Student Identity in the Secondary Orchestra Classroom: An Ethnographic Study

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Student Identity in the Secondary Orchestra Classroom:

An Ethnographic Study

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Student Identity in the Secondary Orchestra Classroom:

An Ethnographic Study

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
Meadows School of the Arts
Southern Methodist University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Music
with a
Major in Music Education

by
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Identity formation, as a critical process during adolescence, has been found to impact the musical and non-musical lives of students. As students rise to secondary education in the United States, they are navigating complex intersections of identity and the presentation of those identities within complex social environments. Marginalized communities are navigating many of these identities with a lack of support from those in their lives, whether from family, friends, peers, teachers, coaches. The historic underrepresentation of people of color, women, and LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Western Classical Tradition adds another layer of complexity to student identity in the orchestra classroom. High school orchestra student survey participants (n=98), and interview participants (n=6), enrolled at a large senior high school in Texas described their identity and related orchestra experiences. Analysis of survey data provided insight into student perceptions of identity, identity affirmation, self-concept, and safety in orchestra. Interview thematic analysis revealed three themes related to student identity in orchestra: student self-concept, creating connection with others, and the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Teachers have the power to create an environment and culture that affirm student identities. The goal of this study was to understand which identities orchestra students present and do not present in the orchestra classroom, which identities they feel affirmed in, and to provide insight into how this affirmation occurs in secondary education.
Keywords: identity formation, identity affirmation, music education, high school orchestra, musicians
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Status Model</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Self-Concept</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Influence</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Styles and Approaches</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison and Competition</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE OF STUDY</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHOD</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Participant Vignettes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Survey Respondent Demographic Information ................................................................. 17
Table 2: Orchestra Ensembles ........................................................................................................ 18
Table 3: Survey Respondent Academic and Musical Information ................................................ 19
Table 4: Interview Participant Demographic Information ............................................................. 21
Table 5: Interview Participant Academic and Musical Information .............................................. 22
Table 6: Percentage of Students That Felt Safe at School and Orchestra by Race ..................... 33
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Percentage of Students That Believe They Are Good at Their Instrument

by Orchestra Class.................................................................30

Figure 2: Percentage of Students That Believe They Are a Musician

by Years Playing Instrument..................................................32
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The ways we view and present ourselves in the fabric of our communities is one of the most personal and nuanced aspects of the human experience. Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and occupation are several socially recognized areas of identity that drive the way we relate to others in our society. Navigating the intersections of many identities and how they inform our sense of self is a constantly changing and growing process from infancy through adulthood (McLean & Syed, 2015). Adolescence marks a time of great change in the process of identity formation; children are exposed to new expressions of self and often explore these within the crucible of today’s high schools. Identity formation during adolescence and in the context of the United States’ secondary education music classrooms continues to be of interest to researchers, and a growing number of studies attest to this important time in a child’s life for psychological development (Evans & Liu, 2019; Parker, 2014; Scalas et al., 2017).

The school community has been shaken many times during the past few years. The COVID-19 pandemic has understandably robbed us of in-person connection and instigated a mental health crisis we continue to see the effects of today (Rucsanda et al., 2021). Mass gun violence in schools is on the rise (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022), which has created more barriers in the learning environment and necessitated a mental and social “armoring” in the classroom on top of the general anxiety created by the issue. In addition, children are seeing the United States government wrestle with policy on several areas intimately based on and related to identity (Adejumo, 2021; Hess, 2017; Ripani, 2022). Reckonings for racial equity led the Black Lives Matter movement and antiracism work are causing many to reframe their concept of privilege (Dunivin, 2022).
The United States continues to struggle with its own identity as it grapples with patriarchal, racist, homophobic, and transphobic traditions among others. The concept of “the other” continues to be applied to a host of identities in ways that alienate marginalized populations and maintain status quo. In the classroom, this has necessitated overdue work in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging; particularly for people of color, women, and the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and additional gender identities and sexual orientations) community (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Kosciw et al., 2014).

The 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) created through executive order by the Obama administration, supported undocumented children in the United States in finding work and pursuing citizenship. However, the Trump administration targeted and attempted to end DACA in 2017, leading to a future of uncertainty for undocumented children in the United States that continues today as DACA awaits further judicial review and legislative action (Rascón-Canales et al., 2020; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2022). Aggressive policies from the latter administration have also systematically targeted immigrants to the United States, only adding to fear among members of this community, firmly cementing immigrants’ status as “the other” (Butler, 2021)

Adolescents in the United States are constantly navigating these events and issues in our schools, places where they are exposed to a variety of identities that may differ from theirs. Teachers have the power to create safe and respectful environments and facilitate meaningful relationships in the classroom and support their students as they form and express their identity within the current context.
High school music programs, particularly in ensemble-based environments, are often praised for their ability to foster human expression and connection. Students may feel their music class is the one place they can reveal who they truly are amongst a series of lecture-style classes, textbook readings, paper notetaking, and multiple-choice tests. Although many music teachers take pride in the inclusive and supportive environment they create in their classroom, there is more beneath the surface of the faces we see in our rehearsals. Who is truly in the orchestra classroom, and what are their stories?

As a staple of the music education tradition in America, the school orchestra represents an environment with rich potential for student identity growth and interaction. Orchestra programs have existed in schools for almost a century, and, in many secondary schools, service a large population of students on campus. Responding to recent research as well as community and cultural changes, school orchestras may be releasing their grip on the Western Classical Tradition, embracing more culturally responsive pedagogy and modern forms of music making to the benefit of their students.

In a period of great importance for identity formation, and in an environment so integral to its shaping, high school orchestra students need to be supported in their exploration and expression of identities. To impact change, teachers and administrators must understand the identities that students are and are not bringing to the orchestra classroom; which identities they feel do and do not feel affirmed within that context; and how this expression is or is not supported by classroom structure and environment. This study aims to begin the process by describing student perceptions surrounding identity in the high school orchestra classroom.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Individual identity formation as a process has fascinated researchers in the field of psychology since the beginning of the twentieth century. Psychologist Erik Erikson’s identity status model has established itself as central to identity research and continues to sponsor the genesis of new understandings surrounding identity formation (McLean & Syed, 2015). Erikson inspired study in this area beginning with his theory of eight stages of psychosocial development, which was later expanded on by James Marcia in 1996 to the four identity statuses of the identity status model (“Identity status model,” n.d.). A narrative account of identity formation has also gathered support, especially through the work of David McAdams (McLean & Syed, 2015).

Existing research suggests that identity formation takes place continuously through all life stages and through unique phases (Evans & McPherson, 2015). Self-concept is an evaluation of self, emerging at infancy, and observed through all life stages that is intimately connected to identity formation. Self-concept relates how we see ourselves within our unique context to the outside world (McLean & Syed, 2015).

Music programs represent an important social part of the school experience and inherently bring with them the conditions for molding self-concept and identity. An understanding of how identity develops in the music classroom is crucial to informing music pedagogy.

Identity Status Model

As a widely accepted model for understanding identity, the identity status model grew out of Erik Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development in the 1950s. The fifth stage of the eight stages of psychosocial development, identity versus identity confusion, is the starting point for much discourse surrounding the identity status model (McLean & Syed, 2015). James Marcia
continued to cultivate this theory, introducing the four identity statuses: moratorium, foreclosure, diffusion, and identity achievement ("Identity status model," n.d.; McLean & Syed, 2015). Moratorium status is characterized by identity exploration but no commitment to an identity, foreclosure status by commitment to an identity without further exploration, diffusion status by lack of identity exploration and commitment, and identity achievement status by both identity exploration and commitment ("Identity status model," n.d.). Erikson also believed that humans experience different processes of identity development at all life stages which he distilled to four levels: ego identity, personal identity, social identity, and identity synthesis. Ego identity is the understanding of self that allows one to conceptualize their own continuity over time. Personal identity represents one’s beliefs and goals as they relate to relevant roles and positions within a culture. Social identity is the expression of identity related to a larger group. Finally, identity synthesis is the process by which one creates an adult identity valuable to society, incorporating established childhood identities (McLean & Syed, 2015).

**Self-Concept**

Adolescence and early adulthood are believed to be points of extensive identity formation in a person’s life (McLean & Syed, 2015). During this time, people begin to experience contradictions in the self and process their experiences to arrive at an identity expression. Self-concept has been recognized as an aspect of identity development that is present beginning in infancy and continues to play a role in identity formation of adolescents as they accumulate more experiences and responsibilities (McLean & Syed, 2015). The American Psychological Association defines self-concept as “one’s description and evaluation of oneself, including psychological and physical characteristics, qualities, skills, roles and so forth. Self-concepts contribute to the individual’s sense of identity over time” (American Psychological Association,
2022). In studying self-concept and self-esteem formation among junior high school students, Scala et al. (2017) cite self-concept as a major study within the field of psychology including “feelings of self-confidence, self-worth, self-acceptance, and competence formed through experience and strongly influenced by attributions about one’s own behavior and evaluations from significant others” (Scala et al., 2017, p. 764). Together, these understandings of self-concept link it to the formation and expression of identity and define self-concept as reliant on assessment of oneself and perspectives from others.

Researchers have developed tools to study identity as it relates to several content areas to arrive at the above understanding of the processes involved in identity formation. In studying identity within a specific content area, it becomes necessary to create tools that examine characteristics of identity within the unique social context of that area. For example, researchers have all attempted to study identity and its related subjects within the context of academics, athletics, and music through measurement tools such as the Academic and Athletic Identity Scale (AAIS), Music Self-Perception Inventory (MUSPI), Musical Self-Concept Inquiry (MUSCI), and accompanying Chinese translation (MUSCI-CN), respectively (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014; Scalas et al., 2017; Spychiger et al., 2009; Petersen & Camp, 2016). These studies have used and tested tools to gather data on the intricacies of individual and social identity formation in their corresponding content areas.

**Musical Self-Concept**

Supporting the theories put forward by Erikson, Shouldice (2020) found compelling evidence that identity beliefs and self-perception were in the process of formation as supported by the change and malleability of these constructs demonstrated throughout a 12-week study of fourth-grade students in the music education classroom. The fluidity of identity observed in the
study led Shouldice to develop a beliefs/effort/outcome cycle to describe identity formation, in which initial effort leads to a task outcome that can be socially judged or compared, ultimately influencing the student’s musical self-concept. The work of this study aligned with previous research findings that indicated that self-concept was influenced by social comparison, appraisals from significant others, and mastery experiences (Shouldice, 2020).

Parker (2014) describes social identity development in high school mixed choirs as an eight-step process. For the study, Parker interviewed 36 participants from three midwestern high school mixed choirs about their social identity. After coding the interviews, Parker used grounded theory to generate a temporal matrix of adolescent social identity development as it occurs in the choir classroom. The categories of this matrix include: choosing to try out and remain involved; being chosen; singing with others; being part of a team; acknowledgement and accomplishment; pride; “who I am;” and a desire to give back. Between the categories of being chosen and singing with others emerged conditions aligned with the formation of cliques and egos which Parker said impedes the movement to teamwork (Parker, 2014).

Students’ identity development has several implications for the music education classroom in areas of representation, motivation and achievement, life-long music making, and social and group identity constructs. The process of adolescent identity formation has been observed in the high school choir classroom (Parker, 2014), the elementary general music classroom (Kelly-McHale, 2013; Shouldice, 2020), and the high school orchestra classroom (Evans & Liu, 2019). Identity formation is heavily reliant on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality; all these characteristics have meaning as defined by our communities and have become key avenues by which we relate parts of ourselves to others.
Teachers must recognize the power that creating a classroom that is diverse, equitable, inclusionary, and accessible has in supporting their students’ identities.

**Teacher Influence**

Current education research supports culturally responsive pedagogy, and academics in the music education field have sought to provide related strategies for the music teacher to implement in the classroom (Lind & McKoy, 2016). Kelly-McHale’s (2013) case study revealed that first- and second-generation music students experience disjuncture between what they learn in the music classroom and the music they interact with outside the classroom. The four students interviewed came from families that immigrated from Mexico and felt that the use of Spanish translations of English songs in the elementary general music classroom, while well-intended, did not honor authentic Latinx music traditions (Kelly-McHale, 2013). Kelly-McHale concluded that music education that solely recognizes Western notation as “music” can marginalize traditions of music making that focus on rote learning strategies.

When traditions beyond Western Classical music are not taught, students may feel that music-making traditions from their families and communities are not valued in the classroom. Even when curricular goals pointed towards students’ application of general music class concepts to their musical experiences outside of the classroom, the assumption that musicians are those who can read and write music had a significant impact on elementary students’ musical identity (Kelly-McHale, 2013). Students from Kelly-McHale’s study attested that they did not use the musical concepts they learned in class in music-making outside of class. In addition, the tools used to make music in the general music classroom traditionally are not reflective of professional performer-musicians’ tools including beginning repertoire, Orff and Kodaly instruments, and solfege, which can inhibit transfer outside of the classroom (Kelly-McHale,
2013). When music was defined for participants as being able to read and write music notation, and perform on specific conventional instruments, three of four students in Kelly-McHale’s study reported that they did not consider themselves to be musicians. When placed in context, these findings point to beliefs about musician identity formation that extend beyond the classroom. For example, one of the students from this case study shared that “her father played ‘some songs without looking at the notes’” (Kelly-McHale, 2013, p. 208), representing a potential dissonance with the student’s constructed definition of being a musician.

**Musical Styles and Approaches**

Woody et al. (2021) observed that school music is built on a public performance model that is not common for musical activities that undergraduate music students engage in on a regular basis outside of school. In this study, music majors identified the likelihood of singing along with recordings as a musical activity above all other surveyed music practices, including attending a concert performance, singing in a choir, and playing an instrument in a community or church ensemble. The difference was even more pronounced for non-music majors, who were about twice as likely to listen to music on headphones, compared to singing in a choir (Woody et al., 2021).

Popular musical styles and learning styles that accompany these have been observed to be underrepresented in the general music classroom (Kelly-McHale, 2013), even though studies recommend that children be encouraged to make music of their preferred styles through learning methods beyond Western notation literacy acquisition (Woody et al., 2021). Woody et al. found that first-year university students tend to classify music they like as good music. Concurrently, there were several instances in the study where perceived musical quality and preference were not correlated. In these cases, students may have relied on stereotypes of musical styles to define
the quality of music, such as classical music, having a higher perceived quality than pop music (Woody et al., 2021). Woody et al. point to previous research supporting their finding that students’ interests, competency beliefs, and perception of musical value are connected to their ability to interact with music of their preferred style. In addition, when students are offered instruction that aligns with their musical preferences, it may serve to raise engagement and help support individual identity expression (Woody et al., 2021). A democratic process of music making, such as allowing students to choose music and learning through authentic music learning methods for each tradition, also supported the creation of a musical identity (Parker, 2014).

**Motivation**

What drives motivation and achievement in the music classroom? Students’ identity development and motivation seems to be connected to their perceptions of so-called “innate talent” and the role of hard work. Woody et al. (2021) found that across both music and non-music majors, perceptions of music being a given talent versus a skill that can be improved was consistent and varied across both groups (Woody et al., 2021). Fourth-grade music students in the study also expressed the thought that musical ability is an innate talent, despite the teacher’s belief in and classroom practice of supporting universal human musicality, or the idea that all humans are capable of learning and making music (Shouldice, 2020). If teachers buy in to the “talent myth,” they may see their job as finding and teaching musically talented young people. On the other hand, teachers that accept that musical skills can be learned and grown may shift the goal to trying to serve all students, regardless of initial ability (Woody et al., 2021). In support of universal human musicality, the music teacher may find success in fostering students’ musical identity so that students grow to feel that they are musicians (Shouldice, 2020).
Motivation has been shown to be promoted by success with appropriate challenges. Accordingly, the music teacher must set appropriate goals for the student (Shouldice, 2020). Evans and Liu (2019) studied the self-determination theory applied to the orchestra classroom. The self-determination theory, as it relates to motivation, is affected by meeting psychological needs or experiencing psychological frustration. The researchers explored three psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. They found that practice time, intentions to continue participation, and self-esteem were all predicted by psychological needs satisfaction. To support successful experiences in the classroom, the researchers recommended that the teacher consider creating unique ways to practice—such as pod practice or development of an individual practice schedule, offering collaborative experiences, recognizing difficulty as part of the process, and highlighting achievement (Evans & Liu, 2019).

**Comparison and Competition**

Judgement and comparison have been found to be socially influenced processes that impact students in the music classroom. Shouldice (2020) found that when significant people such as teachers, family, friends, and peers give positive feedback to music students, it can positively boost their self-concept. She also found that comparison between students can lead to negative self-concept in the music classroom.

While competition can serve as a form of extrinsic motivation for many music students, the process of comparison and judgment inherent in competition can negatively impact motivation and the development of musical self-concept. Students that participated in a karate-belt system used to reward demonstration of performance objectives placed student achievement in a constant view for students and fostered a negative comparison; students developed negative self-concepts based on this comparison (Shouldice, 2020). For example, one of the students that
placed value in the belt system said, “I was the only person who tested and didn’t get my belt” (p. 530), a decline in positive self-concept was observed for this student following this experience. Another student shared the experience of playing a wrong note and the accompanying feelings of embarrassment due to perceived judgment from other students (Shouldice, 2020). These responses demonstrate the impact comparison and judgment have on defining a student’s musical self-concept.

Long-term identity and sustained high amounts of practice were shown to lead to higher musical achievement through a longitudinal study of children’s musical identity published by Evans and McPherson in 2015. In this study, student performance on the Watkins-Farnum Performance Scale (WFPS) was higher for students who had a long-term commitment to a music identity and practiced heavily in the first three years of study. Long-term commitment to a music identity is a student’s view of themselves as musicians in the future, especially stretching beyond formal education. The biggest influences on students expressing a long-term music identity were an established and visible instrumental program in the school and prior experience playing a musical instrument before introduction in the school (Evans & McPherson, 2015). Shouldice (2020) also found that moving away from the previously mentioned talent myth can help support life-long music making identity.

Social Identity

The eighth category of Parker’s (2014) temporal matrix, the desire to give back, was supported by social experiences present in the high school choir classroom. Student responses showed that choir’s function in creating a social identity extended beyond the choir itself to giving back to larger communities including family, friends, and the public. For example, one participant shared that, “It is important for us to do this because someone really wants us to sing
Students also develop a social identity within the music classroom, especially in group ensembles (Parker, 2014; Evans & Liu, 2019). From Parker’s research in 2014, collected responses pointed to several classroom practices and environmental factors that encouraged students along in the process of social identity formation within the high school choir classroom. Students shared that opportunities for accountability, risk-taking, honesty, and openness to learning in new ways were staples of the classroom and became the defining characteristics of a choir student and part of the ensemble in a social sense (Parker, 2014). Excerpts from student responses revealed that students felt that “Choir is a place to belong” (Parker, 2014, p. 26) and that the time spent together working towards the same goal encouraged deep connection between choir members. Students took pride in the routine work, successful performances, representation of their larger school community, and praise from others. When students were asked what choir meant to their personal identity, students positively responded that it led them to develop new inter- and intra-personal skills and offered new experiences (Parker, 2014).

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are beginning to move towards including belonging as an essential part of enacting social justice for marginalized populations, including people of color, women, members of the LGBQTIA+ community, people with disabilities, and people of low socioeconomic status. According to Vincent Adejumo (2021), diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in businesses can achieve the goal of diversifying staffing without creating an environment where people of color feel that they belong. This can quickly lead to
environments where marginalized communities are expected to assimilate to the current culture of the business, ultimately perpetuating the same unjust systems (Adejumo, 2021). Hess (2017) addresses the importance of work in music education that goes beyond euphemisms such as “diversity” and uses direct language to enact change. Hess says that the topic of race must be a conversation in the music classroom, especially within the predominant Western Classical Tradition (WCT) model of music instruction that has served as a basis for public school music education in the United States. She advocates for using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a tool for viewing and modifying music education practices that are silent or undiscussable (Hess, 2017).

Research related to culturally responsive pedagogy has shown that the structure of the music classroom has important implications for marginalized communities, particularly for students of color and undocumented students (Lind & McKoy, 2016; MacLeod & McKoy, 2012; Ripani, 2022). This includes using multiple modes of instruction, such as notation and aural learning processes, and representation in classroom experiences and resources. Teachers must account for a long-standing history of exclusion from Western Classical music making in America, especially to support equity and justice in the music classroom. According to Jones and Chappell (2022), orchestra in the state of Texas has a history of creating racial barriers for Black students. They cite the delayed integration of Texas All-State ensembles and school ensemble competitions. When interviewed by Jones and Chappell, retired orchestra director, Karen McAfee recollected:

[I] can remember having friends that looked like me, a lot of friends that looked like me, but I can remember having some really good friends—people that I would call my friends—that didn’t look like me. That was pretty cool, you know. So, I think for sure that music can kind of transcend some of this divide. (Jones & Chappell, 2022, p. 200)
McAfee’s response shows that as a child, she noticed the racial identities of those in her orchestra and felt racial integration in orchestra was an important and meaningful event (Jones & Chappell, 2022).

Academic research surrounding identity formation and self-concept in the music education classroom has long-lasting impacts on representation, motivation in the classroom, long-term identity formation, and social and group identity formation. Creating an environment that positively supports adolescents and young adults as they navigate this process may raise student engagement in music education and contribute to a long-term music identity. These changes could support students participating in formal music education for a longer period of time, addressing the issue of attrition in music programs, as well as prepare students to be life-long music makers. Ultimately, the continued study of identity and related concepts of self-concept and self-esteem in the music education classroom will offer new perspectives on students’ identity formation and suggest new strategies for teaching to support musical identities.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to assess which identities orchestra students present and do not present in the orchestra classroom, which of these identities they feel affirmed in, and the process by which this affirmation occurs, to better understand the unique needs of students in their identity formation. In this study, I have gathered student perspectives to examine the orchestra classroom environment and the role identity plays in the student experience. Previous studies have examined identity formation in adolescents, musical identity formation, and student experiences and perceptions in the orchestra classroom; however, no study to date has examined the intersection of these aspects of the secondary orchestra experience.
CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Participants

Survey participants were 98 orchestra students in an orchestra program ($N=206$) at a 6A Senior High School in Texas in ninth through 12th grade. According to the most recent data, taken from the 2021–2022 academic year by the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 3,123 total students enrolled in grades 9–12 at the senior high school. The campus hosts the International Baccalaureate (IB) program for the school district, which enrolls students beginning in the ninth-grade year. Ninth-grade and 10th-grade enrollment for the school, comprised entirely of IB students, were 185 and 195 respectively in the 2021–2022 school year. For the entire campus, grades 9–12, gender distribution was approximately 50 percent female and 50 percent male. Approximately 34 percent of the entire population was eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. The school had a minority enrollment of 74.4 percent with the following distribution by race: 31.6 percent Asian, 27.7 percent Hispanic, 25.6 percent White, 11.2 percent Black, 3.7 percent two or more races, and 0.2 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native (NCES, n.d.).

All students in the orchestra program were invited to participate in a 28-question online survey about student identity and the student experience in orchestra (see Appendix A). Survey respondents were asked to provide general demographic information, including pronouns, gender, race, ethnicity, age, disabilities, and additional identities. Table 1 shows the demographic information for survey respondents. Female students and Asian represented the majority of survey responses in the gender and race demographics respectively. Only 13 students identified as Hispanic. Most students were 16 or 17 years old, which is reflective of the majority 11th- and 12th-grade enrollment at the school. Respondent-provided pronouns included he/him ($n=31$), she/her ($n=56$), they/them ($n=2$), she/they ($n=1$), he/they ($n=1$). Seven students did not provide
pronouns. In the disabilities field, one student listed dyslexia and another student listed ADHD.

In additional identities, four students contributed identities: Bisexual, Aromantic-Asexual, Christian, Musical Composer, Musical Arranger, and Game Developer.

**Table 1**

*Survey Respondent Demographic Information*

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>18 Years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. Respondent-provided identifiers for gender, race, ethnicity, and age are listed with the respondent size \( (n) \) out of 98 total survey respondents \( (n=98) \). “No response” includes participants that did not complete the field or responded, “Prefer not to answer.”

aNon-binary gender identities included non-binary, bigender, and genderfluid. bOther races identified were “Indian” and “¾ Ecuadorian, ¼ Dominican.”

In the orchestra program, all students are placed into one of five orchestra ensembles, based on ability level, except for the ninth-grade orchestra, which enrolls all ninth-grade string players entering the program. In rare situations, ninth-grade students may audition into higher level ensembles and students may be moved out of their ability level ensemble to avoid a schedule conflict. All students in ninth and 10th grades are candidates in the district’s IB program. In this study, orchestra levels will be designated by a letter (Orchestra A, Orchestra B, Orchestra C, etc.), with Orchestra A being the most advanced group and Orchestra D being the least advanced group. Orchestra E will represent the ninth-grade ensemble which does not fit into the ability level hierarchy.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orchestra Ensembles</th>
<th>Survey Sample Size (n)</th>
<th>Percentage of Orchestra Class</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Average Years Playing Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra A</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>17 Years</td>
<td>6.5 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra B</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>6.3 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra C</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>5.7 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra D</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>5.3 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra E(^a)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>14 Years</td>
<td>4.9 Years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Orchestra class respondent information is provided. Survey sample size presents the number of students in each class that responded to the survey. The percentage of orchestra class
represents the percentage of survey respondents out of the total enrollment for the class by orchestra. Average age and average number of years playing orchestra instrument are also provided for each orchestra. Orchestra classes are listed by descending level of ability.

*aOrchestra E is a ninth grade only ensemble that does not fit in the ability hierarchy.*

Survey respondents were also asked to provide academic and musical identifiers including grade, orchestra class, instrument, years playing, and extent of private lessons. Table 3 shows these identifiers. In this study, years playing orchestra instrument were grouped according to expected experience based on the district model for instrumental music. In the district, students begin instrumental music instruction in sixth grade. At the time of the survey, a student in ninth grade or 10th grade would have been playing for three to four years and a student in 11th or 12th would have been playing for five to six years. Any students that began instruction on their orchestra instrument prior to sixth grade would have played for seven or more years. This structure also groups together current ninth- and 10th-grade IB students that transferred to the campus.

Table 3

*Survey Respondent Academic and Musical Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent-provided identifier</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orchestra Class*</td>
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<td>Orchestra A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respondent-provided identifier</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra B</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra C</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra D</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra E&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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**Instrument**

<table>
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<th>Instrument</th>
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<td>Cello</td>
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<td>Bass</td>
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</table>

**Years playing<sup>c</sup>**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years playing</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3–4 years</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>5–6 years</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>7–12 years</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Respondent-provided identifiers for grade, orchestra class, instrument, and years playing are listed with the respondent size (n) out of 98 total survey respondents (n= 98). “No response” includes participants that did not complete the field or responded, “Prefer not to answer.”

<sup>a</sup>Orchestra levels are listed from highest ability. <sup>b</sup>Orchestra E is a ninth-grade-only ensemble that does not fit in the ability hierarchy. <sup>c</sup>Years playing are specifically the number of years playing their orchestra instrument and are grouped according to a pattern of instruction based on the district model: ninth- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students (3–4 years), 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students (5–6 years), and students that began before school instruction started (7–12 years).

In the survey, students indicated whether they would be interested in participating in an in-person interview to share more about their experiences. From those that indicated interest in the interview, six students were purposively selected for a maximum variance sampling based on the identities shared in the survey. Selected students participated in an individual, semi-
structured interview with the researcher, centering on several question stems that allowed
students to expand on their identities and experiences (see Appendix B). Table 4 shows interview
participant demographic identifiers including pronouns, gender, age, race, and ethnicity. Buka,
also listed “ADHD” under disabilities. The older ages of the interview participants coincide with
participant grade levels. Student academic and musical information is also shown in Table 5,
including grade, orchestra class, instrument, years playing and extent of private lessons and were
also considered to achieve a maximum variance sample. While Orchestras A, B, and D are
represented in the sample, Orchestras C and E are not, due to a low positive response on the
survey asking about interest in participating in the interviews. The researcher is less involved in
instruction for Orchestras C and E, which could have impacted students’ comfortability sitting
for an interview.

**Table 4**

*Interview Participant Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buka</td>
<td>She/her</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Two or more races.</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>He/Him</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>She/her</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Prefer not to answer.</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendon</td>
<td>He/Him</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>He/they</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>They/them</td>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Interview participant demographic information is listed for each participant, including
pronouns, gender, age, race, and ethnicity. A purposive sample of participants were invited to
participate to achieve maximum variance.
aInterview participants’ self-identified pronouns also contributed to a maximum variance sample. 

Two students used she/her, two students used he/him, one student used he/they, and one student used they/them.

**Table 5**

*Interview Participant Academic and Musical Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Orchestraa</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Years Playingb</th>
<th>Private Lessonsc</th>
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<td>Viola</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Orchestra B</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Orchestra D</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendon</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Orchestra A</td>
<td>Cello</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Orchestra A</td>
<td>Viola</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Orchestra A</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Interview participant academic and musical information is listed for each participant, including grade, orchestra class, instrument, years playing and extent of private lessons. A purposive sample of participants were invited to participate to achieve maximum variance.

aOrchestra levels are listed from highest ability. bYears playing are specifically the number of years playing their orchestra instrument and are grouped according to a pattern of instruction based on the district model: ninth- and 10th-grade students (3–4 years), 11th- and 12th-grade students (5–6 years), and students that began before school instruction started (7–12 years).

cInterviewees shared their experience with private lessons which could have taken place inside or outside of school. dRoss did not respond to this question on the survey but described his lesson experience in the interview.

**Interview Participant Vignettes**

Buka knocks at the door to join rehearsal, just a few minutes late. It’s not because she lacks punctuality; she’s scheduled orchestra during her one free period: lunch. Buka has strong
STUDENT IDENTITY IN SECONDARY ORCHESTRA

academics, is an engaged viola player, is deeply involved in her community, especially at church, and is a leader in multiple campus organizations, such as the club she started to gather fellow musicians to play at long-term care facilities in the area. Her teachers see her as responsible, kind, hardworking, optimistic, and supportive towards her peers. Right now, she’s leading an orchestra officer meeting as president of the council about an upcoming social she has spearheaded to invite incoming orchestra students to campus.

Henry sits in the bass section, quietly observing the classroom, calm and collected, or perhaps vigilant. He greets his section members with a smile as they set up for rehearsal. Class commences, and the teacher notices laser-like focus from Henry; it is clear Henry is listening carefully, thinking critically, and frequently taking notes in his music. In fact, he might raise his hand to answer the next question. His brother sits across the room in the violin section, happily chatting and laughing with his peers. His teachers remember the day he chose to continue orchestra over football, and they are so happy that he stayed in the program. He has been a true leader and team player in every orchestra he’s been in. Always a polite and friendly classmate, his hard work and perseverance are contagious. Every once in a while, Henry has an expression of true joy on his face, but it quickly evaporates, guarded once more. Henry just sent an email to his teacher, a mark of a responsible high school student. He will be missing class to visit a military academy on Friday as a prospective cadet.

Jennifer enters the classroom with a friend, talking about what happened in first period. The two of them take their violins from their locker and head over to their seats. First violins. They had started in the second violin section but decided to ask the teacher to place them in the first violin section. They were ready to work hard; being in the first violin section would put on some pressure, but it would be super motivating. The teacher asks the orchestra what they did
over the weekend. Jennifer tells her friend what she was up to, but she probably won’t raise her hand to tell the group. She can always tell the teacher about her weekend later. The teacher sees Jennifer bring a smile and excitement to her section, which is so difficult early in the morning. She is not afraid to ask questions and is polite and respectful in doing so.

Brendon is sitting in the orchestra room during his free period, playing the fourth movement of Elgar’s *Cello Concerto*, as he does every day. He’s thinking his friend, a fellow cellist, also working on Elgar, will come by. They always bounce ideas off each other and provide a listening ear. He’s also got some bowings to figure out for the Tchaikovsky *Serenade for Strings*. As section leader in Orchestra A, he is both diligent and humble in leading his section. Brendon runs over his schedule for the next few weeks. He is accompanying the choir competition on Friday, has a lesson on Saturday, then plays in the youth orchestra on Sunday, there’s an orchestra officer meeting next Monday, and of course he is hosting the cello club at his house for a rehearsal tonight. The teachers sit in their offices, happy to hear Brendon practicing after a long day. Brendon has always stood out to the teachers as dedicated and mature. His family is very invested in music, and the first time his teachers met him was at a festival where he played a duet with his brother. His teachers were ecstatic to hear that he was pursuing music as a second major or minor after graduation.

Ross is sitting in the viola section a few minutes before class starts. He is intently focused on his string quintet part, confidently working through a passage several times to eliminate the tiniest errors. He is used to this process. He never received private lessons, perhaps because his family didn’t see the viola in the same way he did. Even so, they supported him in the ways they could. Anyway, he had figured out how to teach himself in the absence of a private teacher. He made the All-State after all, right alongside students in the competitive local viola studio. Ross’s
teachers didn’t know that he composed outside of class or ran a practicing video social media page; he was content to focus on the orchestra music. As his peers come in, they call out to him. He pauses, smiles, says a greeting, laughs, and then returns to his work. In rehearsal, Ross’s teachers notice the expression in his music making as well as the intention with which he approaches each piece.

Carter joyfully takes their bass out of their locker. They’re already talking with the other bassists before they’ve gotten to the other side of the room. Carter’s teachers could tell you that Carter brings a certain levity to rehearsal, not disrespectful by any means; rather, a positive aura that radiates to other students. Carter moved from Orchestra B to Orchestra A at the semester after being one of a few students to audition into the region orchestra. They have a knack for working diligently towards a goal and having fun while doing it. Joining the higher ability group has been an easy transition both for their bass technique and their connections with peers. After working on their homework, Carter takes a break to listen to some of their favorite music, metal.

Materials

An online survey hosted through Qualtrics was used to collect student responses about their identity and their experience in orchestra (see Appendix A). This survey included 14 personal information and demographic questions that asked for student name, pronouns, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and grade. Open-ended responses were included in this section for participants to disclose disabilities and other personal identities. Information was also collected about each student’s orchestra ensemble, orchestra instrument, years playing, non-orchestra instruments, and extent of private lessons. Students were then asked the degree to which they agreed with 21 questions pertaining to musical self-concept and identity affirmation using a five-point Likert-type scale. Finally, students were asked to answer six short answer questions that
allowed participants to expand on identity-related experiences. These questions asked students about music practices outside of school, impactful experiences in the orchestra classroom, and musical self-concept. All questions were optional, and responses were de-identified to preserve anonymity. Four music educators teaching middle school orchestras checked the survey for reliability and did not have any edits for the survey following review. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to analyze quantitative data from the Likert-style questions and quantified data from the short responses in the survey.

As previously mentioned, following administration of the survey, six participants were selected from those who agreed to participate in an interview with the researcher to achieve a sample of maximum variance. The researcher used a handheld audio recorder and a laptop computer running Microsoft Word dictation to simultaneously record and dictate interview responses. Recorded audio from the interviews was transcribed using Temi AI transcription services. NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to assist in coding, analyzing, and developing themes from both the survey short responses and the interviews.

**Procedure**

This study brought together elements of ethnography and phenomenology in its design. The researcher studied the phenomenon of identity formation and affirmation of the participants, including both the personal and musical identities and their formative processes. The intersection of these identities in the experiences of adolescents within the context of the orchestra classroom were explored to understand how students navigate these identities together. The researcher and students’ situation within this particular high school orchestra community was considered to examine the culture of the community and provide necessary background for exploring student experiences and the formative aspects of identity.
A mixed methods approach was used to collect and process data, including a survey offered to all students in the program, and interviews conducted with a small sample of survey participants. Parent consent and student assent or consent was gathered by paper form sent home with all orchestra participants for both the survey and interview components. The form outlined the topic and structure of the study, potential risks, ability to opt out, and contact information for the researcher (see Appendices C–F). An invitation to complete the survey was provided verbally, by an online post on each class’s Google Classroom site, and by email to participants and parents. Online posts and emails included a link to the survey and copies of the assent and consent forms. Invitations again outlined the topic and structure of the study, anonymity of responses, ability to opt out, and contact information for the researcher. Participants were provided information ensuring equitable access to the survey; students had access to Chromebooks provided by the school and could use district Wi-Fi to complete the survey.

Participants were initially given two weeks to complete the online survey, and late responses were taken up to two weeks after the deadline. A follow-up email with a reminder and details of the study was sent before the survey end date. Results of the survey were then exported to Microsoft Excel, de-identified, and analyzed.

Following the survey, selected students were invited in-person and by email to participate in the interviews after confirming by consent and assent form. Individual interviews took place over the course of a week, after school, in the researcher’s office in the orchestra room. After careful consideration, the researcher determined that although there may exist a power dynamic in holding interviews in the office, the comforting environment was preferable to other public spaces available. The researcher notified participants that the interview would be audio recorded.


and that they could withdraw at any point without penalty at the beginning of the interview. Participants were invited to ask questions at the beginning and end of the interview.

The interview was semi-structured using a series of questions designed to allow students to expand upon survey responses and reveal a more personal narrative. The initial questions were designed a priori and allowed the researcher to set the topic while giving the student space to provide their most authentic narrative. Student responses were recorded using an audio recorder and dictated in Microsoft Word running on the researcher’s laptop.

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed using Temi AI transcription service, and the researcher reviewed each recording and transcription to address any errors. Participants and individuals mentioned in the interviews were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. A transcript with highlighted direct quotes was provided to each interviewee to check for reliability. Transcripts were then uploaded into NVivo, where the researcher began the process of coding responses line-by-line to identify common themes across all six interviews. The coding process was inductive by nature; the researcher created detailed codes for all information provided by the interviewees in response to the interview prompts. The researcher then merged related codes from across all interviews and arranged the codes within categories, which then informed the synthesis of themes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Survey

Students were asked in the survey to provide demographic and personal identifiers including pronouns, gender, age, race, ethnicity, grade, disabilities, orchestra class, orchestra instrument, years playing orchestra instrument, instruments played outside of orchestra, and extent of private lessons (see Appendix A). A field was also provided for students to include
additional identities. These initial questions allowed the researcher to examine Likert-style and short response questions in relation to student identities.

Students expressed their beliefs on musical self-concept, musical identities, and belonging in various environments through Likert-style questions, and expanded on: 1) musical practices outside of school; 2) beliefs about musicianship; 3) times they felt valued; and 4) inspiration to pursue music through the short-answer questions on the survey. Responses to both Likert-style and answer prompts revealed trends regarding student identity, student musical self-concept, and identity affirmation in many environments, including the school orchestra.

**Student Musical-Self Concept and Orchestra Class**

When separated by orchestra class, the percentage of students that agreed to the statement “I believe I am good at my instrument,” answering either “strongly agree” or “agree,” ranged from 38% to 80%. Orchestras’ class levels were designated by a letter in order, with the most advanced ability orchestra being Orchestra A, and Orchestra E representing the ninth-grade ensemble, which is not ranked by ability. The lowest percentage of agreement with the above statement was found in Orchestra E, the ninth-grade orchestra. The average of agreement with the statement, “I believe I am good at my instrument” for each group from highest to lowest percentage of agreement leads to the following order according to orchestra ability rank: Orchestra C (80%), Orchestra D (67%), Orchestra A (61%), Orchestra B (50%), and Orchestra E (38%) (Figure 1).
Figure 1

Percentage of Students That Believe They Are Good at Their Instrument by Orchestra Class

Note. Averages of student agreement including answers of “strongly agree” and “agree” are shown for each orchestra class in order of highest ability level beginning with Orchestra A.

*aOrchestra E is the ninth-grade orchestra, which does not fit withing the ability level hierarchy.

Gender and Identity Affirmation

Analyzing responses to questions dealing with identity revealed that students generally felt that they belonged, felt free to express themselves, and felt that teachers created an accepting classroom environment. Female students (n=57) represented 60% of the respondents, male students (n=34) represented 36% of the respondents, and non-binary students (n=4) represented 4% of the respondents. When asked if they felt the need to hide parts of themselves at home, male and female students tended to disagree. Both female and male student groups had a median of “disagree” and a mode of “strongly disagree.” Responses of both groups indicated that
students did not feel they needed to hide parts of themselves at home. However, both the median and mode responses on the same question from students that identified as non-binary \((n=4)\) were “strongly agree.” When asked about their need to hide parts of themselves at school, male students generally disagreed, but female and non-binary students most frequently answered “agree.” All students had the highest frequency of disagreement with the statement “I have to hide parts of myself in orchestra;” however, non-binary students \((n=4)\) most frequently answered “neither agree nor disagree.” While non-binary student responses about having to hide parts of themselves was most positive for the orchestra classroom, these students never answered “disagree” nor “strongly disagree”. These students appeared to believe that they had to hide themselves or at best that they felt indifferent within their environment. Overall, male students answered that they could express themselves authentically in all three environments, while female students felt they could express themselves most authentically at home and in orchestra. Non-binary students generally did not feel they could express themselves authentically at home or at school, and felt neutral about orchestra class.

**Student Musical Identity and Years Playing Instrument**

Student responses to the statement “I believe I am a musician,” when grouped by years they had been playing their orchestra instrument, suggested a positive trend as number of years playing increased. Responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were analyzed. For analysis, the researcher grouped “years playing” by common grade-level boundaries in the high school. Ninth- and 10th-grade students \((n=18)\) typically had been playing their instrument in school orchestra three to four years, 11th- and 12th-grade students \((n=54)\) for five to six years, and students who started studying their instrument prior to school orchestra \((n=28)\), seven or more years. This grouping also allowed responses from IB students transferring to the school in ninth
and 10th grades to be isolated and examined. Responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were included to represent student agreement across the sample. Students who began playing their instrument prior to sixth grade—when school orchestra was first offered had the highest percentage of agreement with the statement, “I am a musician,” at 89% (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Percentage of Students That Believe They Are a Musician by Years Playing Instrument*

![Chart showing the percentage of students that believe they are a musician by years playing instrument.](image)

*Note.* Student responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were grouped by years of playing instrument: three to four years, five to six years, and over seven years. For analysis, the researcher grouped years playing by along common grade-level boundaries in the high school.

Following the district’s instrumental music progression, students in ninth-grade and 10th-grade students (*n*=18) would have played their instrument three to four years, 11th- and 12th-grade students (*n*=54) for five to six years, and students who started studying their instrument prior to school orchestra (*n*=28), seven or more years.
**Safety in School and in Orchestra**

Students were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements, “I feel that school is a safe place for me,” and “I feel that orchestra class is a safe place for me.” Using “strongly agree” and “agree” to represent agreement with these statements among all respondents, the percentage of the overall sample that felt safe at school was 63%, and the percentage that felt safe in orchestra class was 86%. When examined by student-identified race, White students had the most disparity between perceived safety at school and in orchestra. Students that identified as two or more races, or as White, collectively answered that they felt less safe in school than their Asian and Black or African American peers (Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Percentage of Students That Felt Safe at School and Orchestra by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-Identified Race</th>
<th>Percentage of students that feel safe at school</th>
<th>Percentage of students that feel safe in orchestra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian (n=53)</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American (n=4)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races (n=8)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (n=26)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total student response (n=91)</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages of respondents that answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to the statements “I feel that school is a safe place for me,” and “I feel that orchestra class is a safe place for me,” are listed by race. Data includes only students that responded to the statement (n=91) and a total percentage of agreement is included for all respondents.
Interview Themes

As previously mentioned, following the survey, six students were selected to participate in the interview phase of this study. Nine initial questions, as well as related follow-up questions, were posed during the interview (see Appendix B).

Following the interviews, coding and thematic analysis of student responses were generated through an inductive process to allow a natural and constructive generation of themes from codes. The researcher coded line-by-line in detail before organizing codes into categories and finally analyzing categories to develop themes. This process revealed three themes connected with student identity affirmation in the orchestra classroom: 1) student self-concept; 2) creating connection with others; and 3) the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Each of these themes was prevalent in the interviews of all six interview participants.

Student Self-Concept

Student self-concept was the most frequently coded theme from the interviews, demonstrating that the ways students construct an identity both in and out of orchestra class have meaning in their personal narratives surrounding orchestra. Responses related to student self-concept tended to center on the ways the students viewed themself in relation to a musical identity as well as their overall perception of self.

Forming a Musical Identity.

Interview responses on forming a musical identity could be grouped into the following categories: experiencing music, music and feeling, types of motivation, the ideal musician, and life-long musicianship. Responses in each of these categories contributed to an overall picture of how students view themselves musically, and how this forms a unique musical identity. Two of the interviewees specifically described a musical dimension of their identity, unprompted. For
example, Buka stated, “In middle school, being in orchestra was like my, like identity, I guess… Since I was so involved, I was playing multiple instruments.”

*Experiencing Music.*

During the interviews, students talked about their musical experience through descriptions of the musical activities they participate in, the ways they think about music, and the characteristics of a musician in general. They described engaging with music through performance—both individually and in a group, through composition, improvisation, and music appreciation. Volunteering and performing in religious contexts were significant musical practices as well. Students recognized a complex relationship between their self-concept of musicianship and the need to view their music making through a growth mindset and to not be so hard on themselves. For example, when asked what he would like his classmates to know about him, Ross shared the following perspective:

> I think one of the things that they would want or I’d want them to know is that I'm probably just like them, if not worse whenever it comes to just committing to like, practicing or anything. Because a lot of the times whenever I'm playing, like anyone that would come in would just be like “Oh, you probably practiced a lot.” And I'm like, “I kind of touched this like a week after, I stopped… And it's just like, a really nice experience to relate on. And like, we're all just slackers sometimes.

Brendon also spoke to the importance of not being so hard on himself, saying, “I always thought of like criticizing myself when it came to making mistakes. But I realized that, you know having fun while making these mistakes and like, it really brightens up… rehearsing.” Musical preferences of WCT, movie soundtracks, rock, and metal styles were personally meaningful for students. When asked what music they would like to make in the future, Carter said “maybe like
metal. I don't know, that's like, that's what I normally listen to a lot.” Henry shared that he would consider playing jazz on his bass after recounting a positive experience playing in middle school jazz band.

**Music and Feeling.**

Music making and feelings were tightly interwoven. Students frequently talked about their enjoyment in making music and the positive environment of the orchestra classroom that allowed them to express themselves. Making music led to feelings of joy, gratefulness, happiness, and freedom. Brendon shared that music was a way to relieve stress, saying, “But I think in general, a lot of times, what I do is, if I’m feeling stressed from everything related to school and I don’t really know what to do, sometimes I pull out my cello.” Ross shared a similar sentiment, saying “Honestly, I used orchestra as like a way to just, take away my stress.”

Students also described emotional struggles that they experienced in orchestra class and in competition. The doubt and lack of confidence that some students experienced affected their enjoyment and quality of music making. Continuing her thought about her orchestra identity in middle school, Buka shared that while virtual learning and the transition to senior high school had shaken her confidence, she felt that her musical identity was coming back: “I think my identity is slowly starting to come back. So, a lot of it was, I actually lost a lot of confidence in my music, my musicianship.”

While some students identified the negative impact a lack of confidence had for them, others shared that recognition of successes and positive self-concept helped them regain their confidence. Jennifer shared that after her orchestra director placed her in the first chair, she felt proud of her sound and could sense that her teacher and community were proud of it as well. In Jennifer’s words, “I just sounded like really good. And I was like super proud of myself and so
was she… And like, the audience heard it too.” When asked by the researcher how she felt in the moment, Jennifer said, “I felt good. I felt very like, confident.”

**Types of Motivation.**

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation played distinct roles in each student’s mindset and view of success in orchestra. Sources of intrinsic motivation included valuing hard work in making progress towards a goal, having a growth-mindset, and reflecting on the experience. For example, Brendon talked about an experience he had with a piece he was having trouble connecting to, and the impact that hard work had on his outlook, saying:

Initially I, I really didn't like it. But I think once I put 100% of my energy into it, into learning how it's supposed to go, into learning the style in which we're supposed to play it, it really helped me understand more about a lot of the older composers we learn about… And I think that in itself helps translate into other music we play.

The interest sparked for Brendon was reflected in other students’ views on working to achieve a collective goal in orchestra. Students’ mindsets about making music had a large impact on their experiences in orchestra class. Statements from students in which they were unmotivated or felt pressure to achieve corresponded with feelings of disconnection both socially and musically. However, students’ positive mindsets were connected to successful outcomes. As Jennifer said, “If you think you can do it, you will do it, but if you just have like a negative mindset, then you’re probably not gonna do the best.”

Sources of extrinsic motivation included motivation from peers, positive feedback from others, and attaining perfection, and, most notably, competition, which played a complex role in students’ orchestra experience. When describing extrinsic motivation from others, students described quick interactions with teachers and peers where they felt praised for their work or
pressured to achieve more. Competition was occasionally successful in pushing students to achieve, especially in auditions; however, most students, even those that found success through competition, felt that competition was in some way damaging to them as musicians. Ross experienced this when competing for a seat in an All-State orchestra, saying, “I would like, hyper fixate on one little mistake that I can't get right, which would cause a lot of the other problems to just worsen.” Brendon shared, “Because there's kind of this perfectionistic approach, when you get to a certain level, that's very discouraging, unless you put in the efficient hours.” Jennifer shared her thoughts when being placed by her teacher in the second violin section, a placement she attributed to a lack of success. She said:

I think because, I don't know, but I always liked being a first violin, so it kind of…

Accepted, like, sorry. It kind of like made me upset when she like gave me second violin… So, like all of my first violins were there and I was just like there like, I felt like not included, you know.

When students were placed in competitive environments, they felt that their musical and personal value was attributed to rank and consequently, felt less in control of their ability to achieve.

When Jennifer sat at the back of the violin section, she felt that she did not play her best, saying that she was not under pressure like she was at the front:

Because like, I'm not like under pressure, you know what I mean?... Or like, oh, I have to do good, so I have to sound good, so everyone hears it… I feel like in the back you just like, maybe you get to hide a little bit.

Despite sharing experiences where competition was either positive or damaging for students, most interviewees dismissed the importance of competition. When speaking on the concept of rankings in seating or audition placements, these students noted that high rankings
were not important in defining the musical experience nor evaluating their worth as an individual.

*The Ideal Musician.*

When asked to envision a person playing their instrument (a deliberately undirected prompt), most students described what they viewed as a successful musician on their instrument rather than identifying physical characteristics. This led the researcher to group student statements about the characteristics of the ideal musician as they defined it.

Many students felt that the concept of ideal musician started with the self, and these students said that they saw themselves in the person they envisioned playing their instrument. For example, Brendon responded to the question saying, “A lot of times I just think of… not really anyone specific, but sometimes when I think of a piece I’ve already played, I see myself playing.” Carter responded similarly, saying “I have to think of this mostly what I can think of is relatively similar to myself or at least my image of myself.” Ross shared this understanding in the following exchange:

ROSS: I feel like, it re-, it describes who they are, because I feel if you're imagining someone, you wouldn't want to have like, you don't know anyone who relates to yourself, so how could you create a mental image of someone you don't know, I guess?

Researcher (R): Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

ROSS: So, if you're having that mental image of like, that said person, you, I think there is even a little aspect of it-you see yourself in that person.

R: Sure.

ROSS: And you might not be at your like capability to achieve it but, you wanna become that person. And if you're imagining it, I think you would take the steps to become that.
R: So, follow up question. Do you see yourself in that person you just described?

ROSS: Yeah, I can see myself in that, yeah.

Throughout the interviews, participants identified qualities of their ideal musician, including strong instrumental technique, confidence, and the ability to transcend physical constraints to engage fully with music making. When Henry shared his image of the ideal musician, he thought of his bass teacher, whom he described both physically (including the way he dressed), and musically (in terms of his technique and musicality).

**Lifelong Musicianship.**

In response to the question, “Will you be playing your instrument in ten years?”, students talked about their plans to continue music after high school. Very few responses identified the orchestra model as a sustainable musical practice after high school; rather, individual and small group performances dominated the conversation. Many students expressed value for the music profession but felt that it was not a lucrative or viable career choice for themselves. Though it looked different for each, all six interviewees saw some connection with music in their future and recognized its value alongside their primary vocation. Performing in small groups was a common desire amongst a few participants that felt that the small group setting would allow for more personal connections and more realistic opportunities alongside their chosen career paths.

**Forming a Personal Identity.**

As students navigating adolescence and the high school environment, the participants identified aspects regarding the formation of a personal identity. Overall, the role of leadership opportunities and a general concept of maturity and responsibility dominated students’ responses regarding their personal identities. Students found leadership opportunities challenging and felt that they added extra pressure; however, they also shared that leadership opportunities helped
them grow and feel involved in the orchestra program. Buka has served in orchestra officer positions throughout her time in the program, with the responsibilities of planning social events and advocating for program needs. Her leadership experience in these positions was meaningful for her personal and musical identity; it signified being an integral part of the orchestra community for her.

In referring to maturity, a few students described situations where they wrestled with their preconceptions at school or in orchestra and had to change their perspective to make progress or fit in. These students described having to armor up and control their emotions to fit social expectations. Henry, who identifies as a Black male student, felt that he had a responsibility to stay out of jail, which caused him to keep to himself and temper his excitement around others. Even when he saw playful and consensual interactions between friends at school, such as a shoulder touch, he felt he could not be near another person’s personal space. This same student shared throughout the interview that he was adjusting many of his social behaviors and that he generally felt uncertain of himself.

**Creating Connection with Others**

Interview participants consistently identified relationships and opportunities to connect with others, both musically and personally, as driving forces of their experiences in orchestra. Whereas student self-concept centered on the personal experience of the student, connection with others was concerned with how students fit within their social relationships at school and at home. Students talked about how their relationships with others supported them in their musical journeys, and specifically spoke about family, peers, teachers, and the community as important influences in their music education. Students also described barriers to connection, or
experiences that interfered with authentic connection, inspired music making, or sense of group identity.

**Connecting with Family.**

Family served as an important source of inspiration and support as students pursued music in school. Some participants shared that their parents and siblings make music, and even practices of making music with their family, describing an environment of encouragement and collaboration in colorful detail. Other participants described their relationship to significant family members that either stopped making music at a certain point or had not made music before. Regardless of the music practices of their families, students said that music had a way of tying them to their family. Brendon’s family has a strong musical background, with extended family members in Brazil involved in music making, parents that met through music, and a brother with whom Brendon makes music regularly. This student said, “I think just experiences from my family have motivated me in a way to, to enjoy music,” supporting the idea that family music making can create an environment suitable for students to cultivate their own musical identities.

Ross shared a different narrative about his family’s involvement in music. His family does not make music outside of school and, according to the student, initially struggled to see the value of pursuing music in school. Ross was able to successfully earn a seat in an All-State orchestra through multiple rigorous audition rounds despite not having a private lesson teacher like most of his competitive peers. In this way, the student worked within his family’s conception of music while achieving his goal. Although Ross considered pursuing music after he graduates, he received some push back from his family that felt he would be unable to support himself, an assumption that has caused him to shift his career goals.
Despite his family’s limited interaction with music making, Ross felt that his family was supportive of him in his music endeavors. The simple act of his family being present for his All-State preparation made the student feel seen and supported. In fact, Ross felt that his family’s background empowered his musicianship saying:

And it sort of shows you just how different people can be, and just how different your own journey is with everyone else’s. And that is more empowering to me, because it shows just how much I can become, on my journey, and show it to other people.

Family connection, regardless of family musical background, served as a pillar for students in orchestra as they navigated their own musical journeys.

Connecting with Peers.

Students’ interactions and connections with their peers were overwhelmingly positive. They described support received from peers, the power of working together in a group, and the musical connection they established by expressing though their playing. A few students identified the close-knit group that they had formed with the other players in their section. Henry described these relationships in great detail, sharing the ways his section was self-sufficient during rehearsal, the ways they talked about expressive aspects of the music, and his personal connections with the other two players in his section.

Many students saw the musical strengths that peers contributed as an exciting part of making music in a group. Ross said, “But I feel like if I'm in an ensemble I have a lot of, I have a lot more people to share my story with, and that makes the music a lot more special to me,” and Brendon said, “I had tons of fun getting to meet every one of them and learn a bit about their stories… I was able to learn about like the musical background of a lot of them there.” Both
students talked about how important it was to connect with their peers through music to better understand each other.

**Connecting with a Teacher.**

For interview participants, the teacher was crucial in the student feeling valued in orchestra and served as an inspiration. Students felt valued when the teacher had honest conversations with the student, recognized their contributions, and trusted them in the rehearsal setting. Four students offered interactions they had with their teachers that inspired them. For Henry, their teacher’s casual appearance, technical proficiency on his instrument, and compelling musicianship were inspiring. Jennifer was musically inspired when her teacher shared about a job she had playing music for movies. Brendon recounted his studies with an inspiring teacher in Brazil that encouraged deeper musical exploration. Ross explained that his teacher sharing her background including struggles affording music in a socioeconomically disadvantaged family growing up resonated with many classmates and established relatability:

[H]ow she talks about her poor background and how she talks about how like, she was more, or she is fortunate to be here. And it's really, well, I know it's really inspiring for a lot of people, because you're just looking up to someone that is teaching you, and is like, you're kind of under their wing. And to have that relatability between you and your mentor, it's really powerful.

For each of these students, the teacher created a space of acceptance and served as an inspiration for continued musicianship.

**Connecting with the Community.**

A connection to community appeared in the interviews in two forms: being supported by the community and making music in the community. Community took many forms in these
interviews including the audience at performances, social communities within the orchestra, and online communities. For two students, the response from their communities helped to support their continued musicianship and trying new things. Jennifer said that she felt that the audience could hear how good her playing was, which elicited a sense of pride and confidence that made her want to keep growing musically. Ross spoke of the power of social media, which at the time gave him the opportunity to share his practice process with peers online. This student perceived an importance and convenience of social media communities in providing a readily available connections to music appreciation and music making after high school.

Two students spoke about reaching out to a community through music making, specifically through a connection with their audience. For Ross, the audience in the concert hall was important to impress with their musical skills, while the audience at home could appreciate the personal message expressed by the student. Buka has extensive experience making music at church alone and in a group. While she did not feel like her church community pushed her to grow as a musician, she was appreciative that the environment was fun and collaborative.

**Barriers to Connection.**

Barriers to connection was a recurring subject, especially when students responded to an interview prompt asking for a time when they did not feel seen, heard, valued, or accepted in orchestra. A few students shared that their family did not engage with music the same way they did, which sometimes created a barrier in understanding what the student did. Even students whose parents played a musical instrument at one point were quick to dismiss their parent as nonmusical. For Ross, whose family does not practice music at home, his experience playing viola and his sister playing French horn in school were oddities. Over a long stretch of time, this student had been able to communicate the importance of music, even if his family was initially
united to see it. Even so, this student felt that his parents would not understand his desire to explore music a career, and for this reason he chose a different career path.

Feelings of being alone or isolated also created barriers for orchestra students. For Buka, who is part of the school’s IB program, the transition to a new campus and placement in a ninth-grade-only orchestra made them feel isolated from the parts of the orchestra program. This student said that she only got to see her older peers at concerts and that she didn’t feel like there was emphasis for her class on the social activities of orchestra that year—an experience that was particularly meaningful in later years for her.

The COVID-19 pandemic came up as a contributor to feelings of isolation. For three students, their joy of making music with others was inhibited by virtual learning and cancelled music making opportunities. Identifying the physical barrier that the pandemic and virtual learning created, Buka said, “Because also during COVID, um, um, it became really hard to like get the motivation to practice or really find joy in making music because a lot of it comes from doing it with others.” Brendon described a similar experience, saying, “I just feel like I, I wish I was exposed to a lot of these people before. I think in terms of motivation, it kind of died down a lot and, in the COVID year.” As a major source of motivation for these students, the lack of face-to-face interaction caused them to disconnect from their musical growth.

Lack of musical connection in a group was also identified as a barrier to connection. Students felt that the orchestra was at times not connected due to students being too focused on themselves or not focused enough on making music with others. Whereas the connections with peers was a great motivator for many students, instances where their orchestra section did not communicate well created space between peers.
Ross also shared a vivid experience with one of his former teachers characterized by a disconnect between perceived needs. He said that when he approached his teacher about joint pain while playing, they were dismissive and pushed the student to play through the pain. For this student, the experience was reflective of a greater issue in the musical community, a grind culture that causes musicians to ignore their wellbeing for the sake of competition.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

The importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) was prevalent throughout all interviews. Students shared meaningful experiences in orchestra that celebrated diversity and described practices that contributed to an environment of inclusion and belonging where all students are accepted and valued. A few students also mentioned the financial barriers that can be restrictive for orchestra students.

**Diversity in Music Making.**

Diversity in music making was often described in terms of the styles or repertoire played in orchestra. Almost all students expressed a desire to explore non-WCT styles of music making, including jazz, musical theater, pop, metal, and Latin rock. Similarly, students argued for the importance of including culturally relevant music in orchestra. Previous orchestra experiences that explored Indian Classical and Latin musical traditions were meaningful for students. Students said that playing music from other traditions was important for students from those respective cultures as well as students who were learning about a cultural tradition different from their own. For example, Carter said “Danza was cool cause that was more of like a Latin kind of thing and it's sort of a new style. And back in [Orchestra B], when we played um, what was it called? [name of Indian classical piece]. That was pretty cool” describing experiences in the
program with non-Western Classical music traditions. They went on to express interest in a concert dedicated to World Music.

In analyzing the interviews, the researcher noted a trend of assuming WCT and the corresponding canon of music as the status quo for orchestra. Buka and Jennifer talked about the focus in orchestra on classical or modern contemporary literature and European music respectively. Most comments coded were neutral in addressing this topic, though some students expressed their desire to continue playing classical music. When asked about music making after graduation, many students immediately gravitated to Western Classical music before sharing their interests outside that tradition.

**The Inclusive Orchestra.**

Students consistently attested to the belief that everyone is welcome in orchestra and described the diversity present in the orchestra program. Whether referring to cultural diversity or diversity of background and interests, these students felt that diversity was a strength of orchestra. This diversity had the power to bring students together in forming both musical and personal connections. Buka said she believes “that each person is important to the orchestra ensemble” and Carter said “anybody can play any instrument, anybody can be a bassist. Like you see all sorts of people whenever you go to like orchestra camps and stuff like that” demonstrating the inclusive nature they experienced in orchestra.

**Orchestra and Belonging.**

All students interviewed described an environment of acceptance and belonging present in orchestra class and many connected this to feelings of being individually valued. These students shared stories about times they were accepted by their peers and felt that they could be themselves in orchestra. Henry expressed that he felt he could be any kind of musician, that he
didn’t have to put on a façade to show up to class saying, “I’m not forced to be um, not forced to be a stoic type of musician” and “I can be, uh, you know, happy musician, a sad musician.” Brendon shared an experience where the 12th-grade students in the orchestra told him to sit first chair on his first day in the orchestra, which made him feel welcomed and valued by his peers.

Students found deep connections with peers in orchestra to the point that they considered them to be friends, family, and a community. The time spent together in both a musical and social sense created deep relationships between students. The researcher asked students if they felt that orchestra was a safe space and all students quickly and definitively answered “yes.” Ross said that the friendships developed in orchestra by nature made them feel accepted and safe. Henry described the orchestra classroom saying, “There’s like a sense of friendship that’s pervasive.”

Students attested to the role teachers have in creating an environment of belonging. Teachers were responsible of fostering a welcoming community, delivering respectful and individualized instruction, and establishing trust with students. In each of these areas, students felt affirmed by the actions of their teachers. When asked what he would like his teachers to know, Ross answered,

[Not mentioning simple mistakes made the players feel] trusted and how we're not being sort of babied around. Like, because I feel like if you just mentioned like a, entrance mistake and you just told them. Well, I feel like the person would be like “Obviously.” Like, “I realize, I played it.” And the fact that you guys don't mention and you just trust us to stop and just hold back your comment, is a lot more empowering for us because you have a trust between us and then that makes us trust ourselves even more.
This expression of trust in the student in turn boosted his trust in the teacher and ultimately his sense of belonging and power in the group.

Creating Access.

The financial burden of orchestra was mentioned in three interviews. Two students said that the price of instruments would keep them from trying new styles of music and ultimately impact their ability to continue making music in the future. Another student described the elitist system that heavily impacts competitive orchestra environments. This student said that lessons and fees for extracurricular orchestra programs were not affordable for all students and therefore created a great disparity in who is accepted and successful in competitive orchestras.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Musical Self-Concept and Musical Identity

Through Likert-style survey questions and short responses, and interview prompts I sought to encourage students to talk about experiences that surrounded how they viewed themselves musically and how they shared that with others. Results revealed that many students are developing their musical self-concept and expressing their musical identity in the orchestra classroom. While no questions directly asked students to identify a musical identity, two interviewees described a musical dimension of their identity. Other perceptions and experiences shared created a context for students experiencing these aspects of identity formation.

Multiple Likert-style survey questions were designed to capture the student’s musical self-concept, including identifying whether it is primarily a result of students believing in themselves, or because they perceive that their parents, peers, and teacher believe they are good at their instrument. Student responses to the statement “I believe I am good at my instrument” provided insight into musical self-concept as it relates to orchestra ensemble. Including
responses of “strongly agree” or “agree” to represent a level of agreement, the range of averages differed by 42 percentage points. Considering the orchestras by ability level (with comprising the most advanced players and with Orchestra E representing the ninth-grade members), the upper-level student orchestras averaged much higher than Orchestra E in their belief that they are good at their instrument. The low levels of agreement for all five orchestras highlight a need to better support students in developing their musical self-concept.

Several factors could have played a part in this result. Orchestra E includes the youngest students in the orchestra program (average age = 14 years). It is possible that students earlier on in their school orchestra experience look less favorably on their own technical and musical ability, especially with the juxtaposition of having been the most experienced orchestra students in their middle school the previous year (eighth grade), to having the least experience of all orchestra students in their high school.

Students in Orchestra E are also likely navigating the greater shift in their school environment—due to the nature of the IB program, which comprises all students in Orchestra E. These students come to this senior high school from throughout the district. This means that students living on the other side of the district, who would have attended one of the other four traditional high schools with their peers, are now traveling to a new side of the district, many miles away. This transition is defined for many by the loss of friendships from middle school, placement in a new environment, and necessity of forming new friendships. The jump from middle school to senior high school is also atypical of the traditional school progression in the district. Students would normally progress from middle school (Grades 6 through 8) to high school (Grades 9 and 10) and finally to senior high school (Grades 11 and 12), which means these youngest students are acclimating to a much more different school community. Most
students in Grades 11 and 12 at this senior high school grew up attending their neighborhood schools, and thus attended this program with the peers they have known throughout their school, with the exception of IB students that entered in ninth grade.

One interview participant, Buka, who had joined the IB program in ninth grade talked about her experience joining the orchestras at the senior high school and how she felt that it was difficult to form friendships with new people. This student, in 12th grade at the time of the study, also said that they felt isolated from the rest of the orchestra students by being placed in Orchestra E. For this student, the formation of this ninth-grade cohort prevented additional immersion in the overall orchestra community. As the youngest students in the orchestra community, and without having much knowledge of the other students, ninth-grade students may have perceived a wide gap in ability when comparing themselves to the 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-grade students. Comparison can play a large role in students’ self-concepts (Shouldice, 2020) and the results from the survey of the present study would seem to support this idea. In the interviews, a few students discussed their own perceived ability in ninth-grade compared to 12th-grade students in the orchestra.

Interestingly, the lowest two orchestras in ability level, Orchestras C and D, had the highest percentage of students that believed they were good at their instrument. While students in the highest ability-level orchestras had extensive experience and dedication to music making, they reported less confidence in their abilities than Orchestras C and D. Given the difference in response between students in Orchestras C and D, and Orchestras A and B, other factors may be more influential in building a confident musical self-concept.

Interview participants described the effect that competition and a drive to perfectionism had on their playing. Given the structure of the ability levels, students in Orchestras A and B
would likely experience the most competitive environment out of the five orchestras. This ability-focused environment may encourage comparison between peers, which in turn might influence the student’s perception of their musical ability. The student perspective Shouldice (2020) shared about earning a belt for accomplishing a goal supports this view of comparison; the student felt discouraged because they didn’t achieve what their peers had. The structure of class for Orchestras A and B tends to look different than that of Orchestras C and D. Orchestras A and B tend to spend more time rehearsing music with heavy emphasis on outside preparation while Orchestras C and D sometimes require a slower pace to provide opportunities for technical remediation. As students move from a slower pace and more individual technical attention to a traditional rehearsal setting, they may feel less seen and affirmed in their musical ability by the teacher.

The Likert-style prompt, “I believe I am a musician,” was included to look beyond musical self-concept to get directly to students’ musical identity. Similarly to the prompt, “I believe I am good at my instrument,” younger students tended to consider themselves musicians less than their more experienced peers. These results seem to echo when Kelly-McHale (2013) observed that three of four students did not consider themselves musicians. Students may have viewed “musician” as a title appropriate for those that had been playing their instrument for a long time or even professional musicians alone. When interview participants spoke about musicians that look like themselves in the classical music world, many students shifted the question to talk about what they viewed as the ideal musician. Many of these responses positioned the professional musician as the ideal musician and students took the opportunity to explain how they viewed the professional musician.
From student descriptions, their vision of an ideal musician is confident, has good technique, and is completely submerged in the music making process. Just as fewer students in Orchestra E believed they were good at their instrument, student assumptions about the confidence, technique, and musicality required to be successful at their instrument may have discouraged them from pursuing that musical identity. The concentration of positive musical self-concepts and identities in older and more experienced students in this study may represent a student-held belief they have developed confidence, high technical ability, and expressive musicality beyond that of their younger peers.

The environments described in students’ view of the ideal musician were often reflective of the traditional Western Classical concert stage. One student (Ross) distinguished between a formal concert performance and an informal “living room” performance saying during their interview:

Yeah, so for large like ensembles and like on stage, you're playing for an audience that obviously you want to like, have a good image on like, you want to sound good for them you want to sound like, you wanna do everything good for them. But, whenever you're in a living room kind of performance, I feel like you just have a lot, because, well, I mean obviously for living room performance you’d get people who are a lot more closer to you, who know you. And I feel like that component really makes you, make, really makes a difference in how you play and how like, what your intention of playing is. And I feel like, whenever you're playing for like those type of people who are really close to you, you just feel a lot more home and you feel like you're like, you don't have to rely on sounding good. You just have to rely on conveying a message through your music.
The ideal musician alluded to in this student’s response is heavily concerned with appearance, with a particular emphasis on sound quality; in fact, students may incorporate this specific cultural practice as a defining characteristic of what it means to be a musician. If teachers centered in the Western Classical tradition are not careful, students may construct a narrow definition of a “musician,” and ultimately exclude themselves from engaging with a musical identity. When students were asked whether their families make music at home and what that experience looks like, several survey participants stated that their family was not musical even though their family members did, in fact, play instruments or sing. This again aligns with the experience Kelly-McHale (2013) shared of a student that said her dad was not a musician despite playing guitar. This discounting of the musical experience can have a direct negative impact on a student’s musical self-concept and ultimately their musical identity.

Student musical identity as measured through the statement, “I believe I am a musician,” may have implications on the timing for starting students on their instrument. Orchestra classes in this particular school district begin in sixth grade, which offers students a total of seven years of formal orchestra instruction before they graduate. Other string programs across the country begin instruction years earlier and, given that students who studied on their instrument for longer seemed to demonstrate a stronger musical identity, beginning orchestra instruction earlier may help students develop this identity more thoroughly before they graduate. Access to instruction and instruments in conjunction with public school orchestra instruction is likely more readily available than access following graduation. Interview participants identified barriers in cost and access to music programs after graduation that could keep them from continuing music after they graduate. This supports starting students earlier while public school resources are available, so that they have more time to form a musical identity through school instruction.
The ways students engage in music making offer insight into the experiences students are having and in which environments that impact a musical self-concept and identity. For example, interview participants offered performance, composition, improvisation, and music appreciation as musical activities they participated in. Performing ensembles typically focus on the first of these, especially in the large group setting, yet the students interviewed were engaging with music outside of the classroom in other facets as well. Ensemble teachers may consider ways to support these aspects of music in their classroom, as well as provide opportunities for solo and small group performances to offer more contexts for students to develop musical self-concepts.

Buka shared her musical experiences in the church, which were significant practices of hers outside of the orchestra classroom. One student on the survey listed “Christian” as an additional personal identity, and a few other students shared in the short response that they sang or played their instrument in a religious setting. While the division between secular and sacred music must necessarily be distinct in the public-school classroom, teachers may consider appropriately expressing support for all students’ musical practices within this unique intersection of religious or spiritual identity and musical identity when they share. Religion and spirituality can be deep and complicated dimensions in personal identity, and related music practices may be opportunities for students to continue making music after graduation.

Students shared musical interests in their responses, indicating the importance they placed on what kind of music they played. While many students shared that they enjoyed learning music from the Western Classical tradition, other students expressed interest in learning different styles and traditions of music. This idea seemed to align with the findings by Woody et al. (2021) that students enjoyed making music that fit with their style preference and even were more motivated when learning music in modes that fit with their preferred style of music.
making. Lind and McKoy (2016) also highlighted the importance of culturally responsive teaching and choosing styles and educational experiences that were relevant to the student. As Parker (2014) suggests, a democratic process in music selection and classroom practices may encourage students to share their musical interests, allowing the teacher to shift instruction to teach in a relevant context for their students.

When talking about their music making experiences, interviewees described the importance of setting goals and framing their experiences in a positive manner to promote musical growth. The teacher may consider demonstrating good goal setting practices and modeling a healthy relationship with musical performance evaluation. For example, Henry talked about a reflection process the students complete after a performance:

I definitely think it's more of an orchestra thing because we're, um, these reflections that we are asked to do it actually. Helping look on the positive types of things help us to actually more engage with the music… Rather than, um, practice it mechanically… It helps us take it into like the musical sense and musical state of mind that it more an expression and on feeling rather than, the grinding and grit…

Henry highlights the importance of considering what went well in a performance to connect with the music, set meaningful goals, and grow as a musician. This is especially meaningful when approaching competition in the music field with students such as All-Region, All-County, All-State, scholarship, and college auditions. Jennifer’s comments about being able to achieve a goal if one has a positive mindset, as opposed to the negative outcomes from not believing in oneself, demonstrate the impact that a student’s mindset may have on their ability, or perceived ability, to achieve.
Students identified both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that encouraged them to achieve musical goals in orchestra. The intrinsic motivators aligned with the Evans and Liu’s (2019) exploration of self-determination theory in meeting psychological needs of the students. Interview participants expressed the importance of investing and driving their own musical experience as well as setting and achieving goals. Responses portrayed intrinsic motivation as a longer lasting and renewable source of motivation as opposed to extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation also formed the basis for forming connection between peers; peers that were intrinsically motivated to achieve a goal were focused on their own music making and were not evaluating themselves or their peers in relation to one another. This created the space for students to connect over the mutual experience of setting and achieving a goal in orchestra.

Extrinsic motivators shared in the interviews relied heavily on the way students compared themselves to peers or competed with others. Competition was sometimes viewed as a positive experience although it was mostly associated with isolation and pressure. While many students were aware that competition played a role in their musical journey and then dismissed its importance, comments through the interview demonstrated that students were still viewing aspects of the orchestra classroom as a competitive environment. Chair placements in professional orchestras are usually one sign of ability level; those that are of higher ability often audition and win the front seats, and the best violinists that audition are placed in the first violin section. Many school programs follow this same structure, ranking students by ability level and seating them according to their ability. When students viewed their placement as a product of competition, they shared that they were less likely to be motivated and felt they were unseen. For example, Jennifer shared her experience as a violinist and the way she felt sitting at the back of the section:
JENNIFER: I feel like if I sit in the back section, I don't really do my best.

Researcher (R): Okay.

JENNIFER: Because like, I'm not like under pressure, you know what I mean?

R: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

JENNIFER: Or like, oh, I have to do good, so I have to sound good so everyone hears it.

Jennifer also stated that she felt she wasn’t seen or valued when her teacher placed her in the second violin section, saying, “It kind of like made me upset when she like gave me second violin,” and about her friends in the first violin section, “all of my first violins were there and I was just like there like, I felt like not included.” Brendon shared about the pressure to perform in order to maintain his seating placement, saying, “I actually had to practice a lot of the music beforehand because I felt like there was this pressure on my position just because everyone around me was like working just as hard.”

The experiences shared in the interviews coincide with the downsides to merit-based seating in orchestra class. This seating arrangement does not allow students to experience different sound environments through the orchestra, connect with a variety of peers, experience multiple musical roles, or develop leadership skills. In addition, merit-based seating does not give the teacher freedom to meet the special needs of students such as proximity to the teacher, proximity classroom learning aids, or seating away from distractions. By rotating seats, the teacher can give students unique aural and leadership experiences, create a zone of proximal development for students needing support, and account for the needs of diverse learners.

Orchestra students at this senior high school will likely be exposed to a competitive musical experience at some point, such as school orchestra placement, All-Region, All-State, scholarship, and college auditions. Ross shared his experience auditioning for All-State and
described the process of dismissing the competitive aspect to focus on his own technique and musicality during the audition process, saying, “And then for All-State… a lot of the times I would repeat that phrase like, ‘I don't care. You shouldn't care about the rank. You should just care about yourself.’” This was contrary to many outside forces he cited, such as the pressure to study viola in private lessons. In opposition to this pressure, Ross said, “As soon as I made All-State, I realized that I don't need someone to help me. I mean obviously that would be like, great, but I just need myself and my own devotion to whatever I put myself into.” Carter also described the competitive environment of chair placements, saying:

I mean there's first chair and that stuff, but like the chairs don't really matter cause it's all like sort of a section and everybody's kind of like collaborating with each other versus like violins or whatever. They have, they got first desk, you got second desk and once you're, you hear a lot like with auditions like, like, oh I'm not even first desk, it doesn't even matter or stuff like that.

At some point in their personal or musical journeys, these students must have learned that the emphasis in music making was not in competition. Teachers should similarly support students in addressing competition in the orchestra setting, outlining the purpose for competition and how to process it in a beneficial way while maintaining self-confidence.

Leadership was an important aspect of personal identity formation and appeared in many interviews. It offered both a challenge and opportunity for growth has well as an opportunity for students to be more involved in the orchestra program and community. Seeing leadership as an important piece of autonomy and relatability in the self-determination theory and its importance in forming personal identity, there is likely a connection to a student’s musical identity formation (Evans & Liu, 2019). Being that leadership is not an experience unique to the orchestra
classroom, it can offer students a strong entry point in building their musical self-concept. As such, opportunities for students to be leaders, such as by rotating seating as mentioned above or by giving students an activity to complete in small groups can offer meaningful experiences for growing both personal and musical self-concept.

Feelings were an important topic in all interviews. Our students are experiencing feelings in our classroom environment that are directly related to their self-concept. Whether students were describing joy and happiness, relief of stress, or varying levels of confidence, emotion accompanied music-making experiences. Ross’s aforementioned comment about communicating emotion through performance also supports the idea that students see the relationship between music and feeling, and even perhaps view it as a vehicle for self-expression.

Life-Long Musicianship

When interview participants talked about their plans for music making after graduation, few could see themselves in an orchestra setting and no students were planning to pursue music as their main career. Large ensemble settings offer students opportunities to hone many skills, an environment for creating many connections with peers, and an instructional model that fits well with public school needs. However, it is possible that there are skills that are not being taught in the large ensemble classroom that would better prepare students for relevant music making practices after high school. Small group music making was a recurring topic when students were asked what their music making would look like in the future. In addition, students shared that previous experiences in this setting were meaningful because they allowed for deeper connections with other ensemble members. This supported the recommendations Evans and Liu (2019) made regarding the offering pod practice and smaller group collaborative experiences to help students cultivate the tools they would need to autonomously engage in this process.
The large ensemble classroom may not be conducive to preparing students for careers in music as well. This model replicates the professional Western Classical orchestra model well; however, there are many other contexts in which people make music in our communities and specifically that serve as a career for musicians. For example, Jennifer shared that she would be interested in the making and performance of soundtrack music for movies like her teacher. To find and share relevant musical careers with students, a teacher may peruse degree music offerings at local or national colleges or seek careers in their community; some connected careers include composition, sound and audio technology, free-lance performance, and education.

Although some of these careers seem out of the scope of public-school education, there are many students that graduate from our programs and continue into these fields without much understanding of them, or worse, students that graduate and do not continue into these fields even though they would be interested or successful in pursuing them. Giving students experience with a variety of musical styles is a great start, but teachers can push beyond repertoire selection to provide musical experiences with other professionals and in different environments. In addition, teachers may consider ways to communicate musical career opportunities, viability, and pathways to such careers to parents.

**Envisioning the Ideal Musician**

Interviewees were asked to envision and describe a person playing their instrument. I hypothesized that students would describe visible identities such as gender, race, ethnicity and even consider the place these identities occupy in the music world. Having reviewed previous studies (Jones & Chappell, 2022), I was aware of disparities in representation across these identities in the music profession, especially in the Western Classical orchestra tradition, and the ways those were experienced by musician. The orchestra classroom environment involved in this
study was conducive to student conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, which has led to class-wide discussions in this program about representation of POC and women. Contrary to this hypothesis, interview participants tended to describe the characteristics of a successful musician, and almost exclusively performers. Students also shared powerful statements about these characteristics originating within a person, which speaks to the self-concept and formation of a musical identity. Many participants directly connected to this ideal musician view as an identity they were actively pursuing. Students may have been primed by previous interview questions to describe characteristics, though they may have also perceived support in this classroom, to pursue their musical goals regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and other identities. Unfortunately, isolating the detailed impact of the students’ music teachers and culture of the orchestra program was not within the scope of this study.

Connection and Forming a Musical Identity

Connection with others was an integral part of students’ narratives about identity. Family, peers, teachers, and the community served as key relationships in orbit of the student. Identity expression for the student in relation each of these groups involves a complex intertwining of interactions. How each respond to the student across environments is responsible for students’ perception of support and ultimately willingness to be vulnerable. The musical experiences a student has in connection with these groups are formative in their feelings of belonging. The teacher has an important role of shaping the classroom environment as well as providing opportunities for program outreach to facilitate positive connections between themselves, peers, families, the community, and the student musician.

Family music practices and understandings of music were influential for students’ experiences in orchestra class. Brendon shared an in-depth narrative about his family’s music
practices, including those of extended family in Brazil. The following is an excerpt from that conversation:

BRENDON: Yes. Growing up my mother had always played the piano. She, has, she has stopped more recently just because she's, she's working now. So, she has less time. But I would remember like literally dancing in our living room.

Researcher (R): Really?

BRENDON: Cause I would just hear, yeah. My mother would be playing piano and I would just be outside. I don't think she'd know I was outside, but I'd just be like wandering around dancing a bit.

R: Uh-huh <affirmative>.

BRENDON: It was fun. And every time I visited Brazil, my grandfather, he had a collection of instruments. Last time I counted he had like 14.

R: Wow.

BRENDON: I mean they're all like, there's like two keyboards, 2 guitars and stuff like that. But there are like, there's a variety of instruments there and that always, to me it, it felt normal,

R: Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

BRENDON: But I realize now that it's not, not really something that everyone has.

R: Sure.

BRENDON: I think just experiences from my family have motivated me in a way to, to enjoy music

R: Yeah.
Brendon shared many family stories that demonstrated their connection with music: his mother playing piano, his parents meeting through karaoke, visiting his musical family in Brazil, and playing duets with his brother. The way he described it, music was an ever-present force in his life, completely supported by his family. Jennifer similarly talked about how her family’s band in Honduras was inspiring to her:

Researcher (R): Okay. So, tell-, so is this your uncle that has the band?

JENNIFER: It's my mom's uncle, so I don't know, that's like,

R: So, um, tell me more about this band. Like what do they play? Who's in it?

JENNIFER: Yeah. Um, it's like rock in Spanish.

R: Have you ever gotten to play with them or sing with them, or?

JENNIFER: No, they actually live in Honduras so.

R: So, have you like, have you met these family members before?

JENNIFER: Not at all.
R: No? Okay.

JENNIFER: But like, I always like dream like, oh, what if I ever get to like, play with them, that'd be cool.

R: Yeah. That would be awesome.

Even though Jennifer shared that her parents were not very musical, she was inspired by stories of her great uncle’s band to continue playing violin so she could play with them. Ross contrastingly shared how his family’s limited understanding of the importance of music coexisted with his desire to play the viola saying,

A lot of times my parents like, whenever I tell them I'm gonna continue music, not as a degree, but as like just in general like, hobby during college, they're always asking why, and I have to explain to them that, because if I had the chance, I would do music.

While Ross’s family still supported him, Ross had to define his relationship with music to them and engage with music on his own. In these cases, the family can be an encouraging and supportive force for students in their orchestra education, inspiring them though their musical practices, and even providing opportunities to make music together.

If they are not vigilant, Western Classical based ensemble teachers may take for granted the implicit understandings of this tradition, neglecting the relationships individual families and cultures have with music making. When Ross shared that his parents experienced a disconnect with the way he engaged with music, it created a moment of pause. First, it is not the music teacher’s place to assume nor require families to assimilate into Western Classical music traditions. This can easily put pressure on the line of connection between student and parent in the student’s musical experience. Second, if teachers wish to support students in sharing what they do and achieve in class with their family, it is necessary to create opportunities for families
to be offered context and the opportunity to see into the music making process. The goal of this process cannot be to change a family’s musical tradition, but instead to invite others to witness a particular tradition, in this case one based in the WCT. As in Ross’s case, family engagement in related music making practices is not a requirement for a student to feel supported in their self-driven desire to make music in orchestra.

Another question Ross’s account raises is how teachers establish connection with prospective students who are interested in joining a school music ensemble with families that might not have a frame of reference for the corresponding practice of music making. Ross worked with his family to express the importance of this type of music making to him and was able to connect on a level where he felt supported in pursuing music making in this way. Again, the teacher may consider creating opportunities open to families in the community that allow them to observe the process of learning that takes place in the classroom, attend performances and music making opportunities that demonstrate growth and achievement, and establish connection within the program’s community.

Students’ connections with peers created a sense of belonging and motivated students to achieve. For Ross, the feeling of being able to share his story with others, to demonstrate vulnerability in that way, made music making special. Ross also talked about the power of personal stories. These examples show how connection with peers directly impacted the student’s music making in orchestra. Creating an environment for peer interactions such as these is one of the most accessible ways to support students as they navigate relationships relative to participation in orchestra. This starts with creating a safe space, then encouraging supportive relationships, modeling appropriate story sharing, and finally opening space for students to
interact with their peers. Giving students the opportunity to set classroom expectations is a powerful way to foster this supportive environment.

One barrier to peer connection was expressed in Buka’s experience being placed in the ninth-grade orchestra, which made her feel isolated from the rest of the program. In creating a ninth-grade cohort for establishing peer relationships for transferring IB students at campus, significant connections throughout the program may have been overlooked. It is also important to note that Buka’s experience was also situated within the COVID-19 pandemic and a hybrid classroom with both in-person and virtual instruction. In addition to an isolating orchestra placement, Buka joined orchestra rehearsal on a virtual conference platform that only a few students attended in person. She said, “COVID it was probably the worst… Because online rehearsals and you couldn't see any faces. And I personally didn't enjoy being, didn't enjoy that year.” Orchestra socials have served as an important experience for offering connection between ninth-grade students and the 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-grade students. Buka has put forth significant effort in her role as orchestra student president to minimize this gap between grades.

**Teachers Connecting with Students**

The teacher’s relationship with the student is the most immediate way to support the student in orchestra. Student accounts of their teacher inspiring them or being vulnerable brought students further into music making and made them feel trusted and seen. Students connected most with their teacher when the teacher demonstrated appropriate authenticity. Appropriate authenticity and professionalism must coexist in this relationship; authenticity without boundaries can quickly become insincere and unhealthy over-sharing, while strict professionalism can create a barrier for students, who do not see human traits modeled by their teacher. For example, Ross’s experience of being dismissed by his teacher when sharing that he
was experiencing pain while playing demonstrates a lack of empathy on the teacher’s part. This solidified an expectation for the student that orchestra was rooted in “grind culture” or the belief in this case that achievement comes at the expense of personal health. Likely, the teacher was trying to uphold a classroom expectation, but the way they handled the experience lacked the empathy necessary to support the student. Henry, Brendon, and Ross all shared experiences that demonstrated how the appropriate authenticity of the teacher made an impact on the student’s experience in orchestra—Henry with his private lesson teacher, Brendon with his cello teacher in Brazil, and Ross with his orchestra director. Ross’s story of his teacher sharing about their own low socioeconomic background is a poignant example of how a student can connect with a teacher’s story and even see a path in music for themselves.

Sharing Music with the Community

The community and the audience had a strong influence on the students’ musical self-perception. In the WCT, which values perfectionistic qualities of a stage performance, students felt both driven and pressured to succeed. Performing in this context required a great deal of vulnerability on the student’s part, which opened them to both praise and rejection. Students personal and musical identities. While we cannot control this situation, we can help students navigate experiences of praise and rejection so that they emerge with a strong self-concept.

The virtual community described by Ross in his sharing or practice videos on social media is a new dimension of social connection to consider. These platforms can be powerful tools for students to communicate through music with a larger audience. Ross’s videos of practice sessions can help model practice strategies for students while offering a way for Ross to contribute to a global community. As Ross alluded to in stating that his practice videos are private and only accessible by approved peers on his social media platform, expressing oneself
vulnerably to a public and unknown audience opens the student up to experiences of intensified praise and intensified rejection. Modeling of proper social media etiquette by a teacher can teach students how to healthily engage this emerging community.

**The Lasting Impact of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic came up in a few interviews and represented a significant barrier for connection in orchestra. Most students’ relationships were limited during the pandemic to those at home; therefore, connections with peers, teachers, and the community all suffered through the necessary isolation as interviewees attested. Some teachers have identified an academic gap for students that were affected by the pandemic yet fail to recognize the social and emotional struggles created by that experience for students. The connections students talked about in the interviews require time to form and will continue to need time to re-form following the pandemic. With heavy attachments to expression of emotion, individual growth, and personal and musical self-concept, acknowledging the continued identity development students are navigating is crucial.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging in Orchestra**

While interviewees did not explore concepts of DEIB in relationship to their idealized musician, they certainly were thinking about these concepts in relation to the orchestra experience. This took the form of conversations about who belongs in orchestra, culturally relevant music experiences, and financial access to participate in orchestra.

Interview participants strongly believed that everyone belonged in orchestra and voiced this, saying that every student is important, anyone can play any instrument, and diversity is a commonplace in the orchestra world. These students’ teachers and other stakeholders in their music education instilled a respect for others and rule of acceptance in the classroom.
Accordingly, it is important that the teacher consider the ways they can welcome all students and create an environment where each student feels they belong. Traditional music education practices have sometimes caused teachers to assign students to a particular instrument, whether for technical reasons, such as instrument size, or social perceptions, such as gender stereotypes. Teachers may consider providing all instruments as options to students and figuring out ways to modify instruments if technical barriers exist. A student’s ability to achieve success on an instrument is an important part of the learning experience and should be considered when navigating instrument selection.

Students also identified the importance of representation in repertoire selection and musical experiences in both the survey and interviews. One recurrent example was an experience students had with a piece that combined Indian Classical and Western Classical traditions. Student experts were asked to help teach the piece and a Hindustani vocalist was brought in as a clinician to teach students about the Indian Classical tradition. A student expert was also invited to perform on dilruba, a string instrument she played outside of school, at the concert. This experience had a lasting impact on students who expressed the value of learning about music from other cultures. Carter participated this experience, learning more about Indian classical music and said, “When we played, what was it called? [Indian Classical style piece]. That was pretty cool, cause. It's like, exploring the other cultures of music and like their traditions and styles.” When introducing music from other cultures, the teacher must consult experts in the tradition and hire culture bearers to form an authentic and meaningful musical experience for the students. Involving student culture bearers is a great way of creating an environment where students feel seen, heard, and valued in orchestra.
Many survey and interview prompts elicited responses about student’s feelings of acceptance and belonging. Additional prompts about these feelings allowed for the opportunity to compare the environment in orchestra to environments outside of the classroom. Both survey and interview participants noted an environment in orchestra class that gave them more freedom to express themselves or show up as their authentic self. Looking deeper at these accounts offers important insight into how the students navigate sharing their personal identity with those they believe have earned that vulnerability. Identities serve a purpose of communicating who we are with those around us; personal, occupational, social identities all represent how we wish to be seen by the world. As such, the concept of belonging in the classroom space and community is integral to how students present themselves.

The affirmation of student genders at home, at school, and in orchestra class was at times drastically different across environments. From the survey, orchestra class was generally where students felt they were least judged and had to hide themselves the least. Perhaps unsurprisingly, male students felt heavily affirmed in all three environments; however, female and non-binary students answered more often that they had to hide parts of themselves. For female students compared to male students, the biggest discrepancy was in the school setting. Non-binary students’ responses across all environments were generally the inverse of their male peers. While only four students identified as non-binary and contributed responses, all four responses consistently supported this perception. Even in orchestra, non-binary students seemed to feel uncertain about the ability to express themselves fully. While school and home environments need to change to better support our female and non-binary students in their personal and gender identities, orchestra teachers can most directly impact change in their own classrooms. Creating welcoming and accepting environments for students of all gender and sexual identities, and
modeling support for and celebration of these identities are necessary ways for teachers to communicate their value of students with these identities.

**Orchestra as a Safe Environment**

Responses from students about feelings of safety in school and orchestra in the survey again seemed to support students’ perception that orchestra was a safer environment than the school environment as a whole. While students that identified as Black or African American did not express much difference of feeling between these environments, a larger sample size could have revealed more about this relationship. The low feelings of safety in the school environment amongst white survey participants of 25 percentage points seems contrary to society’s grappling with anti-racism, diversity initiatives, and culturally relevant teaching in education. The school studied has a minority-majority enrollment, which may represent a different community make-up for white students than they are used to in their community outside of school or nationally.

Another important note is that students at this senior high school had been considering the concept of school safety throughout the year as the school and district elicited student input on campus safety surveys.

Overall, Asian and White students in this study reported the greatest degree of safety in orchestra class. Asian students represented the greatest portion of the sample and represent the majority enrollment in the orchestra program, which could account for their high rate of agreement about feeling safe in orchestra. Students identifying as Black and African American and two or more races can use more support in this environment, especially with these two racial groups representing the smallest part of the sample. Orchestra teachers may consider finding ways to support the minorities enrolled in their classroom, especially for students of color.
The feeling of being free to be themselves in orchestra was meaningful for students and was communicated in both the survey through questions about acceptance in the classroom and in the interviews. Students stated that they felt they could be themselves in the orchestra room, but more importantly demonstrated this perception in their personal accounts. In the interviews, students expressed that the teacher was instrumental in creating an environment for students to feel accepted and valued. They can begin by helping to foster collaborative student relationships between peers. Teachers can also promote this environment by demonstrating an appropriate level of authenticity and vulnerability for their students. Authenticity and vulnerability are vehicles to establish a culture of belonging and can help students remove emotional armor that they may feel the need to wear at school or home. The trust established by this environment was particularly meaningful for Ross as he felt that the teachers’ trust in them made them feel empowered.

Orchestra students are noticing financial barriers in orchestra as noted by conversations in the interviews. Although the financial barriers to participating in orchestra or continuing to make music were only stated explicitly by three students, the fact that these ideas were shared was significant because there were no questions directly addressing this issue. Access to instruments, private lessons, and extra-curricular orchestra experiences were the three primary barriers identified in the interviews. For Ross, these barriers contributed to an “elitist” culture, observed primarily in a local youth orchestra. The elitist culture described by Ross also made an impact on the student’s musical self-concept. While this student was able to compete and be successful within this elitist context without a private lesson teacher, they referenced “impostor syndrome” and general feelings of doubt and lack of confidence in their shared experiences participating in the community. Ross also felt that it was meaningful when his teacher shared their experiences
being raised in a low socioeconomic environment because it offered an entry point for connection with students that were navigating the same issue.

The financial burden of continuing to play an instrument after graduation has implications for long-term musical identities. While teachers may recognize the importance of setting students up with skills to make music after school graduation, little research has considered how this will impact students in their long-term music making practices. The two students that identified this as a barrier also felt that it kept them from exploring new styles of music after graduation, which would limit the diversity of musical styles and traditions that students could participate in—an aspect of orchestra that students found to be important in the survey and interviews. As a field, orchestras and orchestra educators should continue to find resources and ways to remove financial barriers from participation so that all students may learn a string instrument. Barriers to examine include instrument and supply cost, private lessons, competition fees, uniform requirements, transportation, and program-wide trips, as well as the practice and event expectations that may unintentionally conflict with the financial needs of the student or student’s family.

**Recognizing the Individual in Every Student**

One of the most impactful findings from the survey and interviews was the realization that student identities are extremely diverse and many times, overlooked or unknown to the teacher. For example, the diversity of gender and pronoun usage was much more substantial than the I knew. While survey participants answered in anonymity, and only provided a general picture of all identities in the orchestra program, students that participated in interviews shared rich narratives about their many identities and intersection of those ideas as they relate to music making and their personal experiences. Stories about students’ families and musical connections
in other countries were particularly poignant. I was surprised by how much I did not know about my students, even students that I had been building a relationship with for four years. The structure of the American school orchestra, band, and choir often parallels the professional world for these ensembles, which have traditionally been didactic in nature, with one knowledgeable director and ensemble members ready to listen and learn. In addition, the size of these ensembles, particularly in public schools can make it difficult for teachers to form individual relationships with students. Both the other orchestra director and I have worked to shift this model to provide opportunities for students to drive the learning process and to create space for deeper relationships with students in the program.

The directors of this program regularly begin class with a question of the day to invite students to share their experiences, interests, and feelings. For students that may not feel comfortable sharing in front of the group, the teachers have also provided space on individual class assignments to share anything with the teacher they would like them to know. When asked in the interview if there was something the student would like their teacher to know about them, most interviewees answered “No.” At the same time, each of these students shared information with the researcher that was unknown prior to the survey and interviews. While this could be attributable to the students not seeing this information as substantial in the same way the researcher did, it could point to the necessity for deeper student to teacher relationships.

Limitations of the Study

This study aims to begin study of identity formation as facilitated by orchestra classes. The population for this study represents one high school orchestra program in the state of Texas in the 2022–2023 school year, and therefore will not provide comprehensive data representative of all orchestra programs in the state or country. Students’ responses to the survey and in the
interview, process drove the narrative of this ethnographic study. There is always a possibility that students who chose not to participate had valuable or contradictory information when compared with the responses of their peers who did participate. While the teacher’s position in the learning environment afforded added context for the culture of the program and context of the environment, there could have existed a power imbalance that might have shifted students’ views or the answers they were willing to share, especially in the interviews. At the same time students may have been more likely to share meaningful information about identity with someone they had developed a relationship with. The relationship between participants and the researcher could have also influenced which students were willing to participate in an interview. Biases were likely present because of this relationship and were mitigated by the researcher when able, in a methodical and professional manner. Although the data collected in this study were not longitudinal, the researcher’s experiences over time, and the responses gathered through the survey and interviews, spoke to a general process of identity formation and affirmation in the classroom. Further research may investigate these processes within a longitudinal context to provide a more time-specific understanding. Additional research is also needed to address identity formation as it presents in the music classroom, including (a) studies of identity formation in K–12 public music education, (b) creation of tools to measure identity in the music classroom, and (c) suggestions of strategies for teachers to implement that support positive self-concept and identity formation in the music classroom.

Conclusion

The findings of this study carry great importance for teachers that have not considered the personal narratives of their students, for teachers assuming an understanding of their students, and for teachers that are looking for ways to engage further with their students. Responses in the
survey and interviews where students shared their experiences feeling seen, heard, accepted, and valued in the classroom, particularly by the teacher, pointed to feelings of trust, connection, and recognition that the teacher established. The role of the teacher in forming bonds with their students, as well as creating an environment that encourages meaningful connections between students and their peers, parents, and community appears to be impactful for students’ personal and musical self-concept and overall identity. When students perceived a safe and accepting environment characterized by vulnerability and authenticity, they reported feeling able to express themselves, often more fully than in other environments in their lives. The impact of orchestra in secondary schools as both a classroom for skill development and a social community provides students many opportunities to navigate their own intersections of identity.
References

https://doi.org/10.1177/742715020976202


https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.53.8.1


https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2117320119

https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429418812769

https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735613514471


## Appendix A

Survey

### Personal Information

Please complete the following personal information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, Other (list below)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

The survey form includes sections for personal information and age selection. The form is designed for students to fill out their personal details and indicate their age.
Race

○ American Indian/Alaska Native
○ Asian
○ Black or African American
○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
○ White
○ Two or more races.
○ Other (Please describe)
○ Prefer not to answer.

Ethnicity

○ Hispanic
○ Non-Hispanic
○ Prefer not to answer.

Grade

○ 9
○ 10
○ 11
○ 12

Disabilities you would like to disclose (if none, leave blank):

[Blank Box]
Additional identities you would like to disclose (if none, leave blank):

Orchestra Information

Which orchestra are you in?

- Philharmonic Orchestra - Pd. 2
- Varsity Gold Orchestra - Pd. 3
- Chamber Orchestra - Pd. 4
- Sinfonia Orchestra - Pd. 5
- Symphony Orchestra - Pd. 6

Which instrument do you play in orchestra?

- Violin
- Viola
- Cello
- Bass

How many years have you played your orchestra instrument?

If you sing or play any other instruments, please list them here.
Have you taken private lessons?

- I currently take private lessons.
- I have taken private lessons, but I don’t anymore.
- I have never taken private lessons.

**Likert Scale**

Please select the best response for these questions about your musicianship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a musician.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone can be a musician.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classmates are musicians.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I am good at my instrument.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classmates believe I am good at my instrument.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher believes I am good at my instrument.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family believes I am good at my instrument.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My orchestra instrument is part of who I am.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will play my instrument after high school.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please select the best response for these questions about your learning environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that school is a safe place for me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that orchestra class is a safe place for me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel respected at school.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel respected in orchestra.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I belong in orchestra.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am free to express my individuality in the orchestra classroom.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My orchestra teachers create a welcoming and accepting environment in the classroom.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel judged at school because of who I am.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel judged in orchestra because of who I am.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to hide parts of myself at home.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to hide parts of myself at school.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to hide parts of myself in orchestra.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Short Response

Does your family make music at home? If so, what does that look like?

Do you make music outside of the classroom? If so, where does that happen, who are you with, and what are you doing/playing?

Have you ever had an experience in orchestra where you felt personally valued as an individual? If so, tell me about it.

What does it mean to be a musician?
If/when you see someone that looks like you in the classical music world, what role or job do they have?

Who or what inspired you to join orchestra?

**Interview**

Would you be open to being considered for an in-person interview to share your experience following this survey?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
Appendix B

Interview Prompts

Could you tell me about a time you really felt seen, heard, accepted, and valued in orchestra class?

• How did you feel?
• Who was with you?
• Where were you?

Could you tell me about a time you did not feel seen, heard, accepted, and valued in orchestra class?

• How did you feel?
• Who was with you?
• Where were you?
• What could have been done? How could that situation have been handled instead?

Envision a person playing your instrument. What do they look like?

Does your family make music outside of school?

• What does that look like?
• Where does this occur?
• Who is there?

Will you be playing your instrument in 10 years?

• Why or why not?
• What kind of music would you play?

If we had more time, what else would you like to learn in orchestra class?

Do you think that the music play in class covers most music making? What is missing?

Do you feel that orchestra a safe space?

• Why or why not?

Do you get to be your true self in orchestra class?

• What do you want your peers to know about you?
• What do you want your teachers to know about you?
Appendix C

Parental Consent Form: Survey

SURVEY PARTICIPATION EXPLANATION AND CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Student Identity in the Secondary Orchestra Classroom: An Ethnographic Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mr. Kelton Burnside
STUDY ADVISOR: Dr. Sarah Allen, SMU Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education

Overview
• We are conducting a research study to learn more about student identity and the student experience in the orchestra classroom.
• Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree for your child to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw them for any reason. There are no penalties if you withdraw your child, decline for your child to participate, or if your child skips any parts of the study.
• If you agree for your child to participate, they will be asked to participate in an online survey about their experience in the orchestra classroom.
• The survey should take no more than 12 minutes and can be taken on an electronic device with internet connection outside of class time. The survey will be open from Thursday, January 19th until Thursday, February 2nd, 2023 at 11:59pm.
• This study presents no known risks.
• The responses in this survey will help music teachers across the country better understand the student experience in the music classroom.

Introduction
Before you say that your child will be in this research study you need to read this form. It is important for you to understand all the information in this form because it will tell you what the study is about and how it will be done. It will tell you about some problems that might happen during the study, as well as the good things that might happen during the study. When you read a paper like this to learn about a research study, it is called “informed consent.” When you give your consent for something, it is the same thing as giving your permission. If you do not understand something in this form, please talk with one of the staff to answer your questions. Do not sign this consent form unless all your questions have been answered and you feel comfortable with the information you have read. You will be given a copy of the form to keep.

Purpose
We are conducting a research study to learn more about student identity and the student experience in the orchestra classroom. We are asking your student to be in the study because their thoughts and experiences in orchestra are important for teachers to know about when creating the classroom environment and designing instruction. All members of the [Senior High School] Orchestra program are invited to participate (210 students).
Your Child’s Rights
Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. Your child does not have to take part in this study, and it is okay to refuse to sign this form. If you agree for your child to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw your child for any reason. Deciding for your child not to be in the study, your child choosing not to complete a part of the study, or your child leaving the study early will not result in any penalty. If you or your student change your mind and want to withdraw permission, you may do so by notifying Mr. Kelton Burnside by phone, via email, or in person. If you decide to do this, all data and information will be destroyed.

Procedures
If you agree for your child to participate, your child will participate in an online survey about their identity and their orchestra experience. The survey should take no more than 12 minutes and can be taken on an electronic device with internet connection outside of class time. The survey will be open from Thursday, January 19th until Thursday, February 2nd, 2023 at 11:59pm. All responses will have names removed before data analysis.

Duration
The survey should take no more than 12 minutes and will be open from Thursday, January 19th until Thursday, February 2nd, 2023 at 11:59pm.

Risks
This study presents no known risks. The researcher is taking care to keep your child’s responses secure and confidential. Only the researchers in this study will see the responses and responses will be locked and restricted to keep others from accessing the information.

Benefits
The responses from your student’s survey will help music teachers better understand the student experience in the music classroom. This will help your student’s teacher create the best environment and instruction for them and the results of this study will greatly contribute to music programs across the state and country.

Costs and Compensation
There is no cost or compensation to you or your child for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality
The information collected about your child during this study will be kept confidential to the fullest extent of the law. However, information about your child from this study may be provided to governmental officials if necessary in the interest of public health and safety, but only to the extent necessary to satisfy the public purpose. Otherwise, only the researchers who are part of this study will see the information about your child from this study.
The results of this study may be published in a scientific book or journal or be part of a presentation. If this is done, your child’s name will not be used, and no one will know who they are. All information collected in this survey will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. All physical information about your child from this research project will be kept in a passcode-locked safe in a locked office at [Senior High School]. Digital information will be stored in an encrypted and password-protected file on an encrypted computer with password protection to keep it safe from access by people who should not see it.

**Future Use of Your Child’s Information**
The information collected about your child during this study will not be used or distributed for any future research studies. The information will be destroyed following the conclusion of the study either by digital deletion or physical shredding.

**Whom Do I Call If I have Questions or Problems?**
You can ask Mr. Burnside or any of the study staff if you have questions at any time. You’ll find their contact info below.

Mr. Kelton Burnside
Associate Director of Orchestras, [Senior High School]
Principal Investigator
[School Email Address]
[School Phone Number]

Dr. Sarah Allen
Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education, Southern Methodist University
Study Advisor
[Office Phone Number]
[University Email]

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or feel that you have been placed at risk, you may contact the SMU Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair at [Research Compliance Email] or [Research Compliance Phone Number].
**Statement of Person Obtaining Consent**

I have explained to ______________________________ the purpose of the research project, the procedures required, and the possible risks and benefits to the best of my ability. They have been encouraged to ask questions related to taking part in the research project.

_____________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_______________________
Date

**Confirmation of Consent by Legally Authorized Representative**

You are making a decision about ______________________________ being in this research study. When you sign this form, you are giving your permission for him/her to be in the study. By signing this form, you have not given up any of his/her legal rights or released anyone from liability for negligence. You confirm that you are at least 18 years of age.

Mr. Kelton Burnside has explained to me the purpose of the research project, the study procedures that will take place, and the possible risks and discomforts that may happen. I have read (or have had read to me) this consent form. I have been given a chance to ask questions about the research project and the procedures involved. I believe that I have enough information to make my decision. I have also been told my other options. I agree to give my consent for ______________________________ to take part as a subject in this research project.

_________________________________________
Signature of Legally Authorized Representative

_______________________
Date

Relationship to Subject: □ Parent □ Legal Guardian □ Other:
SURVEY PARTICIPATION EXPLANATION AND ASSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Student Identity in the Secondary Orchestra Classroom: An Ethnographic Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mr. Kelton Burnside
STUDY ADVISOR: Dr. Sarah Allen, SMU Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education

What is this study about?
We are doing a research study to learn more about student identity and the student experience in the orchestra classroom. We are asking if you want to be in this study because your thoughts and experiences in orchestra are important for teachers to know about when creating the classroom environment and designing instruction. All members of the [Senior High School] Orchestra program are invited to participate (210 students).

What are your choices?
If your parents agree, you can participate in this study if you want to. You don’t have to participate in the study if you don’t want to and there are no penalties for not participating. There is no cost or compensation for participating.
If you decide to be in the study now and you change your mind later, just let Mr. Burnside or any of the study staff know as soon as you change your mind, and you will be taken out of the study. There are no penalties for withdrawing from the study.

What will happen if you decide you want to be in this study?
If your parents agree, and you agree as well, you will be asked to complete an online survey about your experience in the orchestra classroom. The survey should take no more than 12 minutes and can be completed on any electronic device with internet connection outside of class time.
Again, you may choose not to participate, to withdraw, or to decline to answer survey questions at any time without penalty. The survey will be open from Monday, January 16th until Friday, January 27th at 11:59 pm.

☐ I give my permission participate in an online survey about my identity and orchestra experience.

☐ I do NOT give my permission participate in an online survey about my identity and orchestra experience.
Will being in this study have any risks?
This study presents no known risks. The researcher is taking care to keep your responses secure and confidential. Only the researchers in this study will see the responses and responses will be locked and restricted to keep others from accessing the information. The results of this study may be published in a scientific book or journal or be part of a presentation. If this is done, your name will not be used and no one will know who you are. All information collected in this survey will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Will being in this study benefit you?
The responses from this survey will help music teachers better understand the student experience in the music classroom. This will help your teacher create the best environment and instruction for you and the results of this study will greatly contribute to music programs across the state and country.

What if you have questions?
You can ask Mr. Burnside or any of the study staff if you have questions at any time. You’ll find their contact info below.

Mr. Kelton Burnside
Associate Director of Orchestras, [Senior High School]
Principal Investigator
[School Email Address]
[School Phone Number]

Dr. Sarah Allen
Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education, Southern Methodist University
Study Advisor
[Office Phone Number]
[University Email]

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or feel that you have been placed at risk, you may contact the SMU Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair at [Research Compliance Email] or [Research Compliance Phone Number].
Statement of Person Obtaining Assent

I have explained to _______________________________ the purpose of the research project, the procedures required, and the possible risks and benefits to the best of my ability. They have been encouraged to ask questions related to taking part in the research project.

____________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

Date

Confirmation of Assent by Research Subject

You are making a decision about being in this research study. When you sign this form, you are giving your permission to be in the study.

Mr. Kelton Burnside has explained to me the purpose of the research project, the study procedures that will take place, and the possible risks and discomforts that may happen. I have read (or have had read to me) this assent form. I have been given a chance to ask questions about the research project and the procedures involved. I believe that I have enough information to make my decision. I have also been told my other options. I give my assent to take part as a subject in this research project.

___________________________________________
Signature of Participant

Date
INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION EXPLANATION AND CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Student Identity in the Secondary Orchestra Classroom: An Ethnographic Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mr. Kelton Burnside
STUDY ADVISOR: Dr. Sarah Allen, SMU Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education

Overview
• We are conducting a research study to learn more about student identity and the student experience in the orchestra classroom.
• Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree for your child to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw them for any reason. There are no penalties if you withdraw your child, decline for your child to participate, or if your child skips any parts of the study.
• If you agree for your child to participate, they will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, in-person interview with Mr. Burnside about their identity and experience in the orchestra classroom.
• The interview should take no more than 30 minutes and will be scheduled during the week of February 13th, 2023, at a time convenient to the student outside of class time. Interviews will take place in Mr. Burnside's office at [Senior High School] and will be audio-recorded for later transcription and student review.
• This study presents no known risks.
• The responses in this interview will help music teachers across the country better understand the student experience in the music classroom.

Introduction
Before you say that your child will be in this research study you need to read this form. It is important for you to understand all the information in this form because it will tell you what the study is about and how it will be done. It will tell you about some problems that might happen during the study, as well as the good things that might happen during the study. When you read a paper like this to learn about a research study, it is called “informed consent.” When you give your consent for something, it is the same thing as giving your permission. If you do not understand something in this form, please talk with one of the staff to answer your questions. Do not sign this consent form unless all your questions have been answered and you feel comfortable with the information you have read. You will be given a copy of the form to keep.
**Purpose**
We are conducting a research study to learn more about student identity and the student experience in the orchestra classroom. We are asking your student to be in the study because their thoughts and experiences in orchestra are important for teachers to know about when creating the classroom environment and designing instruction. Approximately five students from the [Senior High School] Orchestra program will be asked to participate in the in-person interview following their survey submission to share more about their identity and experience in orchestra.

**Your Child’s Rights**
Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. Your child does not have to take part in this study, and it is okay to refuse to sign this form. If you agree for your child to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw your child for any reason. Deciding for your child not to be in the study, your child choosing not to complete a part of the study, or your child leaving the study early will not result in any penalty. If you or your student change your mind and want to withdraw permission, you may do so by notifying Mr. Kelton Burnside by phone, via email, or in person. If you decide to do this, all recordings, transcripts, and information will be destroyed.

**Procedures**
If you agree for your child to participate, your child will participate in a one-on-one, in-person interview with Mr. Burnside about their identity and their orchestra experience. Questions will expand on the survey taken by your child and will give them an opportunity to share more about their orchestra experience. The interview should take no more than 30 minutes and will be scheduled during the week of February 13th at a time convenient to the student outside of class time. Interviews will take place in Mr. Burnside’s office at [Senior High School] and will be audio-recorded for later transcription and student review.

**Recording**
The interview will be audio-recorded only. This recording will be transcribed following the interview and is important to make sure student responses are accurate. All recordings and transcripts will be stored digitally in an encrypted and password-protected file on an encrypted computer with password protection to keep them safe from access by people who should not see them. Following the interview, the student will receive a copy of the transcript to as well as themes and quotes from the interview to review for accuracy in a follow-up with Mr. Burnside. All recordings and transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the study.

☐ I give my permission for my child to be audio recorded.
☐ I do not give my permission for my child to be audio recorded.

**Duration**
The interview should take no more than 30 minutes and will be scheduled during the week of February 13th, 2023 at a time convenient to the student outside of class time.
**Risks**
This study presents no known risks. The researcher is taking care to keep your child’s responses secure and confidential. Only the researchers in this study will see the responses and responses will be locked and restricted to keep others from accessing the information.

**Benefits**
The responses from your student’s interview will help music teachers better understand the student experience in the music classroom. This will help your student’s teacher create the best environment and instruction for them and the results of this study will greatly contribute to music programs across the state and country.

**Costs and Compensation**
There is no cost or compensation to you or your child for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality**
The information collected about your child during this study will be kept confidential to the fullest extent of the law. However, information about your child from this study may be provided to governmental officials if necessary in the interest of public health and safety, but only to the extent necessary to satisfy the public purpose. Otherwise, only the researchers who are part of this study will see the information about your child from this study.

The results of this study may be published in a scientific book or journal or be part of a presentation. If this is done, your child’s name will not be used, and no one will know who they are. All information collected in this interview will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. All physical information about your child from this research project will be kept in a passcode-locked safe in a locked office at [Senior High School]. Digital information will be stored in an encrypted and password-protected file on an encrypted computer with password protection to keep it safe from access by people who should not see it.

**Future Use of Your Child’s Information**
The information collected about your child during this study will not be used or distributed for any future research studies. The information will be destroyed following the conclusion of the study either by digital deletion or physical shredding.
**Whom Do I Call If I have Questions or Problems?**

You can ask Mr. Burnside or any of the study staff if you have questions at any time. You’ll find their contact info below.

Mr. Kelton Burnside  
Associate Director of Orchestras, [Senior High School]  
Principal Investigator  
[School Email Address]  
[School Phone Number]

Dr. Sarah Allen  
Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education, Southern Methodist University  
Study Advisor  
[Office Phone Number]  
[University Email]

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or feel that you have been place at risk, you may contact the SMU Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair at [Research Compliance Email] or [Research Compliance Phone Number].

**Statement of Person Obtaining Consent**

I have explained to _______________________________ the purpose of the research project, the procedures required, and the possible risks and benefits to the best of my ability. They have been encouraged to ask questions related to taking part in the research project.

______________________________  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent  
______________________________  
Date

**Confirmation of Consent by Legally Authorized Representative**

You are making a decision about _______________________________ being in this research study. When you sign this form, you are giving your permission for him/her to be in the study. By signing this form, you have not given up any of his/her legal rights or released anyone from liability for negligence. You confirm that you are at least 18 years of age.

Mr. Kelton Burnside has explained to me the purpose of the research project, the study procedures that will take place, and the possible risks and discomforts that may happen. I have read (or have had read to me) this consent form. I have been given a chance to ask questions about the research project and the procedures involved. I believe that I have enough information to make my decision. I have also been told my other options. I agree to give my consent for _______________________________ to take part as a subject in this research project.

______________________________  
Signature of Legally Authorized Representative  
______________________________  
Date

Relationship to Subject: □ Parent □ Legal Guardian □ Other:
INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION EXPLANATION AND ASSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Student Identity in the Secondary Orchestra Classroom: An Ethnographic Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mr. Kelton Burnside
STUDY ADVISOR: Dr. Sarah Allen, SMU Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education

What is this study about?
We are doing a research study to learn more about student identity and the student experience in the orchestra classroom. We are asking if you want to be in this study because your thoughts and experiences in orchestra are important for teachers to know about when creating the classroom environment and designing instruction. All members of the [Senior High School] Orchestra program are invited to participate (210 students).

What are your choices?
If your parents agree, you can participate in this study if you want to. You don’t have to participate in the study if you don’t want to and there are no penalties for not participating. There is no cost or compensation for participating.
If you decide to be in the study now and you change your mind later, just let Mr. Burnside or any of the study staff know as soon as you change your mind, and you will be taken out of the study. There are no penalties for withdrawing from the study.

What will happen if you decide you want to be in this study?
If your parents agree, and you agree as well, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one in-person interview with Mr. Burnside about your experience in the orchestra classroom. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed following the interview and you will receive a copy of the transcript in a follow up with the researcher. The interview should take no more than 30 minutes and will take place the week of February 13th, 2023 in Mr. Burnside’s office at [Senior High School]. You will be able to schedule a time that works for you outside of class time. Again, you may choose not to participate, to withdraw, or to decline to answer interview questions at any time without penalty.

☐ I give my permission to participate in an audio-recorded interview about my orchestra experience.

☐ I do NOT give my permission to participate in an online survey about my orchestra experience.
Will being in this study have any risks?
This study presents no known risks. The researcher is taking care to keep your responses secure and confidential. Only the researchers in this study will see the responses and responses will be locked and restricted to keep others from accessing the information. The results of this study may be published in a scientific book or journal or be part of a presentation. If this is done, your name will not be used and no one will know who you are. All information collected in this survey will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Will being in this study benefit you?
The responses from your interview will help music teachers better understand the student experience in the music classroom. This will help your teacher create the best environment and instruction for you and the results of this study will greatly contribute to music programs across the state and country.

What if you have questions?
You can ask Mr. Burnside or any of the study staff if you have questions at any time. You’ll find their contact info below.

Mr. Kelton Burnside
Associate Director of Orchestras, [Senior High School]
Principal Investigator
[School Email Address]
[School Phone Number]

Dr. Sarah Allen
Professor and Co-Chair of Music Education, Southern Methodist University
Study Advisor
[Office Phone Number]
[University Email]

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or feel that you have been place at risk, you may contact the SMU Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair at [Research Compliance Email] or [Research Compliance Phone Number].
**Statement of Person Obtaining Assent**

I have explained to _______________________________ the purpose of the research project, the procedures required, and the possible risks and benefits to the best of my ability. They have been encouraged to ask questions related to taking part in the research project.

__________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent                      Date

**Confirmation of Assent by Research Subject**

You are making a decision about being in this research study. When you sign this form, you are giving your permission to be in the study.

Mr. Kelton Burnside has explained to me the purpose of the research project, the study procedures that will take place, and the possible risks and discomforts that may happen. I have read (or have had read to me) this assent form. I have been given a chance to ask questions about the research project and the procedures involved. I believe that I have enough information to make my decision. I have also been told my other options. I give my assent to take part as a subject in this research project.

_____________________________________________
Signature of Participant                          Date