I Was Unprepared for College in A Lot of Ways”: SSU and New Beginnings

Southwestern State University is in a city of approximate 135,000 residents, which Robyn described as “a very small college town unlike anything I've ever seen for a school of its size.” According to the SSU website, total enrollment as of 2019 was just under 40,000 students and the university was federally designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI).²⁰ Robyn remarked that the large size of the school, diverse student body, and supportive culture for LGBTQIA+ students made them feel at home almost immediately.

Like many universities, SSU required first year students to live in on-campus housing. Robyn noted their roommate came from a large, progressive city and was helped them explore unfamiliar aspects of femininity and technology:

[My roommate] would wear huge glam makeup and I'd be like, “what's foundation?” [laughter] And so much of that gets chalked up to me, being from a very rural area and not even knowing to look up makeup tutorials on YouTube and just being exposed to this different world of femininity.

²⁰ In comparison to Primarily White Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions must “[have] an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Online spaces were particularly important to Robyn in exploring their gender identity through “increasing [the] conceptual toolkit” and staying connected with peers.

The music school at SSU was very large, with hundreds of students and ensembles that graduated music majors “very factory style.” There were more than 75 trombonists in Robyn’s studio but only 50 performance slots that satisfied the university’s large ensemble requirement; students who did not successfully placed were forced to find their own solutions. For several semesters, Robyn initially sang in the Women’s Chorus to satisfy their ensemble requirement:

Because I was a theory major, I got away with having Women’s Chorus as my large ensemble because I was like, I need to learn aural skills and like it’s just Women’s Chorus wasn’t really, “aural skill-y,” it was very helpful for my understanding of theory and also vocal pedagogy.

Robyn alternated between the chorus and the school’s brass band during their three years at SSU and acknowledged that while the groups had conflicting cultures and performance practices, each contributed greatly their musical and social experiences.

“I’m Just Performing with My Friends”: Joining the SSU Marching Band

During Robyn’s time at SSU, the roughly 400-person marching band was composed entirely of volunteer, non-scholarship students. Robyn described distinct groups of marching band members who had joined for differing and occasionally conflicting reasons:

And so you have music [education] majors who are passionate about the music side of things and education, they’re usually the section leaders. And then you

have a bunch of motivated students who are outside the music school who just love the sport of it, or, and love playing at football games. So, part of that is the [State Name] culture for sure and the [State Name] marching band culture, for sure. And I think a lot of students were actually, I remember, if I remember correctly, just really dissatisfied with [SSU Marching Band] because they thought it was going to be like, “oh man, everybody's going to be so good, we're going to have such a good clean marching band,” but it was just very fun, relaxed, chill.

The number of SSU marching band members who participated in drum corps created subsets within the organization's social structure, which Robyn described as “Drum Corps University.” Many students who marched with drum corps used the fall season to enjoy a less intense experience:

It's an exercise in letting go of your ego, because it's like, “okay this is [State Name], we could all be really great. Or we could have a lot of fun and learn more about instruments,” and it's definitely the latter.

Robyn described game days on campus as relatively laid-back, recalling that members “rehearse in the morning, and then go to [the game] all day, and then you go home.”

After an intense summer of marching in a drum corps and several years of exhausting leadership during high school, Robyn selected color guard:

I was like, “I don't want to be in charge of things. I don't want to be a drum major, I don't want to be in the baritone section” because I just marched drum corps and I have some level of authority as, around people who are music [education] majors who are like, “what's first valve?” I don't want to operate in a teaching capacity. I

just want to be, I just want to be dumb and bad at flag. [laughter] That's all I want. So I think that impulse definitely stemmed out of the kinds of things we did in high school and what was asked of us as drum majors.

Robyn was relieved to discover that the directors were rebuilding the color guard program and made the audition process largely a formality. One day, Robyn was treated to an 18th birthday surprise: "They all took me to Waffle House, I had just met [them] earlier that day, it was really sweet...I immediately felt a sense of camaraderie."

The color guard often experienced autonomy from the rest of the band, getting passed over by the head director. SSU's color struck a careful balance between technical expectations and creating a welcoming environment for students with little or no experience. Robyn's instructor demonstrated a great deal of "hands-off-ness" and focused on "letting the student leaders run a lot of things and mitigate any kind of problems that came up." The color guard was "visually on its own island" to keep inexperienced guard members from hitting other members or dropping equipment. The color guard's limited group of 15 marchers allowed the section to become a "very close group," often interacting both physically and socially away from other sections:

The guard would warm up in the end zone away from the rest of the band, they'd be doing like jumping jacks and stuff. And we're just dicking around doing drop spins, [laughter]...we are definitely like the "Mean Girls" of the [SSU Marching Band], because you know we're not the attention of the director, who is the winds, a wind studies professor, who is also teaching marching band on the side.

Obviously he's like, "oh, that sound, tubas, that's horrible." We got two comments

from the box all season and the rest of it is coming from our tech on the field with us.

Robyn also commented that there were “lots of LGBTQ people in the guard” and that their instructor went out of her way to make the section a “welcome learning space” for all involved.

“I’m Doing This for Me and My Friends”: Visibility and Agency in the Color Guard

Robyn enjoyed color guard for its more relaxed atmosphere, but also expressed a deep affection for the agency that color guard allowed them as a performer in communicating with audience members:

As a brass performer, because usually in sit-down band, there's a stand and an instrument between you and the audience. And in marching band there's still an instrument and usually in a formation, other people between you and the audience, and you're focused on so many other things that performance is kind of the last thing, that's the tip of the pyramid for the wind players versus in the color guard, that's the foundation of what you do. Because even if you're spinning poorly, if you're selling it, it looks great. So, yeah, I loved it. And I love the different ways of the theater side of things, wanting to just demo with my face and body in different ways.

Robyn called the standard marching band uniform worn by wind and percussion players a “mask,” and contrasted that experience with performing with the color guard in which “you have to take that mask off and be really vulnerable.”

Robyn acknowledged that marching as a member of the highly visible and seen

color guard was important as they considered their gender expression and performance:

I was like, “I don't want to be in a uniform. I want to be able to smile at the audience and perform in that way.” And I was like, “oh yeah, that's totally like a trans thing” looking back at that now.

Robyn found that the uniform itself was sometimes constricting and consisted of a “spaghetti strap tube top, and short skirt, and tights and these jazz shoes that were just clunky and ugly.” At rehearsal, Robyn noticed the cut-off shirts and bowties their male peers wore and expressed, “man I wanna wear that, I hate this tube top shit.” Robyn did not feel comfortable challenging their instructor and offered, “I was still figuring out who I was. And I was like, ‘I'll wear this skirt, it's kinda cute.’” Another moment of tension occurred when the school's gendered music fraternity, Phi Mu Alpha, “gathered up all of the freshman girls or first year girls and serenaded them and gave everyone a rose. And I was like, ‘I don't want that. I hate this.’”

Although the band rehearsal field remained largely a positive space, other areas on campus—including the football stadium—often felt unsafe for Robyn. During walks to and from rehearsals, Robyn often encountered “predatory men” who made spaces feel unwelcoming:

There's like a public moment where we're walking to and from band rehearsal past all of these college dudes and everyone just kind of puts their sweater on, and then we get to a rehearsal and it's like, “alright, just a sports bra.”

During halftime performances at SSU, the color guard stayed primarily in the back of the field. The section's assigned spots were in front of the student section, with members'

backs turned to “all these gross college dudes just being disgusting” as they were subjected to “whistling and cat-calling.” Robyn recalled, “it was just really gross, and I hated it.” The contrast between the hostile football crowds and appreciative winter guard audiences became even more apparent as time went on:

[The football game halftime] side of performance is something that's anxiety-inducing. I don't want to feel that, again, I didn't like that environment versus, I really do miss the color guard. I would throw a really high flag toss and people would be like, “wow, so many hours went into that. That's so cool” versus I throw a flag toss and dudes are just whistling at me because I'm in a skirt.

“I Am Truly Just Performing Now”: Social Connection and Alone Time

Robyn took great comfort in the friendships they had made within their section. Marching band rehearsals served as valuable opportunities to “leave the formality of the music school and the pressures of the music school.” After difficult or stressful trombone lessons, Robyn delighted in “[getting] to go onto a football field and just like, go dance and not really have to worry about the way I was playing, or the embouchure, or any of these, like, questions like that.” Rehearsals also offered Robyn space to connect with friends outside of class:

It was one of those things where rehearsal would end and you're like, “oh, but I'm not done hanging out with these people. I want to stay with them longer.” So we'd all go study together, go to Waffle House and have dinner or something after rehearsal, we were all just up to shenanigans at all times.

Marching band rehearsals provided valuable segments of time during Robyn could devote additional “mental energy” to their gender identity and expression: “When I was just having to worry about tossing a flag and not talking to other people in my presence, I was really like, ‘wow, no thoughts, head empty. I don't know what I feel. But this isn't great.’” With the potential for more members to join the color guard, Robyn decided to leave after one season.

“Getting to Experience Both Ends of the Spectrum”: Women’s Chorus and Brass

Band

Noting that they had been “[passing] as a woman” their entire life, Robyn reflected on the challenges they faced in how their voice was stereotyped by others:

And like my first interaction with the trombone studio, we had to stand up and introduce ourselves. So you hear all of these men have deep voices and I stand up like “hi, I am a freshman,” and I have a very feminine voice, my voice is high and is, it isn't very androgynous.

As one of only five female or fem members in a 75-person studio, Robyn felt out of place almost immediately. Robyn considered the benefits of joining the Women’s Chorus to fulfill the school’s requirement. “It was pretty quick for [the administrators] to approve Women's Chorus,” Robyn recalled, and they immediately developed an affection for the ensemble and its members.

**“Having an All-Female Space Helped Me Understand My Identity”: Women’s
Chorus**

One of Robyn’s favorite aspects of the Women’s Chorus was its diverse membership:

[There was] a very wide group of people who were on the LGBTQ spectrum and people who were very conservative, straight married people who were in their 40s and had kids and worked in the administrative building and just wanted to sing.

Robyn found that Women’s Chorus provided a “low stakes” environment for making music and improving their aural skills. At Robyn’s first choral performance, their anxiety of being read as female:

I also remember my first Women's Chorus concert being so entirely anxious about wearing lipstick and wearing this dress and being in the front row and just having my [sheet music] binder, but only for one song we put our binders away having absolutely nothing between myself and the audience. I took my glasses off, so that I wouldn't see the audience. And that, to me, was a way of dealing with performance anxiety because to me it was, the mask is complete because I can't see the audience.

The male-dominated trombone studio, anxiety-inducing objectification during halftime shows, and mixed feelings toward what they initially assumed would be an all-female choral space had combined to create a challenging first semester for Robyn at SSU.

“It Was Dope”: Victoria and a Changing Women’s Chorus Landscape

At the beginning of Robyn’s second year, a doctoral student named “Victoria” from South Africa took over directorship of the ensemble. During one of Victoria’s first rehearsals, members were asked to sing individually to allow the new conductor to assign parts. Robyn was pleasantly surprised when Victoria recognized and spoke openly about their voice as nuanced and complex:

I don't like that I have a high voice. But then [the director], she did a vocal test on everyone...and [the director] put me at the very end of the sopranos, and she was like, “you're almost an alto, you're a bass soprano. I can see it.” And that was validating because I was, I hear myself as having a really high voice. I never heard myself as a mezzo soprano, never even thought to explore the alto part of my voice because I'm always in a male dominated space. I'm like, “yeah, I have the highest voice, whatever.” And then I go into Women's Chorus and there are these sopranos, who can sing like 10 notes higher than I can. And so it was really affirming in that way.

Robyn reflected that “[the] all-female space helped me understand my identity relative to like, traditional performances of femininity” and formed a valuable foundation for later being able to “articulate myself as not-binary.”

Robyn found a sense of connection and comfort singing alongside “other non-binary, assigned female at birth (AFAB) people” in the ensemble. During their third year after they had come out as non-binary, Robyn was able to “look across to [another] non-binary person if somebody gets misgendered and will like, let the instructor know,

whether in that moment or after.” The new conductor also upended the ensemble’s traditionally gendered concert attire:

[Victoria] was like, “what the hell is this, like my students don't do this in South Africa, like what is this [State Name] bullshit?” So she was like, “we're wearing power black, wear whatever you want that makes you feel great, strong, whatever you want to do.” And so we all just wore whatever made us feel good and for some of us, that meant full on lace-collar dresses and a lot of us it was like, finally I can wear pants in a choir performance. [laughter]

For Robyn, Women’s Chorus provided, “an all-female space [which] helped me understand my identity relative to like, traditional performances of femininity.” Robyn had started to reclaim aspects of traditional femininity including makeup and costuming as “performance tools,” and proudly utilized them to create moments of empowerment and agency:

In later years, I would just wear contacts because I wanted to interact with the audience in that way and being like, “yeah, I'm gonna buy into the bit, this is a Women's Chorus performance, I'm a bass soprano, and I'm going to sing on the front row because I'm really expressive and I have good choreography skills from marching band.”

It all came to a head at Robyn’s final concert with the Women’s Chorus:

I brought in a swing flag from color guard, and everyone was like, “wow!” It made such cool noises in our soundscape...I don't feel like I would have been comfortable doing that my freshman year or my sophomore year even, because I

was just very self-conscious of the way that I sounded and the way that I looked and the way I was like, “oh, I look very feminine. I don't like that,” but then actually just kind of buying into it my senior year.

Women’s Chorus had provided the opportunity for Robyn to exercise agency over their gender expression in a way that facilitated their coming out during their final year at SSU.

“Other Times, It’s Just Really Exhausting”: Brass Band

At the beginning of their final year at SSU, Robyn auditioned for and received one of few trombone spots in the university’s Brass Band. Robyn immediately noticed the starkly different Brass Band culture in which only five of the ensemble’s 25 members were female or fem: “I [had] to like pull back, like temper my own expectations to where, ‘okay now that I'm just going to be seen as a woman, I guess I'm going to have camaraderie with all these other women in the ensemble.’”

Robyn felt most connected with the women scattered throughout the room. Noting that “there's like no speaking in rehearsal,” Robyn recalled the “Geertzian winks”²¹ members would shoot across the room in the absence of casual conversation:

As the semester progressed, I would be throwing glances across at the other women in the ensemble every time some dude would just have a complete meltdown where he'd be like, “oh, I got this in rehearsal.”

²¹ In his 1973 book titled *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz used the imagery of the movement of one’s eyelid being interpreted as a twitch versus a wink to describe the importance of “thick description” (p. 7) as a means of inscribing intent within a cultural context rather than simply describing an act with no context or attributed meaning.

Although the subdued nature of the ensemble was at times restricting, Robyn admitted that “it's kind of nice to go to Brass Band where [the men] can't talk to me, and then I can just leave after that.”

Robyn recalled that the strict rehearsal structure and emphasis on technical perfection in the Brass Band “was kind of a way to invalidate the different identities of the different performers.” The male faculty member in charge created a “silencing” environment which Robyn summarized by saying, “there's a musical standard we have to achieve, and we can't dare waste a minute of rehearsal.”

“We Just Got to Explore Who We Were as Performers”: Two Ensembles in Tension

After our first conversation, it was clear that Robyn’s experiences in two highly contrasting environments had contributed to their identity development in powerful but divergent ways. Robyn described the “tension of getting to experience both ends of the spectrum” as “beneficial, ultimately,” and posited that “I've always left the space knowing more about myself whether that was from a positive or negative thing.”

Contrasting the masculine, “tough” environments of Brass Band and the marching arts with the ability to “be vulnerable” at Women’s Chorus allowed Robyn to reflect, “oh, I'm both and neither of those things at different times.” Robyn felt that immersing themselves in two highly distinct cultures allowed them to apply tangible concepts to their preferences:

If I had only ever had ensembles that were very high pressure, note-driven, I would have just never, I don't know. I don't know what process of coming out I would be in. What stage, where I would be at in that process. Versus in an

ensemble where you just have a ton of agency, I wouldn't have any standard of comparison to be thankful for the educators who are doing that work to create a space for their students.

Robyn expressed “a lot of gratitude for the educators, everyone that's ever taught me” for offering diverse experiences and creating opportunities for social connection.

“That Was a Very Queer Space”: The Performing Arts Center and Queer Reclamation

Many of Robyn's most favorite memories were made during their time as an usher at the SSU performing arts center. Robyn's favorite aspect of their job was the uniform, consisting of “a button-down white shirt with a tie. Everyone wore that and black pants, and normally like some black wedges or black dress shoes.” Robyn explained that many of the queer ushers would find camaraderie in trying to apply a “smidge of self-expression” to their uniform and expressed a sense of liberation in “getting to have moments where we could just be our authentic selves,” treating the uniform as a blank canvas upon which students could express their personalities.

Robyn noted that the performing arts center was one of several “spaces that were reclaimed to be queer spaces” on campus. In contrast to many environments in which cishet²² people were in the majority and queer folks were guests, the performing arts necessitated that cishet patrons enter a queer space:

²² Robyn utilized the term *cishet* to refer to individuals or practices that were both heterosexual/hetero-normative and cisgender/cis-normative, for example a person who identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth and experiencing exclusively heterosexual attraction.

I think just...cishet anxiety around seeing queer people in real life and being like, “oh, I have to be an ally right now, quick what do I say to show them that I'm a safe person?” And then it ends up being a really weird interaction.

“A Space to Kind of Let Go”: Expression and Individuality Through Winter Guard

Although Robyn only performed for one season with the SSU marching band, they remained heavily involved in drum corps and winter guard. Robyn recalled the contrasting experiences of winter guard fluidity and drum corps rigidity:

In the backdrop of being asked to wear a horn line uniform that is very uniform, you've got your shako on, no one can see your face and the [drum corps] like traditional uniform...having winter guard as an exercise in expression and individuality, while still being asked to do the same makeup and hair as everyone else was very helpful.

Robyn recalled a revelatory moment from their second season of winter guard at SSU, during which the group's instructor brought in floor-length skirts for members to try on: “I really don't want to wear a skirt because people are just going to be like ‘she/her.’ But as soon as I saw it used as a choreographic device, I was like, ‘now that's cool.’” Robyn recalled, “if I walk into a winter guard performance, people are going to be thinking about what I can do, versus what I look like at a football game.”

During their second season of collegiate winter guard, Robyn faced a dilemma as they started to experiment with their hair. Now beginning to explore agender and non-binary identities online, Robyn decided to shave part of their head:

I kept shaving my head that way. Which is something I didn't know I could do, because I was like, "I'm in winter guard. I have to have long, beautiful flowing hair," because you have to be able to do a lot of different things with your hair as a performer to like, match the look. But I went to the guard instructor, like, "I just shaved half my head, am I going to get kicked off?" She was like, "no, it's never, it's about how you spin, stupid. Come on, I would never kick you off for shaving your head."

The interaction marked one of many "gender euphoria moments" in which they experienced affirmation and celebration of their gender expression.

The next year, Robyn joined a professional Independent Open winter guard. The show's theme was based on the Netflix show *Stranger Things*, specifically a parallel universe filled with exotic creatures and environments known as the "Upside Down." The uniform that season consisted of a full bodysuit and facemask supplemented with makeup, and Robyn commented on the feeling of social bonding they felt as cishet and queer members alike donned the outfits:

Everybody had this over-the-top makeup and that helped me feel less anxious because it was like okay this is very clearly a mask. If I walk around, I'm going to look like a Disney World performer and like all these high school kids are not going to know my name or who I am or my identity, they're just going to see this really scary looking person [laughter] And having the whole guard do that too, and the guard being mostly queer or mostly women and then a couple of cishet straight men who were like, "fuck it, we're wearing full makeup." That was really

cool.

The winter guard environment became a “really important self-expression tool” in Robyn’s identity development and self-confidence.

“The Switch Flips Immediately”: Uniformity and Conformity Through Drum Corps

Robyn performed for a total of four summers with drum corps organizations. Although they later assumed leadership roles, Robyn noted that 2016 was their favorite season “just because it was new, I didn't have any things to worry about.” Drum corps performances permitted less individual expression and fluidity of movement than winter guard shows, and Robyn noted the importance of the “social camaraderie” that corps members built through their uniform presentation, saying that “you can just feel this kind of electric energy between you and all of the other people that you're sharing and you're walking in time with.”

During the summer of 2017, Robyn returned to the corps as a baritone horn section leader. Reading from a journal they kept during the summer seasons , Robyn recalled an instance where the brass instructor “pulled the horn line girls during visual warm up without any warning and [exercise] stretched us separately from the rest of the horn line.” One of the new trumpet section members questioned the instructor, who then “blew her up for no reason other than her fighting for us.” Robyn recalled, “it was absolutely humiliating to...miss part of the warmup and high mark time because I have a vagina.” Robyn’s concern that day was heightened when they noticed that several members who had been pulled for excessive conditioning were already injured and risked permanent physical debilitation. “I have never felt so intensely discriminated against,”

Robyn read, noting that “[watching] these strong ladies be dehumanized” was the worst day of their corps experience. The moment was also pivotal to Robyn as in the context of their gender journey: “I just never experienced anything that was like ‘you’re a woman, [go] away’...now I know that part of that pain came from the fact that I really didn’t feel like I was a woman.”

Later that season, Robyn witnessed male corps members struggle with dysphoric feelings toward feminine attire and makeup, in some cases seeming to move through the “stages of grief” at the perceived loss of their masculinity:

Watching men go through that same anxiety I had felt, that was actually really affirming for me because all these men were like, “I don’t want to wear a skirt.”

And I was like, “yeah, I felt that two months ago. But watch this, it’s really cool.”

Robyn described the marching arts environment as “rich sites for those kinds of interactions,” noting that in some instances “we all get to experience gender dysphoria together, and some of us are really good at handling it, and some of us have never handled it before.”

“Being My Most Authentic Version”: Teaching, Courage, and Coming Out

Robyn approached their final year at SSU in the fall of 2017, they reflected on their identity and what the next few years might look like. Robyn was studying for the GRE, applying to graduate programs, and preparing to leave a part-time teaching job with a nearby marching band. Working with high school students had been an affirming experience, and Robyn reflected, “that moment of ‘I don’t have to explain myself’ really came from being empowered by younger students where I’m still figuring things out and

that's okay.” Robyn found “hope and courage” through “just being in a setting where I was asked to be a teacher and instructor to students who are like, genderqueer or non-binary.” During the fall of 2017, Robyn finally came across the words most aligned with their experiences:

I just didn't have the vocabulary because non-binary wasn't, circulating as a word until 2016–17, so I was like, I don't know, maybe I'm agender?” I was on that Tumblr discourse trying to figure out, what of the million words to describe yourself would best express how I felt to other people. And it was hard because it's just you don't have the words.

Robyn recalled thinking, “well, I can at least control this part of my life, how people perceive me and speak to me, even though I literally don't know what's going to happen in the next year.” As Robyn made their way through the fall semester, “coming out was just a very gradual process.” Noting that every person’s coming out experience is vastly different, Robyn commented that “it was never like ‘I am this’ on social media or anything like that.” By October, Robyn was “defending my [they/them] pronouns ardently” and reported that they “felt good enough to do that in front of other people in a musical environment, especially [in] Women's Chorus.”

That semester, Robyn learned about one of the queer organizations on campus and recalled the experience of meeting and advocating with other queer students: “That was when I was finally like, ‘I'm non-binary and there's a place that I can help other students and socialize with other students.’” One of Robyn’s favorite aspects of the organization combined their love of music and their previous experiences in reclaiming

public spaces as queer:

We had these traveling bands of preachers that would just show up on campus, and it was very violent rhetoric, and it was like “gays are going to burn in hell,” and SSU would just kind of let them be on campus, and usually students would counter-protest all the time. And so our organization would go and get speakers out of our office and just play music really loud to drown them out and turn them into little dance parties.

Social connectivity was huge for Robyn in affirming their sense of self and providing an outlet for advocacy.

As Robyn was filling out graduate school applications that spring, they endured a flurry of comments from professors commenting on the lack of women in the field of music theory. Robyn’s experience of being “reduced to like one specific identity that I don’t really feel aligned with” and “just being reduced to this like checkbox” diminished their feelings of accomplishment.

“Owning Performance and Feeling Included”: One Final Summer of Drum Corps

When Robyn returned to the corps in 2018 as a brass leader, the organization was reeling from a staff shakeup. Robyn recalled that members turned inward for social support, forming groups around various identities: “Everybody got to feel their own social groups, even within the drum corps, outside of like ‘we’re in the baritone section, but I’m also part of Gay Debts, but I’m also part of the Women in the Horn Line.’” Staff took note of the new groups, often asking particular subsets to rehearse sections of the show on their own in front of the rest of the corps. The groups quickly became

“pedagogical [tools] and [moments] for us to bond with our instructors and also kind of socially solidify that they saw that that was a valid, kind of way of interacting with us.”

Robyn also commented on instances where the highly standardized uniform was helpful in shielding members from discrimination. Robyn recalled a specific moment during which a member observing Sikh grooming and dress practices expressed concerns about being targeted:

We cut a hole in the shako, it was a black shako, and he would wear a “show turban.” And you couldn’t, you could barely see it. We would stick the plume in the front and it was his turban was at the top, and you know [Corps Name] are clean shaven corps, usually. And [Corps Member] was the only one who didn't have a clean-shaven face, he would like, do his show beard, he would gel his facial hair down and we just did everything we could...we don't want anyone in the audience to say some racist bullshit. So when the whole section of people is wearing maroon turbans, you're like, “okay, weird kids,” you're not able to single someone out.

Robyn argued that the rigid structure of drum corps sometimes allowed members to coalesce around “an expression of like ‘we have some solidarity, so you can't single us out or bully us.’”

During their final season, Robyn was selected to perform a baritone solo during a slow section of the routine. At the time, select drum corps performances were broadcast across the United States in movie theaters, and Robyn was acutely aware that crowds of spectators at home would, even if just for a moment, be staring at a close-up of their face:

I was like, “okay, I have to like look nice,” and looking nice to me wasn't necessarily passing as feminine. But also, kind of wanting to pass this feminine because there aren't that many women low brass players who are soloists in DCI. So just being kind of like, “yep, there is a person in makeup playing a baritone solo right now.”

Robyn's recollection was one of many moments in which they experienced tension between being read as a gender they did not align with, while also wrestling with the positive impacts of female representation.

“It's Always Going to Be About the People in Your Life”: Life After SSU and Present Day

After receiving their undergraduate degree from SSU, Robyn attended PMU for a master's degree and at the time of our discussions was enrolled in a music doctoral program. PMU's location in a large, Midwestern city of several million residents allowed them to explore new social and musical opportunities such as the HONK! band with which they played often. After having come just a year prior, Robyn reflected that they “had a much firmer sense of self and how to, how to and when, and when not to explain myself to other people.” Meeting people as non-binary for the first time allowed Robyn to assert their they/them pronouns as the norm:

I do put they/them on a lot of like my bio statements so that people will say they/them instead of she/her when given the option. Because that's usually when people use a gendered pronoun and a non-gendered pronoun, they will opt to use the gendered pronoun that they think is most visible or reflects to them what they

think they see. So, yeah, I do very much so intervene on my behalf frequently when I introduce myself to a group for the first time, I would say 99% of the time, say, “I’m Robyn, I use they/them pronouns” and then proceed with the rest of my introduction.

Faculty and staff representation were also impactful for Robyn, who noted that “over the 30 classes I will have taken for coursework, I think 18 were taught by people who are marginalized of gender” in addition to their major advisor who was also non-binary.

Robyn had also accepted teaching positions with a local Catholic high school marching band and an Open Class drum corps on the east coast. Noting that they were not “super upfront” about their gender identity at their Catholic school job, Robyn commented that they would sometimes wear an accessory that signaled their queer identity to other LGBTQIA+ students: “I needed that when I was in high school, but I don't know if I could have articulated that need or what I was missing without seeing someone who is so visibly queer teaching me.” In their drum corps teaching position, all but one member of the visual staff identifies as a member of the queer community. Robyn asserted that the shared knowledge and experiences of a queer-friendly staff assisted in creating space for a respectful exchange of ideas:

Everyone is taken seriously, which is a huge problem I have in other spaces with cis het educators, because the second you bring up gender, or it's something that they just, they don't know about, people get really insecure when they're in situations where they have to deal with something new or they just don't know about anything...I know for a fact people have taken what I've said to students,

even though my pedagogy and my approach doesn't change whatever space I'm in, I know they take it less seriously because it's coming from a trans person, and they're still grappling with that part of me. They don't know, they've never met a trans educator when I'm just actually functioning as an educator in that situation.

Summary

Robyn's narrative drew heavily on the themes of claiming and reclaiming space, the importance of social bonding, leadership roles, and the power of agency in determining one's actions. After experiencing tension in how they were forced to dress and present to the world as a child, Robyn struggled with but ultimately regained power over articles of clothing, makeup, and hair styles as "performance tools" to better express their gender identity rather than suppressing it. Importantly, Robyn pointed out multiple times that it was not being read as feminine or masculine that gave them pause, but rather lacking the agency to control how, when, and in what manner the presentation took place. Robyn grew apart from family members as they grew older but found kinship and joy in connecting with those they found affirming, supportive, and engaged in activities that codified shared interests and values. Robyn commented often on the ability of leaders and teachers to influence the feelings of safety in their classrooms or rehearsal areas, able to shut down or open avenues of discussion and exploration. Robyn's experiences in leadership roles demonstrated the exhaustion many queer folks feel being constantly questioned and forced to explain themselves rather than performing to their own strengths on their own terms. Above all, Robyn's stories and reflections have impressed upon me the importance of creating spaces for students to discover their own voices and

acknowledge that one's voice may change over time. Rooted in hope, Robyn's narrative is best summarized by a simple, yet powerful statement: "Sometimes negative things can become positive things over time."

“Instead of Being the Best at Band, I Was the Best Member

I Could Be in the Band”: Taylor’s Story

As I prepared to speak with Taylor, a heavy snowstorm had just blanketed the region in which they were living, and I was concerned that the sporadic power outages in his northeastern state would affect our connectivity. Luckily, our video connection started without issue and I was immediately greeted by Taylor’s face and an enthusiastic wave. Taylor was wearing a turquoise sweatshirt with his university’s name stamped across the front, and the bright red coloring in his hair stood out against the olive-gray walls in the background. After reading Taylor’s cheerful responses to my initial emails and within only a few moments of conversation, I discerned that he was eager to begin and share his story. After assuring me that he was safe and only mildly chilly, I asked Taylor if he had any questions about the IRB documentation or proposed schedule for interviews. “Nope, that makes sense,” Taylor replied, and with mutual smiles and nods, we settled into our conversation.

At the time of our discussions, Taylor, 22, was a graduate student studying secondary English education at his undergraduate alma mater, NSU (Northeastern State University). NSU’s school of education allowed students to apply for a program during their sophomore year which guaranteed a one-year master’s degree immediately following completion of their bachelor’s. Taylor had completed his undergraduate education during COVID-19 restrictions and was forced to complete his student teaching online. With only a year to complete his master’s internship, Taylor was hopeful that health and safety conditions permit in-person lessons with students before the academic

year concluded.

“Not Really Sure What’s Going On”: Childhood and Growing Up

Throughout our discussions, Taylor acknowledged, “I’m trying to remember my childhood, because I actually cannot remember most of it, I’m in therapy for that.” The first half of elementary school “wasn’t a very traumatic part of my life,” and Taylor recalled a relatively smooth childhood before his family moved away. Taylor grew up with his mother, father, younger brother, and younger sister in a mid-Atlantic state before leaving for the northeast shortly before the fourth grade.

“We Just Didn’t Get Along”: Family and Difficult Moments

Taylor summarized his relationship with his parents by saying, “I didn’t have a bad relationship with my parents, I just didn’t have a good one either for a long time.” Taylor’s mother served as “the primary caregiver” throughout his and his sibling’s childhoods, and Taylor recalled, “I’m the oldest so I kind of got the experimentation” with family rules. Taylor noted that his relationships with his younger brother and sister were “on and off” for most of their childhood, although the trio did find common ground through participating in their elementary school’s general music program.

“I didn’t know what transgender meant or anything like that,” Taylor recalled about his childhood. Taylor’s family knew of only one LGBTQIA+ couple in the area and noted that non-heterosexual civil unions were not allowed in the state at the time. Taylor reminisced about a specific moment from his youth during which he questioned both his assigned gender and its expectations:

All my friends were guys, I distinctly remember asking [my mom] why I wasn't a boy. Not why am I a girl, but like, why am I not a boy. And then having so many angry moments, like those crying angry moments because my little brother would get to do boy things with dad and I'd be like, "why can't I do that, I don't want to do girl things with mom." And my mom was like, "well why? It's fun."

Taylor commented, "looking back, my mom says there weren't really any signs, I disagree." Taylor's interests were varied during his childhood and adolescence, and were not tied to traditionally masculine or feminine activities:

I was not particularly masculine in any way. I didn't have any, I wasn't like, "oh football and trucks and stuff." I was a really bookish kid, I liked to read and knit, those were the, and play video games. It was all pretty neutral things for the most part.

Religion played only a minimal role in Taylor's family life growing up. At the time of our conversation, Taylor and his mother were practicing Buddhism, adding, "we are both the only people with any form of active religion."

"Leaving Really Sucked": Elementary School and Drastic Changes

Taylor attended two elementary schools before moving from his home state, recalling "a minor bullying issue." One of Taylor's teachers expressed frustration toward teaching classes which included students with "special needs" identified by the school. One day, Taylor's teacher burst out at his parents, saying, "your child is ill, you need to get it help." Taylor never received a clinical diagnosis but commented, "I was very informally diagnosed with autism by a teacher and a doctor and then...they just sent my

parents out of the room.”

After transferring to a new school, Taylor was placed into an accelerated track but also remained in several traditional classroom settings with peers who became fast friends. Taylor’s family decided to move to the northeastern United States at the conclusion of his third-grade year, upending his growing sense of normalcy and acceptance.

“No Sense of What’s Going On”: A Tumultuous Move

Taylor described his new town as “big, on paper,” with roughly 53,000 residents as of 2019 living in rows of suburban houses that “all looked the same.” Taylor’s family knew only one other person in the state, forcing Taylor, his siblings, and his parents to seek new relationships in. Taylor recalled that “[local families] get treated the best, and the people who moved into the town get treated the worst.”

Taylor immediately began to be “horrendously bullied” by peers who “didn’t like me and saw me as an outsider to the day I graduated.” Name-calling and snide remarks quickly turned to physical harassment, and Taylor’s teachers consistently failed to intervene in the bullying.

“Band Should be Fun”: Trumpet as a Lifeline

Feeling socially lost and physically isolated, Taylor turned to music. “Mr. G” was Taylor’s band director from fourth grade through middle school. Mr. G encouraged Taylor to play trumpet, the instrument on which Taylor continued through college. Weekly private lessons provided a valuable respite from the bullying. Taylor acknowledged that he did not improve a great deal “in terms of technical stuff,” but

developed an appreciation for ensemble playing and the social connectivity his director fostered. For Taylor, joining the school band was “my one constant thing and it was also the thing that I was best at other than test-taking basically.” During band rehearsals and performances, Taylor befriended students who were “kind of on the like outskirts of society” and reflected that “[the] bullies were in the choir and a lot of the bullied were in the band or the string program.”

“Very Traumatic at the Time”: Middle School as a Low Point

Taylor advised me that the intense bullying he experienced was “part of the reason I'm in therapy and also part of the reason I can't remember anything that happened.” Although Taylor was able to “skate through” many of his assignments and understood most material well, he also acknowledged that “I have anxiety and then I [am] also not neurotypical, so I was really struggling in my academic environment.” Taylor became “very distant” from his family as their mutual relationship was put “on ice” for several years as a result of his suffering grades.

Taylor’s middle school band director remained a consistent presence in his life, providing constant encouragement. Still, Taylor’s stress and anxiety forced him to retreat from social relationships and take a more muted approach to participating in band:

I just worked on my own. I wouldn't work in groups, and when I was in ensemble I was just trying to hide as much as possible to the point where I would play like piano on every song, including my solos. Everything was quiet.

As Taylor’s musical and social prospects began fall apart, he began to explore his gender identity and expression. As a middle school student, Taylor gained access to websites and

social media platforms and began to explore his sexuality and gender presentation:

I thought I was bisexual because I couldn't figure out why I wanted to look like a man but didn't like women. So I thought I was a closeted lesbian who was trying to figure that out. So I came out as bisexual just put out feelers that like, "I'm not straight" around this time.

“I’m Off the Beaten Path and I’m Fine with That”: High School and New Possibilities

Taylor’s anticipation of joining his high school’s marching band was offset by the cold reception he received from his peers. Taylor did experience a sense of solidarity with peers who were similarly looked down upon or excluded:

We had a few families who would homeschool until high school because they were really religious. And so those kids also experienced something similar. So it was those kids and then those of us who moved in and then the very few people of color, disabled people, and openly LGBT people, nothing. You were not on the same level as everyone else.

“Basically, they made fun of me for looking poor,” Taylor recalled. It was around this time that Taylor began attending therapy.

“Oh, I’m in the Band”: First-Year Triumphs and Pitfalls

As marching band rehearsals started during the fall of Taylor’s first year in high school, the band room became a “safer space” and he would regularly eat with other band members during lunch periods. Taylor also became increasingly self-conscious about being outpaced by his technically more advanced peers. Being outperformed was a “peer

pressure moment” for Taylor, and he commented, “in early high school especially, I was mortified of looking bad at stuff.” Taylor began taking trumpet lessons and immediately noticed a change in his confidence level. Although Taylor often felt left behind or neglected in his other high school classes, “[band] was also the place where I was really good. People knew I was good at something.”

“Loved the People but Hated the Teacher”: A Complicated Band Director

At the outset of Taylor’s high school career, his band director was experiencing “a very contentious time in her marriage” which resulted in divorce. Taylor’s director “would just kind of come in and like take out all of her frustrations on us as students.”

Taylor’s band director also showed signs of favoritism toward individual students:

So she would basically rank her favorites, is what we thought she was doing...she would rank, at least from our perspective, rank who her favorites were, so it was definitely a bit more competitive between the 12 of us because what are you even supposed to do with the information that you're going to be constantly compared against 11 other people who you've, some of whom you've known since elementary school who you never had to compete with before? And you did band so that you didn't have to be competitive, and now you have to compete with all these people.

Despite Taylor’s poor experiences with his band director, he did acknowledge her occasional demonstrations of inclusion. Taylor recalled the accommodations his teacher made for a student who had suffered a stroke in the eighth grade and was in a wheelchair during high school: “[My teacher] had someone else march his spot but have his

wheelchair...not a very nice woman but like made so many efforts to be an inclusive teacher.”

“Empowered to Be Who I Was”: Music Camp as a Space for Affirmation

As Taylor’s first year in high school ended, he received an invitation to attend a summer music camp. State Music Camp (“SMC”) was held at a Boy Scouts of America site, complete with tents, latrines, a long wood-framed dining hall overlooking a lake, and sheds of varying sizes in which ensembles rehearsed daily. Taylor signed up for a slot at SMC and enrolled for what would be the first of many years at the camp.

From the moment he stepped foot on the SMC campgrounds, Taylor sensed a change in his environment. Coming from a “pretty conservative town” and surrounded by family who “weren’t very understanding” of queer issues or identities, Taylor was prepared for intolerance and indifference. Taylor was pleasantly surprised by a conversations he had with a fellow camper:

This is the first time I really met other out-and-proud queer and transgender folks. I was questioning my sexuality but didn’t know that you could question your gender. I then met a person, [Camper Name], who told me that she identified as “bigender.” I was so confused about what this meant, and she explained that you don’t have to identify as the gender you were assigned at birth. She also gave me her Tumblr URL and told me to follow her, since she posted about this kind of stuff frequently.

By the end of the week, Taylor fondly recalled “a lot of the people I met at camp were people who accepted me on my own terms, which I wasn’t very used to.”

“It Kind of All Connected in the End”: Online Safe Spaces

Later that summer, Taylor’s parents loosened internet restrictions at home and allowed him to spend more time online. When Taylor received his first smartphone, he escaped his parents’ supervision by using the Tumblr app to connect with other trans youth, since his parents “didn’t know what [the app] was, so they didn’t know to look [for Tumblr] on my phone.” Taylor also connected with high students from across the country who also felt marginalized or excluded:

I definitely escaped to online a lot, which I think is very, very common, regardless of who you are when you're a teenager. I was very online. I was very on Tumblr, and in Facebook groups with other people. I'm, so many group chats, mostly with people I didn't go to high school with, it was people I met online who also were bullied at their high school.

Taylor’s social difficulties were alleviated online because “there wasn’t any way for people to know the reputation I carried in my hometown.” Online spaces were also critical in introducing Taylor to a variety of LGBTQIA+ role models, experiences, and identities through fandom communities which were “filled with a lot of like LGBT people” and “normalized” queer relationships.

“I Was Good at What I Was Doing”: Sophomore Year and Internal Conflict

As Taylor returned to school in the fall, he thought to himself, “‘maybe I'm non-binary’ and I didn’t, I didn't come out to anyone.” Although conflicted between his evolving views on sexuality and gender and his “really conservative Christian” boyfriend, Taylor decided to stay closeted.

Band continued to provide a source of consistency and comfort for Taylor. Taylor quickly matched or exceeded his peers' technical abilities, boosting his confidence: "[The other band members] thought...I was a competent musician." Taylor was also invited to become an administrative assistant for the band. Taylor recalled that his membership comprised a "core part" of his high school identity and that the band established "its own little culture within the school" and offered "a place to kind of practice being a leader, practice being someone other than the quiet bookworm in the back of the class that nobody really cares to know about."

Taylor returned to SMC that summer and witnessed an event during which male campers dressed in drag. This was the first moment in which he "saw drag performance [and] gender nonconformity portrayed as good and acceptable." However, several transphobic comments that were "disparaging towards the guys who decided to participate" forced staff to cancel the event.

"My Path Definitely Wasn't Linear": Junior Year and Coming Out

Outside of band, Taylor's junior year relationships grew toxic. Taylor began to experience greater levels of physical harassment and even assault due to his increasingly masculine appearance. During the holiday season, Taylor recalled an important moment of self-reflection:

My sister used to love to do makeup. So she did my makeup and hair, and I looked in the mirror and I couldn't recognize, I physically did not recognize myself and I was like, "okay, this is a problem. And I think it's time to start addressing it."

The internal tension proved to be too much for Taylor, and several evenings later he sat down at his computer and “wrote a letter and sent it in the form of an email to my parents.” Taylor then sat in his room and waited for his parents’ reaction. After a few moments, Taylor got his answer: “[My parents] called me downstairs, were like, ‘so what's all this then?’ And I was like, ‘well, I don't know what to tell you. I already did, there you go. I don't know what else to say.’”

Commenting on his father’s relative indifference, Taylor offered, “how is he going to even have these conversations when he's trying to start a business, and like, in [State Name], half the time.” Taylor’s father reflected on Taylor’s sexuality when he was younger, referencing a moment from his childhood:

My dad was like, “yeah, sure. Whatever. Cool, I thought you were going to be a lesbian, but that works.” He, when I was three told my mom he thought [I] was going to be a lesbian. So he's like, “oh, I guess I was kind of right.”

Taylor’s mother displayed a “melodramatic” reaction to her son’s coming out, and Taylor described her as “blindsided” by the news. “You would have thought I died,” Taylor recalled. Navigating his mother’s reaction proved challenging for Taylor in that moment:

[My mom] was like, “well, like you're my beautiful daughter and now it's like my daughter's dead. And now I have this boy who I don't know.” And I'm like, “I cannot stress to you that I'm literally the same person, I just don't like being a girl and I just want to be a boy, literally nothing else has changed.”

Taylor’s siblings expressed divergent opinions on his announcement:

My brother was like, “I don't think that's okay. And I don't accept that,” my parents were like, “oh, well that's just how he feels.” And I was like, “[what] the fuck is wrong, what about me? How about how I feel?”

Taylor then recalled his sister's far more positive response: “My sister was so excited, she still is. She's very excited. She loves, she loves having a little spice in her life and that's spice for her.”

“She Let Me Do What I Needed to Do”: Conflicting Messages in Band

When Taylor returned to school for the spring semester, he recalled that “things got really awkward between me and multiple members of the band because I came out and they were not very accepting of my identity.” Taylor pointed to an example of a peer who had a “conservative upbringing” who had a “tacit understanding” that Taylor was not trans. Taylor was also pleasantly surprised by his band director's show up support:

She was very LGBT-accepting because her sister came out as a lesbian in the 90s when they were in high school and their dad was the band director at their high school, so the dad had to kind of set the precedent that this is a safe space, even when it wasn't necessarily safe to be that way.

Later that season, Taylor's director allowed him to deviate from the standardized concert band uniform: “We had three options, it was a woman's dress, a woman's pant suit, and a tux without a jacket. And my teacher let me get a tux without a jacket.”

“I Was One of Those Kids Too”: Coming Out at SMC

From pride flags on tents to pronouns written on camper and staff name tags, Taylor fondly remembered his third year at music camp as “the first time that I was able

to live out as a man comfortably.” The process of coming out at camp provided Taylor valuable confidence before he left SMC and returned to school in the fall: “I had to come out to everyone and tell people, and like ask for things and to be treated differently and it worked out really well. And people really were respectful of that.”

“It Was Like Game of Thrones, but With High Schoolers”: Senior Year and Letting Go

When Taylor returned for his final year of high school, he felt empowered to advocate for himself after several relentless years of bullying. As a leader, Taylor stepped into additional music and mentoring roles: “I learned how to fix reeds, do a bunch of stuff, basically...I was able to accomplish a lot just by working with freshmen and sophomores in the band and getting to know them.” Taylor considered his final season to be an “equalizing” experience: “Everyone kind of just acknowledged who knew what on their instruments and who's good and who's bad, and that was really it.” Frustration at home ensued when Taylor attempted to explain to his parents that he was both trans and gay:

I also tried to come out to them, my parents as gay right after I broke up with my girlfriend. And they were like, “oh, so you like girls.” And I was like, “gay men don't like women. I am a man.” They were like, “but you, you don't have the boy parts”...that took them forever to wrap their head around, and I have dated exclusively men since 2016.

Taylor was relieved when a new romantic partner created space for Taylor to express his masculinity. Taylor’s new connection was “the first relationship where I was really out

and dressing mostly masculinely, or my gender non-conforming version of masculine.”

“There’s Just So Much More for People to Do”: Starting Over at NSU

When Taylor began looking for colleges, his criteria for a large school environment and high PFLAG²³ rating—the extent to which a college or university is considered friendly to LGBTQIA+ students—were satisfied by a public university of approximately 30,000 located in a northeastern U.S. state. Taylor initially considered auditioning for the university’s music department, however his high school director dissuaded him from pursuing a music degree: “I couldn't afford private lessons at the time, basically, and [my director] told me that if I couldn't afford them, then I shouldn't apply for music school, so I didn't.” Taylor finally selected psychology as a major. Leaving high school, Taylor strongly considered letting go of ensemble music performance:

After high school, I was like, “oh, maybe I'm just going to like get rid of my trumpets, it was good while it lasted, and I'll just go on and have a different life without music, or just very casually participating in music, or just going to camp or something like that.”

Weeks later, a representative of the school’s marching band reached out to Taylor confirming that he played the trumpet. Taylor cautiously answered “yes,” to which the representative responded, “okay, cool. So we're signing you up for marching band.”

²³ Formerly known as “Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays,” the listed mission of PFLAG is to, “build on a foundation of loving families united with LGBTQ people and allies who support one another, and to educate ourselves and our communities to speak up as advocates until all hearts and minds respect, value and affirm LGBTQ people.” (PFLAG, n.d.)

“Very Strange, but Not in a Bad Way”: An Introduction to the NSU Marching Band

After experiencing traumatic bullying, Taylor was hesitant about forming relationships with a new set of band members. While he was confident in his gender and sexual identities, Taylor decided to “almost keep [my trans identity] separate from my band life” as he evaluated his safety. During his first pre-season “band camp” sessions, Taylor reluctantly took part in group icebreaker activities but otherwise “didn’t speak to anyone.” At NSU, Taylor quickly realized that his musical experiences were not shared by many:

I’m also not a “trumpet player’s trumpet player.” So I don't like playing loud, I do not like playing first trumpet, I don't go above the staff if I can help it, none of that. I don't like it at all. I like to play second trumpet or third trumpet, I like to stay playing counter melodies or harmonies. That's what I like. So I was also, and I was in a crowd of very boastful trumpets...so that was the rest of the trumpet section that I was with, and then I was just dead silent.

Taylor felt like the “odd one out” and added, “[the section members] actually didn't know if I was a girl or a boy and then they all just decided I was a girl.” Still, Taylor experienced aspects of his band membership as “equalizing,” commenting that “some of your best players are not music majors, some of your worst marchers are music majors.”

Although Taylor dressed in mostly masculine clothing, many of his peers were “oblivious to the world around them,” and “it was very easy for them to pretend I was just a girl who liked to dress like a boy.” Although Taylor felt “a lot more comfortable” after eventually attending section social events, he continued to shield his trans identity

from most other band members during his first year and turned to practicing and operations work to occupy his time.

“Tried to Make It Work”: Finding His Place

Taylor began visiting the university’s LGBTQIA+ resource center where he met numerous friends and learned about the school’s trans-inclusive housing. Recalling that he was “very fragile to criticism” during his first year, Taylor felt worn down and desperate to find meaningful relationships: “[My partner] encouraged me to feminize my presentation more to match my personality, was their justification. I guess they coded me as feminine and wanted me to match that coding.” Later that year, Taylor opted to wear a dress and makeup to the marching band’s annual banquet. Although he later regretted that decision, Taylor spent much of his first year afraid of not being read as “transgender enough”: “I like nail polish, and I knit, and I do some other traditionally feminine things, [should those] mean that I’m not actually a transgender man?”

The only moments in which Taylor was not forced to make agonizing decisions about his attire occurred while wearing his band uniform: “I loved that thing because it flattened me out super like, before I had top surgery, I was flat as a board, you could not tell my gender.” Fondly recalling feeling visible and hidden at the same time, Taylor remarked, “having somewhere where I could just blend in and just be part of something greater without having to worry that people were looking directly at me was very comforting to me.”

“Slowly Edged Out of the Section”: Conflict Erupts

After breaking up with his partner and slowly being invited into the trumpet section, Taylor gained a greater sense of confidence. Although Taylor “re-closeted” to his friends in band, he became “more comfortable” around his section mates through increased social interaction. However, Taylor soon noticed “racist” and “transphobic” text messages sent by a trumpet section member in a group chat. After receiving an anonymous complaint, the university’s Office of Institutional Equity summoned numerous band members for interviews. The instigating student was eventually found guilty of violating university policies and suspended from the band.

Trumpet section members quickly began to ruminate over which of their section mates had lodged the complaint. Section members immediately began to take sides between Taylor and a transphobic member of the section, and conflict “tore [the section] to pieces.” A majority of Taylor’s peers sided with the student who had been suspended: “I was in was the camp that got rejected from trumpet dinner and got slowly edged out of the section.” Social events within the section “fell off” precipitously, and Taylor watched many of the fragile social relationships he had spent months building fade away.

“Was It Really a Phase?”: Family Life Improves and Mom Comes Around

When Taylor returned home for the summer, tension with his mother persisted. After “re-closeting” around many of his peers, Taylor’s frustration boiled over after being met with either disbelief or scorn: “I was told, like ‘you can’t really be a guy because X.’ So I was like, ‘maybe I can’t.’” Taylor confronted his mother, who still expressed skepticism:

My mom was more like, “no, that can't be true. You're so feminine, you like men. Those are girl things.” I'm like, “well you know that's not true. All your friends were gay during the AIDS crisis. So I know you know that's not true” ...it's like, “look, here's the proof that it doesn't change. I tried to go back into the closet, and it didn't work.”

After the conversation, Taylor’s mother “started actually looking into resources to learn about how to be a parent to a transgender child.” Taylor and his mother began to develop a “more normal child-parent, adult-child and parent relationship.”

“Re-Coming Out”: Sophomore Year and Finding His Voice

Taylor felt emboldened to be his authentic self as he returned to NSU for his second year and moved into “super fun” trans-inclusive housing. After realizing that he “absolutely hated” his psychology coursework, Taylor selected Secondary English Education. The NSU marching band staff introduced a policy of including students’ pronouns on their nametags, and Taylor noted, “it was a clean cut off point to start adding that, incorporating that” into his life, and decided to write they/them pronouns at the start of the year.

Taylor noticed that “there was so much tension” among members of the trumpet section. At a post-rehearsal group dinner one evening, the student who had sent racist messages crossed. out the pronouns on his nametag in an attempt to rattle Taylor. After the incident, Taylor noticed that other trans band members were suffering:

There were other trans people in the band who were out and open, and who he would frequently misgender, and if he knew their birth names and they didn't use

their birth names, he would use that exclusively to refer to them. So it wasn't like this was a secret.

Making matters worse was the support the trumpet player received from staff members. The band's new assistant director was immediately drawn to the junior trumpet player's talent despite his transphobic and racist behavior. Taylor was immediately threatened and forced to withdraw from the section even further:

He had terrible field etiquette...he would just goof off all the time. And I mentioned that...we used to have a trumpet group chat and he texted in it, "we know where you live, I'd suggest being more appropriate before fucking with us."

"Getting to Trust People I Did Not Know": The Sisterhood

As the weeks progressed, Taylor felt increasingly abandoned. Taylor pondered, "if this season is really bad, then I just won't come back." Taylor's situation improved when he was invited to join the band sorority, Tau Beta Sigma, and formed "very meaningful" friendships. Taylor was pleasantly surprised at the inclusivity displayed at the first gathering of new candidates:

At my first [prospective members] meeting, I think it was our [Vice President of Membership] asked us to remind her of our names and our pronouns, all that, and I shared like, "oh, I'm using they/them/theirs right now," a couple people were like, "oh, that's so cool."

Taylor viewed involvement with the sorority as gender-affirming, "getting to be with sisters who were cisgender men, who [called] themselves sisters and were proud to carry that title." Taylor was able to "[become] vulnerable" and was especially excited to

witness “a more healthy version of masculinity, that doesn't rely on ‘being a guy’ to be a man.” The sorority also provided a layer of protection against Taylor’s trans-phobic peer: “[The trumpet player] went inactive because everyone stopped tolerating his behavior and he was, it was basically like, ‘you have to accept the trans and queer people in our chapter,’ he was like ‘no, [goodbye].” Taylor felt defended and affirmed in a way he had not felt in the trumpet section.

Taylor continued advocating for himself while in band: “I kind of could be more like, ‘this is how I feel, this is what's going on, you're going to listen to me. You're going to use my pronouns.” Taylor felt empowered to “[add] any kind of feminization I want on my terms, in my way.” Reflecting on his sorority membership, Taylor commented, “I get the question all the time like, ‘how can you stand to be called a girl?’ and I'm like, ‘no one's calling me a girl, they're calling me a sister. That's not the same.’

“Things Were Mostly Better”: Junior Year and Stepping Out

Taylor had an uneasy feeling as he returned to NSU for his third year. Surprised that his transphobic peer had been offered a section leadership position, Taylor offered, “[the director] believes that the best players should be the teachers. Which, that doesn't always work and that season he was section leader, and he was a terrible teacher, because playing ability doesn't translate to teaching ability.” In an attempt to escape the trumpet section, Taylor shouldered additionally non-playing responsibilities:

I love the music, but we could have been playing no music and just doing that was honestly, my favorite part, doing the formations and putting pieces of a puzzle together, that just resonates with my brain a lot...my favorite days were putting

the dots on the field, which I don't think anyone has ever said.

As Taylor's connection with the trumpet section deteriorated, he leaned on his connections in the band sorority and service opportunities. Taylor immersed himself with loading equipment trucks, picking up food orders, setting up sound equipment, and distributing yard markers along practice field each day. Taylor expressed no regrets about leaving the trumpets behind: "I didn't think it was very fair that I had to pretend not to be trans for six and a half hours out of a week just to accommodate this person who hated me."

During the spring semester, Taylor applied to lead the logistics team. Taylor's excitement was quickly dampened during his interview, when a staff member asked a shocking question:

One of [the questions was], "what do you do if you have a conservative member of the band and a queer member of the band and they're in the same section and that becomes an issue?" And I'm like, "well, I can tell you what happens from experience, that person gets away with it and then they graduate and everyone loves them, and they get treated really well while the minority student gets treated very poorly." And he was like, "no, you would stand up to them." I wanted to say, "where in my band experience would I have learned that when a person who was known for being racist, homophobic, and transphobic it was put in a position of power over me?"

Taylor felt as though the staff did not "fully appreciate" the extent of his peer's harassment and expressed surprise that he escaped staff scrutiny by presenting his "best

image.” Taylor was offered the logistics team position and recalled, “I legit don't think I would have gotten through another year of my section.”

When Taylor returned home after his junior year, his mother “apologized for her behavior” in a “heartfelt” way, Taylor responded with a call to move forward together:

“Well, it's already happened. It's fine. You don't need to apologize anymore, it, you've proven that you care and accept what, the decisions that I've made about my transition, so there's, there's no need to apologize. I've worked through what I need to work through. I'm in a good place. It's time for you to start moving on from that because there's just no point in this level of upsetness.”

Taylor’s mother began to vigorously advocate for her son and was “super vocally supportive” on his behalf, saying in one conversation with a family member, “you need to cut the shit of...choosing what you do and don't accept about Taylor.”

After exhibiting a strong negative reaction to Taylor’s coming out moment, Taylor’s brother had been emotionally absent from his life for several years. Taylor’s parents finally confronted Taylor’s brother:

They sat him down...it was like, “look, you need to start behaving, because if we have to pick, you're leaving. We're not letting you behave the way you did.” And he was like, “chill, I don't feel that way anymore. Sorry, I don't feel that way, I haven't in a while.” So that was good and that helped us heal a lot.

“I Got to Cement Who I Am’: Senior Year and Looking Back

When Taylor returned to NSU for his final year, the toxic student he had avoided during the previous season was finally gone. Although the trumpet section was “healing

from that toxicity,” Taylor had already committed to friendships elsewhere. Taylor continued to bring his trumpet to rehearsals and performances but rarely played: “I didn’t learn the show music that year at all. I never bothered learning it and I didn’t march one time, at all...it also did give me more of an insight into certain parts of the [band] that I didn’t have before.”

As an outgoing senior, Taylor also assumed a mentoring role. Shortly after one of the junior logistics assistants indicated her interest in assuming Taylor’s role, he “took her in as like an understudy.” Taylor recalled, “I do not think she is heavy enough to weigh down the brakes of the trucks, so I do not think she should be loading those on her own.” Nevertheless, Taylor was excited to be valued as a teacher and mentor, a role that had been denied to him as a member of the trumpet section.

Noting that he was not a “traditional section leader,” Taylor was immensely proud of the “social-emotional skills” he learned leading the operations team. Taylor commented that learning how to “F up in front of a very large group of people and move on from that” was an invaluable experience:

[Marching band] provides so many different opportunities, it just lets people grow exponentially in a way that might get capped in other situations...there’s just so much there for people to do...another part of the large, large part of the reason that I stayed was because there was more than just having to stand in line with the trumpet section.

Despite the incredible pain and harassment to which had he been subjected, Taylor expressed gratitude for the opportunity to lead and make friends on his own terms.

“I Do This Differently”: Present Day

After Taylor received his bachelor’s degree, he continued his studies at NSU and enrolled in a master’s program for Secondary English Education. As the only openly trans member of his entire education cohort, Taylor “became a lot more vocal about being trans” and was excited to incorporate queer issues in his teaching: “I feel like that's a good way to kind of [bringing] up those subjects, because that's a part of characters in certain stories and it's part of nonfiction literature.”

Although restrictions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic had curtailed his in-person student teaching, Taylor was utilized the confidence and self-advocacy he had garnered from his years in band:

In teaching where I don't act as a woman teacher, people are like, “well, why aren't you doing, why don't you wear the fun little cute outfits that middle school teachers who are women wear, why aren't you doing these certain activities?”

And I'm like, “well, why aren't you asking my male peers to do the same things? Because I never see you require that of them, but I'm not a woman and I do this differently.”

Taylor was also elected to serve on one of Tau Beta Sigma’s district councils, providing oversight and guidance to chapters within segregated geographic regions of the country.

Summary

For Taylor, being a member of the NSU was heart wrenching, affirming, frustrating, and filled with joy. In the face of incredible discrimination from students and lack of empathy from staff, Taylor recalled thinking: “I definitely like reminded myself

that ‘I’m just here to have fun, and I can do things just to have fun.’” As Taylor grew out of the anxiety he experienced over his perceived lack of technical skills and began to articulate his strengths, he came to terms with his band membership:

There was no way I could have been the best. I don't march drum corps, nor do I have an interest in it. I don't, I'm not a music major, and nor do I have an interest in being one. There was no way I was going to be the best at band, so instead of being the best at band, I was the best member I could be in the band.

Taylor focused his narrative on the impact of leadership, the importance of providing multiple pathways for students to find their niche, the influence of representation, and dangers of peer pressure. Taylor’s story highlighted the ways in which leaders influence those around them at both the student and staff levels. Taylor’s elementary and middle school band director’s passion for “fun” in music and inclusive attitude fostered the young trumpet player’s love for music, but his high school director’s vindictive and cold approach prompted him to consider dropping music from his life altogether and dissuaded him from pursuing music as a major.

In college, Taylor’s student leaders permitted abusive behavior and comments, dealing a glancing blow to his self-esteem and confidence. Further, the band’s professional leadership exacerbated existing issues by ignoring and then rewarding a harmful member of the community, negatively impacting not only Taylor but many of his peers as well. As a leader himself, Taylor felt empowered to advocate for trans issues and engaged in a mentoring relationship that reflected the way in which he viewed teaching and instruction.

Although Taylor excelled at trumpet performance in high school after several years of lessons, his confidence was shaken in college as he was surrounded by peers at vastly different technical levels. Provided only one means to contribute to the band, Taylor felt trapped until he found like-minded individuals in the band sorority and later in his non-playing role as a logistical coordinator.

Taylor grew up in family and school environments in which his queer identity was either ignored or actively scorned. Cast aside early on by family members and forced to mute his gender presentation at school, Taylor turned to online spaces and only saw normalized queer relationships later in life than many of his friends at different schools. Seeing male musicians at his summer music camp was hugely impactful for Taylor, witnessing gender non-conformity as “celebrated” and not simply tolerated. As Taylor assumed leadership roles and stepped into student teaching, he resolved to take on the role as the representative he would have liked to see during his own childhood.

Finally, the peer pressure Taylor faced at all stages of his educational career manifested in both internal self-doubt and external expressions of conformity. Although peers’ comments may have focused on specific elements of his presentation such as clothing or hair style, Taylor internalized many of the negative critiques to deny possibilities he had just begun to explore. Years of conforming to peer expectations finally bubbled over, and Taylor leaned heavily on the empowerment he experienced at SMC and in the sisterhood to advocate for himself and move beyond external commentary.

I was incredibly moved by Taylor’s earnest, thoughtful, and deeply personal

recollections during each of our conversations. Taylor's resilience in the face of an onslaught of negativity and a lack of support in most every facet of his life throughout his childhood and early adulthood was a somber reminder of the situations that many trans people face every day. However, the strength Taylor exhibited and joy he experienced in "doing band" on his own terms provided a great deal of insight and context to the power and responsibility that those of us in the profession of music education have to our students and their incredibly special journeys.

“It’s Just Band, and Band is Fun”: Grant’s Story

Grant joined our first video call from his family’s home in a large northeastern metropolitan area. I was immediately struck by the number of personal items adorning his bedroom walls, with paintings, lighting fixtures, posters, and word art decorating the blank, white canvas on which they sat. Grant wore a long-sleeved grey sweatshirt with a thin green bracelet tied around his right wrist, which flashed across the screen as he gestured with his hands. Grant’s round glasses and transparent rims sat comfortably against his face, his dark brown hair buzzed on the sides of his head faded to the top.

Grant was working in the development department of an LGBTQIA+ non-profit in a major northeastern U.S. city, a job he began several months after graduating from Northeastern State University (NSU) in the spring of 2019. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Grant commuted daily through busy streets to reach his company’s downtown office building. Once the company mandated remote work, Grant decided to set aside dedicated office space in his bedroom. Although Grant’s work leadership had already discussed allowing some employees to work remotely once offices re-opened, Grant indicated that he “likes a very separate work and life” balance and would return to his desk in the city. After discussing the IRB documentation and outlining the structure of our discussions, Grant shook his head when I asked him if he had questions, and we began the first of three insightful and deeply moving conversations.

“A Very Stable Family Life”: Background and Growing Up

Grant was born just outside a major northeastern U.S. city of several million residents. The oldest of his siblings, Grant and his two sisters lived with their mother and

father for the entirety of their childhood. Grant's parents were "very liberal" and had grown more "progressive with age," and Grant expressed that he "had the liberty to kind of express myself however I wanted" from a young age, particularly with clothing choices. Grant's family was not particularly religious and he was not "forced to go to church or anything like that."

Although his younger sisters were drawn to "girl" activities, Grant grew up with "very gender-neutral" interests: "My favorite like TV shows and movies were SpongeBob and Toy Story...I was not into Barbies, I was not into Legos and race cars and trucks and those kinds of things." Grant "didn't really have a traditional trans timeline of like, I was always a tomboy," and enjoyed balancing his interests beyond "masculine" or "feminine" labels. While Grant's father was heavily interested in sports, his parents "never forced [my siblings or me] to play sports."

"I Loved School and I Hated the Social Life Aspect": Navigating School Experiences

As a child, Grant "read really early, spoke really early." However, Grant struggled significantly with social situations, and experienced "a little bit of a harder time connecting with people who were my age." Grant recalled excelling in many of his classes, but "had a harder time learning social cues":

[My] mom...was like, "I kind of wish, you know, we had you evaluated when you were younger for, you know, autism and things like that." I look at my life now and I'm like, "I am definitely autistic and that's fine."

Involvement in music classes and the school band gave Grant a valuable outlet at his

young age.

Grant's love of music was sparked at a young age during a trip to see the Broadway musical *Wicked*:

This is linking into my trans identity I guess, but I always linked to the, I loved the, Fiyero's songs...they are so good, like "Dancing Through Life" and "As Long As You're Mine" were my faves and I was like, "why are these my faves when they're not the showstopper anthems?" You know, I guess it makes sense.

Drawn to the saxophone, Grant recalled thinking, "oh, this is my thing" on his first day of band class in the fourth grade. Grant was able to focus on participating in band rehearsals rather than the social skills with which he struggled.

As Grant entered middle school, he became increasingly self-conscious over his appearance and "really fitting into" his body and expressed a lot of "shame" as a student. Grant struggled to "[fit] in with the other girls in my grade," and expressed difficulty in "finding boys that would like me, finding girls that would like me." Grant turned to relationships with teachers to fill in the gaps and acknowledged that he "definitely hit the teacher's pet expectation fully, so kind of every teacher was my buddy at that point." Grant also became more involved in the band program "[and] really participated in, you know, things like jazz band and wind ensemble and you know, going to [Regional Musical Festival] and doing lessons and you know, things like that." Band rehearsals were one of the few moments during which Grant felt pushed to excel and celebrated for his contributions.

“Every Queer Person Kind of Needs That”: High School and Being Seen

Grant attended an International Baccalaureate (IB) school—a high school which utilized an internationally standardized curriculum and examination sequence—and was immediately placed into a rigorous course schedule. Opting for intensive music classes, Grant took advanced courses in music theory and performance in addition to ensembles. Grant’s high school did not offer a marching band program, but did provide a wind ensemble, jazz band, and pit orchestra.

As Grant dove into his schoolwork and band rehearsals, his social life continued along a tenuous path as he attempted to “[assimilate] to everyone else and the social expectations of myself.” Music streaming apps and online platforms had become more common, and Grant sought new artists to help pass the time. The pop group One Direction (also known as “1D”) had recently grown in popularity, and Grant searched for every song, album, and biographic tidbit on he could find. “That was my thing. Loved them, still love them,” Grant offered. As Grant delved further into 1D’s music, he gravitated toward online fan communities:

Being part of fandom Twitter, and Tumblr, and Instagram, and things like that...that's how I had friends for the first, throughout high school. That's how I kind of made friends and I still follow some of them, and I still, you know, keep up with how, you know, people are doing.

After school and on weekends, Grant expanded his 1D following to other artists, meeting up with online friends in person at concert tours and performances in the city.

“Those Spaces Are Very Queer”: Online Communities and Self-Discovery

Through his participation in online communities, Grant found a sense of belonging and shared interests: “I was having a hard time really just finding connection in people, so I found connection to music and like [people] online.” Fandom communities also allowed him to “connect with my queerness” through depictions of LGBTQIA+ people and their stories. “I realized I was queer, that I was just not straight and I never pursued anything about that for a few years,” Grant added.

Grant saw new possibilities in online descriptions of gender and sexuality that he had never considered before. “I started learning about trans folks and different gender identities that are not just like ‘trans guy’ and ‘trans girl,’” Grant commented. Grant recalled a particular YouTube video in which two presenters discussed multiple gender-expansive identities:

One of the identities in there, I was like, “oh my God, that could be me.” And it's, the identity is demigirl, which I do not identify with, it was basically like, “you identify as a girl, but there are non-binary aspects of your identity.” And I was “oh that makes sense.”

Grant generously shared the video link with me, and after watching I began to understand the power of seeing positive, celebratory conversations and depictions of individuals’ expressions of and experiences with gender. The video provided Grant with a rich vocabulary of new concepts, and he spent many evenings “thinking about names, thinking about pronouns, thinking about if I ever wanted to medically transition.” Grant also pondered his attraction to LGBTQIA+ issues:

People like to say that some queer people have an “aggressive ally phase” before they come out...and then it's like, “why am I obsessed with this? Why do I keep consuming queer media? Why do I do all these things?” And I very much felt that, and I was like, “maybe I should just lean into this.”

“Fostered My Growth”: High School English and Self-Reflection

Grant’s favorite non-music courses and teachers were in the English department. While Grant used his time in band to leave his queerness and bodily self-image behind, he used literature in his English classes to explore themes of gender and sexuality:

I really liked [my English classes] because you can express yourself and understand a lot of yourself through the things that you read, and I mean I was reading things like *Frankenstein* and I don't know, *Lord of the Flies*, totally obscure readings, but the teachers always felt so warm and comfortable to me.

Grant’s sophomore year English teacher, “Mrs. A,” took note of Grant’s enthusiasm for and the material in her class and invited Grant to write for the school’s literary magazine. The magazine offered a juxtaposition to Grant’s band experiences, the former providing a individual creative accomplishment and the latter assimilation to a structure.

Grant’s work with Mrs. A and the school magazine proved crucial as it was to Mrs. A whom he came out as trans: “We still talk to this day...she was the first teacher from my high school that I told I was trans and she was, you know, obviously really supportive and everything.” Grant added, “this is a common queer stereotype, that every queer person's best friend was their English high school teacher and that is correct.”

Grant was deeply moved by Mrs. A’s compassion:

Every queer person kind of needs that, to see someone in high school or see someone in any setting that just looks at them and says “I see you. You know, “I see that in you,” and not to point it out, but it's just, [acknowledging] that either a classroom’s a safe space or that they just recognize you is so profound. So profound.

“There’s So Much Nuance to Coming Out”: Stepping Out on His Own

As Grant looked ahead to post-high school life, he decided to come out as a lesbian to his family. Having grown up in a progressive household, Grant felt comfortable divulging his sexual identity to his family. Grant’s parents were “absolutely fine with it” and “everything was great” at home. Soon after, Grant reflected, “okay, you're going to question your gender now. And you're going to go through this whole thing.”

Grant recalled that he “didn't really explore my queerness through music” during high school and spent much of time improving his technical proficiency. Although Grant’s band director was “really supportive” of him, he was unsure of his objective technical abilities:

We didn't really audition for anything. So there was no form of competition or anything. So I had no really, gauge if I was good or not, I was only told that I was good by like my directors in high school, my parents, things like that.

Although Grant’s school did not offer a marching band, he was excited to participate during college: “I still wanted to play music in college, but I didn't want to major in music. So I was like, ‘oh, marching band's a really good, you know, outlet for that.’”

Searching for universities in the region, Grant settled on Northeastern State University.

“One of the Best Decisions I Made”: NSU and a Fresh Start

As Grant prepared to start school at NSU in the fall, he began thinking more critically about his gender identity, expression, and presentation: “I played around with being non-binary and what that felt like. And then two weeks before I left for college, I cut my hair. I used to have really long hair and then I cut it pretty short.” Although he came out as trans to a few friends during high school, he was unsure how his announcement might be received at the university: “I was really worried about...having a really good social life because I had not had one in years past.” Grant considered coming out right away, but “didn't know necessarily how or if I was ready or anything like that.” Grant ultimately decided to “[go] by my old name and she/her pronouns and stuff like that” as the season began.

In preparation for joining the marching band, Grant purchased a new tenor saxophone. Grant began his college career as an actuarial science major, but quickly grew frustrated and switched to mathematics and statistics. As an honors student, Grant lived in the residence hall for first year students in the honors program and lived with a friend from high school.

“That Was Such a Hard Thing for Me”: Leaving the Past and Embracing the NSU

Band

When Grant finally arrived at NSU for the band’s pre-season camp, he was filled with anxiety and anticipation. Grant was “really nervous about making friends...because you know, that was such a hard thing for me,” while also “feeling excited” to meet new

people. Grant was hesitant at the prospect of being judged or ignored, but he “felt really validated” by meeting new and returning members. “Nobody at college ever knew me with long hair...ever knew me as someone who was straight” Grant commented, and added that it was refreshing “not having to look back on who I was then and could just move forward on who I was now.”

The NSU marching band divided its rehearsal time between a paved practice field at the north end of the campus and rooms in the school’s music department facility. Grant was comfortable with the bathroom layouts in both locations, using individual portable toilets at the practice field and one of the music department’s single-stall restrooms. However, on football game days Grant was forced to leave the stadium to use portable toilets at the edge of the concourse: “I literally went there because I was like, ‘I’m not picking any of [the gendered bathrooms].’”

Grant described his first pre-season camp as “rough,” and “was really tired...I was never really an active person so going through that much physical activity was a lot.” The physical pain and soreness were justified, Grant contended, as he was also building a “social foundation” he had not had in high school. One of Grant’s new friends, a senior member of the saxophone section and one of its leaders, quickly alleviated his concerns about his technical abilities:

He was just like, “you’re really good.” And I was like, “what?” And he was like, “yeah, you’re like frickin awesome.” And I was like, “okay, thanks, no one’s really said that.” But to hear that from a senior who I looked up to, who was a really good player too. I was like, “okay, I belong here.” You know, I needed that

belonging, more than anything in life, so that was, that was, I was really happy to have that.

Grant's musical affirmation was reinforced weeks later as the band directors held auditions for the program's competitive basketball pep band. When the rosters for the selective groups were posted, Grant was "taken aback" when he saw his name on a list. "That was again, just a really affirming experience on its own," Grant added.

Grant's section mates were "very familial" and supportive both on and off the field. As he built trusting relationships, Grant felt as though he had permission to express his sexuality and gender openly and without fear of shaming:

I was very openly gay. I was gay, "I'm into girls, that's the deal." And everyone, my section was like, "great, fabulous." And I remember being at my first [saxophone] party and then people, seniors went up to me and they were like, "who do you want to make out with?"

Grant started mixing masculine and feminine attire and purchased a binding garment. Grant enjoyed his new presentation, but also recalled immense physical pain: "You're only supposed to wear it eight hours a day, no physical activity, and obviously marching band is not that. So, pretty damaging to my ribs and my back." However, Grant continued to wear the compression garment and ever wore it around his parents at home.

While he detested the gym, Grant found physical activity at marching band rehearsals to be "super enjoyable," blending components of moving in time with music with the social element of playing with friends. Grant learned how to march only weeks earlier, but quickly grew to love the structure: "Something about formations and

marching band and things like that being solidified and everything was very, very pleasing.” Small opportunities for Grant to collaborate and coordinate with other section members were crucial as he continued to build self-confidence in a new activity.

“Just Let Me Do Whatever I Wanted”: A Flexible Spring Semester

During the spring semester, Grant traveled to several post-season basketball tournaments with a small group of fellow band members. Initially concerned about hotel rooming assignments, Grant added, “they let you pick roommates, which I thought was nice.” Later that semester, Grant was forced to make a difficult decision for the marching band’s annual spring banquet:

The last time I wore a dress while presenting as a woman was my freshman banquet. And I remember hating it. I was just, I couldn't, I couldn't find you know, masculine clothes that fit my body. That was fine.

Although he felt uncomfortable at the time, Grant commented, “now my friends and I look at those pictures and we laugh.”

While he remembered his year as largely positive, Grant acknowledged two issues that persisted. First, Grant was still concerned about “body image issues,” and was working to fully internalize the welcome and support he received from friends. A second concern occurred when Grant, along with two close friends, expressed interest in rushing the band’s fraternity, Kappa Kappa Psi. Both of Grant’s friends received invitations, leaving Grant out of their process and shared experiences. “I was really confused,” Grant recalled, “I was really concerned that I was going to lose these two really close friends of mine.” However, Grant’s friendships continued to strengthen despite not becoming a

member of the organization. Grant summarized his first year at NSU as “180 [degrees] from high school” and the first time he had been “really supported, really understood for everything I was.”

“I Didn’t Really Know What Was Going On”: Sophomore Year and Coming Out

Grant began his sophomore year by moving into an apartment with five other members of the marching band. “I still wanted to live with girls, I was more comfortable with girls,” Grant noted. Although Grant enjoyed living with his friends, he was concerned that he had “no privacy.” During the NSU band’s pre-season camp, Grant decided to remove his binder and wear more feminine athletic attire in the hot summer sun:

Nobody wears clothes, that's just how it went. So I felt fine, wearing things that felt comfortable to me that weren't necessarily affirming to me...I would just wear just a sports bra and shorts, and not have my shirt on, and it was fine.

As we discussed the marching band’s uniform, Grant’s face lit up and he joyfully exclaimed, “oh, I loved it. It was very affirming to me [because] it was a very neutral thing.” Recalling his experiences, Grant commented that “a lot of queer people...deal with things like body image and body shame.” However, wearing a “big, boxy” uniform permitted him to focus mental energy on his peers and performance: “It was really validating because I was like, ‘I don't even have to worry about what anything looks like. I'm just me in my uniform doing band, and it's not, it's not anything else.’”

“Really Stressed About It”: Friends, Family, and Speaking His Truth

“I’m definitely trans. I have to tell someone,” Grant recalled thinking as the season progressed. Grant had recently added a minor in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and spent many of his classroom hours “[learning] more about like my identities, my communities, and stuff like that, [I] was just very passionate about the topics.” Soon after, Grant came out to his roommates:

I remember there was one night I was just feeling really down about myself in terms of my trans-ness. And that was when I told them, because they were like, “what’s wrong?” Like obviously like when you’re in [Dorm Name] because you have no privacy, so you have to tell them things. And I told them that I was trans and, you know, really figuring it out. And they were like, “alright, we want to be here for you and help you figure things out.”

During casual conversation during dinner one evening, Grant’s roommates “started calling me like he pronouns when I didn’t tell them to do that” which was “very nerve-racking” and “overwhelming.”

After again not receiving an invitation from the band fraternity, Grant became concerned that he had been denied because of anti-trans sentiment. Grant approached several fraternity members with his concerns:

And I asked them, I was like, “is it because I’m trans?” They were like, “no, it is not, they use the right pronouns for you. The entire discussion, you know, everyone was cool with that.” But there were just a few people who didn’t want me in it for whatever reason.

After a disappointing semester, Grant returned home for the holiday break struggling with his mental health. Grant expressed that he often felt torn between devoting the entirety of his mental energy to either his gender and sexual identities or past struggles with his body image, with little bandwidth:

It was almost as if I had all of this body image issues and then immediately realized I was trans and then decided to not worry about my body image issues for four years while I came to terms with me being trans, coming out, and then starting hormones. And am now finally, you know, healing from those issues, growing up.

During the university's final examination period, Grant called his mother to come out: "I called my mom, and I was like, 'I need to tell you that I'm trans' and she, you know, we talked on the phone for a while. And she was like, 'you know, I need time.'" About common trans stories of coming out, Grant commented that "the parent is on either spectrum of 'super accepting or kick you out of the house.'" Although Grant's parents were "really shocked" by his announcement, they showed no hostility or anger. Rather Grant's parents expressed concern and fear over anti-trans violence:

They were mostly really scared for me with, you know, seeing how widely impacted trans communities are by violence, really scared that I wouldn't be taken seriously by people. Really scared that I wouldn't be able to be my authentic self. Grant's mother later came to him and remarked, "I feel like I don't know you...it's like meeting a new person again."

Grant acknowledged that his long absences from home made it difficult for his

parents since they were “really good at exposure” to new ideas or concepts. “It's like, ‘surprise I'm trans’ and then I'm gone for four months,” Grant added. Acknowledging that “representation is an awesome thing,” Grant offered:

There needs to be more stories of...not that it's ok that your parents didn't accept you right away, not to, not be so, I guess to not be surprised...I think sometimes we can go in with an expectation of how our parents will react to things. For some people, turns out great. For some people it doesn't. But in my case, it just took time. People need time to sit with stuff.

Grant recalled needing to remind himself to show “a lot of grace” to his family as they adjusted to his correct name and pronouns: “My parents knew me as one name for 19 years and I couldn't expect them to fully call me a new name the next day.” Grant's conversations with his sisters were more muted: “I actually only told one of them and I texted her about it. And she was like, ‘yeah, I figured.’”

Grant was initially worried about sharing his story with extended members of his family, since he had “no queer family members” on either side. “I didn't feel the need to tell any extended family [because] I wasn't seeing anyone,” Grant remarked, “that's kind of the really easy way of being like ‘I'm gay, I'm seeing someone.’” A few months later, Grant's mother spoke with family on her side; family members expressed support and love. Grant's grandmother asked if she had his permission to send him a “grandson card” on his birthday but wrote both his dead name and “Grant” because she was unsure. “It's a laugh for me, it's honestly funny,” Grant commented.

Although Grant acknowledged that he continued to live in “a lot of gray” for the

next year, he was relieved to take an important step in affirming his gender and sexuality. Most importantly, coming out to his family, loved ones, and friends was critical for Grant in freeing himself from an internalized negative self-concept:

As a fat person, I had a lot of internalized fatphobia and I would then project it onto other fat people and think they were, you know, ugly, gross, things like that because I thought that about myself. So if someone internally realizes they're gay sees another gay person acting super flamboyant, wants to, you know, hate them because they hate that about themselves and then they project that hate on to someone else.

“A Little Bit Hard to Deal With”: A Challenging Return to NSU

Prior to his return to campus, Grant came out to one of his band directors through a Facebook message. The director enthusiastically expressed support for Grant and ensured that his name and pronouns on documents and files within the band's administrative offices would be changed accordingly. Grant added, “there was no mention of my old name ever again, and it was great.” Grant also visited the university registrar's office to change his name on all other official documents and apply for a new email address. Grant's request was promptly denied under the premise that the school “couldn't have different IDs” for a single student. Grant opted to write a “preferred name” on the back of his existing ID. However, Grant was forced to email professors individually about his name change, desperately hoping they would acknowledge receipt of his request before the first day of class:

I'd be like, "hi my name is this, I'm listed on your roster as this, I go by Grant and use he/him pronouns." You know, "please use these," but whatever. And I'd be really happy when a professor would be like, "great Grant, and thanks for letting me know. I'll see you in class." But it would suck when they wouldn't respond, because then I get to class and be like, "fuck, what's going to happen?"

Grant was unable to change his documents throughout the remainder of his time at NSU and was worried about the implications for graduate school applications.

Now in his fourth semester at NSU, Grant was forced to evaluate his dropping grades. Grant commented that he adopted a "band is everything" to "compensate" for the years he had been socially separated from his high school peers:

For the first three semesters of college, I really did not focus in school, because I was so preoccupied with creating my social foundation that I kind of ignored a lot of my schoolwork, which was not great.

Further, Grant's sleep routine had suffered with few restrictions on staying out late or ignoring assignments.

Grant expressed frustration after not receiving an invitation to the band fraternity for a third straight year: "I missed the vote by one vote. So if I had one friend who was not [absent during the vote], I would have had [an invitation] letter that semester," Grant added. By the end of the semester, Grant was grateful to have not joined the fraternity after spending time "more focused on school."

“Always Being Evaluated”: Junior Year and Tough Decisions

At the end of his second year, Grant was elected to a position on the NSU marching band leadership council and appointed as one of the leaders of the saxophone section. Part of Grant’s role on the council was to plan and implement the band’s pre-season training camp. Grant felt empowered to use his position to advocate for other queer band members: “Whoever was making the name tags and I was like, ‘there needs to be pronouns on these. That’s a, that’s a full stop. That has to happen.’” Grant also attempted to invite staff from the university’s LGBTQIA+ resource center to provide a training session. Although the directors asked members of the school’s disability and special accommodations department to provide “sensitivity training,” the absence of queer education frustrated Grant during planning sessions: “Obviously [during the camp] they’re just trying to learn part one of the show and go on with it. So there wasn’t a lot of time for that...I mean that would be my dream.”

Elsewhere on campus, Grant moved into a trans-inclusive residence hall on campus and enjoyed the sense of privacy in living alone. Grant’s Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies courses opened space for him to speak plainly and honestly about queer issues. Noting that he “didn’t participate” in his math courses, Grant added that “STEM kind of classes don’t really offer for that kind of like, communication like that.”

“More of a Control Freak Than I Like to Admit”: The Challenges of Section Leadership

While his position as a band officer involved a great deal of planning and logistics, Grant’s responsibilities as a section leader immersed him more deeply into his

section's culture. Grant acknowledged that he entered the year "very much a stickler for the rules" felt as though he "had to prove something." Grant also noticed a demonstrable shift from his first two years in the band to his third, witnessing a growing divide between groups of students. Those students who came to band "for the social" were labeled "four-to-sixers" in reference to the band's afternoon rehearsal block. Band members who were "really harsh rule followers" were more invested in band politics and policies. "Everyone comes to band for different reasons," Grant asserted. As Grant started his junior year, "more people from the NSU band decided to start joining DCI, and those were the people in leadership positions." New to his position and eager to prove that he was "capable of leading people," Grant grounded his leadership style in adherence to rules and policies. Grant felt torn between the welcoming and laid-back atmosphere that had attracted him to the NSU marching band and the increasingly intense experience that leaders and staff were fostering: "People who joined just to, you know, play their instrument and march and have fun feel kind of turned off from that which I completely, completely understand."

A few weekends into the semester, Grant decided to visit his partner attending a university in a different city. Upon his return, Grant received a surprise invitation to join the band fraternity. Grant was joined by only two other band members, allowing each person to receive a great deal of individual attention. Although Grant was thrilled to receive an invitation, the scrutiny exacerbated his stress: "You're kind of always under a microscope, kind of. You're kind of always being evaluated, or, not just by people in the frat, but directors too, especially if you're a section leader as well."

The band's head director later warned band members against holding parties or engaging in underage drinking. "Being a first-year student leader, I was like, 'oh my god, really scared', like 'don't want that to happen,'" Grant recalled. A few weeks later, Grant discovered that several of his peers were organizing a section party. Grant was unaware that his friends were serving alcohol, but became upset upon arrival: "They all knew that I would be a stickler for rules and gave me dead eyes like, 'what is he doing here.'"

Grant quickly left the apartment, upset and scared that he and his peers would be harshly penalized. After asking a friend to pick him up from the apartment, Grant drafted a message to one of the directors. Word spread that Grant had alerted staff to their gathering, and Grant commented that "it then set the tone for the season, that people in my section hated me." After risking his social relationships, Grant was irate when staff failed to act on his information: "Nothing ended up even happening, we just got a stern talking to from [The Director] and that was it. It was nothing, nothing happened." The party damaged Grant's relationships for the remainder of his junior year. "A few people quit, it was really dramatic," Grant recalled. The same friends who had been supportive of his transition now showed "a lot of hostility" toward Grant.

"Affirmed by People in That Space": The Band Fraternity as a Safe Haven

Grant experienced "a deeper level of friendship" with members of the band fraternity than he did with members of his section. The fraternity also offered valuable opportunities for Grant to express his femininity and masculinity with agency:

I love fashion, so I always wait for every formal...to, you know, really bring out my best outfits. And some of them were not full suits. I sometimes wore heels. I

wore more flowy pants. I don't think I ever wore a dress. I did not. But I felt really comfortable in that space to be able to do that stuff because I know no one would give me weird glances for it, or you know, comments about it. They would just be like, "I love your outfit." And that would be that. So it was a very, you know, affirming space.

As a fully initiated member, Grant advocated for other trans members of the band and argued that they "really have to get into using pronouns and stuff." The organization quickly adopted Grant's recommendation, and members introduced themselves with their pronouns at all subsequent events.

At the end of the school year, Grant invited returning members of the saxophone section to dinner during which the group mutually agreed to leave hard feelings and resentment behind.

"I Just Wanna Have Fun": Senior Year and a New Outlook

Shortly before his return to campus, Grant noticed a social media post from a social media account and gained inspiration from its brevity:

[The account] put out these stickers that just, in a rainbow said like, "it's just band and band is fun." And so I let that carry me and, you know, I said that to everyone. I was like, "it's just band and band is fun" and that's what it should be...people lose sight of that all the time.

Exhausted after a year of "policing" his classmates, Grant decided to take a more passive role during his second year: "I was like, 'gonna let you do your thing. I'm going to be here if you need me. Let's have, let's just have a good time.'"

During Grant's final pre-season band camp, he was elated to march alongside a band member who was trans and had recently undergone top surgery. During the camp, many members removed clothing to escape the intense summer heat. Grant's fellow saxophone section member took off his shirt, revealing the results of his top surgery for the first time. "I was like, 'oh my God, like fantastic.' And nobody else made it weird, which was great," Grant recalled.

Grant had also made numerous friends in other leadership positions and felt empowered to insist on trans-inclusive policies. Noting that there were no band members who were out as trans during his first year, Grant resolved to serve as a role model:

I think I was that person for people when I was a senior and I loved that. I was really into that because I feel like people always need someone to show them like, "hey, this is an affirming space, you're good here." And so that's why I was really persistent about a lot of stuff having to do with trans folks, making sure there were designated gender-neutral restrooms, making sure that pronouns were on name tags and, you know, enforced and things like that.

Grant continued to push for a member of the LGBTQIA+ resource center but was unable to convince staff members to give up forego time. An incident during which one of his section members collapsed during a rehearsal after numerous ongoing mental health struggles pushed Grant to ask for mental health and wellness training which was also denied.

Grant soon discovered that a member from another section had expressed transphobic attitudes, using trans individuals' deadnames or scratching out pronouns on

band-issued name tags. Grant immediately reported his concerns to staff, but his complaint elicited no response. Other student leaders approached staff members but received a “really problematic” response:

All three of [the leaders] went to [Band Director], were like, “are you going to do anything about this? And she was like, “no, because I don't want to give him the attention he is craving.” And I was like, “it's not about that. It's, it's not about giving him what he, what he wants and acknowledging that he's doing something wrong. It's about, you know, making this a good place for people.”

After witnessing staff failing to act on multiple occasions, Grant felt affirmed in his decision to step away from enforcing band policies and rules, adding that “lots of complacency happens because a lot of people are not trained to deal with certain issues, because the only people who are trained are the three adults out of 300 students.”

By mid-semester, Grant felt ready to move on from NSU and the marching band. During a rehearsal on the band's gravel practice field, Grant turned to a friend and reflected, “if we left right now, we, everything would be okay, it would all be fine...I gave everything I wanted to and that I could, and you know, it's time for other people to do the same.” In an effort to make more non-band friends during his final season, Grant began working at the school's LGBTIQ+ resource center. The center was a “great place to work,” and Grant was able to work on trans-specific projects and initiatives as he searched for jobs.

Grant also expressed appreciation for having joined the band fraternity later in his college career, keeping him from becoming “old and grumpy” over time. At a conference

that year, Grant was accepted the opportunity to deliver the keynote address and reflected that “it was just a really good two years to be part of [the fraternity].” Grant summarized his last months at NSU by saying that he “kept that mentality of like, ‘it’s just band and band is fun’ for my senior year, and it really, it really helped me a lot, because otherwise it would have been a really hard senior year” and added that he “felt more sad graduating from [the] fraternity than band.”

“A Blessing and a Curse”: Life After NSU

After receiving his undergraduate degree, Grant returned to his hometown. At the end of the summer, a non-profit organization serving LGBTQIA+ clients offered Grant a position. Grant liked many of his colleagues but also noted that there were signs of discrimination and oppression within the supposedly LGBTQIA+ friendly environment:

My work added a new health insurance plan to more widely accommodate trans-specific needs whether that’s hormone surgeries, etc. Yet, it’s the most expensive plan. And I was like, “this is not what we were looking for, this is not, this is not the answer.”

Grant also asserted that many trans, non-binary, fem, and employees of color were denied promotions and paid the least compared to their White, cisgender peers. “It’s just really frustrating and I’ve talked about it with my fellow team members a lot and we really recognize it,” Grant acknowledged.

Grant was actively searching for representation on popular and social media platforms, adding that he “[doesn’t] fit a lot of boxes and a lot of different ways.”

Pointing to gender and sexuality as fluid over time, Grant described an image he had seen

just prior to one of our conversations: “I saw actually a graphic today that was like, ‘I’m a non-binary trans guy. I’m not a man, I don’t want to be associated with cisgender masculinity.’ And I was like, that’s exactly it.” While imperfect, Grant pointed to new social media platforms as providing diverse expressions of gender, sexuality, and body image that he had not seen before:

You know, I’m a fat person, I’m a very flamboyant person, but almost exclusively into women so it makes it very hard to find another person who is like me and it took so long for me to find those people, but it was on TikTok, which is much newer social media and, I think TikTok is a blessing and a curse.

Grant had also began hormone therapy a few months prior to our discussions and made the decision to come out to his father’s side of the family. While he was initially nervous, Grant was relieved by the family members’ support and acceptance.

After Grant came out to his sisters, the three siblings did not speak openly about his transition or gender identity. One element Grant appreciated about his membership in the band fraternity was “being called a brother,” and added that he wished members of his family would refer to him with the term as well. On a car ride with one of his sisters, Grant was surprised by his sibling’s comments during a phone call:

I picked up my youngest sister from work and she called one of her friends and she was like, “oh yeah, my brother’s driving somewhere.” And I was like, “you just called me your brother? That’s weird.” I was like, “I’ve never heard you do that.” It was just weird. But I’m like, “okay, what else would she have called you?”

Grant's previous marching band experience, particularly his time as a leader, provided a valuable foundation for his post-graduate job duties and he expressed "confidence to know, 'okay I can lead people, I can educate people, I can manage people...I can, you know, come up with the idea for a project and execute it and see it through.'" Still, Grant looked ahead to graduate school for a career in teaching which he had "denied" himself as an undergraduate student.

Reflecting on his time at NSU, Grant recalled that although he was frustrated by friends who had "totally just dropped" him during his junior year and staff members who were not always attentive to the needs of their minority students, he walked away having learned to "not take things so seriously and not to look at things so black and white. There's a lot of gray in life and that's, you just have to live with it."

Summary

Grant's story was heavily focused on the importance of representation, the impact of leadership on his self-confidence and perception, and the need for safe spaces in which he had the agency to experiment and explore his gender identity. As Grant was beginning to consider his sexual orientation and gender identity, he had few role models or mentors to whom he could turn at school or within his family. Grant found valuable stories and depictions of trans individuals through online communities, connecting with other trans and queer fans of musical groups. At school, Grant found solace in the fluidity and self-exploration common in many of his assigned novels. Upon entering NSU, Grant observed the lack of out trans musicians in the marching band, and although he was immediately accepted for his sexuality, was anxious about publicly identifying himself as trans to his

new friends. As a senior leader, Grant attempted to assume the responsibilities of a queer role model to younger students and fought to implement LGBTQIA+ friendly policies in the band program.

Grant's English teacher's invitation for him to write for the school's literary magazine provided Grant a medium for leadership that was not available to him as a band member. Grant recalled that musical leadership "was just never provided to me in high school because like my band was so small." As a student leader at the college level, Grant was torn between enforcing rules that were ultimately not backed up by professional staff and souring friendships in the name of upholding written policies. Attempting to align himself with the staff, Grant quickly lost faith and felt abandoned after several failed requests for interventions on student behavior. However, Grant was also encouraged by the staff's willingness to include pronouns on student name tags and include gender-expansive language in band documents.

Grant mentioned several times that he had been living in a "gray" area for several years, eager to explore his gender and sexuality. The band's fraternity provided support with its culture and language (e.g., being referred to as a "brother"), and permitted Grant to dress in masculine and feminine attire with which he resonated. The marching band itself was an "equalizing" space, allowing Grant to take off his shirt without question or march in the same uniform as his peers without regard to the gender of its wearer. Traveling two spaces that allowed for differing methods of expressing his gender was affirming for Grant and provided a great deal of flexibility throughout his journey.

Grant's story points directly to the consequences that organizations face when

leaders act or fail to act on issues deemed important by their members. Marching bands rely heavily on student leaders for musical, social, and structural assistance, and supporting or abandoning them may result in wide-ranging and long-lasting shifts in morale and efficiency. Grant's story of coming out to his family and friends demonstrates the need for additional narratives that are not necessarily aligned with the extreme ends of unwavering support and immediate rejection, and the imperative to include more diverse voices that celebrate the uniqueness of the individual story.

“You Can Be Wrong, But Also Right”: Quinn’s Story

During our first video call, Quinn was in the process of packing up for a move later in the week. Although I noticed a few small packages throughout their otherwise immaculate living room, I was surprised by the lack of boxes I would have normally expected to see. Quinn logged on from a computer that they had built during his sophomore year of college as a digital media and design (DMD) major at Northeastern State University. Quinn wore a simple grey t-shirt with the school’s name patterned across the front, and their soft, round glasses reflected the glow of the dual monitors in front of them. A futon sat behind Quinn’s right shoulder, over which a large LGBTQ pride flag sat affixed to the white walls.

Quinn graduated from NSU in the spring of 2019 and was only the second class of undergraduate students at NSU to major in digital media and design. Working from home throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, Quinn noted that they enjoyed alternating between video games and catching up on episodes of *Star Trek* with a friend to help pass their free time. Before logging on, Quinn had been playing one of their favorite massively multiplayer online role-playing video game titles, *Final Fantasy XIV*. After some small talk about our respective video game experiences, I asked Quinn if they had any questions about the IRB documents. Quinn gave each file a quick scan after reading them several weeks prior and shook their head.

“A Fairly Normal Upbringing”: Family and Background

Quinn grew up with their parents and two younger brothers in a town of approximately 14,000 residents in the northeastern United States. At home, Quinn was

“left alone” by their parents and from a young age enjoyed listening to video game and movie soundtracks. Aside from the occasional shared musical interest with their father, Quinn noted that “none of [the] things I liked to do, [my parents] were particularly into. And so it's just kind of like, ‘go, go do what you want to do, as long as it doesn't annoy us.’”

Quinn spent much of their time reading, playing with Legos, and becoming immersed in video game worlds. However, Quinn felt most at home in their family’s large backyard and surrounding woods. As the oldest of their siblings, Quinn would lead their brothers and friends up and down a nearby river pretending to be soldiers and setting up small “bases.” Quinn had a tenuous relationship with their brothers growing up and characterized their frequent fights as “antagonistic.” Quinn was reluctantly involved with after school soccer from a young age at the urging of their parents and developed a strong aversion to the soccer camp to which they were sent each summer. “It wasn’t my own space. It was fun but it wasn’t really comfortable,” Quinn recalled. Religion played only a minor role in Quinn’s life growing up, and Quinn commented that there was “none of that in the house” as a child.

“On the Outside Trying to Get Included”: Early School Years

As a child, Quinn’s relationships were built around fantasy environments and fictional worlds:

We would make up, where we'd draw a top-down military base, basically. And then make up units that we put places and we'd, to move them we'd draw them again farther up and then erase them, then attack and stuff like that. We all had

our own factions that we represented, I guess that, that was fun.

Elementary school was also the time when portable gaming systems were becoming increasingly popular. Quinn resorted to borrowing friends' gaming systems, upsetting their mother when they would stay up into the late hours of the evening. Quinn spent a great deal of time "more on the outside trying to get included because of all the stuff I didn't have. I wanted to participate in the same way."

A child, Quinn's mother registered them and their brothers in a home music program, experimenting with "glockenspiel stuff and recorder." At school, Quinn initially learned percussion in the band but did not enjoy playing and quit soon after. Quinn then moved to the violin and played with the orchestra throughout the remainder of elementary and the first few months of middle school. Shortly after dropping the violin, Quinn showed interest in learning piano and remained on the instrument through the end of high school.

"I Am Still a Little Bitter": Middle School and Carving Out Space

With a limited social circle, Quinn leaned more heavily into fantasy and science fiction books, television, and internet communities as a middle school student. Although Quinn did not recall any overt harassment or bullying, they acknowledged that they had blocked out many negative comments:

If I was bullied, I didn't notice it because what I would do is just kind of assume that everyone around me was stupid and didn't know what they were doing, and I did. And so whenever there were people being dumb I'd be like, "uh huh, but they are not smart like I am." Which was, saying it out loud, it's a little sociopathic. It

was the way for me to get through middle school without, with having two friends in total.

Although Quinn enjoyed graphic novels during elementary school, they became drawn to full-length novels during middle school: “Why would you write a story about real people in the real world when you could not?” Quinn found the fictional characters and locations “more interesting” than those in their daily life. “[The stories] are better when you re-read [them]. Especially when you're in middle school and you don't understand the politics,” Quinn added. After experimenting with violin for a few years, Quinn stopped playing to take piano lessons. In seventh grade, Quinn’s mother encouraged them to join the school’s choir. Recalling that they “somehow didn’t freak out at the audition,” Quinn joined the ensemble for their first and only year and joked, “I don’t think they were very picky.”

“Less Closed Off”: High School and Time for Growth

In high school, Quinn quickly formed a new social group. Quinn started each day at their regularly assigned school before busing to a nearby magnet school. Quinn was drawn to several of their English classes throughout high school and fondly remembered a unit during which students were asked to select a book to read and discuss in small groups. Choosing *A Fault in Our Stars*, Quinn noted, “that might be the first time I was in a group only with girls, which was nice.” Around this time, Quinn’s mother also started scrutinizing their grades:

I found it [impossible] to be perfect, I always messed up somewhere. Which was extremely annoying as like a, just like an honors kid and, whose mother didn’t

like when he got C's. Because my mother was one of the ones who if I got an 80, she'd be like, "but that's almost a C. You're, that's almost a C, you're almost in the C range, and that won't do." It's like, "well, it's not though. Very clearly there is an 8 in it, which means B." Bs are fine, I was fine with Bs, and liked As.

One of Quinn's major successes came during junior year when their college essay was selected as an exemplar. The essay featured Quinn's experiences during annual family trips to Cape Cod during which Quinn enjoyed standing on the shore and walking on the beach, imagining "worlds and characters" amidst the waves. Quinn contrasted the enjoyable beach trips to their father's family trips to North Carolina during which they felt trapped, adding that there were "not a whole lot of opportunities to be alone" and that family members' hyper-masculine attitudes and expressions were "unrelatable...on the deepest level." Looking back, Quinn recalled a "weird, uncomfortable feeling" and added, "it took me until this summer to think, 'hm that might have dysphoria the whole time.'"

"I Never Got Burnt Out on It": Joining the Band

Until junior year, Quinn had not been involved in school music activities. However, the school's band was in search of a pianist, and two of Quinn's friends identified them as a candidate. Quinn joined primarily to fill free time they had at the end of the summer months. At the first rehearsal, Quinn briefly panicked when they realized they would be performing at the very front of the field. "It took most, a lot of that season to just get used to performing in front, in front of people," Quinn commented.

Quinn was not particularly close with their band director, whom they described as

“scary and loud, and very mean.” Despite the instructor’s demeanor, Quinn thrived in the competitive environment:

When you're at a competition or an exhibition, everyone is there for marching band which makes it a lot more fun to actually perform because the crowd cares...I'm what I call a closet competitive person where, I'm not competitive, but if I am found in a contest, I don't want to lose, until the point where I don't care about winning, or it is hopeless.

Band turned out to be “a lot less social” than Quinn had anticipated, but the sense of reward they felt from making music and participating in competitions mitigated feelings of loneliness:

No matter how bad it gets, like when the band hits that chord and you hit that crash, it's, it's pure serotonin. So I can't imagine people not doing band for the music. Like, “why are you here? Go, go. You can watch us and talk to your friends afterwards.”

“My First Time in Real Life”: Senior Year and Starting to Reflect

One of Quinn’s first experiences with non-binary language came during senior year as a friend who was trans prepared to move out of state. Quinn recalled the moment when their friend asked Quinn to refer to them with new pronouns: “I was like, ‘sure.’ And I had no idea what that meant other than the fact that it was a neutral pronoun, which means in-between. And I was like, ‘I'm cool with that.’” Quinn was unfamiliar with the terminology; however, the experience prompted Quinn to reflect on their own gender and sexuality.

Quinn later came out as bisexual to their parents, who were “supportive, albeit confused.” Quinn’s mother was “hopelessly confused,” while their father expressed support as an educator and someone who tried to “improve on his attitude towards different kinds of people.” Soon after, Quinn’s father referred to sexuality as a “scale from straight to gay.” Quinn simply responded, “that’s not how that works.” Quinn then came out to a few of their high school friends, and added:

My sexuality has always been fairly trivial to me ‘cause I haven't, I haven't suffered because of it or had to hide it. At least not consciously. I basically “don't ask, don't tell’ed” myself through high school.

Toward the end of high school, Quinn experimented with three-dimensional sculpting programs that reflected their love of video gaming. After some research, Quinn found a new digital and design major that Northeastern State University had just established. Quinn excitedly applied and was accepted to NSU, eager to learn more about graphics, gaming, and web design.

“Really New, Confusing, and Anxiety-Inducing”: Year One at NSU

As a fine arts major, Quinn moved into the university’s designated fine arts residence hall. Quinn lived on campus all four years at NSU and commented that they “like being near everything...I like having my tiny little cell that has everything I need in one room, the ability to go straight from here to my bed.” Quinn was “kind of friends with” several of their residence hall peers who enjoyed playing Dungeons and Dragons, a tabletop fantasy role-playing game. “It was just kind of an awkward year...just trying to find my place,” Quinn added.

“We Don’t Need to Not Have Fun”: Joining the NSU Marching Band

Having researched the NSU’s band program, Quinn knew that its front ensemble would not match the competitive experience of high school and added they “[felt] like I’d get so bored in the NSU pit because they do so little.” Quinn realized that they found disliked the college football element of band performances: “I do not give one iota about football, and every second I was in that stadium I wanted to leave.” Quinn initially planned to play cymbals while learning snare drum. After joining the cymbal line, Quinn grew to enjoy their new instrument: “I did love the sound and the size though, the...loudest thing on the field you are with 20-inch cymbals.”

Quinn relied on the excitement of making music to carry them through the season. Standing in a single, cymbal players spent most of their time in front of snare drummers or beside one or two other members of the cymbal line. “I didn’t like the person next to me, and I wasn’t really friends with everyone,” Quinn recalled. Quinn observed the diverse personalities within their section and perceived themselves as more introverted and reserved.

One theme that stood out during my conversations with Quinn was their sense of fulfillment in “[playing] the role of an expert.” While they struggled with social relationships during their first season, Quinn “realized that I was much, much better at the instrument than [my outgoing friend] was, which helped with any imbalance of the social situations.” Reflect on the impact of the marching band uniform, Quinn argued that the garment “probably makes marching band appealing to more non-binary people just because everyone wears the same shit.” Quinn compared the band uniform to costuming

from the television show *Star Trek*, commenting that it felt empowering to “be in the know” as a uniformed band member: “Being in a group and knowing things...I'll get a certain ‘huff puff-ness’ when we're setting up all the equipment, it's like ““this needs to go over here.””

While other members of the drumline generally experienced close social connections, Quinn believed that the cymbals were less connected. Quinn characterized the cymbal line as the “peanut gallery of the drumline,” and added:

There's no section quite like us. We're percussion, but we're nothing like a drum. Our music is different, our visuals are different, our culture is different. It's no wonder [Staff Member] didn't know what to do with us. Someone with a drum background would find playing cymbals is learning a whole new instrument.

As a result of the disconnect from their instructor and the other drumline sections, Quinn had a smaller pool from which to find friends.

At the end of one of our discussions, Quinn shared with me a number of band-related photos and videos they had saved. Of particular interest were bits of media from Quinn's first year in band, including a video in which Quinn jokingly sparred with another member of their section. Carefully watching the video several times, Quinn recalled, “play-fighting was my highest form of affection.” Quinn added, “watching this person just move around, I'm, I don't, I don't remember it. I can't imagine being that.” I asked Quinn if there was a point at which the pictures no longer produced dysphoric feelings. Quinn offered, “the ones where I look like a marshmallowy boy are not high on the list.”

The musical and marching aspects of band rehearsals left little time for Quinn to reflect on other aspects of their life: “Whether you're trans basically, and the practice environment doesn't particularly, not allow that...I was more thinking about my eight-to-five²⁴ than anything else at band.” The spring semester, which Quinn characterized as “the most boring” of their life, created additional time during which they could consider their identities. Remembering their friend who was trans during high school, Quinn began to envy her hairstyle and grew their own hair longer. Quinn jokingly added, “if you have any friends who in high school say they want to be a cute girl and then start growing their hair out in college, I mean.”

Determined to return to the NSU marching band in the fall, Quinn became increasingly socially connected with other members of the section. Many pictures Quinn shared with me depicted smiling band members together in residence hall rooms, at off-campus events, or at the band’s annual spring banquet. “I would occasionally hang out with cymbal line members and I actually became friends with them. And so that helped me motivate into the next year,” Quinn reminisced.

“I Just Want It to Sound Good”: Sophomore Year and Stepping Up

When Quinn returned for their sophomore year, they felt “attracted to the [cymbal] line more” and were excited to start a new season. Quinn shared numerous photographs of section members wearing t-shirts they had decorated together, small Halloween bags filled with toys, and cymbal line members posing together at band

²⁴ Quinn’s reference to “eight-to-five” marching refers to the distance between lines on a U.S. college football field. Long, white lines are five yards apart, and many marching bands designate the distance between the five-yard lines to accommodate eight standard steps.

practices. Quinn also shouldered additional responsibilities as a member of the section. Music written for cymbals featured several parts that were split between “tops” and “bottoms” among the cymbal line members. As a leader of the bottoms—members playing the lower notes—Quinn was assigned a position at the end of their line in acknowledgement of their superior marching: “The ends are important because we had to be, we were the ones who had to be right on our spots. And I was good at getting to my spot. So I was given the end of the bottoms.” At least, Quinn felt seen and recognized for their contributions.

Academically, Quinn also found marching band rehearsals to serve as an important tool in keeping a consistent schedule. During our conversations, Quinn was working remotely from home like many employees at technology companies and firms. “I really need places that I need to go in order to like keep a schedule,” Quinn commented. Quinn noted that the lack of a set routine was “messing up” their nightly sleep schedule, and fondly remembered that “marching band was probably the, the most important thing to go to in my mind, which was annoying because it was, it's marching band rehearsal.”

“The Year I Was Looking Forward to the Most”: Junior Year and Mixed Feelings

During a conversation, Quinn and I paused for a moment to watch a full performance of the 16-minute show from their third band season. Quinn stopped every few minutes to comment on experiences they had on the field or the music selections. It was clear to me from Quinn’s enthusiasm and excitement that their junior year show was particularly important to them.

During the fall semester, Quinn was selected as a candidate for the band's service sorority, Tau Beta Sigma. Quinn progressed through their process with nine peers, and recalled many nights occupied by computer games, impromptu dinners, and late-night study sessions. Although Quinn had not intended on joining the organization, they described their invitation as "another bit of an egg crack moment" and looked forward to joining a co-ed sorority. Upon becoming a member, Quinn received a shirt stitched with the sorority's Greek letters in pink, white, and blue fabric; the same colors as the transgender pride flag.

During their sorority membership process, Quinn met another candidate who became their partner shortly after both became full members. Quinn described the experience of watching how their partner interacted with the organization as "eye opening in the way that you're looking over your friend's shoulder as they're writing their notes and you're trying to copy stuff, just to kind of, to see what that experience is like." Quinn had not come out as non-binary at that point but recalled that "[my identity] would have been fine in TBS too." Quinn cautiously observed how their partner's peers treated him and added that "I honestly think dating him delayed me coming out." Quinn expressed that they were "probably afraid of [Partner's] judgment or something."

"More of a Fight": A Tense Ending

Quinn had applied for a section leadership position at the end of their junior year but was passed over in lieu of another cymbal player whom they jokingly referred to as their "sworn enemy." As Quinn prepared for their final season, they "[hoped it would] be good, but also dreading it." As the season started, Quinn immediately noticed that the

band's culture "was going in a really [drum corps] direction that I'm pretty sure a majority of the band didn't like, but we were going there anyway for sure." The shift resulted in students who marched in a drum corps being shown "supreme favoritism" by staff.

Although Quinn focused much of their attention to achieving technical excellence, they were wary of the "braggadociousness" that accompanied a drum corps-centered experience:

[Drum corps] can do whatever they want, people pay to be there. But college bands, they need to have some kind of, they need to have the level of self-awareness where we're a college band and that's fine. We're still worthy as an institution of art...we don't have to not be fun.

Quinn noted as an example a new procedure during rehearsals in which students were instructed to "stand there silently and don't move," calling it "silly and counterproductive."

Quinn's time at band rehearsals was dedicated to music and marching, and they added that "gender stuff wasn't connected to marching band." While Quinn felt physically safe during rehearsals, they were not yet ready to experiment: "I'd rather go to band practice in a skirt than the supermarket, but it's still, it's still public." Quinn "definitely [felt] safer" at Tau Beta Sigma events than full-band rehearsals, particularly because of the higher percentage of queer friends in the sorority. Quinn commented that their friends in the cymbal line were "all straight," and felt a "disconnect on certain things" related to queer issues.

Quinn was forced to take a pseudo-leadership role during the marching band's fall season. The student who had been selected as the section's appointed leader missed several rehearsals every week, leaving Quinn and several older members to make important decisions: "As the section who literally makes up half of our show ourselves—no one makes up visuals for us—[we] could not afford to waste time waiting for a final answer."

When I asked Quinn whether they utilized the LGBTQIA+ center on campus, their response surprised me. While Quinn acknowledged feeling safe in their small, connected academic spaces, they expressed tension between their bisexual identity and utilizing the LGBTQIA+ center. Quinn noted that while interacting with the center would provide some sense of safety and community, they were not fully comfortable interacting with others on the basis of that sexuality:

The idea of hanging out with other queer people simply because we're all queer is silly to a point. 'Cause listen, we can be real shitheads. We can be shitheads in a way that cis and straight people cannot even comprehend of being shitheads. So there's just, I don't think like sexuality and gender is specifically a reason why you should hang out with someone.

In a journal entry, Quinn wrote, "I was generally intimidated by other queer people, my partner had bad experiences with the center, and not all queer people want to be info dumped on about [television shows]. I would still feel safest around queer people>women>men." One of Quinn's LGBTQ history classes also served as an affirming environment, and they jokingly added that "everyone in there [was] some

flavor of gay.”

Quinn firmly stated that they were “happy with college band” overall, but also that “college band...makes you miss high school band sometimes, and you forget how awful it was.” Having started their college band experience feeling isolated from their fellow cymbal players and concentrating entirely on the act of making music and moving around a field, Quinn highlighted the uniqueness of the peers with whom they performed:

The culture difference is really that of jocks and misfits. By definition, plenty of cymbals become cymbals because they didn’t make a drum. There’s a kind of camaraderie that comes from that that you can’t share with anyone else.

“Damn, I Can’t Argue with Them”: Present Day and Coming Out

After graduating from NSU, Quinn accepted a job at a digital media company. Quinn still enjoyed playing video games, and although they had spent several years learning the technical language involved in building and programming games, they much preferred the “design and story” to the code. Several months after leaving NSU, Quinn came out as non-binary to their parents. Referring to the moment as a “second round,” Quinn was surprised by their parents’ positive reactions, and commented that “they were more like cheerleaders.” However, Quinn’s mother still struggled with the concept of non-binary identity, and Quinn reflected at length on her “confused and curious reaction”:

One night I felt I was a little harsh on them (it had only been a day or two), making comparisons like, “if you don’t use my right name and pronouns, it shows me you don’t respect me as much as people who do.” Which, of course, is correct

to an extent, but it's also true that it is simply hard for people who are not in queer spaces to adapt. There's a language gap. There are parents (and people) who make dumb excuses out of malice, but it's important to recognize when the excuses are not justified. The effort is important, and that's something that's easy to overlook. You know? Anyway, after I thought it over, I sent them a book by an author I follow on twitter about her wife and child transitioning. I think it helped them to read the same kind of story from the parent's perspective.

With Quinn's permission, their parents eventually sent messages to relatives over Facebook and received numerous responses of support and encouragement.

As we discussed Quinn's decision to come out, they recalled that they "never really had a moment" of realization but rather had a "sneaking suspicion over the course of four years." Quinn's summer vacation trips during which they experienced dysphoric feelings and the impact of their trans high school friend contributed to Quinn's attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about gender and sexuality. Quinn then asked me, "I don't think I know what it's like to be a boy, but how, you know what it's like to not be a boy?" Quinn continued by saying, "there's really no objectivity. It's really just kind of got to go with the flow, which I don't, I don't like going with the flow. I like having solid concrete facts of stuff, but I can't have that here."

Although Quinn had not discussed their transition much with their two brothers, they experienced a moment of affirmation during an afternoon get together. Having not spoken for quite some time, Quinn was unsure what to expect from one brother after coming out. Quinn was surprised by their brother's question: "Eventually it was like,

‘hey, can I call you Quinn?’ And I’m like, ‘yes, it’s usually not supposed to go this way, but I’ll, I’ll take it.’

Since starting their remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, Quinn noted that they enjoyed being able to more frequently experiment with feminine clothing. Quinn also purchased fake breasts from an online store, commenting that they wanted to “test to see if I’d want to go on estrogen.” Wearing a mask due to pandemic regulations was also comforting for Quinn, hiding most of their facial hair. Quinn added, “it’s just this hyper awareness of what you look like and what you sound like. I can pass if I don’t talk because my voice is obviously not feminine.”

Quinn reflected that they had a “complex” relationship with pronouns even after coming out as non-binary, feeling uncomfortable with “she/her” pronouns when they did not intentionally present femininely, but equally distant from the masculinity associated with “he/him” pronouns. Quinn commented that they did not mind being referred to with “he/him” pronouns in public around strangers, adding, “I don’t expect you to know.” The only aversion to “he/him” pronouns Quinn identified were instances in which their pronoun request was explicitly undermined or denied.

Discussing the complexity of fitting gender identities or sexual orientations into neat labels, Quinn thoughtfully offered, “I’m sure if everyone on the world sat down and thought about their gender for more than three seconds, I’m sure there’d be a lot more trans people the next day.” Arguing that individuals should possess the agency to freely interact with their gender presentation and expression, Quinn asked, “the idea of people being able to experiment like that is good and should be encouraged, you know?” During

our first conversation, Quinn was celebrating the “three-month anniversary” of starting estrogen treatments. Explaining that they disliked their body hair, Quinn hoped that new therapies would allow them to thin out certain patches. Quinn added, “the other main goal is, I would like hips.”

Quinn expressed a desire to return to NSU as a part-time staff member with the marching band. “Going back in my femmed version and how people react and the, that thought is scary,” Quinn commented, “[the] internet does like to joke, band is pretty gay, but it's not totally gay.” Quinn summarized their experiences in the NSU band by reflecting on lessons they learned as an emergent leader but also as an individual for whom “being wrong” was a theme:

You can be wrong about something and also be right about something else. It's also harmful the other way around, because if you think you have to be perfect in order to criticize someone else, then that's harmful for you because it means you're not giving yourself the opportunity to advocate for yourself, you know...there's no such thing as a perfect run or anything, but as long as in here and there, you know how to make it a perfect run, then that's as close as you're going get.

Summary

Quinn centered their narrative on the concepts of space, agency and fluidity, and the impact of self-surveillance. During their childhood, Quinn spoke about creating imagined or envisioned spaces separate from those in their proximity, as well as transforming physical spaces into more comfortable, enjoyable environments through

their imagination. Quinn's turn to video games, books, and role-playing activities allowed them to perform roles and characters not available to them daily. The two vacation spots to which Quinn's family traveled each year were cogent examples of the importance of space. The small family gathering at Cape Code created an opportunity for Quinn to be alone with their thoughts on their own terms, with fewer spectators watching them play in the water and imagine far-away landscapes. In contrast, the crowded, claustrophobic surroundings of an all-family house rental in North Carolina left little time or physical space for Quinn to process their thoughts and surroundings. Reflecting on their childhood, it was during those stifling moments when Quinn felt most distant from themselves. In college, Quinn assigned specific roles to each of the musical spaces through which they traveled. Marching band rehearsals were not spaces for Quinn to explore and freely express their gender, but rather served as environments in which they were an "expert" among peers, exerting rather than experimenting.

Quinn focused heavily on the individual's ability to discover new paths related to their gender identity, free to turn back at a moment's notice. To Quinn, greater experimentation and understanding one's preferences should take priority as they consider their own gender expression. Conversely, Quinn expressed disappointment at certain societal standards that might negatively perceive or judge their open and fluid presentation and therefore limit a feeling of agency. Similarly, Quinn acknowledged the occasional need to pass in order to gain passage through certain spaces, rituals, and processes. Involved in Quinn's journey was others' surveillance of their body, as well as their own surveillance of their self-concept.

Quinn's story provided rich insight into the diverse reasons for which students join and remain in band programs. While they were largely socially isolated from their section during their first year in band, Quinn's dedication to an organization which kept a consistent time slot in their daily schedule blossomed as they expanded their social circle, joined a tight-knit group of peers with whom they could express their queer identity more freely, and assumed greater responsibility as an "expert." I am immensely grateful for Quinn sharing their journey with me, especially as much of it was just beginning even as our conversations came to an end.

Chapter Five: Within-Case Analyses

The participants' narratives—their voices—were the focus of the fourth chapter. Jack, Robyn, Taylor, Grant, and Quinn shared stories about the challenges, surprises, and sometimes joys of their lived experiences as TGE band members. In Chapter Five, I present an analysis of each case by emergent themes that arose from conversations and collaboration with each participant. Chase (2018) noted that “what distinguishes narrative analysis is a focus on each account in its *entirety* and integration among its parts, rather than on discursive or thematic parts per se” (p. 955). Case study research provides a complementary foundation for examining and shaping data, including its decontextualization through the coding, theming, and sorting processes before being reconstructed in order to “explore theoretical or process relationships among these clusters of meaning” (Ayres et al., 2003, p. 872).

When a case-based research project involves multiple cases, the researcher may wish to attend to the particularities of each case (e.g., within-case analysis) before exploring emergent and recurring themes among all of the cases within the project (e.g., cross-case analysis) (Stake, 2006). As Riessman (2008) argued, narratives are cases and may be explored in a variety of ways. Eisenhardt (1989) posited that the process of within-case analysis “allows the unique patterns of each case to emerge before investigators push to generalize patterns across cases” (p. 540), although methods of case analysis vary across disciplines. Simons (2009) noted that within-case themes may be developed a priori from theoretical or conceptual frameworks, organically during data analysis, or a combination of the two. In the present study, within-case themes were

drawn directly from each case in collaboration with each participant after organizing recurrent and emergent threads.

The research question which guided this study was: What are transgender and gender expansive students' lived experiences of navigating their collegiate marching band membership? Using the metaphor of wayfinding to organize research data, I drew from Page-Reeves et al.'s (2019) study of how Native American professionals navigated their careers in predominantly White STEM fields. The researchers identified the ways in which participants described "*being in, engaging with, and experiencing* the world" (Page-Reeves et al., 2019, p. 189, emphasis in original) within the context of their professions. In this study, *being in* band refers to the processes and events that influenced participants' paths to joining their respective college marching band, *engaging with* the marching band refers to the factors that influenced a participant's membership, and *experiencing* refers to the ways in which a participant's band membership influenced their academic and social lives beyond the band structure itself. Each of the following cases begins with a participant introduction and background, headings broadly organized by how participants navigated *being in, engaging with, and experiencing* band are expanded by further sub-headings specific to each participant's experiences (e.g., people, places, events, or structures) that emerged as themes during the coding and sorting process. I conclude each within-case analysis with a summary and conclusion.

Table 1

Demographic Profiles of Study Participants

Name	Age	Pronouns	Section	Years in Band	U.S. Location
Jack	23	He/Him	Clarinet	5	Midwest
Robyn	23	They/Them	Color guard	1	Southwest
Taylor	22	He/Him	Trumpet	4	Northeast
Grant	23	He/Him	Saxophone	4	Northeast
Quinn	22	They/Them	Drumline	4	Northeast

Jack’s Journey

Jack graduated from Big State University (BSU) with a degree in graphic design approximately seven months prior to our first interview. Jack grew up with his mother, father, and younger brother in the same state in which he attended college and was living and working at a print shop near his college campus. As a member of the university’s marching band program for each of his five years, Jack assumed numerous leadership and service roles. Jack highlighted the band’s service sorority as being the most affirming environment in which he was able to express his gender identity after coming out during his second year and discussed how his band membership provided leadership roles that he might not have otherwise assumed. University staff varied in their support of Jack’s transition, and Jack’s band friends formed a valuable support network within his section and in the broader ensemble. While his mother was initially uncertain in her support, Jack noted that his overall relationship with his family had improved since coming out.

Being In Band

After a tumultuous K–12 experience, Jack was excited at the opportunity for a “fresh start” at BSU. Jack’s band membership afforded him a sense of community and

belonging that he had experienced in high school, and his close friendships were crucial during his coming out and transition process. While Jack found BSU to be sufficient in meeting his needs generally, there were spaces related and unrelated to the band that proved challenging. Further, working with university support staff and band faculty was an inconsistent experience.

Music and Sense of Community

Throughout our conversations, it was clear that Jack valued being a member of a supportive, nurturing community and did not enjoy being singled out. During elementary school, Jack attended dance classes that he enjoyed, but often argued with his mother as she attempted to make him wear dresses and feminine makeup. Jack floated between several friend groups during elementary and middle school, and although he described his relationship with family as “pretty fine,” he occasionally felt isolated when he heard homophobic or transphobic comments at gatherings. Jack picked up the clarinet in sixth grade, excited to excel on the instrument because he “never liked not being good at things.” Playing in the school band proved to be a stabilizing factor of Jack’s life, allowing him to participate in a group as an equal contributor with his peers. His band teacher’s laid-back attitude toward directing the ensemble created space for Jack to enter the group on his own terms: “I feel like he was a good amount of helpful where I was not, if you wanted to really get into it, he would help you.” The bouts of anxiety that Jack developed during elementary school subsided during middle school, and he was able to enjoy being part of the relaxed ensemble.

During high school, Jack played the bass clarinet during most of his ensemble

time. Although he had switched in middle school, his previous director's recreational attitude toward performing and rehearsing meant that he was never singled out or assessed solely on his musical skill. However, Jack's high school director proved to be stricter in her management of the groups, and Jack felt his anxiety return in part due to being isolated as a musician:

I don't like playing by myself for people. And then you're in a clarinet sectional and the octave lowers so everyone can hear everything, and there [were] two of us those two years, so. It was pretty easy to tell if I was wrong and I was not into that.

Jack's director also tended to "play favorites" with the best players in the concert band, creating a divide in the social structure between students who were seen as musically proficient and those who were not. However, Jack also served as a band librarian for two years and asserted that his director showed more consistency toward band members during marching band rehearsals.

As Jack recovered from a "questionably abusive" relationship during his first year of high school, the importance of community—and lack thereof—became a painful component of the remainder of his high school career. Additionally, the relationship forced Jack into uncomfortable gender roles just as he had realized he was "some kind of queer." The stark musical divide within the high school band and Jack's partner's negative impact on his ability to make friends left Jack eager for a social support group. One bright spot in Jack's high school band membership was his openly gay clarinet section leader, providing valuable representation in an environment that was contested.

However, Jack was consistently excluded from clarinet section “guys’ nights” during his junior and senior years which he described as a “pain point” and negatively impacted his male friendships from that point on.

Jack later acknowledged that he valued the community and social aspects of band membership more than the opportunity to improve technical musical skills:

I think it’s [the] band more than music just because I don’t know that I would very strongly associate myself with like being a musician, “capital M.” It’s...always been a communal, a community experience for me.

It was clear that Jack had thoroughly enjoyed the relaxed, individualized attention his middle school band offered and experienced some tension in high school with more attention paid to the most accomplished musicians. Although Jack ultimately selected BSU for its distance and the strength of its graphic design program, he also valued a more laid-back environment less focused on technical proficiency: “I don’t care if you’re a quarter step off your dot. I want, I get to do a cool move with my clarinet, sounds awesome! I love all that stuff.”

Engaging With Band

Jack acknowledged that his marching band membership comprised most of his time outside of the classroom during his five years at BSU. Jack identified structures, systems, and relationships that impacted his band membership considering his self-reflections about his gender identity and presentation.

Uniform and Clothing

Clothing and attire played a significant role in Jack’s life throughout his life. After

experiencing what he now understands as dysphoria when asked to wear dresses and makeup during his childhood, Jack regained some sense of control when he assumed a “tomboy” persona in middle school and started to wear more masculine attire. During high school, a toxic partner forced him to perform feminine gender roles, and Jack continued pursuing feminine attractiveness through high school and into college. Away from home and in a space where he felt more comfortable experimenting with his gender presentation, Jack gradually shifted his hair and clothing choices to a more masculine expression as he reflected on his gender identity. Jack’s changes in clothing signaled a change to his friends, and he remembered, “I think some people were like, ‘okay, you’re very strongly changing your wardrobe. Do you need to tell us anything?’”

Given the tension Jack experienced between wearing masculine and feminine clothing, the band uniform offered “an escape” from the gendered choices he needed to make on an almost daily basis: “There’s nothing less gendered than the marching band uniform. We all look like little stick people, and that stuff’s great...it’s such a de-gendered experience.” Jack noted that while there were gendered sets of uniforms (e.g., male and female pants), students were assigned uniform parts based on fit rather than gender. Notably, Jack’s statement about looking back at old photographs implied that pictures of himself wearing the band uniform were among the few categories of media that allowed him to trace his progression through the band program without experiencing dysphoria.

The Role of Leadership in Building Self-Confidence

Jack’s leadership philosophy aligned with his musical experiences during his shift

from the clarinet to the bass clarinet. Like the discomfort he felt when playing bass clarinet and feeling singled out among his peers during high school, Jack articulated that as a college student he “[didn’t] command the room. I [wasn’t] not going to stand up and get the whole crowd. [I’ve] never been very good at leading stuff like that.” Jack thus never considered interviewing for the position of clarinet section leader, adding that the seemingly mandatory extroversion and visible teaching were not his “cup of tea.” However, serving in several leadership roles “opened up a broader idea of leadership and different qualities that I had that were really good that I didn’t realize I had.”

Jack identified three positions that aligned with his passion for “behind the scenes” service and leadership. On a broader band level, Jack was elected as a sophomore to serve on the band’s executive leadership council during his junior and senior years. At BSU, the band council served a “very much operational” role, and members frequently communicated with directors and administrative staff on orders, meals, and band member dues. Jack’s role on the band council served two distinct functions: solidifying his social circle and facilitating his coming out.

After Jack was elected during the spring of his second year at BSU, he was invited to attend a summer retreat for all the new and returning officers. Although he had already made friends through the band’s service sorority, Jack was excited to find a new avenue for social connection:

It's funny because we have this super fun retreat and we were all hanging out and then we all, we were working so hard through the fall that we were like, “are we friends?” and then we had a really fun time hanging out.

Jack highlighted the experiential aspect of many of his friendships, noting that by the end of his college experience, “most of my friends ended up being in that [service/leadership] group.” The relationships he formed also served to create a layer of protection after he came to other band members.

Around the time he was elected to the council, Jack came out as trans to a small group of sorority members and close friends. Jack’s upcoming visible leadership role within the band program served as a catalyst for his coming out over the summer, posting to Facebook and then speaking with his parents before returning to school. As a newly elected officer, the relationships he had fostered through his leadership and service-minded involvement eased his transition among his peers:

Being very visible and everyone knew me in band and I feel a little bit like an asshole saying this, but I was fairly popular and well-liked, so I didn't, a lot of people got corrected on my behalf so I didn't have to.

In addition to Jack’s role on the band’s council, he also served in the leadership of the band sorority. Although BSU had previously maintained chapters of both the national band service sorority, Tau Beta Sigma, and its fraternity counterpart, Kappa Kappa Psi, the latter had been disbanded during Jack’s first year. During Jack’s third year, he served as a committee chairperson responsible for educating prospective members, and during his fifth year was elected as vice president of membership. Whereas Jack’s council position was rooted in operational and logistical support, his roles within the sorority emphasized mentorship and relationship-building with younger members. Jack’s vice presidency also provided him with the authority and capital to re-write sorority

documents with gender-neutral language. Jack described his leadership positions as having “instilled a lot of confidence in me and [pause] the ability to feel like I can lead in the situations [in] that culture.”

Staff/Faculty Relationships and University Policies

University staff and faculty played a significant role in Jack’s campus experiences. Notably, the band staff makeup changed between Jack’s first two years in the program to his final three. Jack thoroughly enjoyed his first director’s emphasis on empowering student leaders, focusing on the individual, and fostering an “us against the world” mentality that fostered a shared sense of resilience among band members. As Jack entered his first band season as fully out as trans, BSU had just hired a new director and re-organized the band’s staff. Although he was initially worried about coming out to the new director, Jack found some comfort in confiding in the openly gay instructor: “I just emailed him. I’m like, ‘hey, I’m trans. Here’s the name.’ He’s like, ‘okay, cool. Congrats.’ I’m like, ‘cool, thanks.’ So I never had issues with him.” The band director’s gay identity did not guarantee any knowledge or support of trans-related issues, but Jack’s limited exposure to queer role models and instructors had encouraged him to view any member of the LGBTQIA+ community as a potential member of his support system.

Jack did not experience any overt hostility from members of the band staff but described several instructors as “very not socially aware.” One director approached Jack directly and inquired about his name, while another was “very good with me one on one” but required Jack to “poke and prod” the staff member to change Jack’s name on band documentation. Jack expressed understanding that certain university documents did not

allow the name change but requested numerous times that staff make changes where they could. Of note is that directors' demonstrations of kindness did not correlate to a greater awareness of issues relevant to trans students, adding that "no one was actively malicious, just maybe a little unknowledgeable." For instance, while certain staff members asked Jack about his name, Jack witnessed another trans student's dead name placed beneath her locker. Throughout his final three years in band, the tension he experienced with caring but uninformed staff mirrored what Jack broadly described as a relationship between students and staff that was "a little messy" and "very hit or miss."

Jack did not experience issues with his professors in other parts of campus and noted that before he was able to successfully change his name in the university systems, he would email professors prior to classes starting each semester with his name. "It was never an issue," Jack added. One particularly important person during Jack's transition was Megan, his university co-op advisor. Megan assisted Jack in changing his name on official university documents, a process which Jack noted, "technically through the university you're not supposed to be able to change your email or anything." In addition to helping Jack navigate the institutional name-change process, Megan's timely assistance ensured that he did not have to out himself at his next internship. Megan's active guidance and logistical support contrasted greatly with the more passive and less organized help Jack received from his band directors.

Campus and Band Spaces

Jack identified bathrooms and changing facilities as being the most difficult physical spaces to navigate on campus. While Jack's design classes within the art

school's facilities were near single-stall bathrooms, the marching band building was less hospitable. Jack "never changed in the locker room once" during his time in the band and would often use the building's music library to change into and out of his band uniform. Even during his final year, Jack preferred to physically leave the band facility and use restrooms five minutes away than have to use the multi-stall bathrooms.

On band trips away from campus, Jack reported a relaxed approach to rooming and changing. Students were permitted to room with peers regardless of gender identity, causing a sense of relief for Jack after his negative experiences with all-male gatherings during high school. Although BSU band members were rarely asked to change out of their uniforms on buses, Jack did acknowledge a situation from his most recent trip to a post-season bowl game:

I know this past bowl trip we had to actually, fully change out of uniform. So we did [an], "okay girls go get on the bus and change, guys stand outside and turn around and then switch" which didn't really affect me, but could have affected people.

Although Jack mentioned multiple times over the course of our interviews that his band membership was empowering and affirming in many ways, it was interesting to note the dichotomy between the welcoming social space band presented with its more rigid and constricting physical space. I found it particularly interesting that there seemed to be more flexibility and comfort in certain processes such as changing away from campus than in a familiar space on a game day. Additionally, while Jack described several challenges that other trans members of the band faced, his leadership positions and

positive reputation across the band may have mitigated issues that non-named leaders may have experienced.

Within the art school, Jack described the common occurrence of students being instructed to “pin up your work and you have to explain your thought processes.” Although Jack had experienced strongly negative reactions to being singled out as a musician throughout his playing career, he did not seem to mind—and even came to cherish—the opportunity to display and discuss his work while under review from his peers. Between the art school exhibitions, changing procedures, and leadership positions, it seemed as though Jack felt comfortable being visible as a member of a collective group, each person contributing and being held to similar standards.

Experiencing Band

Being a member of the BSU marching band provided Jack with valuable space to explore his gender expression and more intentionally reflect on his gender identity. One of the most salient themes during our conversations was the importance of passing through Jack’s coming out and physical/social transition. Additionally, Jack found several social support networks that opened space for him to feel safe and affirmed during his coming out process.

The Importance of Support Systems in Coming Out

Although Jack began to grapple with his sexual identity during high school, he did not have “the mental capacity to self-reflect very much” about his gender. At school, Jack’s questioning of his sexuality came against the backdrop of a harmful relationship. At home, Jack’s family, while loving and generally supportive, did not create space for

him to challenge gender roles or expectations. Jack described a stagnation in his own development, unable to progress the feelings he began to have around his gender presentation and expression: “You kind of, can stay in your habits and your patterns and you're not processing a lot of new things.” Jack identified the band sorority, the clarinet section, and the band council as support networks that provided space for him to come out and feel affirmed in his band experience.

Jack’s membership and leadership roles in the band sorority provided valuable relationships that facilitated his coming out as trans. After making the decision to come out during the spring semester of his second year, Jack initially disclosed his trans identity to a member of his sorority class as a “test run.” After feeling supported and affirmed, Jack came out to more sorority members at a gathering and built up the confidence to tell his parents and brother later that summer. After not experiencing support during high school, Jack created a network of supportive friends who in turn allowed him to facilitate building additional support with his family. Although it took longer for Jack’s family to fully accept and celebrate his transition, Jack was able to devote more of his “mental capacity” with his family rather than navigating interactions with critical peers.

Jack also appreciated the relationships he had built in the clarinet section, recalling that “the clarinets were pretty chill with me, and it was also, I was very involved, I was very much around so the ones who weren't as good about it were still trying.” Jack’s close relationships within the clarinet section expanded to other sections through his sorority and band council positions, and he observed that the prevalence of

LGBTQIA+ band members may make it easier and safer to come out:

Everyone was a little bi[sexual], that in the generic way just felt like so many people in the [BSU marching band] identified as bi, and so I think that was a good space of, when you know people are trying, gay or bi people, you have better odds they will be okay with trans people. It's not one to one, but you're on that path.

In hindsight, although it may be reasonable to assume that not every member of the BSU marching band identified as bisexual, Jack may have viewed a higher presence of openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual members of the band with fondness and excitement. Again, Jack noted that the collective nature of his on-field, in-uniform performances as well as rehearsal and social environments created a support system: "I did some really dumb stuff that was not worth my time. But we all kind of did it together."

Passing as a Source of Affirmation and Tension

The concept of passing was a recurring theme across Jack's story. Jack described the experience of passing as:

Anytime I was gendered correctly unprompted, so it's not like, "hello, my name is Jack, I am trans, I use he/him pronouns." It's like you're at the grocery store and someone's like "young man, what are you doing?" it's like, "hey, yeah."

Being singled out as trans and subjected to public scrutiny was a source of anxiety for Jack, and he added, "I prefer when people can't tell, and I can just go about my business. So I think that was more of what I was hoping for, especially when I started hormones and stuff." Jack first experienced a moment of passing during a fundraising event at which volunteers wore large t-shirts and was called "young man" by a patron. Across

campus, Jack noticed that while many fellow students and professors did not seem to be malicious in their misgendering, “they don't catch on to names and pronouns and stuff if you don't pass.” Jack started taking hormones during the spring semester of his third year and described the fall semester of his fourth year as a “turning point,” fully passing as male to band members who had not known him the previous year. Despite feeling affirmed in his gender presentation and ability to pass, Jack also felt unsettled by the fact that he “never really knew who did or didn't know.” On several occasions, Jack’s friends disclosed his trans identity to younger band members, causing Jack to feel uneasy with certain groups of friends to whom he had not fully disclosed. Jack expressed particular concern over not knowing if members of the candidate class with whom he worked during his time as vice president of membership knew of his trans identity. Passing simultaneously served as a source of empowerment and eased his ability to move around campus, but also served as a source of frustration when tied to involuntarily being disclosed to others.

Case Summary

Jack’s membership in the BSU marching band allowed him to find valuable support networks within the band’s service sorority and as an elected officer on the leadership council. These networks in turn provided space and trusting relationships for Jack to realize his trans identity and feel safe in coming out gradually to friends and then family. Throughout his musical career, Jack enjoyed playing as a member of a larger ensemble but felt uncomfortable being singled out. The BSU band structure allowed Jack to find behind-the-scenes positions that permitted him to be visible without feeling

isolated. While members of the band's staff demonstrated tepid support and were not actively hostile, Jack received the most support in navigating campus policies and offices through his co-op internship advisor and worked well with his professors as he worked to change his name. Although Jack saw the benefits of and was eager to pass as male to his peers and professors, he also expressed anxiety over the timeline of his passing and to what extent disclosure of his trans identity was occurring without his knowledge. Overall, the collective nature and ability for Jack to choose the manner and mode of his contributions provided him with the confidence and sense of safety that allowed him to come out and flourish as a trans man within the BSU marching band.

Robyn's Journey

When Robyn and I met, they were in the second year of a doctoral program in music theory at a Midwestern university. Growing up with their parents and younger brother in the south, Robyn first learned trombone to play in the school band and continued their studies as a music theory major at a large public university in the Southwest. During their undergraduate career, Robyn performed in numerous ensembles as an instrumentalist and vocalist, was a member of the color guard section in the school's marching band for a year and participated in several drum corps and winter guard organizations. Robyn frequently mentioned the importance of queer representation in our interviews, both in coming out as non-binary themselves and serving as a role model to younger students. Robyn also highlighted the importance of agency in creating smaller social groups within larger organizations, allowing individuals to express different aspects of their identity in various contexts. Although Robyn was a member of their

university marching band program for a year, I reference aspects of their winter guard and drum corps experiences that align with elements of collegiate marching bands (e.g., uniforms, drill charts, hierarchical structure).

Being In Band

Robyn knew from a young age that they wanted to play trombone, and upon joining the school band found the ensemble to be rewarding in two ways. First, Robyn enjoyed the competitive nature of the audition process and high standards of performance to which band members were held. Second, being a member of the school band allowed Robyn to meet students from outside of their grade and form social bonds that were otherwise unavailable. Robyn “didn’t really have a ton of friends” before learning the trombone and found “the trombone section which is a very tomboy section” to be “gender affirming.”

During high school, Robyn spent one year in the trombone section and three years as a drum major. In their student leadership role, Robyn found the position of drum major to be simultaneously empowering and restrictive. The band’s directors often assigned running rehearsals and logistical aspects of the band’s operations to the drum majors, providing a valuable platform for Robyn to engage in decision-making processes. Additionally, Robyn leveraged their position into an advocacy role, stepping in to perform with members of the newly formed color guard who were “getting bullied” due to their lack of experience. Robyn’s participation influenced several more senior members to join the color guard, resulting in a “culture change.”

Robyn’s leadership position also prompted moments of tension and conflict, as

they struggled to balance their mounting responsibilities with increased self-reflection: “My personal development and progression toward my identity that I have now today [were] put on hold because I was trying to manage so many different parts of the band.” The marching band’s popularity in Robyn’s hometown and visibility of its leaders also pressured Robyn to perform both musical and female gender roles, leaving little room to experiment without violating the social norms placed upon them. “There’s an appearance” to which the drum majors were expected to conform, and Robyn reflected, “you’re just worried about other people, and that can kind of delay your ability to self-reflect and think about yourself and how you fit into that piece.”

Color Guard and Stepping Back from Leadership

Robyn applied to Southwestern State University intent on majoring in trombone performance but selected music theory accidentally while filling out application forms. Robyn ultimately still performed on trombone in numerous ensembles and was eager to separate their curricular musicianship from leisure music-making. After a high school experience during which Robyn described “not knowing I was really in a state of dysphoria because so much mental space was being devoted to other things,” they decided to perform with the SSU color guard:

I chose to do color guard in college because I was like, “I don’t want to be in charge of things. I don’t want to be a drum major; I don’t want to be in the baritone section because I just marched drum corps... I don’t want to operate in a teaching capacity. I just want to be dumb and bad at flag.”

Ultimately, Robyn’s decision to remain with the color guard was rooted in stepping away

from leadership roles to focus on self-reflection and addressing dysphoric feelings they had not yet labeled. Robyn described wanting to arrive at a more certain idea of who they were before re-devoting their energies to leading people:

I prefer to take roles that aren't super heavy in leadership, even though I have experience in that, because it's like, “yeah, I'm still figuring out who I am and I kind of want to feel a point of arrival before I really step into a leadership role” because who I am is constantly changing.

Engaging With Band

Although Robyn only spent one year in the SSU marching band, their time in the color guard served as an important opportunity for self-reflection and re-allocation. Robyn talked extensively about the importance of the uniform across their multiple forms of marching involvement (i.e., marching band, winter guard, and drum corps) and how different uniform and costuming styles allowed them to engage with their peers and the audience in contrasting ways.

Visibility and Audience Interaction

In contrast to the rather restrictive role of high school drum major, Robyn thoroughly enjoyed the visibility they experienced as a member of the color guard. “I really enjoyed the performance medium and the intimacy that I got with the crowd being so close to the front,” Robyn commented, “in the color guard you have to take that mask off and be really vulnerable.” However, Robyn identified both positive and negative aspects of their increased visibility. As a member of the marching band, Robyn described their frustration at being objectified by college students at football games and added that

“dudes [were] just whistling at me because I'm in a skirt.” Being placed at the rear of the football field, members of the color guard were largely unseen by the more appreciative audience members seated on the front side of the stadium.

As a member of the school's winter guard, Robyn conversely enjoyed audience members' cheers in celebration of the group's collective performance. The extent to which audience members showed support also influenced inter-section communication: “We were talking to each other during [a football game] performance and communicating to get through it, versus like in the indoor scene, it's like we're communicating to each other.”

Robyn noted tension between being visible and being read or labeled and being visible and using “performance tools” to affect *how* they were read or labeled: “The feeling of someone reading me as female, I don't like that. But being and presenting as female, that's fine with me.” The frustration and isolation Robyn experienced being objectified by college students during football games mirrored the anxiety they felt at their first Women's Chorus performance, during which Robyn removed their contacts in an attempt to escape the audience's gaze.

Uniforms, Attire, and Social Connection

Clothing, attire, and the uniform as tools for self-expression was a recurring theme throughout our conversations. From a young age, Robyn resented being pressured to wear feminine clothing, a topic which remained a source of tension between them and their mother for several years. During their time in marching arts organizations, Robyn identified three distinct aspects of their relationship with the uniform and attire: (a) the

uniform as a performance tool; (b) marching attire as an equalizing force; and (c) the uniform as a protective mechanism.

Robyn struggled with the uniform requirements at the beginning of their collegiate marching arts participation and experienced tension between wanting to move fluidly between masculinity and femininity without being assigned to either. During their one season of color guard in the SSU marching band, Robyn generally did not enjoy wearing the feminine uniform and envied their male counterparts' sleeveless tops and bowties. However, Robyn began to see the uniform as a performance tool which, when re-claimed, could be empowering:

I really [didn't] want to wear a skirt because people are just going to be like "she/her." But as soon as I saw it used a choreographic device, I was like, "now that's cool." And it kind of helped me realize it's like okay, clothes. I'm attaching way too much of my personal anxiety to this clothing, and I can still be myself and still ask that other people see me for who I am even though I'm wearing a skirt.

Robyn also commented that experiencing the more traditional style of the woodwind, brass, and percussion attire contrasted with the openness of the color guard uniform:

To wear a horn line uniform that is like very uniform...no one can see your face...having winter guard as an exercise in expression and individuality, while still being asked to do the same makeup and hair as everyone else who's really, was very helpful.

Later, Robyn commented that their desire to both make eye contact with audience

members and be seen and acknowledged as a performer was “totally a trans thing.” As Robyn was exploring their gender identity, they commented that wearing the uniform in color guard and winter guard situations allowed them to “really lean into to hide parts of myself I’m not necessarily comfortable with” and gave them greater control over what audience members viewed and perceived.

Although Robyn experienced dysphoric feelings while wearing uniforms in the early stages of their college marching experiences, they also found the uniform to be an equalizing force. During one drum corps season, members of the horn line were instructed to wear floor-length dresses and makeup. For Robyn and other gender minority members of the corps, watching cisgender musicians struggle with the same dysphoric feelings many of them experienced on a daily basis was affirming and allowed them to serve as advisors to their peers:

[Different uniforms can] kind of encourage people who wouldn't normally have a gender dysphoric moment, specifically cis people, [to] have gender dysphoria. Because in the guard, we have to teach all of these young men, some of whom are straight, how to do makeup for shows. And they just, they go through the stages of grief. And I've seen it happen over and over again, where I'm watching people go through gender dysphoria. And there are all these people in the ensemble that can help them through that, because it's something that they grapple with in their daily life. So there is kind of this heterotopic space where we all get to experience gender dysphoria together, and some of us are really good at handling it, and some of us have never handled it before.

Finally, Robyn emphasized the uniform's role in acting as a protective mechanism. While Robyn valued the expressivity and vulnerability that the color guard uniform offered, they also expressed awareness for instances in which the uniform may be useful in hiding personal characteristics one may not wish to broadcast to the world. The uniform sometimes served as a manifestation of the community and sense of belonging members experienced, and Robyn noted one particular instance in which a Sikh member of their drum corps section was concerned about being singled out at a show in a southern state. Robyn's peer wore a turban during rehearsals and performances, which the rest of the section emulated to ensure he would not be as easily identified and subject to harassment: "When the whole section of people is wearing maroon turbans, you're like, 'okay, weird kids,' you're not able to single someone out. So it was a protective measure at some point too." The different uniforms also served as a self-protective measure for Robyn at times.

Whereas the color guard uniform allowed Robyn to at times express a more "visibly queer" part of their identity, they also described constantly teaching peers about queer and trans issues as "just really exhausting." In the latter moments, wearing the more traditional attire as a brass player in their drum corps allowed for "collective action" and an "electric energy" where no one individual was highlighted or forced to explain themselves. In short, there were days when Robyn wanted to express a visible queerness that felt liberating, while at other times they preferred to step into the background and contribute as "just another member" of the organization without regard to their gender identity; having different marching arts outlets allowed for both.

Experiencing Band

Robyn's experiences in their single season of collegiate marching band and several seasons in winter guard and drum corps organizations provided valuable space for self-reflection and expression. Although Robyn did not identify their home life as a supportive environment in which they could come out, they built and maintained strong social relationships that fostered their comfort in self-advocacy. One of Robyn's most frequently stated frustrations was a lack of mental space to self-reflect in situations where they did not have agency of expression or presentation. Once Robyn gained control over several "performance tools," they felt empowered to claim and reclaim spaces across campus as not only safe but affirming for themselves and their queer peers. Finally, the theme of representation and leadership both as a role model and recipient recurred across our discussions.

Creating Mental Space and Coming Out

Robyn realized they were "definitely not straight" in high school, but "just didn't have the vocabulary to describe what I was feeling." Robyn's high school drum major responsibilities and compliance with social expectations left them unable to reflect on their gender identity. Robyn identified the male-centric brass band environment—in which they played trombone—as dichotomous with the more expressive elements of the school's Women's Chorus, both of which allowed them to realize, "I'm both and neither of those things at different times." Robyn's marching band, winter guard, and drum corps experiences provided similarly dichotomous, gendered experiences within a single ensemble: "Having a space to kind of let go of all that and just be yourself and be an

individual and having a show...that allowed you to have that individual expression was really important.”

During their season in the SSU marching band, Robyn reflected, “just having to worry about tossing a flag and not like talking to other people in my presence” gave them the mental energy, space, and time to reflect on “feeling weird and at odds with how I see myself in the mirror versus how I see myself in my head.” Robyn described coming out as non-binary as a “very gradual process” that did not involve a social media announcement or gathering of friends. As Robyn more actively reflected on the tension they experienced in their music-making, they explored online spaces to put words to their thoughts, feelings, and emotions:

Non-binary wasn't circulating as a word until 2016–17, so I was like, “I don't know, maybe I'm agender?” I was on that Tumblr discourse trying to figure out what of the million words to describe yourself would best express how I felt to other people. And it was hard because it's just you don't have the words.

The confidence and sense of self that Robyn had built through their social connections with accepting peers, gaining a broader set of performance tools, and finding vocabulary that aligned with their experiences arose from having the space and time to do so. As Robyn came out to friends at SSU, they also became more comfortable advocating for themselves while not surveilling their peers:

[I didn't tell] my friends like, “oh, you need to correct your friends if they refer to me with she/her pronouns,” but just being like, “nope, this is me, and when I'm here I want you to speak about me this way.”

Robyn also experienced mutual benefit in carving out spaces by signaling their trans identity as a high school marching band staff member. As an instructor, Robyn’s “cues” such as pins or their parasol often led to intense and emotional conversations with LGBTQIA+ students who did not feel comfortable disclosing their identity to other adults. In turn, witnessing some students signal their own queer identity during rehearsals and social events provided Robyn with a sense of “hope and courage” about their own coming out process.

Agency in Ensemble Selection and Participation

Robyn and I spoke about agency across each of our three interviews. Robyn expressed a great deal of gratitude for the role their teachers played in giving them space to experiment and experience different environments: “So much of the empowerment I felt and being able to come out came from educators who made space...where everyone could act as free agents and we just got to explore who we were as performers.” Robyn often referred to their experiences with agency by first describing instances in which that agency was denied, almost to define agency by what it was not. Moments in which Robyn felt constricted, harassed, or filled with anxiety—such as marching during a halftime show in their color guard uniform while being harassed and cat-called by fellow students—were those in which they did not experience agency. Conversely, experiences such as teaching, reclaiming previously dysphoric “performance tools” such as clothing and makeup, and even their very presence as a queer and non-binary person in spaces that had not been designed for them were empowering, affirming, and created a sense of agency.

Agency also came in the form of claiming and reclaiming spaces through music, expression, and dress. While Robyn often felt under surveillance walking across campus, they were able to re-assert their agency through choice of attire while at marching band rehearsals:

I've just uncritically worn whatever the hell to band rehearsal, but there's a public moment where we're walking to and from band rehearsal past all of these college dudes and everyone just kind of puts their sweater on, and then we get to a rehearsal and it's like, "alright, just a sports bra."

Robyn also worked at the school's performing arts center as an usher, a job which attracted other LGBTQIA+ students from across campus. The job allowed Robyn and their peers to "experiment within constraints," pushing the boundaries of what was allowed as part of the job's uniform. Working as staff members in a space which they perceived as traditionally cishet, Robyn enjoyed forming bonds with queer friends while working with a largely cishet audience:

There were spaces that were explicitly designated for queer people and then spaces that became queer just because a lot of people involved in performing arts or ushering or retail have a very theater aspect and theater attracts a lot of queer people.

After coming out as non-binary, Robyn got more involved in the school's LGBTQIA+ resource center and its own activities in reclaiming spaces. When anti-LGBTQIA+ preachers came to the otherwise very queer-friendly campus, members from the center "would go and get speakers out of our office and just play music really loud to drown

them out and turn them into little dance parties.” Additionally, Robyn found strength from the LGBTQIA+ center, their students, peers, and online resources to advocate for their identity and pronouns, and used their pronouns to set the “ground rules” for conversations and presentations:

I do very much so intervene on my behalf frequently when I introduce myself to a group for the first time, I, I would say like 99% of the time, say, “I’m [Robyn], I use they/them pronouns” and then proceed with the rest of my introduction.

The agency and ability to initiate an interaction with one’s own pronouns rather than having labels projected onto them by others was a manifestation of the empowerment Robyn felt upon not only claiming, but proudly *exclaiming* their pronouns.

Queer Representation and Leadership

Representation was a vital aspect of Robyn’s coming out process, leadership philosophy, and journey through the marching arts. During their first season of drum corps, Robyn was drawn to another member of the organization who was trans, referring to him as their “trans elder”:

I was just trying to play it cool socially. And being like, “oh, that’s cool.” And just sneak in a question here or there, like “how did you know you were trans?” And being like, “oh, I’ve always known” I was like, “okay, that’s cool.”

Robyn was drawn not only to their trans corps peer, but also the way in which corps members and leaders treated him. Robyn had never had close trans friends before and seeing the normalization and celebration of trans identity in a musical space without exception was an important step. In the SSU marching band, Robyn noted that there were

“lots of LGBTQ people in the guard” with whom they were able to form valuable social connections and converse about challenging topics.

Robyn also commented that the numerous layers of leadership inherent to marching arts organizations (e.g., marching bands, winter guards, and drum corps) may positively reinforce queer marchers’ feelings of safety and empowerment, but also provide numerous opportunities for microaggressions or denial of agency. The SSU marching band’s director provided little oversight and expressed scant interest in the color guard, allowing the color guard to “fly under the radar” and focus primarily on building relationships rather than adhering to technical performance standards.

The SSU color guard instructor had extensive experience working with LGBTQIA+ marchers, and the SSU guard’s queer-friendly environment “was a space that was familiar to her.” As a winter guard member, leaders were collaborative in allowing Robyn to express their gender, for example assuring them they would not be removed from the organization after shaving part of their head and seeking opinions on dress, makeup, and costuming. One of Robyn’s drum corps directors insisted that the entire organization participate in their city’s LGBTQIA+ Pride Parade and fostered an environment in which pride shirts and paraphernalia were commonplace. During their experiences with another corps, members formed groups based on overlapping social identities (e.g., all-female or fem groups, Latinx groups) that allowed for participants to celebrate the intersection of multiple identities.

In online spaces, queer representation among public figures was influential for Robyn. Observing message boards, forums, and social media pages allowed Robyn to

simultaneously witness the public affirmation as well as harassment and negativity they might face outside of their hometown: “[Negative comments] could be damaging, but it also helps you realize that ‘okay, the outside world isn’t as friendly and inclusive as when I open up my phone and speak to my friends.’”

While some of Robyn’s teachers and ensemble leaders affirmed queer and trans representation and created space for self-expression, others reacted more negatively or reinforced hetero- and cisnormative attitudes. Some marching arts staff Robyn encountered were willing to overlook racist, homophobic, or transphobic comments in favor of a musician’s technical abilities and often forced members of marginalized identities to employ “survival tactics” as a condition of their participation: “You have to ‘performatively dissociate’ when your brass captain says, ‘nothing’s going to change about [a racist member], sorry. Get over it.’” Robyn also recalled a moment during which a marching instructor compared his heterosexual marriage to the emotional impact of the music being rehearsed. While many ensemble members were visibly moved by the remarks, Robyn felt isolated unable to relate to the heteronormative representation: “I was like, ‘oh no, I’m missing out on this very emotional moment because I got so wrapped up in heteronormativity that my straight peers didn’t think about.’” Robyn felt relieved when the terminology was later changed to “best friend,” and felt more actively included.

As a performer, Robyn often “really wanted to be read as androgynous,” but struggled with balancing fem representation with queer representation. During Robyn’s 2018 drum corps season, they were featured as a soloist on camera during a broadcast to

hundreds of movie theaters nationwide. During the performance, Robyn was torn between feeling uncomfortable at being read and passing as female while understanding the impact of female representation in a male-dominated space:

[The camera] was like zoomed in on my face and I was like, “okay, I have to look nice” and looking nice to me wasn't necessarily passing as feminine. But also kind of wanting to pass as feminine because there aren't that many women low brass players who are soloists in DCI. So just being kind of like, “yep, there is a person in makeup playing a baritone solo right now.”

During their time at SSU, Robyn also took several positions working with area high school marching bands. As a leader themselves, Robyn reinforced the importance of being “visibly queer” to signal to LGBTQIA+ students that they were a safe person with whom to talk:

I'll wear a little pin that says they/them so that the students to whom that means something, they know that in this, in a society where they probably don't have anyone they can talk to about it, they can be my friend, I can talk to them about it, we can have a connection that goes past a week of me [leading a clinic with] their band.

Robyn was also invited to participate in a roundtable discussion about trans issues in the marching arts on a podcast, but was frustrated by the performative nature of the representation in that medium: “There's just this very much like, ‘oh, I get it, it's a semantic knowledge thing that they have’ where it's like, no, this is working, procedural knowledge that you need to amend constantly and change constantly.”

Similar to their own experiences as a marcher, Robyn acknowledged the relationship of one's gender identity to their ensemble participation varies from student to student. Robyn recalled that while many educators expressed a desire to learn more about gender identity and expression, they often lacked the vocabulary and resorted to inclusive strategies they had seen elsewhere such as having students disclose their pronouns. However, while Robyn acknowledged the value in educators' efforts to create a welcoming environment, they also commented that in certain situations "there might be a student in there who's not comfortable disclosing their pronouns" and that mandatory disclosure "kind of erases the ability to sneak. I don't like it; I want the ability to sneak sometimes."

Case Summary

Although Robyn only spent one year in the SSU marching band, their experiences intersected with their other SSU ensembles as well as the drum corps and winter guard memberships they enjoyed elsewhere. In finding the vocabulary for their non-binary identity, Robyn described the importance of seeing other queer individuals within the marching arts community as well as public sphere as celebrated and not simply present. Clothing, attire, and band uniforms were incredibly important initially as a means of putting words to dysphoric feelings but were later reclaimed as performance tools and mediums for expression and presentation. Robyn recognized the importance of leadership within the marching arts community and commented frequently about how queer-affirming leaders allowed students to experiment within the bounds of highly uniform activity, while other leaders struggled or actively shut down students' queer expression

and thus denied them agency.

The confidence Robyn gained in their experiences at SSU carried through to their own leadership experiences as a marching band instructor, as well as serving as an advocate for themself and others as a doctoral student. After SSU, Robyn continued to participate in marching arts organizations, serving as an instructor with a drum corps in the Northeast and staff member with a high school near their Midwestern city. In both instances, Robyn has been insistent on creating “queer spaces” for both students and fellow instructors. Additionally, Robyn joined a HONK! marching band in their new city, performing with other marginalized gender musicians and engaging in social justice activities such as protests in front of immigration detention facilities. For Robyn, being both seen and heard as a queer and non-binary musician has been a valuable experience and allows them to “parade around the city and have a very visible presence.”

Taylor’s Journey

When we met, Taylor was halfway through a graduate program in secondary English education. After receiving his undergraduate degree from Northeastern State University, Taylor remained at the university to complete a five-year licensure program. Taylor played trumpet throughout his K–12 education and continued through college, and during high school and the first half of college felt pressured to gain a high level of proficiency on the instrument to prove himself to other students. After coming out as a trans man to his parents during high school, Taylor felt compelled to “re-closet” to his NSU marching band peers during his first year. As Taylor did not begin taking gender-affirming hormones until his senior year of college, much of his story is expressed

through his “social transition” within the band program.

Although he participated in several ensembles throughout his time at NSU, Taylor felt drawn primarily to the marching band. Taylor’s least enjoyable experiences were as a member of the band’s trumpet section, juxtaposed with the trumpet’s role as a tool for visibility and success during high school. Section members’ attitudes ranged from ambivalent to hostile toward Taylor’s trans identity, and staff regularly failed to address transphobic rhetoric. Taylor sought opportunities outside of his section and found other roles and leadership positions—as an operations coordinator and in the band sorority—to buffer the discomfort and isolation he experienced around fellow trumpet players. Salient themes in Taylor’s story included the impact of teachers in creating safe and affirming environments, leadership as a form of empowerment, defying expectations and reclaiming his band membership, and the importance of social support networks in moving beyond physical safety to agency.

Being in Band

During the fourth grade, Taylor moved from the southern U.S. town in which he was born to a state in the Northeast. As an outsider to his new community—and later as an out trans man—Taylor was bullied and harassed throughout his K–12 education. Playing trumpet in his schools’ bands provided Taylor access to valuable social connections, leadership opportunities, and tangible performance goals. During elementary and middle school, Taylor’s band participation served as “a chance for me to meet other people who were more like me who were kind of on the outskirts of society.” Further into his high school career, band membership provided Taylor with a “core part”

of his identity and a “niche” within his school community.

Band as Shelter and Belonging

As a student originally from outside of his new hometown, Taylor was bullied both for his status as a transplant and for his family’s lower socioeconomic status in comparison to many families who lived in the area. The elementary school band was “where the weird kids kind of hung out,” and Taylor’s band director prioritized band as a space for socialization and enjoyment over building technical proficiency: “I didn't learn, in terms of technical stuff, much from him, but in terms of loving music and being appreciative of an ensemble, I feel like I learned a lot of that from him.” Taylor’s band director did not emphasize students’ participation in solo or ensemble competitions, rather focusing on building rapport and relationships among band members. Taylor enjoyed being able to “hide out [in an] ensemble” rather than taking on visible playing roles.

In high school, playing trumpet served numerous functions in Taylor’s life. Despite not getting along with his high school band director, Taylor was offered a position as a band librarian responsible for organizing and storing sheet music. The position provided Taylor with a more defined social identity, and Taylor added, “everyone knew what ‘the band’ was. And that's kind of the case I think at most high schools that have a robust band program, it kind of becomes its own little culture within the school.” Taylor’s increased responsibilities allowed him to interact with more band members outside of his section who in turn motivated him to improve his trumpet playing: “My peers didn't think [I wasn’t competent at playing]. They thought I was good

at what I was doing. They thought I was a competent musician. I had people come to me with questions about their music.”

Having found his “voice” through playing trumpet, Taylor’s confidence in performance settings increased. Taylor joined the jazz band, started taking private lessons, auditioned into the wind ensemble, and eventually auditioned at an all-region festival. Interestingly, Taylor described what seemed like nested roles, narrowing down his place within increasingly specific settings: “I’ve kind of found a niche that I belonged in the school, which was a person in band, and then in the band which was kind of this person who walked around and kind of tried to help out everywhere.” Taylor attributed his constant practicing and attempts to improve to his tendency to feel “mortified of looking bad at stuff.” After experiencing bullying around the rest of his school, less-than-supportive parents, and a history of being on the periphery of most social circles, Taylor found a space that was both challenging and empowering.

Despite the bullying and harassment he experienced in school—in some instances including physical violence—playing trumpet provided Taylor with an opportunity to gain the respect of his peers through “speaking” a common participatory language and improving his craft. One example Taylor provided was interactions with a fellow member of the trumpet section, with whom he got along during rehearsals but otherwise held what Taylor described as discriminatory views. After Taylor came out as transgender, the pair had a “tacit understanding” that Taylor was not trans and were often too “in the weeds of playing trumpet” and concentrating on their shared musical goals. During the marching season, Taylor’s peer served as a section leader and, despite his transphobic attitudes,

delegated teaching responsibilities to Taylor based on his sharpened skills in both playing and reading the band formation charts. Although Taylor noted that the relationship was not ideal and not being able to address his trans identity at times felt constricting, the bullying he faced daily had created a low bar for Taylor's comfort and safety: "We just had to ignore that part of it that he was uncomfortable with. Which in high school, honestly was a nice concession, considering some of the people that I had to deal with."

Music Camp as a Space for Queer Representation

Growing up, Taylor had limited exposure to LGBTQIA+ figures in the media and his community. The only memories Taylor recalled involved knowing of a gay couple in his childhood neighborhood and seeing a small group of individuals dressed in drag at a rest stop during a family vacation. Otherwise, Taylor's first in-person interactions with other openly trans and queer individuals occurred at a music camp recommended by his private trumpet lessons teacher. Almost immediately, Taylor met another camper who was non-binary and engaged in a conversation about gender-neutral pronouns. Taylor's worldview was changed immediately, and he commented that he "knew about drag queens and I kind of conflated those two things, which I think a lot of people if they don't really know kind of do tend to conflate the two." After his first camp season, Taylor returned home to follow his friend's social media accounts and broadened his online social network of LGBTQIA+ individuals. The following year, several male campers decided to informally organize a drag competition. The male participants visited the female campsites to style makeup and find accessories, and Taylor was enthralled by the eagerness with which his friends not only tolerated but embraced gender fluidity.

Elsewhere on the music camp's grounds, Taylor noticed visible signs that queerness was celebrated in musical and non-musical spaces. During rehearsals and at camp sites, Taylor was excited to see "kids bringing pride flags to hang on their tents or like wearing a bunch of pride merch and having their pronouns like on a pin." Taylor found camp as an environment in which he felt "empowered" and able to "be himself": "Everyone knew I was a guy, everyone referred to me with him/his or they/them/theirs because I used both for a while, and they didn't even think anything of it." Importantly, Taylor not only embraced the visible signals of queer acceptance but felt validated when staff members actively spoke up against transphobic or homophobic comments among campers. In one instance, younger campers' negative remarks were dealt with publicly by the camp director who "had to address the entire dining hall" and threatened to dismiss future violators from the program. Overall, being around and with queer campers, seeing queerness and gender fluidity as a source of pride rather than something to be hidden, and being surrounded by staff members willing to publicly and immediately address transphobia made Taylor's music camp experience pivotal in his sense of self and pride in his trans identity.

Engaging With Band

Upon graduation, Taylor prepared to store his trumpets and quit playing instrumental music. Although Taylor had enjoyed his high school concert and marching band programs, he had little interest in joining the band program at NSU and only learned that NSU had a marching band program after receiving a call from the band's administrative offices asking him to join as a trumpet player over the summer.

When Taylor arrived at NSU, he immediately felt out of place and unsure of himself. Themes that arose during our conversations included Taylor's experiences of self-surveillance and needing to "re-closet" during his first year, the importance of androgyny through the band uniform, the impact student and staff leaders had on his Taylor's feelings of safety and support, and the band's sorority as a site of healthy masculinity.

Projection and Going Stealth

After coming out to family and peers who reacted with mixed feelings, Taylor felt the need to "re-closet" during his first year at NSU. Taylor commented that "you don't know how safe it is to [disclose your trans identity] even if a school says they're safe," and relied on interpreting his peers' reactions to gauge the safety and acceptance of his new section. Taylor recalled that he did not feel like the archetype of a "trumpet player's trumpet player," adding that he "[did] not like playing first trumpet," "[did not] go above the staff," and preferred to "play second or third trumpet" to experience the harmonies and countermelodies. Taylor's preference for background support and serving as the foundation rather than visible representative of the organizations of which he was a member was a metaphor for his leadership philosophy and approach to engagement.

Between entering NSU as a new student unsure of his surroundings and the realization that his membership in the trumpet section looked vastly different from his peers, Taylor went "dead silent" for much of his first year. Although Taylor had started to dress in a more masculine way, his trumpet section peers "just decided I was a girl" and viewed him through a lens of "a girl who liked to dress like a boy." Early on in his

college career, some of Taylor's friends and romantic partners "coded" him as feminine and encouraged him to "match that coding" through feminine clothing, makeup, and physical expression. Taylor entered NSU "very fragile to criticism," which created space for his peers to project their versions of femininity onto him. Around his section mates and other band members, Taylor "really tried to avoid the topic" of his trans identity to escape conflict or harassment. Taylor sought out the school's LGBTQIA+ resource center and was heavily involved throughout his first year. Although Taylor signaled his trans identity and queerness through social media posts and pins on his backpack, his band peers either ignored or were "oblivious" to the messages. Taylor thus was adept at code switching between band and "literally every other aspect" of his life in which he felt more comfortable being out. The impact of Taylor's forced trans stealth during his first year in band served as a dichotomous cycle of social invisibility and an enduring physical spotlight.

The Uniform and Aspirational Androgyny

Taylor enjoyed experimenting with feminine, masculine, and androgynous clothing styles, but was frustrated when he was labeled or read within the binary. Throughout high school and early college years, Taylor felt constantly burdened to conform to the contradictory and competing standards of femininity and masculinity expressed by his family, partners, peers, and even himself. The single piece of attire that allowed Taylor a respite from the stress of having to negotiate his gender expression to the world was the band uniform:

I loved the band uniform. I loved that thing because it flattened me out super, before I had top surgery, I was flat as a board, you could not tell my gender. People would regularly say “oh he's doing this” before I was on any kind of hormones, any kind of surgeries. I was like, “yeah, you can't tell what I am.”
Loved it.

Interestingly, Taylor’s statement reinforces the default masculinity associated with the marching band—and formerly military—uniform. However, Taylor did not express concern or distress over being read as male even in moments where he aspired to a feminine presentation. Taylor added that the band uniform “made everyone super androgynous” and was his “favorite part” of the NSU marching band. Since Taylor had not yet begun hormone therapies, the uniform shielded him from having to choose.

Impact of [In]Active Leaders

Without social support systems at school or home, Taylor relied a great deal on his music teachers as he navigated band experiences as a transgender man. During high school, Taylor did not get along with his band director who often played favorites, belittled students, and whose temper often resulted in classroom outbursts. However, Taylor also commented that “despite all of [band director]’s flaws, despite her bad, outwardly bad behavior, she was very LGBT accepting,” for instance allowing Taylor to select his band concert attire rather than being confined to the traditionally feminine articles worn by previous members. At NSU, Taylor’s unsupportive peers and his social isolation during his first year forced him to look to staff for indications of support, affirmation, and protection. Immediately, Taylor noticed that the college staff members

also “played favorites” with certain students, forming valuable social connections with musicians who participated in drum corps organizations. As a trumpet player who had joined the marching band in search of a laid back, social-oriented experience, Taylor felt closed off to his new directors.

Taylor also had numerous negative interactions with a trumpet section member who professed openly transphobic, racist, and homophobic ideas in person and through online social media. Although the section member’s behavior was poor enough to be addressed by the university’s disciplinary officers, band directors overlooked his behavior and attitudes in hopes of retaining him and his musical talents. Taylor’s peer was selected as a section leader and held positional authority over him for the subsequent two seasons. The directors’ lack of intervention and active promotion of a transphobic student to a leadership position signaled to Taylor that he could not seek protection or support from band staff and may not be entirely safe from harassment in his section: “It definitely kind of, to me it sent the message that it doesn't really matter how people behave in the [NSU marching band] if they're a favorite of one of the directors.”

Although Taylor did not seek a section leadership position himself—preferring more behind-the-scenes roles to those directly involved in teaching—he did interview with several of the band directors for a position as student director of marching band operations. During the interview, one of the directors asked Taylor a “hypothetical question” about his reaction to a conservative section member who held transphobic attitudes. Not only had the directors failed to intervene against harassing actions and promoted a transphobic student to a leadership position, but they had also placed the

burden on a now-openly trans student to defend themselves against hostile peers.

Although the band directors instituted a policy including pronouns on band members' name tags, Taylor found the effort to be insufficient and not backed with meaningful support.

Band Sorority and Healthy Masculinity

Despite the gendered implications inherent with the concept of a “sorority,” Taylor was drawn to the band’s service sorority, Tau Beta Sigma, during his sophomore year at NSU. Consisting of band members from different instrumental sections, the sorority provided Taylor with opportunities to socialize with peers beyond the toxicity of his cohort of trumpet players. Taylor’s initiation process allowed him to “[get] to trust people I did not know and meet people from different walks of life.” Taylor also found the sorority to be “super trans-inclusive and friendly,” and his passion for the organization as not only accepting but actively protective of LGBTQIA+ members increased when his transphobic section leader was rejected from the organization after “everyone stopped tolerating his behavior.” The celebration, protection, and affirmation Taylor experienced as a sister provided him with confidence to assert himself more within his own section and form relationships in our sections of the band:

I kind of was like, “no, you're going to acknowledge this now.” Like, “I’m not going to just be like, haha, oops, you called me a girl” and that came a lot with my process and Tau Beta Sigma. I definitely felt more empowered. I had a base behind me that was going to support my decisions.

The amount of time Taylor spent with sorority members fostered close friendships that

allowed him to “[become] vulnerable” in ways he had deemed impossible during high school.

Taylor referred to members of the organization as his “found family” which promoted “familial sisterhood.” Taylor associated the sisterly bond with closeness and mutual respect rather than femininity and equated seeing men in the sorority as similarly empowering to watching male campers dress in drag. Taylor appreciated “learning a more healthy version of masculinity, that doesn't rely on ‘being a guy’ to be a man” and dissociated “being a girl” from “being a sister.” Having recently come out as a trans man to his band peers, being in a space that celebrated a multitude of ways of expressing masculinity and femininity within a traditionally gendered (e.g., a sorority) space was exciting and affirming:

Getting to be with sisters who were cisgender men, who call themselves sisters and were proud to carry that title, I think was just very good for me to hear, and see, and be around, and then get to be a part of.

As part of his membership in the sorority, Taylor also wore shirts patterned with Greek letters which indicated his membership in the organization. Much like the band uniform, the Greek letters allowed Taylor to signal his membership and thus visibility within the protective framework of a collective.

Experiencing Band

Despite the harassment and transphobic remarks Taylor endured from his peers within the trumpet section, he was able to find other spaces within the context of the marching band program which provided not only safety, but also opportunities for Taylor

to thrive and excel. Taylor indicated that experiencing different versions of leadership allowed him to feel empowered and permitted to advocate on his own behalf to his peers and family. Additionally, although Taylor had trouble finding his musical and social voice early on, the numerous roles the band offered allowed him to find positions and social environments that aligned with his values, character, and personality.

Leadership as Empowerment

Taylor's first experiences with leadership in the NSU marching band were largely negative. An openly transphobic section leader who used his positional authority to intimidate and harass LGBTQIA+ and racial/ethnic minority students not only escaped discipline but was rewarded by the next highest form of leadership—band directors and staff—for his musical contributions. Further, Taylor experienced the power leaders held in either intervening and providing safety or exacerbating feelings of loss and hostility.

After feeling out of place within the band for his more laid-back approach to trumpet playing and his trans identity, leadership's failure to provide support or comfort transformed Taylor's later appointments to leadership titles in the band and sorority from simple roles to opportunities to reclaim and repurpose their ability to influence. Taylor's leadership opportunities allowed him to “practice being someone other than like the quiet bookworm in the back of the class that nobody really cares to know about” as well as “practice having a lot of leadership skills and interpersonal skills, problem solving, like every kind of skill you need to like work, especially in a classroom setting.”

Taylor was initially worried that he would miss out on elements of leadership positions that he perceived as valuable for post-college careers or graduate school, such

as “learning how to lead a team” and “working with a large group.” Taylor’s position as student director of operations allowed him to exercise a limited amount of authority over a team of band members. After years of being subjected to others’ decisions made with little or no consultation, Taylor was excited to experience the decision-making process from the leadership vantage point. The leadership post also gave Taylor the ability to leave his section freely, no longer tying his membership in the band to enduring a discriminatory student leader. Assuming a leadership role gave Taylor a valuable sense of confidence and prompted him to assert himself to other family and friends: “I felt like I kind of could be more like ‘this is how I feel this is what's going on, you're going to listen to me. You're going to use my pronouns.’” Taylor’s forthrightness with his parents allowed the family to “heal a lot” and opened the door for Taylor to speak with a therapist about his past experiences. Leadership opportunities had opened space for Taylor to not only introduce his original ideas and thoughts into a situation but advocate and insist upon them as well.

Finding a Voice Through Supporting Roles

One of the most salient themes that weaved in and out of our conversations was Taylor’s ability to find multiple ways of succeeding and feeling empowered within the NSU band program. Within the metaphor of wayfinding, Taylor was forced to traverse several paths which led to negative outcomes before doubling back to journey down different trails of opportunity. Although Taylor was recognized for his technical proficiency on trumpet during high school, he quickly realized upon arriving at NSU that his quieter demeanor and lack of competitive spirit separated him from many of the most

celebrated members of the section. Rather than play first trumpet parts that carried melodic material for the section, Taylor preferred supporting the melody with a second or third part; Taylor desired to be present without being highlighted and thus the focus of critique.

Similarly, Taylor enjoyed behind-the-scenes work in operations management to the more visible and public role of section leader. Rather than using his voice to defend himself or ward off hostile peers, Taylor had found a “niche” that allowed him to mentor, teach, and be seen by others as organized and efficient. Although Taylor had longed to serve, previous experiences did not offer the roles or positions that aligned with his personality, interests, or passions. Pursuing a role in which Taylor was able to lead and make decisions was both affirming and challenging:

You have so many people, you're probably not going to be the best and you're almost assuredly not the worst. So what is the niche that you can fill? And some people, and I know this gets talked about in the [NSU marching band]. Some people just want to come into the stands, march, go to the games, and that's it, and that's awesome. That's the majority of the band and that's what it should be. But there are people who want to do more. And that's, I think, marching band is a great way to offer that to someone in a sense, they can, that, you can do more.

Through his role in directing his peers, devising plans of operations, and meeting with staff on a regular basis, Taylor had found a means to use his voice on his own terms. Taylor's confidence also allowed him to confidently play second and third parts with less concern for his peers' judgement and accusations that he lacked ambition or drive. Taylor

also used his voice as a member of the graduate education program, and he commented he “became a lot more vocal about being trans” once he started his graduate level coursework.

Case Summary

Much of Taylor’s story centered around trying to find a sense of belonging amidst layers of unsupportive peers and teachers. Although Taylor initially felt compelled to return to the closet upon his matriculation at NSU, he managed to find sites within the band program—namely the sorority and his operational leadership role—which allowed him to subvert the negativity within his own section. The confidence Taylor gained through the band sorority was cyclical, providing him with confidence to face unrest at home, which in turn gave him a sense of control and further expanded his support network. The myriad opportunities for students to take leadership roles within the marching band medium is a paradoxical in Taylor’s story, both creating greater space for harassment and hostility as well as more nuanced positions for growth and development. Taylor summarized his thoughts about band’s role by commenting:

Marching band is a great equalizer in a lot of ways, because some of your best marchers aren’t music majors. Some of your best players are not music majors. Some of your worst marchers are music majors, so it doesn't matter necessarily...we all had to march on the same field.

Grant’s Journey

Grant had been out of school for a year and a half when we spoke and was working at home rather than in his company’s downtown office due to the COVID-19

pandemic. Growing up, Grant described his family as “really accepting” and felt support for LGBTQIA+ issues from a young age. Although Grant enjoyed schoolwork and forming relationships with his teachers throughout his K–12 education, he struggled socially with his peers. Grant felt “a lot of shame” about his weight growing up and commented that he perceived having only enough stamina to address either his gender identity or body image at any given time.

Grant picked up the saxophone in fourth grade, and immediately fell in love with his new instrument and the band program. Having had a “harder time learning social cues,” Grant was excited that his peers’ perceptions of him during band rehearsals were influenced more by his playing contributions than his perceived weight. Although Grant enjoyed his playing experiences throughout his schooling, he “didn't really like, explore my queerness through music” and left conversations regarding sexuality and gender to one of his English teachers. At Northeastern State University, Grant was a member of the marching and varsity pep bands for each of his four years. Salient themes that arose from our interviews included the importance of finding and utilizing different spaces within the marching band context, the difficulties and rewards of student and staff leadership, and musical feedback as a mechanism for self-valuation. Of note is that Grant’s experiences in expressing a trans and queer identity allowed him to express through music in college, rather than the reverse (i.e., expression through music allowed him to feel comfortable expressing a trans identity).

Being in Band

Playing saxophone in school bands from a young age provided shelter from needing to assimilate to “social expectations,” especially during middle school when Grant felt pressured to conform to the same expressions of femininity as his female peers. The “common goals” to which Grant and his peers aspired throughout his K–12 education and instrumental ensembles (e.g., jazz and concert bands) the band directors offered were sources of enjoyment. Although Grant’s high school did not have a marching band, he was heavily involved with the concert band, music courses (e.g., music theory), and playing saxophone in the school’s pit orchestra.

As the sole tenor saxophonist in his high school program, Grant experienced both empowerment and a sense of loss. Grant often received solo opportunities in his high school jazz band and was sought after by his band directors who wanted him to take private lessons due to his critical role in their ensembles. Grant enjoyed feeling valued and needed by his teachers—particularly after several years of body image concerns and social isolation from many of his non-band peers—but also was unsure of his abilities. With no competition, Grant felt as though he lacked a basis for comparison to other musicians and had no one else with whom he could “measure up.”

When applying to colleges, Grant knew that he “still wanted to play music in college, but...didn't want to major in music.” Although he had not been a member of a high school marching band program, Grant viewed the marching band as a potential “vehicle for social interaction” which might best align with his desire to stay musically engaged at the college level. Grant had come out as a lesbian during high school, and

while his parents were generally supportive, he remained cautious due to difficult previous social interactions with his peers. It was during his “last semester of high school” that Grant had begun to think more about his gender but decided that he would continue to pass and express as a woman during his first year at NSU.

Band as a Reset

Being new to a marching band environment and college generally, Grant expressed feeling “really nervous” about making friends and establishing a social network. Weeks before arriving at NSU, Grant cut off most of his hair and decided to start college as openly gay to his new peers. Although Grant still experienced some reservations around his body image, he quickly felt affirmed by his college peers:

It was the first time I felt really validated by my appearance, and I really needed that. So that was really exciting, and like nobody at college ever knew me with long hair, you know, ever knew me as someone who was straight.

Grant was relieved that all the new NSU marching band members seemed to be starting the year with a “blank slate” without needing to expend mental energy on explaining their backgrounds or stories. Although Grant’s new path at NSU was uncertain, he perceived fewer obstacles and barriers than the roads he had traveled to that point. After not playing his saxophone for the entire summer, Grant was “really happy to be making music again” and viewed his extensive playing history as a point of confidence to buffer his lack of experience with marching. Grant also viewed marching band as an opportunity to engage in physical activity and exercise without the discomfort of going to a gym or fitness center. Overall, Grant viewed his introduction to the NSU marching band as an

opportunity to reclaim his social life.

Engaging with Band

As Grant reflected on his experiences in the NSU marching band, the concepts of affirmation and space recurred numerous times and in various contexts. Although Grant did not report instances of violence, harassment, or discrimination during high school, he spent a great deal of time unsure of himself and described living in “a lot of gray” for much of his life. Through his experiences in the marching band and band fraternity, it became clear that Grant desired the freedom to express his gender identity through his words, movements, and attire without fear of judgement or fracturing social relationships. Additionally, Grant was excited by the introduction of tangible, concrete goals and performance standards after spending years questioning his abilities. After grappling with his weight and body image for years, marching band membership also allowed Grant to assert his visible presence with pride. As a student leader for two years, Grant also experienced tension between enforcing unsupportive directors’ rules and maintaining social relationships with his peers.

Attire, Uniforms, and Visibility

Grant was “always a tomboy” and “did not have girly interests as a kid.” Although Grant’s parents were supportive in his clothing and extracurricular activity choices, he did not transition to masculine attire until late into his first year at NSU. Grant felt more freedom to experiment with his clothing choices and bought a binder to wear around campus. While Grant had begun to purchase masculine clothing for social situations, he chose to wear feminine formal attire to official band-related events, such as

the organization's annual banquet:

The last time I wore a dress while presenting as a woman was my freshman banquet, and I remember hating it. I was just I couldn't find masculine clothes that fit my body. That was fine. So I wore a dress and like now my friends and I look at those pictures and we laugh, it's funny.

Despite the challenges Grant faced in finding clothing in which he felt comfortable, he commented that he never felt dysphoria or discomfort at school because there was no sense of judgement attached to any of his choices. One specific example Grant highlighted was his comfort in wearing a sports bra during his second marching band pre-semester training camp. After wearing his binder for long periods of time, the pressure on Grant's lungs and ribs became too painful to bear during the already-physically demanding marching band rehearsals. Although Grant initially worried about donning feminine athletic apparel, "nobody said anything" at rehearsals.

Grant described the band's uniform as "very neutral" and "very affirming." Grant "never felt weird" wearing the uniform and described it as "very big [and] boxy." The band uniform provided Grant with the same appearance as his peers, regardless of his weight or shape — a rare experience in Grant's life. The uniform was also empowering for Grant, who as an active member of the drag scene in his metropolitan area discussed the transformative power of band attire in assuming a persona and performing an identity to a captivated audience:

[The uniform] was really validating because I was like, "I don't even have to worry about what anything looks like. I'm just me in my uniform doing band, and

it's not, it's not anything else.” And I find that so interesting because it really, marching band is a performance and you're putting on a show and not everyone who does marching band feels like superbly connected to the performance they're putting on, but myself and some other people really do and really get into it.

Grant also identified the band uniform as a physical manifestation of structure, and commented that while he enjoyed being “flamboyant” and outwardly exuberant in his presentation and interactions with his peers, he was also drawn to strict organization and uniformity:

Sometimes having that environment where I can kind of assimilate and can kind of be in that uniform space kind of helps me, grounds me, but I also, it's also kind of this assimilation with my peers that it's kind of that like, “no matter race, gender, sexuality, everything, everyone is doing the same thing and working towards a common goal.” And I think that can also be part of it where it gives you a sense of belonging, where every single person no matter what is doing the same thing or accomplishing the same goal together.

Grant spoke highly of the marching band show during his senior year, during which members of the saxophone section moved to the front of the formation to dance in a line for the audience. The uniform allowed Grant to “feel both like ‘I need to blend in with everyone else’ but you know, you stand out in your own way,” giving him the ability to be seen and noticed but do so in conjunction with similarly-dressed peers.

The Importance of Multiple Spaces

The word “space” occurred throughout our conversations, referring to physical,

metaphorical, and online environments, communities, and organizations. Grant emphasized his desire to have numerous spaces in which he could engage different aspects of his personality and character, some related to his trans identity and others more distinctly separate. During high school, Grant was struggling with in-personal social connections and turned to online fan communities to make connections. About the online forums and message boards, Grant commented that “those spaces are very queer” and that he “wanted to learn about others” as he discovered different ways of thinking about sexuality and gender. Positive representations of LGBTQIA+ individuals allowed Grant to “connect with my queerness” without the burden of performing for others or being observed or surveilled.

Grant identified multiple spaces that defined his marching band participation: the band itself, the saxophone section, and the band fraternity. Speaking of the NSU marching band program in its entirety, Grant noted that “band never made me feel like I had to hide anything.” Importantly, the marching band was a space in which Grant was able to openly express and advocate for his trans identity but was not one in which he was *required* to do so. After a season during which another band member was known to actively spread transphobic materials through social media and text message chains, Grant viewed the “space” of marching band as having been infringed upon and decided to “reclaim” the space not by openly engaging with the band member, but by advocating for trans-inclusive policies and setting a positive example: “I feel like people always need someone like to show them like, ‘hey, this is an affirming space, you're good here.’” Grant’s confidence had increased through his band participation, and he “never felt the

need to really perform in certain [band] spaces.”

Grant described his marching band section as “very familial,” and appreciated his peers’ support before and after coming out. After a hesitant start to his time in the NSU marching band, Grant disclosed his sexual identity and was pleased at his section’s embrace: “I was very openly gay. I was like, ‘gay, I’m into girls, that’s the deal.’ And everyone, my section was like, ‘great, fabulous.’” Grant “never felt invalidated” around his section mates and enjoyed being treated equally to other band members at social events. During his junior year, Grant served as a leader of the saxophone section and for a brief time was ostracized by section members after he reported a party the members had organized to the band directors. Many of the dismayed section members were seniors who graduated that year, and Grant was able to reestablish rapport with the group the following season. During the fall of his senior year, Grant noticed that another member of the section who was trans began taking his shirt off in hot weather after undergoing top surgery. Grant appreciated his peers’ reactions—and, in some cases, lack of reactions—and noted that the “section members didn’t make anything weird.”

Grant experienced the greatest level of affirmation and warmth within the band’s fraternity, Kappa Kappa Psi. Grant’s attraction to the organization stemmed from friendships he had made throughout the band, and the overlap between pre-existing relationships and fraternity members made Kappa Kappa Psi a logical decision. Prior to Grant joining the organization, “they didn’t really have any trans folks like in the fraternity.” Grant felt empowered to advocate for gender-neutral pronouns and changes to official documents and procedures for potential future trans and non-binary members.

The shared experiences and sheer amount of time members spent together created a level of trust that transcended other differences: “There were a few brothers who I definitely vehemently disagreed with politically, but that's fine. They still respected my pronouns, it's fine, and my name.” Grant also commented that “being called a brother was a very like affirming thing,” and reaffirmed his trans identity. Fraternity rituals often required members to dress in formal attire, and Grant utilized the opportunities to demonstrate his tastes in fashion within the framework of formalwear:

I love fashion, so I always wait for every formal, whether it was first or third or whatever, to really bring out my best outfits. And some of them were not full suits. I sometimes wore heels. I wore more flowy pants. I don't think I ever wore a dress. I did not, I felt really comfortable in that space to be able to do that stuff because I know no one would give me weird glances for it, or comments about it. They would just be like, ‘I love your outfit’ and that would be that.

Finally, Grant commented on the importance of space after he came out to his family as trans. Although Grant’s family members had signaled support for LGBTQIA+ issues and people throughout his life, Grant was still uncertain about coming out to them during his junior year of college. After coming out, Grant’s family “[needed] time to sit with stuff” and added, “for people who don't have experience with trans folks, there's a different story to be lived through...I granted my family a lot of grace and I don't regret that at all.” While Grant’s family worked through his announcement, Grant was able to more heavily lean into the marching band and the fraternity for support, expression, and to more intentionally engage with trans issues.

Musical Success as Personal Validation

Although Grant had enjoyed playing the saxophone throughout his K–12 education, even purchasing his own instrument weeks before arriving at NSU—he struggled to assess his playing ability with few available benchmarks:

[In high school] there was no form of competition or anything. So I had to really gauge if I was good or not, you know, I was only told that I was good by my directors in high school, my parents, things like that.

By the time Grant arrived at NSU, he “needed that belonging more than anything in life” and described musical validation as “something I needed and [had] never felt before.” While Grant was immediately relieved to form social connections with his peers, affirmation of his musical skills strengthened his positive self-concept. Similar to how Grant lived his sexual and gender identities in a “gray” area for much of his life—seemingly being pulled in no direction, left to wander on his own—receiving concrete, tangible feedback was a valuable experience. Grant offered two examples of musical assessment and its importance in affirming not only his confidence, but also his sense of self-worth and ownership of his identity.

After a rehearsal during the fall of his first year at NSU, a senior section leader approached Grant to offer words of praise for his playing abilities. Grant recalled, “to hear that from a senior who I looked up to, who was a really good player too. I was like, ‘okay, like, I belong here.’” Later that year, Grant auditioned for the school’s basketball pep band, comprised primarily of members from the marching band, and was surprised to make the ensemble. Grant was “taken aback” after receiving the news, and remained an

active member in the band throughout his four years:

It made me so happy in a lot of different ways, just you know, socially, feeling confident in my abilities as a player, because no one in high school ever validated me being a really good player.

Experiencing Band

Grant was able to travel between the various spaces within the NSU marching band program to fulfill different needs and form distinct friendships. Much of Grant's pre-college experience entailed uncertainty and a feeling of being "stuck" between multiple poles of existence. Grant's social networks in the NSU marching band provided him with valuable confidence which allowed him to come out as trans to his family. In turn, finding a new social network through his family's acceptance, albeit a network which took time, was encouraging and affirming for Grant as he pursued leadership opportunities. As a leader of the saxophone section for two years, Grant experienced two very different aspects of serving as an intermediary between his peers and staff. Taken together, Grant's two seasons in a leadership role influenced his confidence in navigating his post-college work life.

Leadership as a Pathway for Confidence

During Grant's first season as a section leader, he described being a "stickler for rules" and was often at odds with members of his section. Grant felt as though he was constantly "under a microscope" and "had to prove something" to his peers and directors. Having received positive musical feedback—which had been notably absent during high school—Grant now sought positive leadership feedback and was hesitant to jeopardize

his position. However, even though Grant took on a more “policing” role during his junior year, he acknowledged the privilege of being seen and given authority as a leader:

I think, because I felt especially in my junior and senior year, I felt more in leadership and more like, I guess, not superior, but you know what I mean? So I didn't feel like I had to speak up to someone or anything.

The following year, Grant approached his leadership position from a decidedly different angle and focused on “just having fun.” After receiving no support from professional staff in enforcing rules, Grant began attending section parties and bonding with his new saxophone section members. Grant described his role during his senior year as a “backseat” driver, focusing primarily on maintaining friendships through his position than challenging other members. Having embodied two different approaches to leadership, Grant experienced agency in being able to choose and chart his own path to success. Having traveled down one path of rule enforcement and over-reliance on director support, Grant had found no support at the expense of his social standing. After he doubled back and chose another route, he experienced a balance of connecting with staff while strengthening his social network. The dichotomous experiences instilled Grant with a sense of confidence both as a highly visible leader and the type of individual with the skills to navigate difficult situations:

It was just known that I was a person, and that I was also really loud. I was, you know, trans, I was, you know, a really queer person...very unapologetic, myself, authentic, all that kind of stuff. And I think that, you know, and I'm not trying to sound like narcissistic, but that gravitated people towards me. So [leadership]

created this network of people for me.

Following his graduation from NSU, Grant immediately felt the positive influences from his marching band experiences on his work life. On a practical level, alumni of the band program were a constant present in Grant's industry, allowing him to ask questions and collaborate on projects that may have taken longer with less familiar individuals. Grant also identified his newfound confidence from leading a section of his peer as the most transferable skill to his career:

It [gave] me the, just the confidence to know like, "okay I can lead people, I can educate people, I can manage people or things, logistical things. I can come up with the idea for a project and execute it and see it through." And that's so awesome...I plan to apply to grad school and become a teacher. And keeping those ideas for once I do those things is super important because I can lose sight of that at times.

Grant had also gained confidence to pursue a career path that aligned more with his interests. After solidifying his sense of self and agency while at NSU, Grant decided to follow his dream of becoming a high school math teacher: "My parents were like, 'you know, you're so good at math, you can do careers that make more money' and I followed that boat. But teaching's really the thing I want to be doing."

Case Summary

One of the central themes of Grant's case was moving beyond the ambiguity he had experienced during high school. While none of Grant's experiences were strongly positive or negative, it was the feeling of listlessness and uncertainty that exacerbated the

anxiety he was already experiencing around his sexuality and gender. The NSU marching band provided valuable physical, mental, and emotional space for Grant to experiment with his gender presentation, form valuable social connections, and experience leadership. While Grant never intended to pursue music as a profession, he sought validation from his peers and directors of his musical and leadership skills to further receive tangible, direct feedback about aspects of his life. Grant also saw the NSU as a site in which he could at times overtly express his individuality and at others assimilate into a group and “fade into the background.” The fluidity in his avenues for expression mirrored the fluidity he enjoyed in multiple spaces of his band participation, including his saxophone section and the band fraternity. Overall, Grant left NSU feeling affirmed for not only what he contributed, but who he was to the world.

Quinn’s Journey

Quinn was preparing to move to a new house during our interviews, a task complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. After receiving a degree in digital media and design from Northeastern State University in the spring of 2019, Quinn was able to find steady and enjoyable employment almost immediately. Quinn grew up with their parents and two brothers in a mid-sized Northeastern town, and while they did not offer any complaints about their family life, they did describe being left to their “own devices” as a child. Quinn started playing instruments later in their career, starting on violin and piano and only transitioning to percussion after arriving at NSU. While Quinn had come out as bisexual during their junior year of college, they did not come out as non-binary until after they had graduated. Quinn largely separated their band membership from their

sexuality and trans identity and moved between viewing the NSU marching band as a site for social affirmation and music in isolation. Salient themes from Quinn's story include the importance of worldbuilding as a social survival tactic, the value of structure, and the tension between non-binary visibility as affirming and threatening.

Being in Band

Quinn was musically active as a child, playing violin for several years before "losing interest" and picking up piano during middle school. Much of Quinn's musical experience was spent in solo or one-on-one settings (e.g., taking private lessons with a local teacher), not in ensembles or large groups. It was once upon entering their junior year that Quinn was invited to join their school's marching band as a pianist with the front ensemble (i.e., non-marching members playing auxiliary percussion instruments). Quinn's high school band was "hyper competitive," and after light research they realized that the NSU marching band would not provide the same level of technical stimulation they had received in their previous program. Quinn initially decided to audition for the cymbal section of the drumline, planning to learn the snare drum and move out of their initial section. Quinn ultimately "stuck with [cymbals] all four years," briefly playing in other ensembles (e.g., concert band) as well.

Although Quinn acknowledged that they were not able to put words to their feelings of dysphoria at the time, they recall memories and pictures from their first year at NSU with a sense of separation and dissociation: "I just mean how it looks. I may even, just using 'he.' That's, very different than I am now, both, barely physically." Struggling with their body image and constant feelings of discomfort, Quinn identified their first

year at NSU as being “at the bottom” of their college experiences. Unable to build strong social relationships through their band participation—due to both physical and social separation—Quinn relied on seeking friendships in their dorm to get through the “awkward year.”

Social Space vs. Musical Space

During NSU marching band rehearsals and performances, Quinn often lacked opportunities for social engagement with other band members. Due to the layout of the drumline, Quinn was forced to stand at the end of a line of cymbal players and consistently interact with the same individual. Quinn recalled that they “didn’t like the person next to me, and I wasn’t really friends with everyone. So that wasn’t, it wasn’t brought up too much with the social aspect.” Quinn quickly realized that while they were open to building relationships in the NSU marching band, they could not rely on those relationships to materialize. Rather, Quinn leaned into their musical skills to offset their social awkwardness:

There was a point where I realized that I was much, much better at the instrument than [other members were], which helped with any imbalance of the social situations. You know, where that kind of mindset of analyzing how good everyone is on their instrument? That comes from high school baby [laughter] that isn't a [NSU] thing. Um, that's a competitive, that's a competitive thing.

Quinn added that “gender stuff throughout college really [wasn’t] too connected to marching band,” and that they preferred to use their marching band time to hone an achievable, tangible skill (e.g., music and marching precision) than deeply reflect on

gender fluidity or its implications.

Engaging with Band

Quinn was generous in sharing numerous pictures and videos from their time in band with me. Over several interviews, we discussed photographs, social media posts, and videos of marching band performances. A recurring theme that arose was Quinn's ability to leverage their marching band membership into playing the role of an expert or master of a craft, a role that had eluded them during high school. Throughout Quinn's life, building and living in fantastical worlds was of great importance. Quinn enjoyed immersing themselves in science fiction books and television shows and acting out different characters and archetypes allowed them to flex an intellectual muscle they did not often use in daily life. The structures and trappings of the NSU marching band allowed Quinn another opportunity to build and live in a world much like those they imagined growing up. Quinn also enjoyed the marching band's structure and routine, two concepts that mitigated the feelings of anxiety they felt toward ambiguous or uncertain situations.

Expertise and Worldbuilding

Quinn spent much of their time at school and home to themselves, creating worlds on paper and in their backyard. As a child, Quinn's social connections often revolved around "drawing battles" and creating imaginary "factions" on paper, simulating large-scale conflicts and heroic personas. At home, Quinn spent hours in their backyard or a nearby river, using sticks and rocks to "make up like soldier or knight characters, because it feels like it's something that's easy to act out alone." Although Quinn would invite

friends they made at school or engage their brothers to participate in the imagined worlds, they were often self-conscious and did not want to be seen acting out their dreams outdoors:

I [didn't] want to be judged, but I still [wanted] to do it, you know, I, preferably I want to go live in a house somewhere where I know the people nearby so I can get my fun plastic sword to my, and galivant around to my heart's content.

Quinn also immersed themselves in video games, playing with peers at school or borrowing a friend's console when they got the chance; their parents could not afford systems, and Quinn often felt excluded on the bus or after school. Additionally, Quinn enjoyed reading science fiction books and “[creating] worlds and characters” at the beach during family trips. Quinn preferred fictional stories that stretched the boundaries of politics and popular culture, and asked, “Why would you write a story about real people in the real world when you could not?”

Having been on the social outskirts for much of their K–12 education, Quinn found that being a member of the NSU marching band allowed them to add another role to their portfolio: expert. When we spoke, Quinn was getting together with one of their friends on a weekly basis to watch episodes of the *Star Trek* television franchise. Quinn later connected the marching band uniform to the costumes worn by *Star Trek* characters, adding that, “being in a group and knowing things” allowed them to feel “in the know” about their craft. As Quinn gained more experience in the NSU band, their insider knowledge allowed them to direct their younger peers (e.g., moving equipment) in ways similar to drawing and coordinating battles on sheets of paper during their childhood.

Quinn also commented that while the band uniform “probably makes marching band appealing to more non-binary people just because everyone wears the same shit,” the standardized look was not akin to “hiding.” Rather, Quinn enjoyed the uniform’s visibility and perceived importance to audience members without the burden of being individually scrutinized. In essence, Quinn’s description of expertise in the uniform and as a band member aligned with the concept of character role playing.

Quinn also connected the expertise and insider knowledge they experienced while wearing the uniform to often being the most informed person among their friends regarding queer issues:

That does actually connect to queer stuff because you better believe I know the most about that in, pick a room I'm in, right? So sometimes it's nice to talk to other people, but sometimes it's also intimidating because it's like, “oh no, I don't know how deep you are in the discourse.” There's that kind of cool role playing, I suppose. Makes it easier to exist in the world, but only in certain places.

Quinn’s comments about role playing also applied to their views on passing as male or female in public spaces. Similar to how Quinn felt empowered as an expert performing to audiences at exhibition performances and football games, they also acknowledged that there was a “little adversarial” relationship between performer and audience. Quinn commented that they experienced severe “social anxiety” which resulted from being “hyper aware” of being watched and read in public spaces (e.g., stores and parks). Although Quinn referred to the need to switch performances based on the public audience versus the audience of band members around them during rehearsals, their thoughts may

apply equally to how Quinn viewed the performance of gender generally: “I’m focused on being watched, you know? And so now I need to put on the role for these people up here, not for you people around me.” In all, the militaristic and uniform aspects of Quinn’s marching band experience allowed them to continue the worldbuilding and role playing they found affirming as a child.

The Importance of Structure

Quinn was drawn to online spaces during college after previously learning about non-binary gender concepts through a high school friend. However, Quinn preferred keeping their marching band membership separate from their exploration or discussion of gender topics. The structure and organization that marching band served as a buffer to the uncertainty and fluidity of Quinn’s discomfort about their gender identity:

There’s really no objectivity [in talking about gender]. It’s really just kind of got to go with the flow, which I don’t, I don’t like going with the flow. I like having solid concrete facts of stuff, but I can’t have that here.

Although Quinn acknowledged that they never felt unsafe or in danger of experiencing physical harm while at band rehearsals or performances, they commented that “the practice environment doesn’t particularly, not allow [me to think about gender], you could, but I was more thinking about my eight to five than anything else at band.”

In their daily life at NSU, Quinn expressed a desire to identify “places that I need to go in order to like, keep a schedule.” Although Quinn’s experiences with the NSU band were mixed (e.g., enjoying the musical fulfillment but struggling with social connectivity), the most important aspect for Quinn was the band’s consistency in their

daily routines. Quinn added that “marching band was probably the most important thing to go to,” and kept him from lingering or procrastinating elsewhere on campus. In many ways, the NSU marching band served as an organizing mechanism more than a space for social growth.

Sorority Members as a “Status Bump”

In addition to struggling to form social relationships—many of which came during the latter half of their college career—Quinn grappled with the cymbal section’s place within the larger drumline culture. The drumline was comprised of snare, bass, and tenor drummers, cymbal players, and a front ensemble (e.g., mallet and auxiliary instruments). The front ensemble members had a designated staff member, while the other four remained primarily under the direction of a single “caption head,” or lead instructor. The instructor, “[had] no idea how to play cymbals and specifically has no idea like what to do with us,” and often left the cymbal players to themselves. With little supervision or investment from the staff member, Quinn described a “detachment” both from other members of the drumline and the band at large:

There was never really any drumline culture I was a part of because the cymbals are like...they're the peanut gallery of the drumline. They, we kind of do our own thing, and so aren't generally too attached to the drumline culture. But that said, we don't have any attachment. We have less attachment with woodwind culture and brass culture. We have our own stuff.

Quinn was eager to build the social connections and sense of importance they sometimes lacked as a member of the drumline and marching band program. During their

junior year, Quinn decided to rush and join the band's sorority, Tau Beta Sigma. In addition to being familiar with members of the sorority, Quinn was drawn to TBS over its fraternity counterpart, Kappa Kappa Psi, for the acronym itself: "I also just like the acronym better than KKPsi. KKPsi, it's dumb. TBS, now that's it, that's a, that's a TV channel. Flows, rolls right off the tongue." During their membership candidacy process, band members from different sections interacted on a regular basis, giving Quinn expanded opportunities to make connections outside of their immediate social circle.

For the first time at NSU, Quinn was in regular contact with openly queer people. Since most of Quinn's exposure to and engagement with LGBTQIA+ issues and people had occurred in online spaces (e.g., social media websites), Quinn was nervous but excited to form relationships with other queer individuals in an already-familiar environment: "The amount of disconnect on certain things or just the certain things you can't talk about when you're not with the fellow queers...there were gay people [in Tau Beta Sigma] and there, and it was a safer environment." Quinn also began dating a member of the sorority who was identified as non-binary and was able to carefully observe in real-time how others reacted to their identity. Although Quinn did not yet have the conceptual language for their own experiences as a non-binary person at the time, they acknowledge that they would have been safe and affirmed if they had decided to come out to members of the sorority: "I can see how they treated [my partner]. Like, ah, at least not then, but now I'm like, 'yeah, yeah, would've been fine.'" Quinn also enjoyed having a space to "put a lot of thought" into their outfits during formal sorority events, experimenting with different feminine and masculine articles without fear of judgement.

Wearing the sorority letters in marching band environments also provided Quinn with an “extra little status bump.” Becoming a member of an even more exclusive group within the band program allowed Quinn to exercise layers of “expertise” beyond the band uniform. The social awareness of sorority or fraternity membership as aspirational helped Quinn offset the *lack* of aspirational status they experienced earlier in the cymbal section due to its isolation and lack of attention from staff. In essence, wearing sorority letters was another means for Quinn to be known and be seen beyond their bodily discomfort and prior disengagement from other sections:

Being able to walk around like, “hi I’m a sister,” uh, ‘cause you know, people, even uneducated people know that, you know, they’re the, “oh there’s the, oh, that’s the band sorority,” you know? So there’s some kind of authority from people who actually care about, you know, the, what we do.

Experiencing Band

As Quinn gained more confidence through their membership in the sorority and taking on leadership roles within the cymbal section, their social circle expanded to include friends with whom they still spoke at the time of this dissertation’s publication. While Quinn spoke highly of their friendships and memories made through band participation, it was clear that they valued the consistency, structure, and concreteness of the music making; friendships and social connectivity were convenient byproducts of the experience:

No matter how bad it gets, like when the band hits that chord and you hit that crash, it’s, it’s pure serotonin. So there’s an a, I can’t imagine people not doing

band for the music. Like, why are you here? Go, go, you can watch us and talk to your friends afterwards.

Quinn identified the NSU marching band as a site for learning to take and give criticism as professional, rather than personal adjudications. Additionally, Quinn was preparing to return to the NSU band as a volunteer staff member following the COVID-19 pandemic. Having been removed from the ensemble for several years, Quinn offered reflections on marching band as a public space contrasted with the sorority—or other nested environments—and the implications for personal safety as a visibly queer person.

Making and Taking Criticism

For much of Quinn’s life, they were concerned with meeting external expectations. During middle and high school, Quinn excelled in many of their classes but still faced scrutiny from their mother: “I found it incapable to be perfect, I always messed up somewhere. Which was extremely annoying as just an honors kid and, whose mother didn’t like it when he got Cs.” In college, Quinn was often self-critical about their appearance and body image, and constantly struggled to adapt to social situations. The medium of marching band gave Quinn an opportunity to accept criticism for their musical and marching contributions, rather than personal values or characteristics. Additionally, marching band served as an equalizing experience for Quinn and allowed them to criticize others despite their own flaws:

[During a rehearsal] I was trying to correct one of the seniors, and the senior was like, “well, you did that part wrong.” And I’m like, “well, I’m talking about a different part.” We’re both right. And he said something about like, “fix yourself

before you criticize others.” I can, you can criticize from an imperfect stance, you know?

The ability to critique others also aligned with Quinn’s prized role as an expert in their surroundings. After Quinn came out as non-binary following graduation, they continued to experiment with buying new clothes and considering estrogen therapies. While Quinn expressed dissatisfaction over parts of their body, their marching band experiences had reinforced the notion that holding and defending personal views and critiques even from a place of imperfection is human and natural.

Presenting and Visibility

After coming out, Quinn began to experiment more heavily with different types of clothing, balancing physical comfort with the stress of being read in public places. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Quinn purchased artificial breast implants and several skirts, and enjoyed how the face masks mandated across the country hid their facial hair. Quinn often experienced the “anxiety of presenting fem” and noted that when in public, they preferred to speak with a higher pitch. Quinn was also preparing to return to NSU to assist the cymbal players after in-person instruction resumed. Having graduated several years ago, Quinn commented that returning to the band program with a more feminine presentation was worrying:

That thought is scary because, not because band is an unsafe area, but because, well, first of all, by the time I get back, I'm not gonna know more than half the band. In that way, it really is just going into public and, bands, the internet does like to joke, band is pretty gay, but it's not totally gay. So I'd rather go to band

practice in a skirt than the supermarket, but it's still public. And so there is always going to be kind of that unsafe feeling for the first few times.

Although Quinn was empowered by their experimentation with ever-changing feminine and masculine articles of clothing, they were nervous to overlap their non-binary identity into a marching band environment: two aspects of their life that had been intentionally separated. Quinn acknowledged that they would have likely been “fine” if they had come out as non-binary during their college career, but their concerns highlighted the possible implications of institutional norms and cultural expectations. Although the people within the marching band setting may have been supportive of Quinn’s identity, the enduring structure itself may have reified certain gendered structures and expectations that made Quinn nervous to re-enter the space with a visibly queer affect.

Case Summary

Quinn viewed their NSU marching band experiences through the lens of consistency. Although social relationships had been in flux throughout much of Quinn’s life, the ability to identify and pursue tangible, nameable musical goals within a structured framework allowed Quinn to explore other aspects of their life (e.g., a non-binary gender identity) with the assurance of an organized “home” to which he could return. The band sorority offered Quinn a setting for witnessing and considering the ramifications of coming out as trans in a space safer than the band program as a whole. Further, wearing the uniform and taking on leadership and mentorship roles empowered Quinn to feel like an “expert,” a role that they prized from childhood and rarely occurred outside the worlds they built through video games or novels. Quinn had come out after

leaving NSU, and strongly advocated for the individual's ability to experiment with clothing, presentation, and embodiment on their own terms without fear of judgement or reprisal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Quinn had the opportunity to explore their gender identity in the safety of their own home and was excited but nervous to re-enter a marching band space now more comfortable in their own body. It was evident that the roles Quinn had inhabited during their time in the NSU marching band had built their confidence, and they were preparing to face not only their alma mater but also the public eye from a place of greater peace and self-assurance:

People there might still care [about my presentation], but most of them aren't going to care. Some of them are gonna be outright supportive. Some of them are going to hate it, but never say it. And you're going to not care about those people.

Chapter Six: Cross-Case Analysis

In this chapter, I present an analysis of emergent and recurring themes across the five participants' stories. Data are presented in numerous ways to offer the most comprehensive understanding and presentation of participants' lived experiences. Utilizing the metaphor of wayfinding, I organized the components of each case to provide insight from multiple perspectives by theme. In Chapter Four, I collaborated with participants to construct narratives that best represented how each person navigated their experiences. Chapter Five consisted of within-case analyses of participants' stories, expressing how I as the researcher understood and navigated recollections. Ayres et al. (2003) contended that "neither across-case nor within-case approaches alone enable the researcher to interpret an experience both through its parts and as a whole" (p. 873). Having already presented a within-case analysis of each participant's stated experiences, engaging in coding, sorting, and theming data through cross-case analysis allowed me to "[use] the reduced data set to explore theoretical or process relationships among these clusters of meaning" (Ayres et al., 2003, p. 872).

After iterative rounds of descriptive and process coding (Saldaña, 2013), I developed data into themes through sets of patterns and recurring relationships. I organized themes and sub-themes utilizing the same adapted structure from Page-Reeves et al.'s (2019) investigation of Native Americans' navigation of STEM-related career fields: *being in*, *engaging with*, and *experiencing* one's marching band membership. O'Connor (2019) argued that navigating one's experiences is "not pure intuition, but a process," and the ongoing act of wayfinding through new or unfamiliar experiences

consists of:

[Creating] origins, sequences, paths, routes, and destinations that make up narratives with starting points, middles, and arrivals. It's this ability to organize and remember our journeys that gives us the ability to find our way back. More so, we mold the discoveries we make along the way into insights and knowledge that guide and orient us in our next explorations. (p. 6)

Drawing upon O'Connor's work, the primary and sub-themes in the remainder of this chapter serve to organize, sequence, and detail participants' explorations of time, space, and experience. Additionally, thematic presentation permits the reader to understand how participants agreed, varied, or deviated from different signposts in their stories.

Table 2*Organization of Cross-Case Themes and Sub-Themes*

Organizing Concept	Primary Themes	Sub-Themes
Being In Band	College Marching Band as a line of Demarcation from High School Impact of High School Band Directors and Experiences	
Engaging With Band	Visibility and Collective Action Impact of Staff Social Connectivity	The Band Uniform Collective Action and Mitigating Differences Lack of Education Policies and Procedures Affirmation and Protection Social Capital Environmental Challenges Fraternity and Sorority
Experiencing Band	Leadership as Empowerment Self-Confidence Representation	

Being in Band

The first major set of themes falls under the concept of *being in band*, or how participants' experiences influenced their decisions to participate in a collegiate marching band program and the mechanisms that guided their membership. Two themes relevant to participants' arrival at their college marching band programs arose during analysis: (a)

the college marching band as a line of demarcation from high school; and (b) the impact of high school band directors and overall experiences on student participation.

College Marching Band as a Line of Demarcation

Each of the five participants in this study identified college generally, and their institution's marching band specifically as demarcated—or distinctly separated—from their high school experiences. Although general notions of college life and the specifics of their respective university evolved over time, participants utilized past experiences to inform their opinions toward college band participation. For Jack, Taylor, and Grant, the prospect of marching presented an opportunity to reintroduce themselves and “just move forward” with new peers after having trouble forming and maintaining social relationships during high school. Like participants in Lieberth's (2016) examination of college name change policies, Jack, Taylor, and Grant viewed their college marching band as a site for maintaining a constant in their lives—music performance—while doing so away from prior judgements from family and friends. Quinn also viewed their college band as a constant in their life but viewed its consistency as a goal rather than means of forming social relationships. For Quinn, “high school band [was] a lot less social” and he thus internalized musical and marching proficiency as an antecedent to friendships. Quinn's line of separation came in the form of choosing a different musical medium—marching as a member of the cymbal line rather than remaining stationary as a keyboard player, encouraging them to interact with more students on a regular basis.

Robyn had conversely experienced a rich social experience during high school in their role as drum major, visible to the community and their peers. College marching

band was attractive for Robyn as a chance to step back from the highly social, responsibility-heavy roles they had previously held and use their time to engage in critical self-reflection: “[I] want to feel a point of arrival before I really step into a leadership role’ because how I, who I am is constantly changing.”

Each participant was at a different stage of reflecting on their gender identity, influencing how each interpreted the role of marching band participation in relation to their path. Robyn and Jack had realized they were “some kind of queer” during high school, but neither expressed having the “mental space” or “mental capacity” to find the vocabulary until college. Quinn had begun to express feelings of discomfort during high school but had not yet identified their feelings toward gender or sexuality. Taylor had come out as a trans man during high school, and while he initially was excited to be in a new space to openly express his identity, was forced to “re-closet” upon realizing his section was not as welcoming as he had hoped. As the only participant who was out as trans during high school, Taylor’s experiences are reflected in numerous studies highlighting the stresses and dangers facing new trans college students (e.g., Bartholome, 2016; Meacham, 2020; Walker-Payne, 2019). Grant had largely separated his feelings toward gender and sexuality from band during high school but was excited at the prospect of expressing his queerness with peers who only knew that aspect of his identity.

Participants also approached their college marching band as sites for experimenting with their gender expression differently from how they had done so during high school. Jack, Taylor, and Grant decided to cut their hair shorter prior to enrolling in school, an act which Dentice and Dietert (2015) identified as an important “rite of

passage” (p. 86) and physical manifestation of change for many trans individuals. Robyn cut their hair shorter during college to help them with their goal of being “read as more androgynous.” While Quinn did not change their hair from high school to college, their shorter hair during their first year causes dysphoric feelings during present day as one remaining expression of their previous self that they had not shed upon entering college. Jack, Taylor, and Grant also utilized their new environment to explore masculine attire. Jack and Grant purchased binders during their first few years of school, and Jack’s changes in wardrobe served as a signaling mechanism to friends that he was assuming a more masculine persona before he verbalized his trans identity. For Grant, the opportunity to engage in “physical activity” through marching and being visible to his peers was also a method of rejecting his feelings of shame and body negativity.

Participants also viewed the musical aspects of their collegiate marching band experiences as distinct from their high school membership. Taylor had found little social success during high school, instead focusing on improving his trumpet skills as a means of establishing his “niche.” At NSU, playing trumpet served the opposite role of ostracizing and isolating Taylor, forcing him to instead anchor himself into social relationships within the sorority and other instrumental sections. Robyn chose to join the SSU marching band as a member of the color guard to interact with the audience at a greater level than they had been able to as a trombonist in their high school band, as well as provide relief from their daily ensemble commitments as a music major. Robyn found the color guard experience to provide both valuable visibility and space to reflect in ways that performing on a wind instrument did not. Jack had performed primarily on bass

clarinet in middle and high school, causing him to stress over being singled out or heard making mistakes as the only musician on the instrument. Returning to the B-flat clarinet in college served as a way for Jack to “rejoin” a community with a musical voice that matched his peers, a form of connection that had been missing in high school. Grant had enjoyed the act of playing in ensembles during high school but was self-conscious about his abilities with no standard of comparison (e.g., no peers playing the tenor saxophone to whom he could base his own playing). Placed into social situations that had not been part of their high school experience, Quinn focused on strengthening their playing abilities to even out the “imbalance” they often felt when compared with more popular members of their section.

While each participant viewed their college marching band experience as an opportunity to separate from previous experiences, the manner and method of those separations varied. Of particular interest is Taylor’s negative experience of re-closeting as the only openly trans individual at the time of college matriculation, and the only individual who was actively recruited to join their marching band rather than voluntarily registering. Perhaps the dual expectations of colleges as progressive environments and the experience of being sought after as a trumpet player created expectations of a welcoming environment which were negated almost immediately.

Impact of High School Band Directors and Experiences

Each of the five participants in this study were musically active in their high school’s band program and expressed how their interactions with and perception of their high school band membership influenced their participation at the college level. Only one

participant in this study, Grant, explicitly expressed warm feelings toward his high school band directors. Other participants described more mixed relationships with their directors, aligning with Stewart's (2007) finding that some students separate perceptions of their overall high school band experiences from feelings and attitudes toward their director(s). In short, several participants in this study seemed to persist despite, not because of their high school band director.

Of the five participants, Taylor described the worst relationship with his high school band director. Taylor remembered "hating" his teacher who would "take out all of her frustrations" on band students. In addition to not maintaining a positive relationship with his teacher, Taylor's director also actively discouraged him from pursuing music education at the college level solely due to his financial situation:

I actually wanted to go into music ed and my high school teacher told me that I shouldn't...she said, I couldn't afford private lessons at the time, basically, and she told me that if I couldn't afford them, then I shouldn't apply for music school.

After high school, Taylor was prepared to "just go on and have a different life without music," attributing much of his distaste for band participation to his teacher's negative influence. Taylor was the only participant who had planned not to join his college marching band and signed up only after being recruited by the university's music department office. Taylor's initial experience inversely aligns with Tedford's (2014) finding that many high school students who choose to continue playing in instrumental ensembles at the college level "received more encouragement from people, particularly their high school music teachers" (p. 99).

Grant expressed the most enthusiasm for his high school band directors, and “really enjoyed band” throughout his four years. Grant’s band directors helped him feel “really affirmed” as the only tenor saxophonist in the department, being chosen for solo passages and membership in the top performing groups. Being selected for musical honors and opportunities was a valuable source of affirmation and confidence for Grant and influenced his decision to purchase a saxophone and join the NSU marching band.

Quinn’s high director was “a lot scarier” and “more strict” than their college directors, although Quinn also noted that their high school band environment was a “lot less social.” Quinn’s high school band experience was “high stress” due their director’s emphasis on competitions and attaining high scores, but they did not express resentment or negative feelings towards their former teacher. Rather, Quinn appreciated the structure and uniform standards their director imposed, which in turn influenced their desire to switch sections and challenge themselves musically in the less-competitive college atmosphere.

Robyn did not note any particularly positive or negative feelings about their high school band directors but did acknowledge that the way the directors ran the band program influenced Robyn’s marching band decisions. Since Robyn’s band directors were “hands off” in running their program, Robyn was forced to “run rehearsals” quite often and left them little time to themselves or their thoughts. The directors’ management style therefore pushed Robyn to choose a different path in their college marching band, straying from leadership positions and choosing to join the color guard. Additionally, Robyn was playing trombone, their primary instrument, in other ensembles as a music

major performance requirement in contrast to playing trombone for enjoyment during high school.

Jack had a “pretty fine” relationship with his high school band director, who “ran a tight ship” during marching band rehearsals. While Jack’s teacher tended to “play favorites” with the most talented musicians in the concert band setting, she was consistent in her approach to marching band. Although Jack did not identify any specific encouragement from his band director as influencing his decision to join the marching band at BSU, she did establish a framework for marching band as an environment in which rules were enforced more uniformly. Jack did not report an overly positive social experience from his high school band program but did enjoy the “fun...show band” style of marching that emphasized collectively over individuality.

Engaging With Band

As newly matriculated college students, each participant was faced with navigating situations that were new and unfamiliar. While some participants relied on past experiences to inform their band membership and social interactions, others were left to explore their new ensembles with little or no context. Emergent themes related to how students interacted with and lived their band experiences were: (a) visibility and collective action; (b) impact of staff; and (c) social connectivity.

Visibility and Collective Action

The concept of visibility and being “seen” was a recurring theme among all participants, although opinions varied between feeling safe while being seen and feeling empowered while being seen. Sub-themes included: (a) the band uniform; and (b)

collective action and mitigating differences.

The Band Uniform

The band uniform was mentioned by each participant as important to their band experience, with different aspects being important to each person. Taylor found the uniform to be “super androgynous” because it “flattened” his physical presentation and “always just kind of an escape from like other things.” Additionally, the band uniform’s ambiguity allowed Jack to mask aspects of his presentation that induced dysphoric feelings in other pictures or videos from previous years. Jack enjoyed the uniform for its role in making band members “all look like little stick people,” and although he described the uniform as “de-gendered,” also felt that he could more easily pass as male. For Grant, the uniform was his “favorite part” of his marching band experience and allowed him to have a “flattened” appearance without the need of a dangerous binder. Grant also noted that the uniform allowed him to more easily pass as male due to its “boxy nature. As individuals who valued a more masculine appearance and presentation, Taylor, Jack, and Grant may have benefited from masculine “military aesthetic” (Broslawsky, 2017, p. 36) typical of marching band uniforms. Like “Ken” in Carter’s (2013) study of gay, HBCU marching band members, the uniform allowed Taylor, Grant, and Jack to be “noticed and remain invisible at the same time” (p. 36).

Robyn differentiated between wearing a “traditional” wool band uniform and the more exposed color guard or winter guard attire. Wearing two different types of uniforms allowed Robyn to assume different roles and varied levels of visibility. Robyn valued the traditional band uniform worn by members of the wind and brass sections for its ability to

“hide” aspects of their appearance with which they were uncomfortable, and even protective in the instance of using the uniform to protect a Sikh member of their ensemble from being singled out and harassed. Robyn’s experience with the traditional uniform recalls Lurie’s (1981) assertion that “putting on a uniform may be a relief, or even an agreeable experience...it is also true that both physical and psychological disadvantage can be concealed by a uniform, or even canceled out” (p. 19). However, Robyn also described the full-body attire as a “mask” which forced them to be “hidden” from the audience. Rather, Robyn preferred the more exposed color guard uniform as a “performance tool” which aligned with their non-binary identity:

Looking back on it now I'm like, yeah, that was totally “me just trying to figure out who I am” moment. But I was like, “I don't want to be in a uniform. I want to be able to smile at the audience and perform in that way.” And I was like, “oh yeah, that's totally like a trans thing.”

Robyn also found the uniform to be an equalizing experience when male-identifying members of their ensembles were required to shift from the traditionally masculine sets to feminine articles such as skirts. Robyn described watching their cisgender peers struggle with aspects of dysphoria through the uniform as affirming: “And there are all these people in the ensemble that can help them through that, because it's something that they grapple with in their daily life.”

Quinn did not comment on the uniform in terms of their gender identity, going so far as to say that they had “no gender thoughts about it.” However, Quinn did mention that they thought the uniforms looked “sharp” and they “really like how the [*Star Trek*]

uniforms look like marching band uniforms.” Quinn had engaged in a great deal of gaming and science fiction exploration throughout their youth, and thus their interest in the band uniform may have impacted their desire to play “the role of an expert.” For Quinn, the band uniform may have served as a tool similar to costumes used in Live Action Role Play (LARP), specifically *crossplay* which Seregina (2019) defined as “[involving] a holistic, interactive, bodily performance of an other, including both their inner world and their place within a cultural context” (pp. 468–469). For several participants, marching band participation allowed their presence as transgender and gender expansive individuals to be celebrated and applauded rather than inspected and surveilled.

Collective Action and Mitigating Differences

Participants also commented on the importance of collective action in their visibility. Previously, participants seemingly agreed that “visibility” had been equated to “isolation.” The combination of music and movement created mechanisms by which participants could be both seen and heard, increasing the frequency and intensity of their visibility. Like Ryan/Rie’s wishes to “[be] heard’ after years of being misunderstood” (Nichols, 2013, p. 274), Grant expressed a desire to have, ““someone in any setting that just looks at [me] and says, ‘I see you.’” After struggling with his body image for much of his life, Grant felt empowered being able to dance for audiences in a line with other members of his section; visible, but not alone.

After “[sticking] out like a sore thumb” during high school, Taylor was proud to “blend in and just be part of something greater.” Jack asserted that collective action

accentuated the role of the individual band member and enjoyed “coming together and being more than the sum of [the band’s] parts.” Robyn described an “electric energy between you and all of the other people that you're sharing and you're walking in time with.” Robyn, Jack, Taylor, and Grant may have experienced what McNeill (1997) refers to as *boundary loss*, or the sense of connection established through uniform bodily movement with others. Similarly, Stupacher et al. (2017) found that collective, synchronized movement in time to music promoted “trust and cohesion” (p. 42) and “social bonding” (p. 43). Stupacher et al. (2017) also noted that violating synchronized movement (e.g., stepping out of time) may be interpreted as violating “common social rules” (p. 43).

The existence and enforcement of commonly understood social rules among all members may relate to what several participants described as the “equalizing” nature of their band experience. After being frustrated by the social hierarchy of the trumpet section—and his displacement within it as a quieter member—Taylor commented that at performances, members of all ability levels were viewed in the same way: “Nobody's going to hear you [individually] from 50 feet away, even if you're the best, [or] if you're playing really quietly.” Additionally, despite enduring transphobic and harmful rhetoric from his band peers after coming out, Taylor added that their negative feelings were mitigated by “the concept of people working together, who don't [necessarily] like each other, to make something greater than them.”

For Grant, the idea that all members were forced to “assimilate” in their work toward a “common goal” was comforting, adding that “no matter race, gender, sexuality,

everything, like everyone is doing the same thing.” Jack found the “communal experience” of the marching band environment to be affirming, giving all members a common language that formed the foundation of valuable social relationships. Robyn described the “feeling of camaraderie around us as we're moving this little group” as being crucial to forming relationships and understanding with “someone that I would not give the time of day, if I just met them now.” For Quinn, the collective musical and movement vocabulary shared by members of the ensemble allowed them to critique “how good everyone [was]” in their respective section, reinforcing their preferred role as an “expert.” After being self-critical and lacking a shared social vocabulary for much of their earlier life, the marching band was an avenue in which Quinn could “criticize from an imperfect stance.”

Jack, Taylor, Grant, and Robyn’s experiences align with Matthews’s (2017) study of collegiate marching band members and finding that shared social and technical experiences mitigated perceptions of difference of insufficiency among members:

[Participants] also commented on the importance of being united toward a common goal, exemplified by marching in one style, perfecting the drill (the marching and maneuvering on the football field), familiarizing themselves with the history of the ensemble and their place in it, and emphasizing their selfless willingness to work together for the good of the group. (p. 192)

Gadinsky (2018) found that for transgender and gender expansive students on college campuses, the harmful influences of isolation and separation may be mitigated by “becoming involved in a supportive community and engaging in collective action toward

a common goal” (p. 116). The combination of shared musical and embodied action through marching band experiences may have allowed participants to access the type of shared experiences lacking in other aspects of their lives, forming social bonds and being viewed as equally capable of membership in a group based on their performance rather than gender identity or expression.

Impact of Staff

Due to the amount of time participants devoted to their marching band participation, it may not be a surprise that the impact of their directors and staff played a significant role in their membership. For transgender and gender expansive college students, interactions with faculty and staff through “high-impact practices” (Renn, 2020) may be important to provide access to campus resources and valuable social capital (Walker-Payne, 2019). While each band program’s staff composition varied, two sub-themes emerged: (a) lack of education; and (b) policies and procedures.

Lack of Education

Participants’ experiences generally aligned with previous findings that music educators specifically (Silveira & Goff, 2016) and college faculty members generally (Belanger, 2021; McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020) feel unprepared, uncomfortable, and ill-equipped to address issues related to transgender and gender expansive students. Even when faculty perceive their actions as resulting from positive intentions, there may be incongruence between faculty intentions and student perceptions (Lewis, 2016). Further, some educators may believe that their knowledge of general LGBTQIA+ related inclusive practices (e.g., “safe space” stickers) address transgender and gender expansive-

specific concerns. However, as Robyn noted in their interviews, understanding of terminology, concepts, and prescient issues are ongoing and require constant engagement.

Jack came out as a trans man just as his university hired a new director for the school's marching band, shaping his first interactions with the new director through the lens of his trans identity. The new band director's openness as an out gay man eased Jack's tensions as he prepared to disclose his own identity to the faculty member, and after a pleasant email exchange Jack noted that he "never had issues" with the program's head band director. However, Jack did describe administrative issues that other trans students faced such as misgendering on band lockers and gendered changing procedures on buses (e.g., students asked to change in front of other students). The tension between Jack's experience and those of his peers may be reflective of a common conflation of issues within the LGBTQIA+ community on college campuses (Beemyn, 2003), and need for Jack's new director to engage with broader trans issues despite his own identity as a gay man.

Jack also described other staff members as being a "little slower" to honor his pronouns and name during his transition. Although Jack described the two assistant band directors as being "very good one on one," he commented that they were not "socially aware" and often had to "poke and prod" staff members to change his name on band documents. Jack was often frustrated by the lack of attentiveness toward his requests, but added that "no one was actively malicious, just like maybe a little unknowledgeable."

Taylor was concerned more with his directors' lack of education on dealing with

conflict and handling acts of aggression than their knowledge of trans issues and discourse. While Taylor appreciated the directors' inclusion of pronouns on student name badges during his sophomore year, he "really didn't feel safe in the trumpet section" due to a transphobic section leader and added that "it doesn't really matter how people behave...if they're a favorite of one of the directors." Although listing pronouns on name badges was a helpful addition to Taylor's experience, the practice was more performative than substantive after staff members failed to intervene to stop a transphobic student. Similarly, researchers have found that institutional actors such as student leaders (Kortegast, 2017) and faculty (Lewis, 2016) may worsen trans students' experiences by allowing harassment to continue, oftentimes due to ignorance or lack of training.

Additionally, Taylor was questioned about his response to transphobic comments and commitment to educate peers during a leadership interview, during which one of his directors asked, "what would you do if someone wasn't comfortable with your gender identity?" Taylor felt as though he needed to answer his director's question in order to continue with the interview process but had been burdened with enlightening his peers rather than being provided support from staff or student leaders. Taylor's interview highlighted several participants' experiences in Humiston's (2017) exploration of trans college student experiences, with one participant, Ellery, explaining:

People tend to look at you like you're some sort of science experiment, you're just expected to educate the people around you constantly, as much as everyone wants from you. You're not expected to have any sort of limits or wants or needs of your own. You're just supposed to be there to educate other people. (p. 97)

Grant, who attended the same institution as Taylor and Quinn, had mixed feelings about their experiences with the band's directors. Although Grant felt comfortable coming out to one of the staff members who was close to his age, he was also disappointed by the lack of training on LGBTQIA+ issues offered to student leaders. As a section leader himself, Grant commented that "leaders have more influence than you think" in shaping their sections and creating an affirming environment for all band members and advocated for a session on "queer issues" from the university's LGBTQIA+ resource center. The training requests were denied by directors for perceived lack of time, but the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ training may also have been a reflection on directors' lack of awareness toward transphobic or homophobic actions within the program. According to Goldberg et al. (2019), trainings for student organizations and student leaders about transgender and gender expansive issues is viewed by gender minority students as important for moving beyond tolerance to understanding and empathy. In Grant's situation, the directors' own lack of knowledge on TGE issues may have lessened the perceived impact of LGBTQIA+ issue training, exacerbating negative student encounters and leaving TGE students in vulnerable positions.

Additionally, Grant feared that the program's head director would "be with the mic up at band and call me the wrong name" because his "head was in the clouds" after he came out and requested that his name be changed on official documents. The head director did not misname Grant but did misgender him several times. Grant was mildly disappointed, but added, "I don't care because I knew he never did it like intentionally, like he probably just forgot, which is okay." Researchers have found that many TGE

college students are often subject to micro and macro aggressions such as misgendering, and regularly differentiate between faculty acting with malice and those who lack education, training, and awareness (Humiston, 2017; Roop, 2014).

Quinn, the third band member from NSU, mentioned the transphobic trumpet section leader through the lens of staff favoritism rather than education or training. Quinn kept their distance from staff during their time at NSU, adding that they felt they could “ignore” staff members most of the time without repercussion or feeling a need to interact. Although Quinn did not come out as non-binary until after they graduated from NSU, they did acknowledge that their digital media and design courses in their major area were “a lot safer” than band to explore and discuss queer issues. Additionally, Quinn took an LGBTQ history course which was more “close knit” than their band environment. Quinn did not implicate their band directors’ lack of knowledge or training directly but felt more comfortable in a “warm academic discipline” (Forbes, 2020) for LGBTQIA+ topics and people due to their expertise in the area and overt efforts to form inclusive class environments.

Robyn’s college band director expressed little interest in the color guard—of which they were a member—leaving the section to an outside instructor. Although Robyn did not indicate that the band director’s lack of experience or knowledge addressing trans issues impacted their experience, they did enthusiastically highlight the color guard instructor as creating a “welcome learning space.” The SSU color guard was composed of “lots of LGBTQ people,” and their instructor was “very comfortable and familiar” in a gender and sexual orientation-inclusive environment. Beyond the SSU marching band,

Robyn did acknowledge the tension they felt when a drum corps instructor attempted to inject emotion into a rehearsal by using his marriage to his wife as an example of love and passion. The heteronormative imperative caused Robyn to experience a “mental block” and caused them to “feel really bad” that they were not as connected with the rehearsal as their peers. Robyn’s experience was not uncommon, as many transgender and gender expansive musicians are subject to hetero- and cisnormative metaphors, stories, and comparisons in discussions about music and repertoire itself (Bergonzi, 2009; McBride & Palkki, 2020; Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020).

Policies and Procedures

As “institutional agents” (Barnes, 2016, p. 33), college marching band directors are often responsible for crafting, interpreting, and enforcing university policies within the context of their own ensemble. At BSU, Jack faced tension with the band as he attempted to change his name during his transition. For many transgender students, changing a name on university documents is frequent challenge with multiple steps, confusing rules, and barriers to entry (Cochran, 2019; Humiston, 2017). Many of Jack’s professors were understanding of his transition and changed his name on their rosters without question. Although Jack understood that certain documents could not be changed since they were drawn directly from the university database, he insisted that band directors honor his name on “any [document] that’s facing the band.” Although Jack’s directors were not “malicious” and most often forgetful, Jack was able to successfully change his name by working with his dedicated, persistent internship placement coordinator.

Grant experienced a starkly different process, finding no success in changing his name with university offices at NSU. However, Grant did reach out to the youngest band director after he came out, and the staff member ensured his name was permanently changed on all documents with no issue. Some professors were very positive and acknowledged Grant's name change, but many often did not respond. Although neither Grant nor Jack experienced professors who actively refused to call them by their requested names (Bennett, 2018; Walker-Payne, 2019), many of Grant's professors did not acknowledge his email request by the first day of class: "It would suck when they wouldn't respond, because then I get to class and be like 'fuck, what's going to happen?'" In addition to the stress of not knowing which name a professor might use, TGE students may also be forced into positions of "outing themselves" in front of an entire class by correcting a name listed on an official university roster (Lieberth, 2020).

Grant, Taylor, and Quinn all acknowledged their band's policy of having students write their pronouns on band-issued name tags during their pre-season band camp. Grant felt that the policy was "great," and Taylor felt that the implementation of pronouns on name tags provided him a "clean cut off point" to disclose his trans identity after re-closeting during his first year at NSU. Quinn was rather ambivalent about the change but added that the inclusion of pronouns was "nice." For many students, especially in music ensemble settings with large numbers of participants, having preferred name and pronouns options available to an entire group—rather than options for select students or those who request accommodations—may allow them to feel less isolated and more at liberty to disclose their trans identity in a safe way (Humiston, 2017; Palkki, 2016; Pryor,

2015).

Although mandatory pronoun policies may be affirming and empowering for some TGE students, Robyn expressed concern that some students may not be ready for feel safe disclosing their pronouns in public:

Some of the younger educators [with whom I work] will performatively go out of their way to make every student in the classroom say their pronouns, not realizing that there might be a student in there who's not comfortable disclosing their pronouns. And I see that stuff happen all the time, it's like, 'oh just pass out an info sheet so they can write if they need it, not make them do this in front of all their friends.' Because, you know, there's always maybe one kid that uses of a 'they' pronoun or a neutral pronoun. And of course, everyone stares.

Listing one's pronouns on a name tag may be an act of disclosure for some students who feel prematurely pressured into a potentially unsafe situation (Sugarman, 2020).

Conversely, listed pronouns may also signal one's queer identity to another queer person, opening lines of communication and relationships that may not have been possible otherwise. Jack did not express any feelings about pronoun policies but did acknowledge the harm caused by band staff when a fellow trans student's deadname was used on their band locker.

Participants also commented on their disappointment at lax staff approaches to combating transphobia when harmful acts were committed by the best musicians. Robyn commented that the highly competitive and score-driven nature of the drum corps environment would favor participants who held discriminatory views but were proficient

musicians:

Some educators of world class groups are like, ‘well, they play really well, and that's really all we're here to do is to have the best mellophone line in DCI. Would you dare jeopardize our chance to win a [Award Name] just because you don't agree.’”

Robyn’s experience of musicianship trumping negative and harmful discourse was corroborated by Taylor, Quinn, and Grant, who each spoke to the staff’s preferential treatment of a trumpet section member who had actively promoted racist and transphobic views to other band members. Taylor was frustrated to learn that the student had been promoted to section leader because one of the directors felt that “the best players should be the teachers.” The student was also invited to join a highly selective performing ensemble of the marching band’s most talented musicians. Grant approached band directors about his concern over the growing transphobia but was told the behavior would not be addressed in order to “not give [him] the attention he is [craving].” Grant expressed his frustration, saying, “I was like, ‘what do you care about?’ You know, the priority of his talent or you know, peoples’ comfort?” Quinn was also upset over the incident, adding: “He was basically allowed to do whatever he wanted because he's a very good trumpet player and all the staff liked him...not many other people who were assholes had that privilege.” Despite tacit endorsement of university anti-discrimination policies and procedures as institutional agents, band directors who valued musical talent above addressing the needs of their trans and gender expansive ensemble members had created an ambiguity about the consistent enforcement of standing rules and potential

safety of a supposedly equal environment. Participants' experiences reflect a concern among many TGE students that the existence of trans-inclusive policies is not sufficient to ensure one's ability to thrive in a space or trust in leadership. Rather, policies need "teeth" in order for violators to be "held accountable" (Seelman, 2014, p. 631) regardless of the aggressor's talent or skill.

Social Connectivity

Although forming strong relationships may be important for college students generally as they adjust to their new environments and continue to form their self-concept, relationships are especially important for many transgender and gender expansive college students as navigate the challenges of traditionally hetero- and cisnormative institutions (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016). For students at numerous stages in their education, music ensembles may be important sites for building social relationships and support networks (Hansen, 2016; Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020). At the college level, marching bands may be examples of high-impact practices (BrckaLorenz, 2017) that allow students to interact with peers and staff on a more personal level than offered by traditional college classrooms. Each participant acknowledged the social relationships they had built during their time in their respective marching band programs and spoke to the varying spaces within the larger programs that reaffirmed, celebrated, or restricted their trans and gender expansive identities. The four sub-themes included: (a) affirmation and protection; (b) social capital; (c) adjustment strategies; and (d) the band fraternity and sorority.

Affirmation and Protection

Although marching band members share a common organization membership, many students' primary social relationships are made with "members in their own section [rather than] the band in general" (Weren, 2015, p. 24). One exception may be another microclimate in which some students devote even more time and energy to, and which will be addressed later: the band fraternity or sorority. Taylor's experience as a trumpet section member was largely negative due to his failure to conform to the section's social and musical expectations as well as his unwelcomed trans identity. Taylor preferred to play second and third parts, was not "very boastful" about his playing history or skills and did not fit the stereotype of a "trumpet player's trumpet player."

Taylor labeled himself as the "odd one out" of the section not only because he did not align with the stereotypical trumpet bravado, but he expressed no desire to assume an archetype or conform to the section's expectations as a musical "boundary-crosser" (Marshall, 2011). After he "re-came out" to his section members, Taylor at times felt constricted due to his section leader's transphobic attitudes, forced to interact and remain in close physical proximity to the band member due to their shared instrument. The section leader's social standing within the organization prevented other members from defending Taylor openly, leaving him vulnerable. It was only after Taylor broke away from his instrumental section through his role as an operations coordinator and member of the band sorority that he made close, supportive relationships. Specifically, Taylor "felt so at home" with members of the drumline through their shared experience of loading equipment trucks and coordinating instrument cases. Because Taylor was not a

member of the drumline, he felt no expectation of aligning to that section's expectations and was thus a welcome guest rather than scorned insider.

Grant found the protective bubble within his saxophone section to be affirming to his trans identity, but also somewhat limiting to his general social experience. Section members were accepting of both Grant's coming out as gay, and later trans, offering to introduce him to potential romantic interests at parties or during social events as a first- and second-year student. Unlike Taylor, Grant felt immediately comfortable expressing his queerness with members of his section and was most relieved to easily switch between masculine and feminine attire without fanfare or comment. Grant perceived tangible differences between how queer students were treated across the band, favoring the woodwind and mellophone sections to the trumpets, low brass, and percussion: "I think [a trans person] would be met with more, not hostility, but just inexperience with other queer folks in those kinds of sections." Although the protective bubble that had trapped Taylor in the trumpet section had coalesced around Grant with the saxophones, he also felt socially isolated after reporting a party to directors after assuming a section leadership role. Grant recalled that "half my section hated me, a few people quit, like, it was really dramatic," and the proximity and time spent with section members had turned toxic.

In Robyn's single year with the SSU marching band, they enjoyed the predominantly LGBTQ-populated color guard section as a contrast from their more conservative high school band environment. Robyn's SSU color guard peers allowed them to "leave the formality of the music school" and make room to reflect on their inner

tensions around gender. Robyn’s experiences with two drum corps and several winter guard organizations also provided safety, affirmation, and stability. In one corps, Robyn met their first “trans elder” who served as a role model and demonstrated how a trans person might experience the trappings of a marching arts organization (e.g., locker rooms, showers, and overnight bus trips). Robyn also experienced strong “group identity” with their winter guard peers as they slipped in and out of different costumes—and thus different personas—as well as becoming a member of several social identity groups in another drum corps (e.g., fem members, LGBTQ members). Both the SSU marching band color guard and drum corps members served as parts of Robyn’s “kinship networks” (Nicolazzo, 2015; Pitcher & Simmons, 2020).

Jack grew close with a few members of his clarinet section during his first year—students with whom he later lived with and to whom he came out as trans early in his transition—but it took until his second year to establish strong friendships with many people in his section. Jack emphasized the importance of shared experiences such as a leadership retreat, moving equipment, and spending time on trips with other members of his section and the band generally as creating an affirmative environment after he came out. When Jack returned to the marching band after he had come out as a trans man, he recalled that “a lot of people got corrected on my behalf, so I didn’t have to.” Jack was thus able to concentrate his mental energy on correcting band documents and initiating a name change process through the university.

Quinn came from a high school that did not emphasize social relationships, which may have influenced how they viewed the role of band as a musical entity rather than

social vehicle. Quinn expressed a desire to separate their sexual and gender identities from their band participation, and thus still viewed the band as a “public” space. Quinn’s strongest social relationships came from other cymbal players who also felt like members of the “peanut gallery” within the larger drumline, as well as sorority members. While other participants described their band social network as facilitating their trans and gender expansive identities, Quinn felt the opposite: “If I’d come out [while I was in band], I mean it would have been harder than what I did.”

Social Capital

Participants described how aspects of their marching band experience such as leadership roles, perceived musical proficiency, and social location—defined by Carey (2017) as “the group memberships or social categories that an individual belongs to that place them in a position of privilege and/or marginalization within society” (p. 12)—granted them access to resources, relationships, and “insider knowledge” (Martinez & Ulanoff, 2013). The social nature of group music making may provide valuable opportunities for musicians to develop the skills, understanding of norms, and relationships that benefit them in their ensemble as well as other aspects of their lives (Jones, 2010; Prest, 2014). Building social capital may be especially important for transgender and gender expansive college students as they attempt to access resources and build relationships despite institutional and cultural barrier (Lieberth, 2020; Walker-Payne, 2019). College marching bands may be uniquely equipped to provide participants with close relationships, advice and mentorship, and access to social networks (Weren, 2015).

Quinn initially struggled mightily with members of their cymbal playing peers on the NSU drumline. The two aspects that aided Quinn in building relationships and taking leadership roles within their section included their musical proficiency on the cymbal line and their membership in the band sorority. Quinn found that they were able to alleviate “social imbalances” with their peers by asserting their playing abilities, comparing their own standing within the section as comparable to another more socially connected but less musically adept section member. Like participants in Hansen’s (2016) study of sexual and gender minority musicians, being perceived as an “important member” (p. 107) and receiving validation through one’s performance skills may offset social disadvantages elsewhere. Further, Quinn received a “status bump” whenever they wore t-shirts with the band sorority letters stitched on the front, allowing them to more easily form relationships with band members in other sections who included Quinn on their discussions of band politics.

Taylor initially started his time at NSU at a disadvantage, hiding his trans identity while at band and not conforming to trumpet section cultural norms (e.g., playing higher parts or exhibiting a competitive spirit). For his first year, Taylor gained most of his social capital through involvement with the campus LGBTQIA+ resource center, through which he participated in social events, made numerous friends, and learned about the university’s gender-inclusive housing options. After becoming a member of the band sorority, Taylor felt more “empowered” within the band and did not feel the need to bring in capital from outside. As the leader of the operational team, Taylor also was able to experience the close section dynamics and project management skills his other trumpet

peers were learning within their section. Taylor then was able to “[translate the skills] to the larger group” of band members, and felt more comfortable speaking with directors, addressing large crowds, and being sought after for his expertise in equipment management. Conversely to Quinn, Taylor’s trumpet playing did not provide him any social capital, and one might argue that his proclivity to play lower parts diminished his social location within the section.

Grant gained social capital through being recognized as a skilled tenor saxophonist, member of the fraternity, and two-time section leader. Grant spent much of his time with other band members and at official band events, stating that it felt more like a “sports team aspect than...if it was concert band.” Social capital was thus important for Grant in learning to navigate the band’s political and policy structures in search of leadership opportunities and affirmation. As a younger student, Grant was recognized by a section leader for his musical skills, a validation which Grant desired “more than anything in life.” Grant’s musical skill made him known to the section, fostering relationships and social interactions which eased Grant’s coming out moment later in his college career. When Grant later became estranged from his section peers due to reporting a party to directors, the fraternity’s social connections provided him an outlet and “distraction” after another—the saxophone section—had been closed off. As a section leader, Grant also gained valuable access to the processes and whims of the band’s most senior leaders and staff: “I reported to [the leadership team], but half the [leadership] team were my best friends. So it wasn't like, nothing, I wasn't afraid of anything.” Grant’s connections also allowed him to advocate for younger, less

experienced trans and queer students through navigating which director may be the most willing to adjust policy or which documents needed to be edited to accommodate students' needs.

Jack's accumulated social capital eased his transition after coming out as a trans man. Having been elected to a band council position, he was well-liked and thus had a swatch of peers advocating on his behalf. Jack's experience as an elected officer also provided him insight into the inner workings of the band administration, with whom many other members had a "weird relationship." Specifically, Jack's insider knowledge allowed him to advise other students how to navigate the band's "chain of command," sparing them the punishment of violating unspoken norms or rules (e.g., specific areas of concern held by different directors). Grant's combined positions as an elected band officer and eventually officer of the band sorority may have also given him additional merit in advocating for himself in areas where other trans and gender expansive students faced additional pushback (e.g., name changes on band documents).

Robyn did not accumulate social capital during their season in the SSU marching band, wishing to remain "under the radar" to the head band director and many of their non-color guard peers. However, Robyn leveraged their pursuit of musical excellence on the baritone horn and participation in numerous winter guards to advocate for queer issues in the marching arts from a place of perceived legitimacy. Through their role as an educator and technician, Robyn gained deeper confidence in intervening for students afraid to speak after being misgendered or misnamed. As an outspoken member of a well-established corps and queer advocate, Robyn was invited to participate in a podcast

about trans experiences in DCI. Additionally, Robyn was sought after for advice on issues of gender dysphoria, clothing, attire, and performance within corps environments where cisgender and male participants struggled (e.g., male members being asked to wear skirts). Robyn gained status and influence as both a musician and marcher, and pursued leadership roles in their latter summers of drum corps membership. Robyn, Jack, Taylor, and Grant felt compelled to utilize their accumulated social capital to advocate for issues related specifically to trans and gender expansive individuals within their organizations. Whereas Quinn, Grant, and Robyn experienced their musical performance as a contributor to greater social capital, Taylor did not fit his section's musical or social expectations and experienced trumpet playing as causing a deficit of social capital.

Environmental Challenges

Participants described the importance of two concepts as they navigated their marching band experience in the context of their general college life: passing and code-switching. Passing refers to “projecting and being accepted in a gender that is at odds with the person’s assigned birth sex” (Davidmann, 2010, p. 191). Although the term has been subject to increased scrutiny for its perceived inauthenticity (Fiani & Han, 2019; Lewis, 2016), several participants explicitly used the term as a conceptual tool to express and discuss their lived experiences.

For Jack, passing referred to any situation in which he was “gendered correctly unprompted.” After spending several years exploring his trans identity and developing a vocabulary, Jack viewed passing as male to his collegiate peers as a goal which might allow him to focus his mental energy elsewhere. Passing also mitigated the number of

personal questions and curious stares Jack received at rehearsals or social events. However, Jack also experienced tension with passing and not knowing whom among his bandmates were aware of his transition. The tension Jack felt may have been due to concerns over *concealment*, or the act of “passing as one’s identified gender post-transition, meaning they are perceived by others as their identified gender” (Gadinsky, 2018, p. 44). Further, although Jack was coded as male at several of his internship assignments, he engaged in code switching to avoid scrutiny from supervisors of his trans and queer identities. Code switching, originally applied to one’s ability to monitor and alter their language in order to “[shift] into aspects of privilege” (Cochran, 2019, p.60) for benefit or safety, may also be employed by trans and gender expansive in their gender expression and tone of voice to navigate difficult or uncomfortable situations.

Grant identified passing as a form of “validation,” allowing him to be seen and identified by others as he conceptualized himself. After coming out as trans but prior to starting gender-affirming hormones, Grant had already carved out space within the band program as a visibly queer person who actively expressed as masculine and feminine on a regular basis. However, Grant acknowledged that passing was more important when he left his band social circles, engaging in more self-surveillance and bodily awareness:

[It was] hard for me to what’s it called, pass in public as a guy because I am very flamboyant. And at that point I wasn't on steroids and my voice wasn't deeper, or anything like that.

Grant also engaged in code switching in his classes, switching between openly engaging in trans and queer discourses through his gender studies classes and remaining silent and

more reserved in his mathematics and statistics courses. Grant argued that “STEM kind of classes don't really offer for that kind of like, communication like that,” a sentiment echoed by Forbes (2020) as common with “chilly” disciplines in the hard sciences (p. 14).

Although Quinn did not explicitly address passing within the framework of their marching band experience, they did mention that they experienced dysphoric feelings when looking at earlier pictures of themselves with shorter hair and a different build. Quinn’s later remarks about the “anxiety of presenting fem” did contrast with their successful passing as male while a member of the marching band, successfully able to separate their gender and sexual identity entirely from their experience. Whereas Jack experienced tension over his concealment, Quinn—although they had not yet put words to their trans identity—was able to conceal the inner “uncomfortable feelings” they felt later in college by continuing to pass as male while in band spaces. Quinn also experienced codeswitching through the previously mentioned role-playing lens, reclaiming the act from a burdensome requirement and envisioning it as a form of agency and skill.

Robyn contrasted the struggle of “continuously coming out” as a non-binary individual with the “privilege of passing” as female in public spaces. In some instances, Robyn found that passing as female was empowering and offered expanded representation for their fem-identifying peers. In others, Robyn grew frustrated that they were forced to “initiate [the] conversation” of expressing their non-binary identity, even in potentially dangerous situations. Similarly, Barbee and Shrock (2019) asserted that

“unlike people who pass as binary—whether or not trans—passing as nonbinary in public spaces evoked fear, vigilant situation assessment, and planning for what-ifs” (p. 584).

Robyn often felt more pressured by older faculty members and teachers than peers, of whom the former would often presume their gender on forms or in class. Robyn’s code switching often occurred away from their band experiences, expressing stoicism in the male-centric brass band and becoming much more emotive in the fem-dominated Women’s Chorus. Robyn primarily interacted with members of the marching band’s color guard section and went largely unnoticed by other members of the band leadership, possibly negating their perceived need to code switch in most band environments for either safety or benefit.

Taylor felt the need to “re-closet” during his first year at NSU, concealing his trans identity from his trumpet section peers after realizing they would not be affirming or supportive. Although Taylor had entered NSU wearing “all men’s clothes,” he was read as a woman, causing significant tension for Taylor as he wrestled with his expression and self-concept: “There wasn’t really any reason other than like my voice to assume that I was a girl, and I kind of almost kick myself over not just being more, not honest but upfront.” Although Taylor viewed himself as a “very effeminate gay man,” his ascribed label resulted in romantic partners attempting to “feminize my presentation more...to match my personality.” Taylor took pride in being able to float between masculine, feminine, and androgynous expressions throughout his time at NSU. Taylor did not express an explicit desire to pass strictly as male but struggled numerous times with being misgendered in several of his classes or by peers. Code switching took on

great importance during Taylor’s first year, during which he felt pressured to hide his trans identity during band but signaled his queerness more openly at LGBTQIA+ center events on campus. As Taylor gained a larger support network outside of his section, code switching ceased to function as a survival mechanism and, like Quinn, an exercise in agency.

Although each participant’s experiences with passing and code switching was nuanced and highly personal, the general view that Grant, Jack, and to some extent Taylor took of passing as gender affirming and possibly protective stood in tension with Quinn’s ambivalence and Robyn’s occasional frustration with being labeled or coded. The tension reflects Barbee and Shrock’s (2019) assertion that binary trans and non-binary trans individuals may experience and react to being read differently:

Passing as binary not only mitigated the costs of being nonbinary but also garnered binary-based pleasures, privileges, and resources....whether conforming to or subverting the binary, identity based emotional dilemmas were endemic to identifying as nonbinary in a binarily gendered culture. (p. 590)

Fraternity and Sorority

Researchers have previously found that transgender and gender expansive students’ Greek life (e.g., fraternities and sororities) on college campuses may “perpetuate gender discrimination” (Cochran, 2019, p. 103). As a result, many TGE college students are hesitant to join fraternities or sororities often due to safety concerns (Humiston, 2017; Lopez, 2018). However, four out of the five participants in the present study were members of the two band service organizations—Tau Beta Sigma or Kappa

Kappa Psi—and expressed enthusiastic support. Commonly cited reasons for joining the organizations included their co-ed membership composition, ability to meet members of different sections, common goals, and closer friendships than in the band generally.

Taylor’s largely negative relationships with other members of the trumpet section left him eager to make friendships but possessing few outlets, often feeling “terrified to talk to anyone.” Membership in the band service sorority allowed him to meet members outside of his section through service events, giving him a reason and excuse to interact with peers outside of his comfort zone. Tau Beta Sigma also served as a source of protection for Taylor, especially after the organization “stopped tolerating [the] behavior,” of his transphobic section leader who left the group shortly after being reprimanded. The newfound “support system” allowed Taylor to assert himself and gain confidence to confront transphobia on a larger scale within the band. Although Taylor had come out as a trans man, he found the use of gendered language (e.g., “sister”) to be affirming as he watched his cisgender male peers take pride in owning the label: “As a trans person is, I get the question all the time, like, ‘how can you stand to be called a girl?’ and I’m like, ‘no one’s calling me a girl, they’re calling me a sister. That’s not the same.’”

Taylor also commented that having a “familial sisterhood” within the organization served as a proxy for the lack of family support he initially received at home.

Grant found his membership in the band fraternity, Kappa Kappa Psi, to be “very affirming,” and he felt “very comfortable in that space.” Although there were members with whom Grant disagreed, the shared experiences (e.g., rituals) created a sense of trust

that superseded any tension regarding his gender identity. As a member of his city's drag community, Grant often spoke of the importance of presentation and expression. Grant used the fraternity's rituals as a place to affirm masculine and feminine aspects of his wardrobe, switching between heels and full suits on a regular basis:

I felt really comfortable in that space to be able to do that stuff because I know no one would give me weird glances for it or comments about it. They would just be like, "I love your outfit." And that would be that.

The label of "brother" was also very important to Grant, allowing him to assume the label that was so tied to his self-concept: "Being called a brother was a very affirming thing for me. Cause like, I always wanted to be referred to in my family of course." Cochran (2019) noted that in many instances, TGE college students find "being coded as" (p. 52) and referred to by the gendered language to which they ascribe, if any, may be empowering.

Jack used his sorority's structure to come out as trans, first to a close friend in his membership candidacy class and then later during a meeting of other prospective members. For Jack, the sorority was the "first time I felt like I had a support network of people, and I kind of started working through my stuff." After coming out, several members of the sorority "took some time" to process his transition, but Jack found that they eventually all "came around" and often referred to him as their "favorite guy" in conversations. Service and behind-the-scenes involvement was important to Jack, and the sorority provided him with a core of individuals who were passionate about similar issues: "The people who cared in our band were the people pushing things." As an

emergent leader in the sorority, Jack also found the organization to be a site through which he could affect institutional change (e.g., changing gendered language in official documents) in contrast to the challenges he faced with similar processes on the band-wide level. At the time Jack joined the sorority, the fraternity had been disbanded by the university, leaving the former as his sole option for band service Greek involvement.

Quinn asserted that they “definitely [felt] safer within the TBS environment than just the standard band environment,” having witnessed their partner come out as trans within the group and observing the compassion with which they were treated. Quinn also found the sorority as being more open to queer discourse, connecting with a higher concentration of LGBTQIA+ individuals than they perceived as being around them at band rehearsals. Wearing the organization’s letters was also a source of pride for Quinn both for their use of the trans pride flag colors and the “status bump” they received. Having struggled to find friends outside of a few individuals within the cymbal section of the drumline, Quinn enjoyed the open avenues of social connectivity they experienced with the sorority:

It was nice to have more friends within the band itself, that I think was a really cool part, was actually being able to say “hi” to people who I knew in other sections. Crazy. I think I enjoyed that, I think that junior year of band during my process was the, it was my favorite year of band.

Quinn expressed excitement about wearing feminine formalwear at the first ritual they would visit as a former member. Additionally, Quinn expressed that they selected the sorority because of its name as well as having previously established more relationships

with sorority members than fraternity members.

At SSU, Robyn's only options for Greek involvement were the music social Greek organizations, Sigma Alpha Iota and Phi Mu Alpha. During Robyn's membership, the school did not host Tau Beta Sigma or Kappa Kappa Psi. However, Robyn's negative experience with music-related Greek organizations was influenced by an interaction in the fall of their first year:

The Phi Mu Alpha members of the [SSU marching band] at the end of rehearsal gathered up all of the freshman girls or like first year girls and like, serenaded them and gave everyone a rose. And I was like, "I don't want that. I hate this." [laughter] I was like, "this is stupid." I was so mad...I was so angry about that for no reason other than I probably just wasn't comfortable being read as super feminine.

The labeling of "brotherhood" and "sisterhood" was frustrating for Robyn, as the organizations reinforced gendered norms and stereotypes within a band space that was supposedly safer and more open to queer people than other areas of campus (e.g., athletic events).

For Taylor, Jack, Grant, and Quinn, the band sorority and fraternity served as a microclimate "nested" (Siegel, 2019, p. 2) within the marching band, similarly to how the marching band served as a microclimate within the broader university community. For Jack, Taylor, and Grant, the language of the organizations served to either support or subvert the gender identities of their members. The frequent interactions, social bonding, and sense of common mission, possibly having already been established through the

boundary loss (McNeill, 1997) they experienced as members of the marching band. The language of brotherhood was important to Grant, and the concept of cisgender men assuming the title of “sister” was empowering to Taylor. Jack and Quinn were ambivalent about the labels themselves but appreciate the kinship and relationships. Robyn did not interact with Tau Beta Sigma or Kappa Kappa Psi members but did bristle at the use of gendered language as an intrusion into one of the few spaces in which they were able to express their queer identity with close friends as musicians.

Experiencing Band

For each of the five participants in the present study, their marching band membership occupied a significant amount of time in their schedule and impacted aspects of their lives beyond rehearsals and performances. While researchers have previously suggested that marching band participation may increase some participants’ feelings of confidence, belonging, and leadership capabilities (e.g., Dagaz, 2010; Fisher, 2021; Matthews, 2017), marching band’s impact on trans and gender expansive students’ experiences outside of the ensemble remains unexamined. Two themes related to how participants experienced their band membership in the context of their broader collegiate and post-collegiate experiences emerged: (a) leadership as empowerment; and (b) self-confidence.

Leadership as Empowerment

Participants identified holding leadership positions as heavily impacting their band and non-band college lives. Leadership was “very important” to Jack’s band experience, serving on his band’s officer board and assuming several positions in the

band sorority. Although Jack had assisted his high school band director as a “band librarian,” his preference for behind-the-scenes operations did not receive the same status as other, more visible roles such as section leader or drum major. However, being celebrated for his roles on the band council and in the sorority at BSU assisted Jack in conceptualizing a “broader idea” of leadership, allowing him to recognize, “different qualities that I had that were really good that I didn't realize I had.” Being understood as a leader empowered Jack to advocate for himself across the university, vigorously working with his advisor to get his name changed in university systems.

Grant also served on his band’s officer board in addition to his responsibilities as a saxophone section leader for two years. As a leader, Grant had a large “support network” and became known to many people across the band, allowing him to find new ways to “better support” himself. Grant had longed to pursue education as a career but followed a financial services path on the advice of his parents. However, being a section leader fulfilled Grant’s desire to step into an “educator role” as a mentor and guide to younger students. Grant’s leadership experience influenced his decision to leave his present job and pursue secondary mathematics education. The support and social capital Grant gained also reaffirmed his commitment to advocate for trans issues within the band program without fear of reprisal or retribution. After coming out and being supported as a leader in the marching band, Grant became heavily involved with the campus LGBTQIA+ resource center, taking leadership roles on trans-related campus projects and committees.

Taylor served as the operations coordinator for his marching band as well as

assuming an officer role in the band sorority. As a pre-service teacher candidate, Taylor attributed the teamwork, coordination, and management skills he had learned as a marching band leader as influencing his goal of becoming a classroom educator:

I think it has given me a foundation to work with, I got to practice having a lot of leadership skills and interpersonal skills, problem solving, every kind of skill you need to work, especially in a classroom setting because honestly in marching band, you do have to: (a) you have to kid-glove some people through it; and (b) when you take a leadership position, you're doing a lot of working with a large group, which is what, I mean in a very broad strokes, what teaching is.

The operations coordinator position also allowed Taylor to find his literal and metaphorical voice after being silenced as a member of the trumpet section for several years: “I have a very loud voice; it carries over the full band field. I have yelled at the band before without needing a microphone.” Being seen and heard on his own terms by the entire band was empowering for Taylor, having previously spent much of his time involuntarily coded and categorized by others. Leadership allowed Taylor to break away from the *compulsory hetero-genderism* (Nicolazzo, 2016) he experienced from his peers. Taylor identified “working with others and learning how to lead a team” as one of the most important aspects of his band leadership, which also transferred to his advocacy for trans and non-binary students at his summer music camp. After committing a great deal of “mental energy” to avoiding surveillance or harassment for much of his life, leadership positions had freed Taylor to spend more time considering “future careers” and setting goals rather than simply surviving.

Quinn jokingly expressed that they were “still bitter” about applying for and being denied a section leadership position with the cymbal line at NSU. Quinn’s leadership opportunities may have also been limited by their presence in a “zone” with less prestige, access, and recognition from the band’s leadership (Disney, 2018). During their third year, Quinn did assume a quasi-leadership role in teaching music and marching to younger members in the absence of the section’s official leader. The role also contributed to Quinn’s emphasis on marching band as a site for “role playing,” stepping into a position of observing others when they had been subject to observation for much of their life. Quinn also wished to return to the band as a staff member to work with the cymbal section, using the leadership position and its visibility to return with a more feminine presentation.

Robyn experienced a low point in leadership during their one season in the SSU marching band, taking a break in appointed positions after the stress and lack of agency they experienced as a high school drum major. The year away from leadership allowed Robyn to “figure out” who they were to a greater extent, and helped them revisit their approach to leadership later as a member of a drum corps. When Robyn did assume leadership roles, they felt more empowered to make decisions that were taken seriously by other corps members around costuming, visual design, and presentation. Leadership also allowed Robyn to position themselves as the same type of “trans elder” they had previously encountered as a younger corps member. Robyn’s passion for advocacy that arose from their roles transferred to their doctoral work in music theory, teaching positions at several high schools, and work as an instructor for another drum corps.

In numerous instances, leadership positions became available to participants after being unattainable during their high school experiences. For Grant, Taylor, and Jack in particular, taking on leadership roles may have provided an opportunity to conceptualize a “possible self” that they had not envisioned previously. Markus and Nurius (1986) described a possible self as, “individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation” (p. 954). Participants may not have viewed leadership as a possible aspect of their lived experience because the concept of leadership had been so narrowly defined and separate from their trans and queer identities. Leadership roles in music ensembles for transgender and gender expansive students may be important to bolstering their musical and social self-concept and reinforcing life skills such as conflict resolution and negotiation (Hansen, 2016; Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020).

Self-Confidence

According to Dagaz (2012), marching bands may be vehicles for increasing participants’ self-confidence through musicianship and social networking, which may then transfer to other aspects of their lives (e.g., public speaking). In a study of trans and non-binary vocalists, Sauerland (2018) found that as participants’ confidence in their vocal abilities increased, so did their confidence in their gender identity and expression. Several participants in the present study noted that the multitude of ways in which they were seen as contributors (e.g., playing an instrument, being a skilled marcher, taking on leadership roles) created layers of self-confidence in their abilities within and outside of

the marching band context.

Taylor had initially built his self-confidence through playing trumpet in his high school band and being recognized by his peers as a resource and mentor. When he arrived at NSU, his confidence faltered after both his trans and musical identities were rejected by his section. After becoming a member of a supportive band sorority and all but leaving the trumpet section behind, Taylor gained confidence to advocate for himself as a trans man and trumpet player: “I just kind of felt like I could confidently say like, ‘this is how it's going to be, if you're interacting with me’ and I felt like I had a support system.” Musically, Taylor’s newfound confidence reframed playing lower, less melodic trumpet parts (i.e., second and third) as a source of pride and feeling of contribution to the overall program. Taylor described the confidence he gained as a trumpet player, sorority member, and band leader as transferring heavily to his pre-service education classes:

People are like, “well, why aren't you doing like, why don't you wear the fun little cute outfits that middle school teachers who are women wear, why aren't you doing like, these certain activities?” And I'm like, “well, why aren't you asking my male peers to do the same things? Because I never see you require that of them, but I'm not a woman and I do this differently.”

Taylor was also determined to take an active role in teaching trans-related content in his English classes, bolstered by his sense of self and the support he had received from peers. At home, Taylor felt more comfortable confronting his family’s hesitancy toward his trans identity, establishing boundaries and re-asserting his masculinity.

Grant found that much of his self-confidence stemmed from being musically

“validated.” For much of Grant’s life, he was unsure of his skill level and ability to contribute to musical groups, and the positive feedback he received from section leaders and other saxophone section members provided a tangible recognition of his sense of worth and confidence in his talents. Becoming a member of the school’s varsity pep band—a subgroup of the marching band membership—also was important to Grant in “feeling confident in my abilities as a player, because no one in high school ever validated me being a really good player.” Becoming a section leader and member of the band fraternity also provided space for Grant to exert his leadership potential after coming out. Grant had struggled with his body image for many years, and the self-confidence he gained as a member of the marching band allowed him to reclaim his presence and take pride in being visible in his post-college career:

It [gave] me the, just the confidence to know like, “okay I can lead people, I can educate people, I can manage people or things like logistical things. I can come up with the idea for a project and execute it and see it through.” And that’s so awesome.

As an out trans leader in the band, Grant had taken the role of actively advocating for trans-inclusive policies (e.g., including pronouns on name tags), which boosted his confidence in “selling” himself as a job candidate. Grant’s experiences of musical validation mirror the experiences of participants in Hansen’s (2016) study of sexual and gender minority music students:

Participants in this study needed to experience musical success and feel that they were good at making music. When they experienced musical successes, they

gained self-confidence and felt valued. When members of their communities recognized their musical successes, participants felt heard and validated as musicians and individuals. (p. 111)

Jack's sense of self-confidence derived from his ability to contribute as a single member within the context of a larger group. In other words, Jack's confidence increased when he was surrounded by like-minded peers performing a similar task; a task worth completing. The confidence he gained by experiencing affirmation and support after coming out to his band friends also influenced his decision to come out to his family at home. However, perhaps because Jack's musical and leadership confidence was tied to his peers' proximity and support, it seemed to have dipped in non-music and band situations when he was alone. Specifically, Jack described feeling the need to "de-gender" his college roommates when telling stories to co-workers to avoid raising suspicions of his trans or queer identities.

Robyn gained a great deal of self-confidence through taking ownership over their leadership positions, most notably deciding to decline leadership roles during their time in the SSU marching band. Much of Robyn's story centered around agency, increasingly gaining confidence as they experienced validation in spaces as a non-binary and queer person. As a marcher, Robyn felt freedom to explore their fem side one day and a more masculine or androgynous side the next, each equally valid, accepted, and celebrated, particularly through marching uniforms and costumes. One major turning point seemed to be when Robyn conceptualized feminine clothing and accessories as "performance tools" which they could re-deploy to accentuate or hide aspects of their presentation on their

own terms. Robyn's self-confidence then informed their self-advocacy, defending their pronouns as a non-binary person rather than allowing others to code them without challenge in other ensembles: "Just being like, 'nope, this is me, and when I'm here I want you to speak about me this way.' So I was like, yeah, I felt good enough to do that in front of other people in a musical environment."

Like Grant's experiences in the saxophone section at NSU, much of the self-confidence Quinn developed as a cymbal player derived from affirmation from their peers regarding their musical abilities. Quinn felt most comfortable and empowered when they were "role playing" as an expert (e.g., while in the band uniform or while directing younger band members), traversing the space as an insider when so much of their life outside of the band was much more uncertain and in flux. When we spoke, Quinn acknowledged that they still struggled with anxiety and body image and was actively balancing their hormone therapies to mitigate physical aspects over which they felt discomfort, such as body hair. However, Quinn did report having established their presence in the NSU band to such an extent that they planned to return after coming out as non-binary. Quinn expressed feeling nervous about appearing in a more feminine manner after leaving NSU, setting up their quest for self-confidence as contingent on future events.

Representation

Participants often cited the importance of queer representation in their musical and non-musical experiences, often informing their own relationship with gender and sexuality. During their band experiences, several participants reported being positively

impacted by seeing how their respective programs treated other trans and queer individuals. During their junior year, Quinn witnessed the sorority treating their partner—who had come out as non-binary—with respect and acceptance, allowing Quinn to envision how they might also bring their queerness into that space. Robyn’s “trans elder” with whom they marched during a summer of drum corps allowed them to view a trans identity as aspirational, strong, and protected, ultimately playing an important role in their own non-binary identity. Although Jack did not have older trans peers, his interactions with his openly gay senior section leader and band director normalized the concept of LGBTQIA+ individuals successfully navigating a marching band context. When a member of Grant’s marching band returned to their pre-season training camp after having top surgery, Grant was thrilled to see the positive and supportive reactions of his section mates. Taylor’s positive trans and queer role models came from the music camp which they attended annually during the summer, also witnessing positive experiences and the inclusion of queerness in musical spaces.

Participants also expressed a desire to assume the role of a trans and gender expansive role model for other queer youth or peers later in their band experiences. After struggling with his body image for several years, Grant desired to demonstrate an intersection of body positivity, celebration of trans identity, and gender and sexual fluidity: “Growing up, I wish, I always said to myself, like ‘I’m gonna have to be the representation that I always needed.’” Taylor desired to be a positive trans role model as an English teacher, expressing a more masculine presentation in the classroom and actively including trans issues in his teaching. For Robyn, teaching at numerous high

schools allowed them to signal their queer identity to their students and actively advocating for correct gendering in their interactions with music educators. Jack hoped that his public officer and leadership positions in his marching band and band sorority would provide a sense of kinship and safety to other trans students in the program who may not have considered aligning their gender identity with their band participation. Quinn desired to return to their marching band in a volunteer staff role, prepared to express a more feminine appearance than they had during their undergraduate experiences.

Participants acknowledged an increase in trans representation and the positive benefits of a society more aware of trans issues. For Robyn and Grant, exploring queer online spaces and seeing out and proud celebrities with queer identities was empowering. The visibility of transgender and gender expansive celebrities over the past decade may have been an important “next step” in representation of trans survival to trans success. In 2017, Grammy-award winning singer Sam Smith came out as non-binary, and actor Elliott Page came out as trans in the fall of 2020, becoming the first trans man to be featured on the cover of *Time*. Celebrities including Miley Cyrus and Tilda Swinton have more openly discussed their gender and sexual fluidity in recent years, and shows such as *Transparent*, *I Am Jazz*, and *Pose*, and films depicting trans characters such as *Dallas Buyers Club* continue to present trans issues through the media. However, criticism from some trans activists regarding cisgender actors playing TGE characters have prompted renewed debate around representation and the frustration many trans actors experience when they are passed over for jobs (Copier & Steinbock, 2018).

In 2020, Netflix released *Disclosure*, a documentary featuring trans members of the entertainment industry analyzing and discussing trans representation in film, television, and media more broadly. Shows including *Sense 8* and *The Politician* have been celebrated for plot lines and thematic elements which celebrate trans and non-binary characters' characters as complex and nuanced, examining their experiences beyond their gender identities alone.

Although growth in the representation of transgender and gender expansive people in news and popular culture is often positively received by TGE individuals (Pham et al., 2019), visibility on its own may carry significant limitations. Mocarski et al. (2019) noted that while media representation—often favoring binary trans depictions over nonbinary individuals and stories—may provide a “cultural foothold” (p. 424), it may also reinforce harmful hegemonic stereotypes and offer limited portrayals of TGE individuals' experiences, especially those of non-binary and gender non-conforming people. Additionally, increased visibility, “has not been accompanied by uniformly positive attitudes toward transgender people, rights, and [political] candidates” (Jones et al., 2018, pp. 270–271). To some participants, media attention focused solely on trans stories about violence, discrimination, and harassment left little space for celebrating trans experiences. Jack commented that “you don't see people who genuinely, I don't think enjoy is the word that I want, but have joy in that experience. I feel like we don't see that represented very much.” Similarly, Grant worried that an overrepresentation of negative stories about trans youth coming out to unsupportive parents may perpetuate a cycle of anxiety and worry: “I think the negative is important to show too because that is

also a reality, but it can also be super tragic...I think that middle ground important to show too, because I think that is the more common story.” Positive and ubiquitous representations of trans and gender expansive people in the media may provide empowering depictions of queer people achieving success at high levels and normalize their experiences, but also overemphasize a singular narrative of the trans experience and downplay the diversity in various lived realities.

Cross-Case Summary

Each participant expressed feeling empowered and affirmed in their college marching band experience in some way, although the pathways diverged between musical and social elements. The uniformity and structure of the college marching band did not dissuade participants from joining, but rather often served as a source of affirmation for their trans and gender expansive identities. In some cases, the sameness of musical and movement goals served to “equalize” participants with their cisgender peers whose privilege was taken away while in uniform or behind an instrument. In others, participants felt validated by assuming leadership roles and advocating for trans-inclusive policies. Points of similarity included the uniform and visibility as sources of empowerment, perceived lack of staff training, the importance of leadership, and the impact of a collective goal or mission on one’s sense of purpose. Areas of divergence included the role of gendered Greek organizations, the support of one’s instrumental section, and musicianship as a source of social capital. As Carter (2013) noted in his study of HBCU marching band members who identified as gay, Black, and male, college marching band membership may be rife with tension between acceptance, community,

discomfort, and conformity. For participants working to find their place within university settings still struggling to validate their existence, marching bands may be crucial musical and social homes.

Chapter Seven: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how transgender and gender expansive (TGE) former college marching band members navigated their band membership. I utilized a multimethodological approach of narrative inquiry and collective case study analyses, and the concept of wayfinding served as a metaphor for how participants identified, located, and interacted with important components of their band membership. In Chapter Six, I presented a cross-case analysis of relevant themes which emerged from participants' individual cases, highlighting areas of arrival and departure within the context of their experiences as band members. I begin Chapter Seven by summarizing the problem statement and "methodological commitments" (Caine et al., 2013) that underpinned my approach. Next, I present a broad overview of thematic and narrative findings related to how participants navigated their marching band membership within the context of their transgender and gender expansive identities. In the following section, I address implications for practice and the limitations of this study and its results. I conclude the chapter with recommendations for future research in the field of music education.

Problem Statement and Methodological Commitments

Marching bands are often regarded among the largest and most visible student organizations on college and university campuses (Cumberledge, 2016), prized by administrators and other stakeholders for their role in recruiting students (Madsen, 2007), providing extra-musical personal benefits (Healey, 2016), and fostering a sense of community and trust among their members (Matthews, 2017). For transgender and

gender expansive marching band members, opportunities for social connection, the ability to pursue musical performance as an outlet, and the feeling of playing a role in a larger organization may be valuable and empowering high-impact experiences (Hansen, 2016; Walker-Payne, 2019). However, marching bands may also reproduce hypermasculine expectations (Broslawsky, 2017) and serve as sites for harassment and bullying (Reid, 2020; Silveira & Hudson, 2015) within higher education environments which reinforce hetero- and cis-normativity (Nicolazzo, 2016). Benedict and Allsup (2008) called for band conductors to:

Examine our own complicity in perpetuating and replicating particular role models and social institutions that lead toward a citizenry that takes on the tools of challenge, interrogation, and examining who we are, how we came to be, and who we could be. (p. 163)

College marching bands are located at the site of musical, social, institutional, and cultural activities on a university campus, and it may be valuable to better understand the experiences of transgender and gender expansive students for whom a marching band might serve as one of the only (rather than one of many) outlets for social and aesthetic engagement.

The research question which guided the present study was: What are transgender and gender expansive students' lived experiences of navigating their collegiate marching band membership? I selected a qualitative approach to "make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 43), and employed both narrative inquiry and case study design to provide numerous

perspectives and interpretations of participants' experiences. Although I framed this study within a postmodernist view of gender and sexuality as fluid, I rejected an outright theoretical framework to give participants' voices precedence rather than interpreting their experiences through a "limited array of methodologies and measurements" (May, 2017, p. 535). Wayfinding as a metaphor was useful in organizing and exploring participants' stories, emphasizing those components which were most meaningful to each person. One might replace the words "write" and "writing" with "music" and "musicking" in the following passage to understand how the metaphor was used in this process:

Part of being more attentive to lived experience means that wayfinding tracks an individual's agency in determining what, when, and how to write, as well as in defining what writing should be valued—and how that agency is complicated by discourses, objects, dispositions, and other elements that participants and researchers identify. (Alexander et al., 2020, p. 124)

I collected data through multiple one-on-one interviews with each participant, with digital and physical artifacts supplementing and enriching individual stories. I engaged in member checking throughout the entire data collection and analysis process, allowing participants to challenge, remove, edit, or add to their interview documents. Additionally, I shared my coding and data organization documents, inviting participants to contribute additional perspectives as I generated themes. In the first segment of data analysis, I coded and organized individual participant narratives by chronology and significant events in their lives (e.g., "coming out" or "interacting with family"),

presenting each narrative as its own standalone case. The second segment of coding and interpretation consisted of a detailed within-case and subsequent cross-case analysis of emergent themes related to participants' college marching band experiences.

Summary of Findings

The following section summarizes this study's findings under the previously used organizational headings adapted from Page-Reeves et al. (2019), consisting of *being in*, *engaging with*, and *experiencing* one's marching band membership. Referring to the aspects of their lives which led to them becoming members of their college programs, participants referred to entering their college program in various ways as an opportunity "start over." Musical involvement remained a constant variable in participants' lives while they adjusted to less certain aspects of their college experience (e.g., living in dorms, navigating campus, and meeting professors). Additionally, participants reported widely divergent experiences with their high school directors. While some were actively encouraging (i.e., Grant), others played a minimal or even negative role in their students' musical lives.

The importance of visibility and collective action was also recurrent. Some participants had concealed their trans identity, viewing visibility as a burden rather than source of empowerment or celebration. The combination of the band uniform and collective physical movement allowed participants to be seen without feeling exposed, and musical performance freed them to communicate using the same language as their peers. Marching contexts and environments also served as contrasting scenarios in which participants could switch between personal expression being "visibly queer" (i.e.,

rehearsals) and “assimilate” into the larger groups (i.e., performances), possibly serving as a form of collective codeswitching.

Band faculty and staff were surprisingly and frustratingly distant from participants’ experiences. High school music teachers may play an important role in students’ likelihood to persist, and students who report positive high school band experiences may be more enthusiastic about playing in collegiate ensembles (Arnwine, 1996; Constantine, 2011). While participants acknowledged teachers’ lack of education and training, they expected leaders to demonstrate a goodwill effort in learning and adjusting policies. Participants also highlighted the importance of social connection in their college marching band programs, feeling either supported or isolated in their student-centric sections. The fraternity and sorority functioned as smaller microclimates within the marching bands, providing gender-affirming experiences within a traditionally gender-oppressive model.

The sheer number of leadership positions allowed participants to demonstrate their strengths and take ownership within their programs. Each participant expressed a preference for “detail-oriented” and “logistical” work and enjoyed being viewed as valuable contributors. Participants also described self-confidence as an important outcome, in many cases identifying the marching band as an environment for centering their queerness as a welcome aspect, rather than burdensome accessory to their college story.

Being in Band

Each of the five participants—Robyn, Jack, Taylor, Quinn, and Grant—were members of their high school band programs prior to joining in college. For several participants, high school band membership provided a welcome buffer from the social isolation or harassment they experienced elsewhere in the school environment (Kosciw et al., 2020). Quinn and Grant viewed band as less of a social experience and more as an opportunity to identify and achieve tangible goals through musical performance. Robyn enjoyed playing trombone but framed their experience through the lens of leadership as a drum major. Taylor identified band as his “niche” within the school, excited to be sought after and praised for his musicianship and mentorship of younger students. Jack was largely socially separated from his peers but enjoyed the cathartic experience of marching “fun” shows with his peers. Interestingly, none of the participants actively incorporated their sexual or gender identities in their high school band membership, and Taylor was actively discouraged from expressing his trans identity after coming out during his junior year of high school. Disappointingly, the confidence Taylor gained and excitement he experienced at the prospect of expressing his trans identity in college was quickly squashed by unsupportive peers at NSU.

The prospect of collegiate marching band participation may have been attractive for participants who valued the constant activity and opportunities for high levels of personal achievement. Gadinsky (2018) identified *high-achievement* and *perfectionism* as coping mechanisms against stressors and poor self-esteem among some TGE individuals. Gadinsky (2018) argued:

Among those participants who reported striving to meet psychological or emotional needs through achievement, there was a distinction between: 1) staying busy as a form of psychological numbing or distraction from distress, and 2) seeking a self-esteem boost through accomplishment. In these cases, looking at perfectionism as “avoidant coping” highlights that the *intention* behind high achievement—rather than achievement itself—may be responsible for the potentially negative impact on mental health. (p. 94, emphasis in original)

Quinn was the only participant who came out after leaving their institution and asserted that the number of variables in marching band rehearsals and performances (e.g., musical excellence, the physicality of marching itself, keeping attention focused to dozens of other musicians) left little room to consider their gender identity. For Taylor, Jack, and Grant, marching band membership provided outlets for staying busy when they became stressed or worried (e.g., Taylor’s involvement on the operations team). In contrast, Robyn was attracted to the color guard for its less demanding role and as a result had additional space and time to reflect on their dysphoria and its implications.

The results of this study also seem to contradict numerous previous findings that high school musicians who continue playing in collegiate bands often report positive, encouraging relationships and mentoring from high school music educators (e.g., Moder, 2013). The only participant who described a trans-inclusive action from their instructor was Taylor, whose otherwise verbally abusive teacher allowed him to select his spring concert attire rather than wearing a dress. Grant, meanwhile, actively separated his trans identity from band entirely, and disclosed his identity to his English teacher rather than

his band directors. Quinn had almost no interaction with their director, and Robyn's directors stayed largely distant from their band experience.

Bowles et al. (2014) examined factors which influenced high school musicians to persist in music making at the college level and found that while 68% of respondents ($n = 476$) reported encouragement from high school music teachers, 31% received no such affirmation or mentorship. The results from Bowles et al.'s (2014) study highlight a disparity between the very real conversations happening between high school musicians and the possibility that TGE students may be disproportionately excluded. Although the current qualitative study featured five participants and results should not be generalized, Silveira and Goff (2016) found that educators reported feeling positive but hesitant toward their transgender students. That hesitancy may result in fewer encouraging conversations between teachers and students, forcing TGE students to find motivation to persist in post-secondary music through other avenues. Participants' responses from this dissertation more align with Sichivista's (2003) examination of college choir members' reasons for singing after high school. Sichivista (2003) found that social integration within the ensembles and the extent to which students valued the music itself were the most significant factors in students' decisions to persist.

High school band participation may have also provided participants the opportunity to imagine their *possible selves*. Markus and Nurius (1986) defined possible selves as “[derived] from representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future” and that “represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears, and fantasies” (p. 954). According to Stevenson and Clegg

(2011), students who feel affirmed and report high levels of wellbeing are more likely to imagine their future selves rather than focusing solely on the immediate task or experience. The participants from this dissertation each reported high levels of stress and poor mental health for various reasons, including social isolation, bullying, or harassment. Schnare et al. (2011) found that aspects of musical participation such as technical improvement, opportunities for social engagement, and achievable pathways to success were factors which motivated participants ($n = 204$) to persist in music making. Participants may have found marching band participation as one of the few available options for envisioning their possible selves, whereas their cisgender peers—who, ostensibly, may have not faced the same levels of stress or harassment—may have had numerous pathways for envisioning their own possible selves.

Engaging with Band

Participants often described the social environments of their collegiate marching bands using terms such as “affirming” or “welcoming.” However, positive feelings mostly occurred after participants struggled with how to navigate their gender identity within the context of a new and largely unknown social space from high school and their families. Upon arriving at their respective universities, participants’ first source of social involvement was their band section. Due to the amount of time spent together and similarity in the source of music making, marching band sections are often close-knit social entities that can affirm or alienate new members (Marshall, 2009; Rothbart & Lewis, 2006). The layers of social participation in the college marching band (e.g., individual section, officer boards, appointed positions) may serve to affirm students who

correctly perform the expected “band identity,” but also monitor and discipline students who do not embody the expected characteristics. In short, the number of audience members to whom a band member performs may rise with the number of available social circles. When section members expressed support, participants felt more comfortable expressing their queer identities (e.g., Robyn, Grant, and Jack). When sections were ambivalent or actively hostile, participants felt the need to separate their sexual and gender identities from their band participation entirely (e.g., Quinn and Taylor). In both instances, individual sections served as one of several microclimates within the larger marching band, just as the marching band served as a microclimate within the larger university.

Another microclimate mentioned frequently was the band fraternity and sorority within each program. Robyn was the only participant who did not participate in Tau Beta Sigma or Kappa Kappa Psi, and their reluctance toward gendered Greek organizations should be informed by the fact that their institution did not sponsor the band service groups, but rather the social music fraternity and sorority. Robyn also viewed gendered practices as infringing upon the queer space they had carved out in the band program, while Jack, Grant, and Taylor viewed the Greek organizations as queer spaces themselves. The amount of time spent together seemed to foster a trust among members, even more so than general band membership. The sorority and fraternity offered a valuable shield from transphobic attitudes accepted elsewhere in the band, and in some instances the language of “brother” and “sister” helped to either affirm individuals’ gender identities (e.g., Grant) or break down traditional heteronormative practices of

masculinity and femininity (e.g., Taylor). Additionally, the band service organizations may have provided safer spaces for students to incorporate trans “rites of passage” (Dentice & Dietert, 2015) such as changing or cutting off hair, experimenting with a variety of outfits, and signaling their trans and gender expansive identities through objects such as pins or flags. Importantly, Quinn noted that marching bands were still “public” environments and Robyn commented that while one’s peers may be supportive, they are rarely ever alone and thus are constantly engaged in self-surveillance.

Participants in this dissertation may have utilized their marching band membership as a subversive act to reclaim aspects of their queer identity within a system that seemingly contradicts the notion of fluidity (e.g., military-like command structures, strict uniform requirements). Butler (1999/1990) argued that rather than relying on external critiques to dismantle oppressive and deterministic power structures:

The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (p. 188)

Marshall’s (2009) assertion that female college marching band members were able to reclaim power from their male counterparts through performing masculine acts and playing masculine instruments may reinforce the notion of queer subversion through marching band membership. Ramirez and Sterzing (2017) found that although LGBT military service members faced discrimination and harassment within a system built to exclude them (e.g., the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy), their membership allowed them

to “deconstruct heterosexual power and privilege and reclaim some of this power, privilege, and social space” (p. 76). Jack and Grant used their positions of authority within their band’s sorority and fraternity, respectively, to challenge and ultimately reverse language and policies that reinforced cisnormativity (e.g., references to binary genders in documents, adding gender pronouns to name tags). These changes, while within the framework of the organization, carved out space that acknowledged the participation of queer band members. However, it was the promise of social cohesion and subversion that effectively trapped Taylor and forced him to leave his trumpet section behind to escape bullying and harassment.

Marching band directors were surprisingly absent from most participants’ stories, and when they did appear it was due to poorly enforced anti-harassment policies or instances of favoritism. Grant was frustrated that his band directors refused to institute LGBTQIA+ training for student leaders but was pleased that directors were helpful in changing his name on documents. Conversely, Jack met resistance from band directors when he tried to change his name in band systems. Like participants in Carter’s (2013) study involving gay, male members of HBCU bands, directors overwhelmingly did not make a positive impact on participants’ experiences. In Taylor’s case, a student who had threatened to harass him in his on-campus residence was not punished by band faculty and was even rewarded with a section leadership position. I was particularly disturbed by Taylor’s situation in which he was actively recruited and invited to join the band program and then abandoned by staff when he arrived. Although Taylor did find support outside of the trumpet section, it is not unfathomable to imagine a student who remained stuck in

place, afraid to abandon their musical outlet but equally wary of remaining in a harmful environment.

Music performance also served dual roles in participants' experiences. In some instances, excelling on one's instrument provided much-needed confidence and public accolades from peers. For students struggling with feelings of dysphoria or navigating difficult family circumstances after coming out or transitioning, the affirmation of being recognized as a talented musician may counter feelings of isolation, loss, or devaluation (Hansen, 2016). For example, Grant had spent much of high school unsure about important aspects of his life (e.g., musical talent, academic abilities, sexuality, gender identity). After receiving positive comments about his musical contributions, Grant felt valued and felt empowered to share his gender identity with his peers. However, emphasis on musical performance also allowed transphobic and heteronormative attitudes and practices to go adjudicated under the guise of musical ability which benefited the entire organization. In Taylor's case, the band directors' emphasis on musical performance prioritized a transphobic band member's technical proficiency over his harmful statements and actions. Conversely, Quinn enjoyed the musical emphasis within their section, viewing technical proficiency as one of their greatest strengths and a powerful means of mitigating any "social imbalances" or awkwardness. The mixed experiences with musical performance aligned with Cumberledge and Acklin's (2019) study of collegiate band members' attitudes, with the researchers finding tension between students who enjoyed a more laid back, less structured environment and those who desired a more highly disciplined, product-driven experience.

The act of marching and moving in time separates the marching band from many other sites of musicking at the K–12 and college levels. The boundary loss (McNeill, 1996) inherent to dancing, marching, or walking in time with others may be compounded by the sense of social cohesion, bonding, trust, and understanding of cultural norms and mores communicated through moving in time to music (Stupacher et al., 2017). Thus, the act of making music while moving in time with others may create layers of social trust and connection unique to marching bands, which in turn inform reports of strong friendships within marching band programs (e.g., Dagaz, 2010; Matthews, 2017).

Each participant struggled socially in high school, with interactions ranging from isolation to outright physical harm. The collective action and mission provided a sense of community in which most participant felt safe coming out (e.g., Grant and Jack), disclosing (e.g., Taylor), or engaging with their queer identity on a deeper level (e.g., Robyn). Flint et al. (2019) argued that in some cases, “comfortability congeals around particular places and spaces on campus to produce them as spaces of belonging or kinship” (p. 443). The combination of moving and musicking together may exemplify what Aramphongphan (2015) described as “*the very act of being created* through collective embodiment” and “[sites] of intersubjective commingling and the creation of an alternative sociality” (p. 84, emphasis in original). Thus, marching band membership may have served as a counter to participants’ previous experiences of isolation or exclusion. Quinn did not desire to incorporate their non-binary identity with their band experience, but after coming out following their graduation from NSU did express an excitement to return to the band program as an openly queer staff member. Of note was

Quinn's desire to re-enter the marching band space wearing fem clothing, asserting their presence and space as an openly queer person.

The importance of clothing and attire carried throughout each participant's broader life story but was especially impactful in relation to their band experiences. Quinn, Jack, Taylor, and Grant all wore traditional uniforms in their band programs, worn by members of the woodwind, brass, and percussion sections. Robyn was a member of the color guard in their college marching band, and often wore a more revealing set of articles which allowed them to reclaim their sense of freedom and motion during performance. Interestingly, several participants described the uniform as "de-gendered," while others argued that it reaffirmed their trans-masculine identities and allowed them to hide aspects of their presentation in ways that other clothing failed. In this study, the default masculinity of the band uniform was viewed as not only acceptable, but desired for its role in equalizing the appearance of each member wearing it.

Robyn initially hesitated at the feminine interpretation of their color guard uniform, but later viewed it as a "performance tool" over which they had control. While also valued their queer visibility to audiences and other members, they also recognized that the uniform allowed vulnerable members to step into the background, away from the already increased scrutiny marginalized and underrepresented members received.

At times, the uniform seemed situated between a costume used in drag performance (e.g., Grant noting that it helped him "really buy into" his performances and connect with the audiences from a place of power) and an outfit used in a cos-play scenario (e.g., Quinn's comparison of the band uniform to *Star Trek*). Participants'

experiences echo those of Gould (2010), who described the act of wearing her high school marching band's uniform itself as subversive, asserting her presence in a space that would otherwise not allow her: "I was instantly free of performing heterosexual hegemonic femininity, for the uniform coded me as neither a woman nor as a body that could desire men...I confounded the coding of heterosexual femininity" (p.11).

In her 1991 book *Feminine Endings*, musicologist Susan McClary argued that music and musical practices do not only transmit social constructs but actively participate in their creation and reification:

The codes marking gender difference in music are informed by the prevalent attitudes of their time. But they also themselves participate in social formation, inasmuch as individuals learn how to be gendered beings through their interactions with cultural discourses such as music. Moreover, music does not just passively reflect society; it also serves as a public forum within which various models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated. (pp. 8–9).

McClary's work highlighted music's ability to serve as an active tool of feminine subversion against hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, and posited that musical acts and repertoire are gendered even absent of more typical signifiers such as lyrics. Once constructed, McClary (1991) argued that a feminine musicological analysis may help to trouble the "hierarchy of power" (p. 127) which favored the masculine. Of course, to observe the masculine is to observe its opposition to feminine and thus locate a binary at all.

One may see Robyn's participation in their marching band's color guard as a site of contestation. Wearing feminine performance apparel, Robyn—and their female and fem-dominated section—were relegated to the back of the field, ogled and harassed by students. Robyn's femininity was underlined by their queerness, and was not a failed performance of femininity, but rather a successfully relegated performance of femininity. Perhaps a failed performance of masculinity occurred in Taylor's case, although some tension in his story exists. After gaining a sense of self-confidence as a trans man during high school, Taylor disrupted the expectations of a [masculine] trumpet player within his college marching band section through his preference for second and third (e.g., harmonic) parts and lack of aggressiveness in fighting for solo parts which he articulated by offering that he was not a "trumpet player's trumpet player." Taylor's musical preferences may have also exacerbated the coding he received from his peers as "girl."

Suzanne Cusick (1994) focused her work heavily on the body and its role in musical performance. Cusick (1994) argued:

We who study the results of bodily performances like music might profitably look to our subject as a set of scripts for bodily performances which may actually constitute gender for the performers and which may be recognizable as metaphors of gender for those who witness the performers' displays. (pp. 14–15)

Participants in this dissertation had varying experiences with and opinions about the role of marching band membership as an opportunity to be seen and interpreted as musicians, and the impact that visibility had on their trans and gender expansive identities. Cusick's (1994) commentary poses a distinction between the *intent* behind the performers'

gestures and acts and the *perception* and responses of the viewer (i.e., the audience). Jack identified the uniform as “degendered,” but his comfort in its supposed lack of gender may have come in the context of the uniform’s default masculinity. That default masculinity may itself have been comforting due to Jack’s desire to be read as a trans man but may have also felt neutral with no other object of comparison.

Grant specifically recalled a moment when, in the masculine uniform, he was brought to the front of the field with other members of his marching band section to dance to an arrangement of a Beyoncé song. Grant’s story was outlined by constant gender boundary-crossing, for example speaking to a childhood marked by both feminine and masculine interests, and the act of inhabiting a masculine space as a queer person dancing to music by a popular female artist may have represented an important moment of liberation in which he reclaimed space through his very presence. Cusick (2006) also extended the argument of examining music in the *context* of sexuality to music *as* sexuality and a sexual act. While it is not my goal to provide a thorough analysis of Cusick’s compendium of works, her argument that one might be able to queer the very approach to and performance of music undermines its traditionally hetero- and cis-centric structures. Thus, it may be possible to view queer music-making as the making of queer music.

The tension between the performer’s experience and the audience member’s perception of the performer’s actions may also be interpreted through Butler’s (1999/1990) commentary on the interplay of power relations in the performance and reading of gender. Specifically, Butler (1999/1990) argued for an:

Epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (p. 194).

Here again, Taylor's experience in incoherently performing masculinity—exacerbated by an unexpected and subversive musical performance—categorized him as a social and musical invader who violated the epistemic marching band norms which defined and reinforced a specific version of masculinity. In speaking about the lack of privacy on drum corps summer tours, Robyn mentioned that the performance of one's identity occurred not only on the field, but inside the gym, in the bathrooms, and on the buses. Robyn's comments may be easily transferred to each of the five participants' experiences, in that the audience and thus requirements for intelligibility changed according to physical and social location. The defined and predictable performance identity (i.e., the conditions each participant experienced during the process of marching and playing or dancing to music with their peers) may have provided a stable and known point of departure for exploring their queerness.

Solie (1993) highlighted a central tension between strands of feminist musicology and poststructural views of deconstructed subjectivities:

Poststructuralism, then, “deconstructs” the dualisms, first by revealing that they are not in fact symmetrical, that within each pair dominance of the first over the second is embedded, and then by entirely neutralizing the categories to which the

pairs apply: gender, for instance. (p. 19)

Solie's (1993) argument was reflected in this dissertation by Quinn's conversation with a friend during college: "[My friend] said, 'if gender is a social construct, then why am I trans? You know, 'if gender doesn't exist, then why do I know I'm not the one I'm assigned?'" You know, I don't have an answer." While other participants were drawn to their campus' LGBTQIA+ resource centers, Quinn saw little appeal in finding friends solely through shared gender or sexual minority characteristics. Paradoxically, Quinn may have viewed space designed to accommodate greater levels of fluidity and self-expression as constricting, while experiencing the rigid marching band experience as more enjoyable.

Experiencing Band

As band members, participants identified the newfound sense of confidence they had gained through marching, playing, and engaging with new friends as being beneficial to their post-collegiate life activities. For some, coming out to their network of marching band friends provided them confidence to come out or re-assert themselves at home to family members, as in the cases of Jack, Taylor, and Grant. Quinn experienced band through the lens of playing the "role of an expert," which applied to their feelings of confidence and expertise when discussing trans or queer issues to cisgender friends. Robyn was able to let go of leadership positions while in the SSU marching band color guard section, finally finding time to think more deeply about their gender identity and what specifically had caused them feelings of discomfort and misalignment previously.

Quinn's enjoyment of performing the role of an expert calls into question the

requirements for expertise to which they were subjected. Claiming a greater level of technical proficiency on cymbals served as an external validator of success when so many other lived characteristics were in flux, and in the case of Quinn's gender identity, actively separated from their band experience. However, the same power structures that allowed Quinn to gain expertise were the same structures which made their gender and sexuality "incoherent" (Butler, 1999, p. 23) and incompatible. The band uniform added a sense of coherence to Jack, Taylor, and Grant's queer identities, bringing them into more masculine alignment which was also read as a successful performance by audience members.

In Robyn's situation, their marching band experience seemed to follow three distinct segments. During high school, Robyn was unable to reconcile their dysphoria and discomfort due to the energy expended on administering their band as a student leader. In this sense, the *default* setting of band membership excluded the ability for queerness to be interrogated or experienced. As a collegiate color guard member, Robyn was only able to begin processing their identity as a member of a non-auditioned subgroup that seemingly held little importance to the band director who spent more time with the strict military-clad wind and percussion members at the top of gendered "hierarchy of power" (McClary, 1991, p. 127). The third stage was a full realization of and reclamation of Robyn's non-binary identity in winter guard and drum corps, when they reimagined feminine articles of clothing and movements as "performance tools" for their own queerness.

Grant, Jack, and Taylor also found leadership roles to be empowering, and noted

that their marching band programs provided many opportunities for members with different strengths to assume equally important and respected positions (e.g., elected positions on a council, officer slots within the sorority, and section leaders). Formalized leadership development opportunities are common within marching band programs (Fisher, 2021; Warfield, 2013) and the diversity in positions may allow more members to feel affirmed as leaders.

The intersection of musical achievement perceived “hardcore” band participation (Abril, 2012), and leadership opportunities may provide social and cultural capital transferrable to non-band environments. Like Einarsdottir’s (2012) theory of “choral capital” and subsequent development of a “choral identity,” the layers of musical and social identities present in university marching bands (e.g., instrumental section, Greek organizations, leadership positions) and attainment of one’s “band capital” may be an area of additional research. Several participants noted that being perceived as a talented musician offset the insecurities and anxieties that may have stemmed from navigating their coming out and/or transition.

Implications for Practice

Training and Education

Lack of training, education, and awareness for transgender and gender expansive students among music educators (Silveira & Goff, 2016) and college instructors (Lewis, 2016; Walker-Payne, 2019) has been documented numerous times in the research literature. Similarly, participants often used terms such as “uninformed” or “forgetful” to describe their college band directors. Garrett and Palkki (2021) acknowledged the need

for supporting transgender and gender expansive educators in addition to providing resources for non-TGE educators about queer issues: “As music teacher educators uncover the talents and skills pre-service teachers, they must also consider how they are teaching our future colleagues to teach people through music” (p. 124). While no participant labeled their director as transphobic or expressing openly hostile attitudes, there were numerous instances of administrative oversight (e.g., dead names placed on lockers). Band directors might examine their institution’s preferred name change policies (Lieberth, 2020), documents, and procedures and make note of them in their band’s documentation such as a handbook (Schievert, 2018). In instances where certain forms cannot be changed due to university policies, band directors can be transparent about which documents can and cannot be changed to reflect students’ submitted names and pronouns.

Grant advocated for education for both staff and student leaders, emphasizing the number of contact hours that marching band section leaders have as the primary sources of authority for their section, both during official rehearsal time and in social situations. Grant’s program did not allow the LGBTQIA+ campus resource center to present to the band leadership or membership, and expressed a willingness to have done some of the training himself:

The major thing that I took away from my experience is that lots of complacency happens because a lot of people are not trained to deal with certain issues because the only people who are trained are the three adults out of 300 students.

Robyn acknowledged that band directors, many of whom are outwardly supportive, lack the vocabulary or feel hesitant about engaging with their trans and gender expansive students thinking they may speak out of turn. For nervous professionals, Robyn advised that using online resources such as Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok may provide the same type of safe space for educators to build their “conceptual toolkit” as queer people experience as they navigate their own identities. However, Robyn also recommended that educators engage with queer students and move beyond online discourse, interrogating their own social circles along the way:

It's always going to be about the people in your life. And if you look around and see that you have no queer friends, it's probably worth interrogating why, whether that's like, “I'm in West [Southern State], there are no queer people here who are comfortable being out and open about it.” Or if there are, there's a blooming queer community around you, but none of them are interacting with you in a friendship way, it's worth some introspection.

Facilities

Band directors may also be aware of the bathroom and changing room situations in their facilities and on trips. After coming out, Jack refused to use the gendered bathrooms in his band facility, instead walking five minutes to a nearby building with single stalls. Jack also found changing into his band uniform to be stressful, often locking himself in the band facility’s music library rather than using the provided changing rooms. Grant was forced to use the portable toilets outside of his university’s football stadium due to the lack of gender-inclusive bathrooms. Since college band members may

be involved in changing in and out of athletic apparel and band uniforms more than other musical activities, instructors may best serve their students by being aware of the potential for their discomfort in gendered bathrooms and changing spaces and be able to provide explicit recommendations for all students who wish to use private or gender-inclusive facilities.

Policies and Procedures

Participants also recommended involving transgender and gender expansive band members in policy conversations. Taylor noted that many queer students “feel like their voices haven't been heard, or they haven't been allowed to share them,” and that “the band director is the person who sets the tone, even if there is a staff of a million people.” Having been the victim of favoritism in his college band, Taylor asserted that how directors treat TGE students as well as those who may infringe upon their space may make an environment hostile or affirming from the start of a season. Quinn understood the value of musical excellence, but not to the extent where technical perfection is valued over band members’ needs and experiences: “We're a college band and that's fine. We're still worthy as an institution of art. It's just, we don't need, we're not DCI. We don't have to not be fun.”

While participants generally expressed an understanding for directors who made mistakes and did not label them as malicious, they also wanted to communicate that patience and empathy should not be confused for apathy or disinterest. Band directors could be transparent about their relationship with broader university policies (e.g., name change procedures), include transgender and gender expansive students in building rules

and guidelines for their band program, and actively seek to expand their own vocabulary and understanding of queer issues through media, personal relationships, and current research. Some changes, such as allowing students to list preferred names on mail merged documents prior to a season or including a list of gender-inclusive restrooms in policy manuals, are not difficult to implement but may make an enormous difference in a student's experience and feeling of safety. Educators, scholars, students, and general community stakeholders should further examine not only instances in which bullying may occur, but also how bullying and harassment manifest beyond physical violence. Siegel (2019) noted that within a single institution, policies and procedures meant to protect students may be interpreted and enforced differently, leading to different outcomes and varying feelings of safety in areas presumably covered by the same documents. Garrett and Palkki (2021) added that without policies specifically identifying TGE students, "TGE students may assume without clear indication, that a music teacher is not a safe person who will support them...teachers must consider what may be perceived as bold steps to truly celebrate all of the students we teach" (p. 95).

Access to Campus Resources

Although not perfect, campus LGBTQIA+ centers may be helpful resources for TGE students as they navigate their new environment. Taylor learned about his school's gender-inclusive housing options through the resource center, Grant found leadership positions leader trans-affirming projects, and Robyn participated in protests against anti-LGBTQIA+ religious groups that visited campus as a member of their resource center. Although two participants described therapy as an important part of their transition and

coming out, none of the participants identified their campus as providing adequate mental health resources for trans or gender expansive students. As marching band directors often serve as access point for campus resources (Barnes, 2016), they should strive to identify important health, policy, and support entities on campus and actively promote them to their band members.

Instrument Selection and Section Gatekeeping

Although the focus of this study was band members' experiences during their college years, several implications for K–12 music education arose. Robyn's comments about heteronormative language used in rehearsal techniques mirrored Bergonzi's (2009) call for more inclusive terminology and portrayals in teachers' pedagogy. Just as several participants' band leadership positions allowed them to live a "possible self" that shaped their later experiences, selecting an instrument with gendered implications (e.g., "boys play the tuba") may also provide a glimpse into a possible musical self. However, educators might work to understand that "re-gendering" the instrument selection process (e.g., "girls also play the tuba") is not the same as "de-gendering" the instrument selection process. For trans binary students, the ability to pursue an instrument that more aligns with their gender identity may feel affirming. For trans non-binary or other gender expansive students, the existence of a binary at all may be constricting.

Several researchers have commented on the development of "section culture" and its implications at the high school and college level (e.g., Fisher, 2021; Marshall, 2009). Playing like instruments may provide a catalyst for participants to develop a sense of trust and belonging, in turn engaging in more social activities and developing strong

friendships (Dagaz, 2010; Matthews, 2017). However, the pride and sense of unity may stem from cultural traditions and rituals enforced by section gatekeepers. Shucha (2019) noted that in some marching band programs, students who did not actively and enthusiastically participate in their section's traditions "would not be considered as much a part of the group as those who did" (p. 168).

Taylor was actively resented by his peers in the trumpet section for not conforming to their expectations of a section member (e.g., favoring the first trumpet part, aggressively competing for solo auditions), and later violating the female coding he had received during his first season. Conversely, Grant's section was accepting and protective of his queer and trans identities, making him feel safe and welcome before and during his transition. Educators can be better aware that a section culture may develop in any ensemble in which participants are playing like instruments, providing both comfort and conformity. Concert bands, jazz bands, vocal ensembles, string groups, and popular music ensembles may also produce "section cultures" that reproduce norms without the knowledge or consent of the instructor or teacher.

Safe and Brave Spaces

Although the term "safe space" has been used in reference to environments free of harm or harassment, researchers have advocated for the term "brave space" to expand support for LGBTQIA+ beyond basic human protections (Arao & Clemens, 2013). While many educators of all age groups have shown support through placing pro-LGBTQIA+ stickers or flags around their classrooms (Kosciw et al., 2020), students may also feel lulled into a false sense of security if they enter a space designated as "safe" only to find

an instructor unwilling or unable to make it so.

Educators can be upfront and clear about both their institution's non-discrimination policies as well as their own enforcement mechanisms within their classrooms. Grant and Robyn also expressed that the usage of terms such as "queer-friendly space" may signal a deeper level of support and understanding than sandwiching sexual orientation and gender identity within a long list of other recognized status categories. Further, educators must understand that spaces themselves are fluid and ever-changing, and forming the foundation for a welcoming, affirming space one day may feel outdated or restrictive the next. Language, terminology, and pedagogical approaches change rapidly, and instructors should be prepared to adapt. Robyn's experience of being invited to participate in a marching arts podcast reflected their initial excitement toward having an outlet for educating their peers and staff, and disappointment at those peers and staff assuming they had "checked the box":

What that feels like to me is, "I want to do better, so I'm going to listen to this podcast. Check. I get it. I understand all of the needs my trans students will ever have." When that's not clear at, if you walk away from the podcast with that, because many times we were like, "please reach out to us if you have questions. We're resources, we can connect you with other people who are resources." Nothing. Nothing. So there's just this very much like, "oh, I get it. It's a semantic knowledge thing that they have." Where it's like, "no, this is working, procedural knowledge that you need to amend constantly and change constantly."

While I entered this process with the assumption that the assimilation and

uniformity of the marching band experience may be perceived negatively by trans and gender expansive students—for whom assimilation to societal norms and passing as coded gender identities may be more common—I was surprised by participants’ assertions that the strict conformity in music, motion, and appearance actually enhanced their queerness, providing a predictable foil to moments of greater expressivity and cementing their earned social location within a larger, valued structure. However, the affirmation and support participants gleaned from their peers may be offset by more frequent and exposed opportunities for harassment, bullying, and microaggressions beyond the gaze of professional staff or other institutional actors.

Limitations

Although I endeavored to present five distinct stories about trans and gender expansive college marching band members’ experiences, there are several limitations that should be noted. Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, each of the interviews was conducted utilizing Zoom videoconference software. Although presumably more effective at communicating nuance and detail than a phone conversation or email exchange, digital video may not have allowed me to fully interact with each person. Additionally, each of the participants in the present study identified as White and attended a Predominantly White Institution. Researchers may wish to address the experiences of non-White participants of marching bands at PWIs, whose marching styles differ from HBCU marching bands (Clark, 2019). HBCUs are sites that may be of interest, because cultural and historical contexts in which those institutions’ ensembles operate may situate gender [performance], sexuality, and queer identity differently than

within a PWI (Carter, 2013). An intersectional approach including religion, socioeconomic status, and other aspects of participants' identities may also be warranted (Cayari, 2019). Hearing the voices of queer individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds is a critical area of future research, especially considering the ways in which queer people of color experience and are oppressed by societal structures. Further, as a non-transgender or gender expansive person, I approached this study as an outsider. Although I truly believe that I was able to establish a positive, collaborative rapport with participants throughout the course of the study, there may be certain shared experiences and knowledge that would have allowed participants to share more deeply with a researcher who identified as transgender or gender expansive.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although music education research with transgender and gender expansive individuals has increased in recent years, scholars contend that additional research is needed (e.g., Bartolome, 2016; Cayari, 2019; Palkki, 2016; Shane, 2020). Although some studies have addressed the experiences and needs of TGE students in K–12 music, few have explored collegiate music participation. Although participants' experiences were nuanced and presented both confirmatory and contradictory data, each identified their college marching band as having characteristics of high-impact practices (HIPs), including “demanding considerable time from students” and “encouraging diverse interactions” (BrckaLorenz et al., 2017, p. 351). Participants each utilized their membership in different ways, taking advantage of the musical, social, and structural aspects of each program to supplement their college experience and their journey in

coming out or transitioning.

The band fraternity and sorority played a significant role in several participants' experiences of navigating their identity, coming out, and finding affirmation. Although numerous researchers have addressed Greek life generally on college campuses, no studies to my knowledge have specifically addressed the co-educational band service fraternity and sorority. Since various chapters of the same organizations may enforce policies and structures in different ways, it may be helpful to better understand how a larger population of trans and gender expansive marching band members perceive their respective chapters. Additionally, Silveira and Goff's (2016) study of music educators' attitudes and beliefs toward transgender students addressed practices of K–12 teachers, but a similar study addressing collegiate music educators may also clarify the role of faculty members within high-impact practices. Further, it may be crucial to examine the role of professional development opportunities for college instructors in general, and music educators specifically for whom there may be fewer educational structures (e.g., teaching licensure boards).

Of note is also that this study did not include any trans women. According to Bennett (2018):

Trans women are less likely to complete college, not only leading to fewer eligible participants in studies focused on the trans college student population, but also bringing into question what differences exist in the experiences of these individuals that they are less likely to persist and complete their undergraduate degrees. (p. 84)

Understanding the experiences of trans women in college band programs as they navigate traditionally masculine structures (e.g., the uniform) should be an area for additional research. It may also be helpful to understand the perspectives of trans and gender expansive college students who choose not to participate or who decide to quit before they graduate. Although Robyn only performed for one season with their college marching band, they did continue to perform in winter guard and drum corps organizations throughout the remainder of their eligibility.

Numerous researchers have investigated the experiences of trans vocalists with particular emphasis on vocal change the [mis]alignment of one's assigned part to their gender identity (e.g., Aguirre, 2018; Cates, 2019; Sauerland, 2018). However, to my knowledge no researchers have examined trans and gender expansive musicians' perceptions of wind instrument timbre, register, and sound in relation to their gender identity or expression. Although participants in Silveira and Hudson's (2015) study about hazing in post-secondary marching band programs overwhelmingly identified hazing and bullying as negative forces within their bands, the microaggressions and harassment trans and gender expansive students experience may be more subtle and institutionally accepted (Lewis, 2016; Woodford et al., 2017); in some cases, band directors themselves may be implicated in reinforcing harmful stereotypes and behaviors. Therefore, additional research into how TGE students perceive, identify, and navigate bullying and harassment within band programs may be especially valuable.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how transgender and gender expansive (TGE) former college marching band members navigated their band membership. College professors and instructors may play an important role in the lives of trans and gender expansive students (Lewis, 2016; Walker-Payne, 2019), but band directors identified by participants in the present study were alarmingly absent from their students' experiences. There may be tension between the environment a band director believes they are fostering and the perceptions of TGE students living and moving about those environments. As college band directors may provide valuable social capital and access to campus resources (Barnes, 2016), future research into the experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of college band directors toward trans and gender expansive students is needed. Further, directors' general sense of ambivalence—or in Taylor's case, active disinterest in preventing harassment—is a clear indication that additional training and education is needed for educators at all levels.

It may be helpful to consider the role of music-making as a means of “de-fragmentation.” O'Shea (2020) argued that “[transgender people] are regarded as fragmented beings...whose sense of self does not align with an external visible body morphology to leave us alienated from our very selves” (p. 3). For trans and gender expansive musicians, the part-to-whole act of musicking may serve as a form of resistance against the essentializing, picking apart, and mandatory coding they experience as other-gendered subjects in a binary world. Quinn asserted that “no matter how bad it gets, when the band hits that chord and you hit that crash, it's pure serotonin.” Similarly,

Jack described the piecing together of individual parts rehearsed in sectionals and then brought together during full ensemble practices as one of his “favorite things” about his band experience, and an act that is shared, *all* band members are fragmented and then put back together.

Learning from participants using the metaphor of wayfinding allowed me to conceptualize their experiences as not isolated events best viewed under a microscope, but rather a series of pathways, signposts, and signals that impacted their journey as trans and gender expansive people moving through the world of their college marching band. I approached this project from my position as a cisgender man and college band director. I admittedly undertook this study to inform my own practice as well as contribute to the field, and I have been deeply humbled by the strength, resilience, and passion that each participant demonstrated throughout this process. Although college marching bands *can* be sites for empowerment, fulfillment, and affirmation, they are not *automatically* so. These ensembles may also be sites of harassment, trepidation, and self-doubt. For trans and gender expansive students who may be in transition, weighing whether to come out, or generally attempting to navigate their experience, the social and musical aspects of band membership have an enormous impact on their ability to live and music authentically. Educators, including myself, need to be more wholly aware of their policies, section dynamics, the workings of their band organizations (if applicable), and be willing to lend a listening ear to students yearning to speak. I will be forever grateful to each participant who generously provided valuable perspectives and selflessly offered their multifaceted stories. It is my hope that the voices and perspectives offered here will

join the growing chorus of musicians, music educators, and world citizens calling for a more just, compassionate, and enriched society.

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Social Media Posting

Dear Reader,

My name is Justin McManus, and I'm currently a doctoral student in music education at Boston University as well as an assistant band director at the University of Notre Dame. I want to be as efficient as possible with your time, so I'll keep this as short as I can!

Throughout my coursework and into the dissertation stage, I have been challenged to think about whose voices are being left out of the dialogue in music education. I have been unbelievably fortunate to work with some amazing students throughout my time in the marching band world, several of are transgender. Through both formal and informal conversations, my eyes have been opened to the myriad experiences that many of these students face in their respective programs/situations. Marching band as an ensemble seems to provide numerous events and interactions that may be experienced as affirming or challenging to one's gender identity and/or gender expression in terms of the musical, social, and institutional elements of one's participation. In diving into the scholarship, I've noticed a growing body of research literature in the area of choral/vocal education, but almost nothing related to band (particularly marching band). As such, the current working title of my proposed project is titled "The Lived Experiences of Transgender and Gender Expansive Collegiate Marching Band Members."

My hope through this dissertation is to, as both an educator and student, better understand the experiences of students who were members of collegiate marching band programs who are transgender or gender expansive (e.g., individuals who are transgender, non-binary, genderfluid, gender-nonconforming, or genderqueer). I also wish to encourage discussion and critical reflection within the field for instructors and leaders at all levels within the marching band activity to examine their own practices and the culture of their programs with trans students in mind.

In order to ensure anonymity, all participants will be given pseudonyms. Additionally, all identifying information will be generalized (e.g., rather than your school name, we might use a generic acronym such as UMWU to stand for Upper-Midwestern University or something similar depending on region). All other names of individuals mentioned throughout the narratives (e.g., directors, other band members) will be given pseudonyms as well.

In recognition of the power dynamic inherent with a director speaking with a student, my goal is to speak with folks who have since graduated from a college/university, and have been separated from their previous institution for 1–4 years. The scope of the present study would cover woodwind, brass, and percussion players. Participation would consist of approximately 3 interviews of approximately 1–2 hours each via a videoconferencing platform (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime, Skype), allowing for

additional time based on individual situations. Participants will also be invited to journal freely about their experience, as well as reflect further on their recollections through self-interviewing. I will also encourage participants to bring items or documents such as video/audio recordings of band memories, photographs of one's time in band, concert/show programs, etc.

Lastly, I understand as an individual who is not transgender (as well as my status as a graduate student and band director), I arrive at this proposed project with a great deal of privilege. My aim in choosing a qualitative, narrative study is to hear and honor the voice of the participant, and the writing of each story will happen as a partnership during which the participant will have complete control over what is written/included and the manner in which it is presented. If you are interested in being a part of this study, please fill out this [Qualtrics form](#). Data entered into the form is securely stored as part of an official Boston University account. Additionally, the link itself has been anonymized and will not track personal information. After a two-week recruitment period, I will email potential participants regarding next steps as well as those not selected.

My deepest gratitude for your consideration!

Respectfully,

Justin McManus
Doctoral Candidate, Music Education
Boston University
Jmcmanu3@bu.edu

Dissertation Supervisor
Bruce Allen Carter, Ph.D.
Visiting Research Faculty, New York University
Dissertation Advisor, Boston University
carterbruce@me.co

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval

Charles River Campus Institutional Review Board
25 Buick Street, Room 157
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
T 617-358-6115 / www.bu.edu/irb



Notification of IRB Review: Exemption Determination

November 4, 2020

Justin McManus, M.M.
College of Fine Arts
School of Music
855 Commonwealth Ave
Boston, MA 02215

Protocol Title:	The Lived Experiences of Transgender and Gender Expansive Collegiate Marching Band Members
Protocol #:	5726X
Funding Agency:	Unfunded
IRB Review Type:	Exempt 2 (III)

Dear Mr. McManus:

On November 4, 2020, the IRB determined that the above-referenced protocol meets the criteria for exemption in accordance with CFR 46.101(b) 2 (III). Per the protocol, The purpose of the proposed study is to better understand the lived experiences of transgender and gender expansive college marching band members. The exempt determination includes the use of: Consent Script, Interview Questions, Recruitment Letter, Social Media Post Script, Qualtrics Survey:
https://bostonu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Xca9QQ4EtNNXBH.

Please note the following:

- Any changes to the protocol that may alter the exemption determination must be reported using the [Clarification Form](#).
- Your study qualifies as Exempt using limited IRB review criteria, as such any breaches in confidentiality or privacy must be reported to the IRB using the [Event Form](#).
- Per [Boston University guidelines](#), in-person interactions with research participants may occur only after approval from the BU Office of Research at this time.

If you have any questions, please contact Shayne Deal at 617-358-6116.

Sincerely,

Shayne C. Deal, CIP
Senior IRB Analyst
Charles River Campus IRB

cc: Bruce Carter, Ph.D.

Appendix C: Qualtrics Recruitment Form

Boston University

Thank you for your interest in being a participant for a narrative study titled "The Lived Experiences of Transgender and Gender Expansive Collegiate Marching Band Members."

The aim of this dissertation is to, as both an educator and student, better understand the experiences of students who were members of collegiate marching band programs who are transgender/gender expansive. I also wish to encourage discussion and critical reflection within the field for instructors and leaders at all levels within the marching band activity to examine their own practices and the culture of their programs with trans students in mind.

Please note that all information entered into this form will be kept strictly confidential. Any potentially identifying names or institutions will be given pseudonyms throughout the data collection and storying process.

Please click on the arrow below to begin the survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail me at jmcmnu3@bu.edu.



Boston University

Name

Age

Graduation Year

Institution Name

Instrument

E-Mail Address

May I contact you via the e-mail address provided to follow up regarding your interest in participating in this study?

Yes

No

Using as much or as little space as you would like, please tell me about yourself!



Appendix D: IRB-Approved Interview Protocol

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

PARTICIPANT CODE: _____ DATE: _____ INTERVIEW #: _____

Understanding the fluid nature of interviewing, the lists of questions below are intended to serve as guides for conversation and may be presented in a different order depending on participant. Additionally, questions may be skipped at the request of the participant at any point. Questions will be separated and organized according to the participant for whom and session at which the questions were asked.

INTERVIEW #1

- 1) What name pronoun(s) would you like me to use during our interviews and communications? Regardless of your answer at this point, please feel free to change your response(s) throughout the process. We will select a pseudonym for the final document.
- 2) What is your birth month and year?
- 3) If you're comfortable sharing, can you tell me more about the institution at which you marched? The institution will be given a pseudonym later, and any identifying information (e.g., the school mascot) will similarly be altered. The following may be helpful for us to discuss, but please let me know if there's something I've missed:
 - a. State and city/town
 - b. Approximate undergraduate student population
 - c. Division of athletic competition, if applicable (e.g., NCAA Division 1-FBS)
- 4) In what month/year did you leave the university at which you marched (this could be due to completing your degree or any other reason)?
- 5) What was your major or degree program? Feel free to speak about any secondary majors, minors, etc.
- 6) How would you describe your current occupational/educational status?
- 7) How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?

- 8) Do you consider yourself a member of a particular religion or faith tradition/practice? If so, how would you describe your relationship with that religion or faith tradition/practice?
- 9) How would you describe your gender? Is this the same way you described your gender during your time as a collegiate marching band member?
- 10) What instrument(s) did you play in marching band? Were you involved in any other musical organizations, ensembles, or activities throughout your college experience?
- 11) Are you still musically active? If so, how and in what ways?
- 12) What was your housing situation during college? For example, were you on or off campus (or both)? Did you have a roommate or roommates at any point?
- 13) Were there any campus resources or organizations available at your university for transgender and/or gender expansive students? What was your relationship, if any, with those resources or organizations?
- 14) How would you describe the structure of your marching band? Feel free to be as specific or general as you would like. It may be helpful to discuss aspects such as band size, its relation to the athletics program (if applicable), the hierarchy of both the student and staff leadership, physical spaces in which you made music, and how you would characterize the marching and musical styles.

INTERVIEW #2

(With the understanding that a transcript of the first interview will be provided before the second occurs)

- 1) Did you have a chance to review the transcript from our last interview? If so, is there anything you would like to add, change, or discuss further?
- 2) Thinking about your college/university campus in general, were there any spaces or environments in which you felt able to most authentically express your gender? Were there spaces or environments in which you felt uncomfortable or unable to authentically express your gender?
- 3) Let's think back to our discussion regarding your marching band structure from our last interview. Can you walk me through your regular rehearsal and performance schedule?
- 4) How would you describe the relationship between your band membership and your gender identity and/or expression?
 - a. Were there aspects of the social (e.g., friendships and relationships with other band members), cultural (e.g., band-wide or section traditions), musical (e.g., instrument choice, repertoire selections), or structural elements (e.g., attire, rules, or rehearsal procedures) of the band program that you experienced as affirming of your gender?
 - b. Were there aspects of the social (e.g., friendships and relationships with other band members), cultural (e.g., band-wide or section traditions), musical (e.g., instrument choice, repertoire selections), or structural elements (e.g., attire, rules, or rehearsal procedures) of the band program that you experienced as challenging or difficult related to your gender?
- 5) What role, if any, did your marching band peers play in your social and musical experiences throughout your collegiate experience?
 - a. Band-wide?
 - b. Within your particular section?
 - c. In another organization within the context of the band program (e.g., a band fraternity or sorority)?
- 6) Do you have a favorite/least favorite memory that involved making music as a college marching band member?
- 7) What impact, if any, has your marching band experience had on your social and/or musical experiences since leaving your college/university?

INTERVIEW #3

(With the understanding that a transcript of the second interview will be provided before the third occurs)

- 1) Did you have a chance to review the transcript from our last interview? If so, is there anything you would like to add, change, or discuss further from either the first or second transcripts?
- 2) What role did the marching band play in your overall college experience? For instance, was your band membership one organization among many of which you were member or did it take up a significant amount of your time?
- 3) Can you tell me about your family and what your relationship with them was like during college? How is that relationship today?
- 4) What advice might you give for directors, staff, and student leaders to help them create a more inclusive environment for transgender and gender expansive students?
- 5) In what ways, if any, do you predict your past marching band membership as impacting or influencing your future social and/or musical experiences?
- 6) What advice might you have for a younger version of yourself, walking into your college marching band for the first time?
- 7) Is there anything else you'd like me to know or be aware of that is important to your story as a former collegiate marching band member?

JOURNALING PROMPT

In addition to our time together during our interview sessions, I invite you to engage in some informal journaling using either voice recording (e.g., iPhone Voice Memos App), a word processing program, or both. Between interviews, I would encourage you journal freely about the items listed below (in addition to any others you may think of). Please feel free to journal as often as you would like, with as much or as little detail as you feel comfortable sharing. After each entry, please e-mail the file to jmcmanu3@bu.edu. The transcripts of those journal entries (if transcribed from voice to text) will be shared with you for accuracy in addition to interview transcripts. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time with questions or concerns.

- What are your reflections on the interview process itself? What are the thoughts and feelings you may have about participating in a project like this?
- If you have been thinking in more detail about a particular experience, memory, or thought we discussed during our last interview session and would like to write/talk through or elaborate upon that item in greater detail.
- If it helps to have a few prompts/topics to think about, these may be of use:
 - o The experience of leaving high school and beginning college. What surprised you? What were some positive and negative experiences of being a college student you had as you started your post-secondary career?
 - o How your musical interests, tastes, and expression(s) evolved throughout your life, through college.
 - o How your band and non-band friendships evolved and developed throughout your college experience. Similarly, how your relationships with band instructors/staff evolved and developed.

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