

THE LESBIAN AND GAY BAND ASSOCIATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING PARTICIPATION

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Community Music

Joining a community music ensemble can provide an outlet for music making, socialization, and continued learning experiences in music education (Rowher, 2016). Higgins (2012) defines community music as (a) “music of a community,” (b) “communal music making,” and (c) “an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants” (p. 3). Furthermore, Olseng (1990) articulates that community music has shown to (a) be highly available, (b) offer freedom of expression to ensemble members, (c) facilitate active participation in the music making process, and (d) exhibit characteristics of autonomy for ensemble members. While these attributes pertaining to community music continue to evolve (Veblen, 2007), they connect meticulously with the vision statement of the International Society for Music Education’s Commission on Community Music that articulates participating in a community ensemble provides members with an outlet of artistic expression, social interaction, and cultural identity for persons at any age and ability level (Hebert, 2001; Rocco, 1986; Rohwer et al., 2012; Sheldon, 1998).

In recent years, the expansion of community music programs have taken place on an international scale with musical ensembles comprised of, but not limited to, concert bands, orchestras, choirs, jazz bands, and small chamber ensembles. The benefits of participation in community music making contributes to many cultural values such as lifelong learning, enhancement of one’s quality of life, positive socialization, creativity, and having aesthetic experiences (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Coffman, 1999; Confredo et al., 2018; Cohen, 1998; Myers et al., 2013).

Community music ensembles have been the focus of several studies (Carucci, 2012; Cavitt, 2005; Coffman, 1996, 2006, 2008, 2009; Mantie, 2012; Rohwer, 2016, 2017). Specifically, research on motivation for joining an ensemble have focused on children (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007; Hewitt & Allan, 2013; Lamont et al., 2003), adolescents (Kuntz, 2011; Patrick et al., 1999), older adults (Coffman, 2002, 2008; Coffman & Adamek, 2001; Darrough, 1990), adults actively involved in community bands (Cavitt, 2005; Mantie, 2012), and ensemble members in gay choruses (Attinello, 2006; Latimer, 2008). For example, Cavitt (2005) surveyed 10 community bands across the United States and concluded that ensemble members joined for social interactions; however, the principal motivation for returning was for the gratification of playing music. Furthermore, implications from this study insinuated that educators at the primary, secondary, and college levels should strive to instill enduring impressions of the importance of music on students. Thus, hoping in time they independently seek and participate

in community music as adults (Cavitt, 2005). Kelly and Juchniewicz (2009) concluded similar results with middle and high school students who were participating in a summer camp in which the desire was to have more musical objectives when compared to social objectives.

One area of research regarding community music has focused on older adults who participate in a New Horizon ensemble. The New Horizons International Music Association (NHIMA), developed in 1990 by Roy Ernst, encourages older adults with little or no musical experience, or who have been musically inactive for an extensive period, to participate in various types of ensembles. While the organization is usually directed at adults 50 or older, the NHIMA is open to all who wish to participate in the music making experience (New Horizons International Music Association, n.d., para. 5). Previous studies have documented that participants in the New Horizons community ensembles joined primarily for the social interaction with people who are in a similar age cohort (Carucci, 2012; Coffman, 1996, 2002 & 2008; Coffman & Adamek, 2001). The results from these studies exhibit a reversal of importance in musical factors for participants in New Horizons ensembles when compared to other community band ensembles and music camps (Cavitt, 2005; Kelly & Juchniewicz, 2009).

Gay and Lesbian Community Music

In 1969 the Stonewall Riots (a.k.a. Stonewall Uprising) led to an increased focus on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) community. During this era, police were routinely raiding gay bars and enforcing the anti-sodomy laws. The Stonewall Inn, located in New York City's Greenwich Village and became a national monument in 2016 under President Barack Obama, was the site of formidable demonstrations. The riots began during the early morning hours on June 28th and lasted over a six-day period. This historical event is considered by most to be the impetus of the LGBTQ+ equal rights movement. Shortly after Stonewall, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus was established. The chorus gave its first public performance in 1978 during the memorial service for Harvey Milk, an openly gay man who was assassinated after being elected to serve on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. This was considered a significant event for the equal rights movement as well as the development of LGBTQ+ community ensembles (Attinello, 2006).

During the 1980s, the LGBT choral movement continued its development and expansion to major metropolitan cities in the United States. This movement helped establish community music ensembles, including the formation of international choruses in Vancouver and Melbourne. Specifically, during this period was the establishment of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA), which has evolved to more than 250 choruses across the United States and expanded to the United Kingdom and Ireland (Attinello, 2006). The mission of the GALA Choruses states "empowering LGBT Choruses as we change our world through song" (GALA Choruses, n.d., para. 3). Furthermore, the statement "every voice is free" holds truth as part of their vision statement (GALA Choruses, n.d., para. 3).

The Lesbian and Gay Band Association

Established in 1982, the Lesbian and Gay Band Association (LGBA) has over 38 instrumental and marching ensembles which are represented in more than 20 U.S. states (Lesbian Gay Band Association, n.d.). The majority of these ensembles are formed around major city centers including Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, Houston, Dallas, Orlando, Atlanta, New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis. Additionally, international LGBA ensembles are located in Canada, England, Ireland, and Australia.

When the LGBA was created, the administration and the members of the organization formed a mission statement to develop “LGBT music, visibility, and pride.” The LGBA mission is achieved by: (a) “providing an international network of lesbian and gay bands in all stages of development,” (b) “promoting music as a medium of communication among young people,” (c) “improving the quality of artistic and organizational aspects of member bands,” and (d) “stimulating public interest in the unique art form of community bands in our culture” (Lesbian and Gay Band Association, n.d., para. 1). The LGBA annual conference is hosted in different cities throughout the United States to discuss future events, stage performances, create new LGBA ensembles, and to “share the gift of music” (Lesbian and Gay Band Association, n.d., para. 3). The most recent and important publicity the LGBA received was their performance in President Barack Obama’s 2009 and 2013 inauguration parades.

Although the LGBA has been in existence for 35 years, no prior research has investigated members reasoning for joining a LGBA ensemble. The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the social and musical components that might influence LGBA members’ participation in an LGBA community ensemble. The researchers hope that this exploratory study could offer valuable information for LGBA ensemble directors and other LGBTQ+ community music programs in establishing social and musical objectives that best fit with their members. Specifically, the following questions were addressed: 1. Who are the participants in LGBA community ensembles? 2. What types of social interactions within the LGBA community ensembles are important to its members? 3. What types of musical experiences within the LGBA community ensemble are important to its members? 4. Which of these two factors (social interactions or musical experiences) is more important when deciding to participate in a LGBA ensemble?

Method

Survey Instrument

The researchers constructed a 28-question survey instrument to obtain data about LGBA ensemble members’ demographics, social interactions, musical experiences, and important factors for participating in the ensemble. The survey questions were constructed from a review of literature on the topic of participation in a community ensemble (Attinello, 2006; Carucci, 2012; Rohwer, 2017; Rowher et al., 2012) as well as discussion with the LGBA board of directors.

The survey was administered via the web-based survey platform *Qualtrics* and contained four sections. The first section consisted of demographic questions regarding gender, sexual orientation, age range, country of residency, level of education, and number of years as an LGBA member. The second section of the survey required participants to rate statements pertaining to musical and social factors for joining the ensemble using a 5-point Likert-type scale between 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The statements for musical factors included the following: (a) The ensemble has given you a greater appreciation for music that you would otherwise not listen to; (b) Since joining the ensemble, I have learned more about music in general; (c) Since joining the ensemble, I practice my instrument more often; (d) Since joining the ensemble, I have attended more live music concert events; (e) My participation in the ensemble has improved my individual playing skills; and (f) I like the musical selections that the ensemble performs.

In terms of social factors, participants rated the following statements: (a) It was important for me to make friends when I joined the ensemble; (b) I joined the ensemble strictly to meet and socialize with other people; (c) I feel that my participation in the ensemble gives me a sense of community; (d) There are members within my ensemble I would consider my closest friends; (e) I socialize with other members of the ensemble outside of rehearsals and performances; (f) My friends or partner influenced my decision to join the ensemble; and (g) The social setting of the ensemble provides a better environment for socializing than do alternate venues such as bars and clubs.

Two questions that compared musical and social factors for joining the ensemble was the third section of the survey. First, participants ranked what was most important when considering joining the ensemble: (a) musical reasons, (b) social reasons, (c) both, (d) neither, and (e) other: please list. Secondly, participants ranked five factors related to their decision to join an LGBA ensemble: (a) community, (b) musical experience, (c) performance opportunity, (d) promotion of a gay community organization, and (e) socialization. In the final section of the survey, participants had the option to write a free response about their experiences playing in LGBA community ensembles.

To establish content validity, the survey was evaluated by two music education faculty who were unaffiliated with the study. These two faculty members were chosen due to their numerous years' experience working with a New Horizon's ensemble. Both evaluators agreed and supported the validity of the survey instrument for its intended purposes. Internal consistency concerning the second section of the survey (described in paragraphs above) where participants were asked to rate certain statements using a Likert-type scales on musical and social factors were also examined. Cronbach's alpha indicated acceptable reliability for these statements, $\alpha = .84$ (musical factors) and $= .74$ (social factors).

Procedure

Following its initial construction, the survey instrument was submitted to the LGBA

board of directors and institutional review board for approval to distribute the survey to LGBA members. After authorization, a pilot was conducted with one LGBA ensemble ($n = 28$) to address any questions or concerns with the survey. One question that asked participants to identify their ensemble was removed from the survey. The reasoning for deleting this question was due to it showing distinguishing information and was important to the researchers and the LGBA board of directors to protect the anonymity of all participants. In the final form, the LGBA organization distributed the survey to all 545 listserv members via e-mail. The member email listserv was not accessible to the investigators in order to protect the anonymity of participants. Members were given two weeks to answer and were sent two reminders. The average completion time was approximately ten minutes, and the final response rate was 84% ($N = 458$).

Results

Demographics

Participants in this study were instrumental performers that belonged to a Lesbian and Gay Band Association ensemble. The first section of the survey was designed to collect demographic information. Respondents ($N = 458$) were asked to identify their gender, sexual orientation, age range, country of residency, level of education, and number of years as a LGBA member. Regarding gender, participants identified as male ($n = 285$), female ($n = 148$), transgender ($n = 12$), genderqueer ($n = 11$), and preferred not to respond ($n = 2$). For sexual orientation, the majority of participants were homosexual ($n = 362$) followed by heterosexual ($n = 40$), bisexual ($n = 25$), other ($n = 17$), questioning ($n = 9$), pansexual (not limited in sexual choice regarding biological sex, gender, or gender identity) ($n = 3$), and queer (relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms) ($n = 2$). The majority of participants were male (63%), homosexual (79%), and between 25 and 65 years of age (85%).

Pertaining to age, the majority of participants were either in the age range of 25 – 44 ($n = 199$) or 45 – 64 ($n = 191$). The remaining participants' age range was either 65 and over ($n = 38$) or 18 – 24 ($n = 30$). When asked about their country of residency, most the respondents were from the United States ($n = 416$), followed by Australia ($n = 17$), Canada ($n = 10$), and the United Kingdom ($n = 2$). Respondents level of education consisted of college graduate with bachelor's degree ($n = 186$), college graduate with master's degree ($n = 146$), high school ($n = 61$), college graduate with doctoral or specialist's degree ($n = 48$), and GED ($n = 2$). Finally, respondents ($n = 344$) had an average of 7 years ($SD = 7.07$) as members of an LGBA ensemble. The range of membership in the LGBA was from 3 months to 33 years.

Social Factors

Concerning the second research question, respondents rated a series of statements related to social interactions within the LGBA ensemble. The respondents were provided seven statements that pertained to multiple social factors for joining the LGBA ensemble. Mean

responses were highest pertaining to the statement, “I feel that my participation in the ensemble gives me a sense of community” followed by “It was important for me to make friends when I joined the ensemble”, and “The social setting of the ensemble provides a better environment for socializing than do alternative venues such as bars and clubs”. Lower-rated statements were, “I socialize with other members of the ensemble outside of rehearsals and performances”, “There are members within my ensemble I would consider my closest friends”, “My friends or partner influenced my decision to join the ensemble”, and “I joined the ensemble strictly to meet and socialize with other people”. Descriptive responses to each social factor statement are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Respondents’ Rating of Social Factors

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I feel that my participation in the ensemble gives me a sense of community.	432	3.29	0.78
It was important for me to make friends when I joined the ensemble.	432	3.01	0.85
The social setting of the ensemble provides a better environment for socializing than alternate venues such as bars and clubs.	432	2.98	0.96
I socialize with other members of the ensemble outside rehearsals and performances.	432	2.73	1.12
There are members within the ensemble I would consider my closest friends.	432	2.57	1.22
My friends or partner influenced my decision to join the ensemble.	431	1.88	1.33
I joined the ensemble strictly to meet and socialize with other people.	432	1.68	1.03

(Based on a Likert-type scale of 1= *strongly disagree*, and 5= *strongly agree*)

Musical Factors

Concerning research question three, respondents rated six statements related to musical factors for joining an LGBA ensemble. Mean scores were highest for the statement “My participation in the ensemble has improved my individual playing skills” followed by “I like musical selections that the ensemble performs”. Lower-rated statements were “The ensemble has given you a greater appreciation for music that you would otherwise not listen to”, “Since joining the ensemble, I practice my instrument more often”, “Since joining the ensemble, I have learned

more about music in general”, and “Since joining the ensemble, I have attended more live music concert events. Mean scores for responses to each musical factor statement are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Respondents’ Ratings of Musical Factors

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My participation in the ensemble has improved my individual playing skills.	435	3.11	1.05
I like musical selections that the ensemble performs.	435	3.02	0.84
The ensemble has given me a greater appreciation for music that you would otherwise not listen to.	435	2.68	1.05
Since joining the ensemble, I practice my instrument more often.	435	2.65	1.14
Since joining the ensemble, I have learned more about music in general.	435	2.57	1.14
Since joining the ensemble, I have attended more live music concert events.	435	2.20	1.08
The ensemble has given me a greater appreciation for music that you would otherwise not listen to.	435	2.68	1.05

(Based on a Likert-type scale of 1=*strongly disagree*, and 5 = *Strongly agree*)

Social and Musical Factors

The final research question sought to explore which factor(s) was/were considered when joining an LGBA ensemble. To achieve this, the researchers developed two questions. The first question asked respondents to choose which was most important when considering joining the ensemble. The factors given were (a) musical reasons, (b) social reasons, (c) both, and (d) neither. The largest number of respondents selected musical factors. Followed by musical and social reasons. The lowest-chosen factors were social and neither musical nor social reasons.

In the final question respondents were asked to rank (1 = *least important* to 5 = *most important*) a list of factors that were most important when joining an LGBA ensemble. The factors consisted of (a) community, (b) musical excellence, (c) performance opportunity, (d) promotion of a gay community organization, and (e) socializing. Respondents ranked performance opportunity, followed by community, musical excellence, promotion of a gay community organization, and socializing. Descriptive statistics showing frequency (and percentages) of ranking factors are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency (and percentages) of respondents' ranking of factors in joining an LGBA ensemble

	<i>n</i>	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
Performance Opportunity	416	132 (31.7%)	96 (23.0%)	72 (17.3%)	68 (16.3%)	48 (11.5%)
Community	416	81 (19.4%)	110 (26.4%)	103 (24.7%)	94 (22.6%)	28 (6.7%)
Musical Excellence	416	103 (24.7%)	87 (20.9%)	87 (20.9%)	86 (20.6%)	53 (12.7%)
Promotion of a Gay Community Organization	416	59 (14.1%)	76 (18.2%)	86 (20.6%)	94 (22.6%)	101 (24.2%)
Socializing	416	41 (9.8%)	47 (11.3%)	68 (16.3%)	74 (17.7%)	186 (44.7%)

1st = ranked most important by respondents

5th = ranked least important by respondents

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the social and musical components that might influence members' participation in an LGBA community ensemble. Demographic information collected revealed that nearly two-thirds of the respondents were male and reported a had high level of education, which are similar to previous research (Bowen, 1995; Cavitt, 2005; Coffman & Schlif, 1998; Moser, 2003). A large number of the respondents identified as homosexual and nearly half of the respondents fell with the 25-44 age range. As the LGBA organization is based in the United States, the majority of the participants responded to living in this country with a small representation from other international regions.

The results from this study are similar to those reported by Rowher et al. (2012), that when asked about what types of social factors were important in considering participation in an LGBA ensemble, respondents indicated that a sense of community, making friends, and a social setting other than bars and clubs were the most selected reasons. The data in the present study supports that the social experience of a community ensemble is a strong appeal for members of the LGBA. Regarding the third research question concerning musical influences on participation, respondents selected the following three statements to best describe their reason for participation - the ensemble has improved their individual playing skills, they like the repertoire that they performed, and they have a greater appreciation for music that they would otherwise not listen.

The final research question in this study sought to ascertain which of the two factors,

social or musical, were most influential in their decision to participate in an LGBA ensemble. Respondents indicated that musical factors outweighed social factors as an influence in their participation. These findings of the present study are similar to results of previous investigations (Cavitt, 2005; Kelly & Juchniewicz, 2009; Coffman & Adamek, 1999, 2001) where social and musical factors for participation were explored. Furthermore, written comments also indicated a strong desire for music making opportunities and suggested that the LGBA community ensembles were the most accepting of individual players, regardless of sexual orientation, age, gender, and playing ability. The data collected in the present study suggest that both musical and social factors are important influences on members in a LGBA community ensembles, but musical factors seem to be implied more than social factors.

Respondents answers to open-ended question (“Please offer any additional thoughts or comments about the musical or social reasons for participating in your LGBA community ensemble”) provided a tentative explanation on how the LGBA organization has impacted its members. While no qualitative analysis of comments were conducted, general statements about the social impact of the ensemble were (a) supportive community, (b) strong representation of the LGBTQ+ community, (c) a place to socialize without judgment, and (d) safe way to meet other (LGBTQ+) people. The researchers selected the most salient quotes independently and compared and discussed until consensus was reached. Two examples follow:

I wanted to meet like-minded people in a non-bar/club setting that didn’t revolve around sex and alcohol. Playing music was the icing on the cake,’ and 2) “my band is my family. The local band is my siblings and attending a LGBA event is like a giant family reunion where we get to meet all the cousins. I would feel so alone without these organizations.

When relating musical factors for joining the LGBA ensemble one respondent wrote,

I was so happy to discover such an organization that allowed people like myself an avenue in which to express myself through music and who would give me an opportunity to play the music that I hadn’t played in over 20 years but always missed.

Another member stated,

For me it’s about music. I’m good and talented, I can play a Mozart concerto with the best. But I’m not going to audition for the SF Symphony or hang out with stuck ups in any audition ensembles. I want to play good music with fun people.

And finally,

I joined shortly after finding out I was HIV positive in 99 - I went through a process of if I were to die, what would I regret not having done? My answer was being away from clarinet for 20 yrs.

Community instrumental ensembles exist to extend opportunities to make music beyond the traditional settings of schools, places of worship and an informal get together (jam sessions). It is likely that members of these ensembles want music making experience above a purely social experience. Results of this investigation show that regardless of the community ensemble type or ensemble organizational affiliation, music performance outweighs other factors. Respondents indicated that although the social element is important, it isn't necessarily a means to an end. The role of community ensembles is crucial to continuing musical education in our society. The addition of organizations like the LGBA to community musical ensembles is critical as society continues to collapse barriers and stereotypes of people in the LGBTQ+ community. These bands serve as an outlet for acceptance, community, and musical excellence as evidenced in both the statistical data and free responses. The findings of this investigation are important to the field of community music and music education, especially to the preparation of pre-service music educators enrolled in college level methods courses.

Preparing preservice music educators to become effective teachers who change society is a goal of teacher education preparation, and we must recognize that the identity of ourselves and our students is valued and respected (Koopman, 2007; Raiber & Teachout, 2014). The data collected in the present study offer continued support of lifelong music participation and should be a topic of continued discussion in pre-service method courses and professional development conferences. While socializing and performing with others could have a positive impact on community music ensembles, music making can contribute to increasing one's own quality of life (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Coffman, 1999; Cohen, 1998; Myers et al., 2013). Future music educators must recognize that participation in music does not have to end when their students graduate. Music educators should also be encouraged to have a stronger, direct impact on community music, and to collaborate with community groups, intergenerational groups, and share the musical, social, and educational benefits of music making. It is the hope of the authors that the findings of this investigation impact the preparation of future music educators who can influence positive societal change through community music engagement.

Limitations and Implications

One limitation of this study was that the dissemination of the survey instrument was at the discretion of each ensemble's communication director. This control of information could have had an impact on the results of the study. Social desirability may be a potential limitation, since participants may have responded in a way that does not reflect their true beliefs. It is possible, though, that those who responded felt differently about these issues than those who chose not to respond. This could result in a risk of non-response bias. However, the response rate to this investigation (84%) was quite high. This could be due to the fact that an organization like this has never been the subject of an academic study. Further investigations into LGBTQ+ music ensembles and participation would deepen and enrich music education research.

The authors hope that these findings serve as an entry point for future investigations into

community music organizations like the LGBA and its membership. In-depth interviews with LGBA members would illuminate the deeper personal reasons for seeking LGBA ensembles over other community ensembles. The data collected in this study indicate that making music and personal expression through music serves a purpose of belonging to a community. Individual involvement in these organizations is critical considering the current climate of political and social change. Both quantitative and qualitative investigations should be broadened to include other LGBTQ+ community music organizations, such as choruses and musical theater.

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