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ARTICLE

"How much glass can I break before they fire me?" Negotiating ethically-constructive education in a fractured political landscape

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ABSTRACT

Amid the myriad of political disagreements that arise among collective identity groups vying for space within the educational curriculum, we offer in this article a theoretical framework through which we argue that schools are uniquely positioned to serve as spaces in which students can negotiate the ethical and moral selves of their choosing. Drawing upon the work from educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1988) and ethics philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005), we suggest that 1) the development or 'becoming' of one's identity is an *ethical* endeavour, 2) negotiating identity space in both education and society at large is a *moral* endeavour, 3) acting upon both the ethical and moral dimensions of identity construction requires that individuals hold a form of socially-contextualised personal freedom, and 4) that practices and policies in education which privilege or marginalise individuals with particular identities ought to be questioned and potentially disrupted. Throughout our articulation of this central argument, we weave in contextualised examples from scholarly literature, recent current events in U.S. news and politics, and autoethnographic reflections. To tailor these ideas more specifically for the music education-focused reader, we draw upon a variety of sources from international music education journals that emphasise settings in which students are prompted to explore and construct aspects of their identities through music.

KEYWORDS

identity,
collective identities,
ethically-constructive education,
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INTRODUCTION

In Rian Johnson's 2022 film, *Glass Onion*, Helen—portrayed by Janelle Monáe—attends a murder mystery dinner at the opulent, glass-themed vacation home of billionaire Miles Bron. Unbeknownst to the other guests, Helen is investigating her sister Andi's murder, only to discover Miles as the culprit and the party guests as co-conspirators in his secrecy. In an act of defiance, Helen begins smashing the menagerie of glass objects within her reach, inspiring others to join until she sets the mansion ablaze, destroying Miles's control and influence.

In the film, Miles refers to these friends as "disruptors": destroyers of norms and breakers of rules that govern systems around them, but in the end, the influence that he exerts over his friends' lives is the one thing the partygoers are unwilling to interrupt. Ironically, it is Helen who commits the ultimate act of disruption by busting up the façade of Miles's economic success (which he earned by stealing Andi's intellectual property), fracturing the other party members' reliance on Miles, and shattering the party's conspiratorial protection of Andi's murderer.

As in the film, "glass" also serves as an important metaphor in research aimed at making visible the largely *invisible* power dynamics between individuals in professional environments. The *glass ceiling* (e.g., Adams & Funk, 2012; Cotter et al., 2001; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Wilson, 2014) is perhaps the most well-known, depicting the unseen barriers faced by people with marginalised identities[1] in seeking career advancement; these barriers are subversive and therefore often deemed non-existent by those who do not personally experience such in their own career development. The *glass escalator* (e.g., Casanova, 2016; Williams, 1992, 2013; Wingfield, 2009) represents the extent to which people with *privileged* identities are able to ascend more quickly to positions of leadership and higher salaries. So while the glass ceiling represents the invisible *barriers* to advancement that people with marginalised identities face, the glass escalator represents the invisible *privilege* experienced by people with favourable identities in career ascension. Lastly, the *glass cliff* (e.g., Oelbaum, 2016; Ryan et al., 2007; Ryan & Haslam, 2005) depicts the documented trend in which people with marginalised identities (women, in particular) are more often promoted to positions of power and leadership by companies that are already in states of turmoil or decline. Thus, a person with a marginalised identity might struggle against various glass ceilings throughout most of their careers, only to finally be placed in a position of power in circumstances that are difficult to turn around.

[1] In defining "marginalised identities" throughout this article, we draw from the tradition of Critical Theory (e.g., Apple, 2013; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 1994; Levinson, 2016; McLaren, 2009) in referring to the systemic disadvantage or "structural domination" faced by individuals on account of one or more aspects of their identities (Levinson, 2016, p. 2). Examples of marginalised identity categories include race (e.g., non-White individuals dominated by White-led societies), gender (e.g., women, transgender, and nonbinary individuals dominated by men in societies with roots in patriarchy), class (e.g., lower class individuals who are socioeconomically disadvantaged), ability (e.g., disadvantage experienced by disabled people), sexual orientation (e.g., LGBTQ+ individuals who experience social disadvantage for seeking non-heterosexual relationships), among others (Talusan, 2022). "Privileged identities," on the other hand, are facets of a person that are socially dominant in terms of economic security, social mobility, representation, and entitlement (DiAngelo, 2018). A person may hold a combination of privileged and marginalised identities that intersect in different ways (e.g., see the concept of intersectionality in DiAngelo, 2018), such that a person experiences privilege in one identity facet (i.e., White racial privilege) while also experiencing marginalisation on account of another (i.e., low socioeconomic status).

In our discussion of ethical self-construction later in the article, we address the ways in which certain aspects of a person's identity (such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, etc.) evoke social, political, and economic advantage and disadvantage ("privilege" and "marginalisation"), which impact a person's ability to construct the ethical selves of their choosing. Thus, we argue that while a person's "ethical self" consists of more than a compilation of fixed identity categories (and involves values about the kind of life a person desires to live), understanding the ways privilege and marginalisation impact a person's ability to live the ethical lives of their choosing are crucial.

Another layer of the *Glass Onion* story to be peeled back relates to aspects of Helen's own identity: she is a middle-class woman, the only Black character amongst Miles's all-White circle of friends, and also an elementary school teacher. To various degrees, these aspects of Helen's identity— woman/female, Black, teacher—contribute to the limited social and economic power she holds, as evidenced by her struggle to convince the party members to tell the truth about the identity of her sister's murderer. Understanding the ways in which Helen is marginalised by society on account of her identities contributes to the force of her disruptive actions as she breaks through glass ceilings of gender, race, class, and influence in demanding justice for her sister. We return to these "variations on a glass metaphor" in our discussion of identity construction throughout the article.

In meandering through film and metaphor in the context of education and identity-construction, we travel now to our own educational contexts as music teachers to consider these ideas; many of the questions we (the authors) wrestle with in this article grew from class conversations (Scarlato as teacher, Kelly as student) related to expanding music curriculum in ways that explicitly address and invite discussion related to identity: How might a music teacher strive to open the conventions that govern a choral ensemble—e.g., gender-based concert attire and part assignments—for transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive students? How might a music history unit be shifted to emphasise works written by women and non-White composers? How might an elementary music teacher build pronoun expressions into a welcome song that also helps students and teachers learn each other's names? As we imagined in dialogue what more open versions of music education with respect to identity might look like, another vein of questions emerged: How do we work toward these kinds of curricular openings in which students can grow and become when X tradition, Y administrator, or Z parent group resists such? How might teachers endeavour to solicit and use a student's preferred pronouns in conversation, for example, when they are not allowed to ask students about such? How might teachers address the history of jazz and blues if they are discouraged from discussing the impacts of slavery and discrimination that Black musicians faced with students? And if a teacher does try to disrupt these exclusive structures in education, what will happen? Exactly *how much glass can I break before they fire me?* Kelly posed.

Our primary focus in this article relates to the idea of schools serving as spaces in which students can grow and become in constructing their "ethical selves" (a collection of self-concepts and trajectories held by an individual) and "moral selves" (positioning of one's actions in relation to others)—concepts we explore in greater detail in the following sections. However, necessarily embedded within this framework for schools is also the condition of freedom: the structural preservation of openings through which students can move, explore, imagine, and enact their ethical

identities. Thus, teaching for ethical development might include both working toward curriculum and pedagogy with structured openings *and* being willing to, at times, question and perhaps disrupt the structures that limit students' becoming.

In the *Glass Onion,* the main characters all strive to disrupt the status quo in a variety of ways and toward different ends. Disruption, which Miles refers to in his famous soliloquy as the "breaking" or "busting up" of norms, ideas, or conventions (film, 34:42), is enacted by Miles and his party for their own, self-serving ends—creating social chaos through which they are able to re-assert social power and influence in ways that further their own fame and wealth. Conversely, Helen's version of disruption functions to bring about justice: disrupting each party member's privileged social power and bringing public accountability to her sister's murderer. Our own characterisation of "disruption" aligns more closely with Helen's, which we suggest should be understood as the breaking of the invisible structures which prohibit marginalised students' becoming (glass ceilings) and accelerate such for privileged individuals (glass escalators). Disruption need not necessitate violence, nor does it always occur in the face of opposition. Rather, we suggest with Quinn (2012) that disruption can be enacted through "adopting a stance of questioning, challenging, and critiquing taken-for-granted ways" of thinking and acting in education (p. 1). In this vein, disruption might simply mean deviating from traditional modes of teaching and learning in favour of more open, inclusive approaches. While some forms of disruption in education might occur on a larger scale (e.g., negotiating educational policy and funds dispersal), other forms may occur at the local level of an individual classroom (e.g., revising class procedures for inclusion). Dialogue is essential to all forms of disruption, Southwood (2012) suggests, in which "multiple perspectives [are] explored, assumptions [are] challenged" such that change "rests on the dynamic interplay of ongoing imagining and positioning" (p. 98).

What might it mean, we ask, to make space in schools for students to engage in free, ethical identity-construction? What might it mean for teachers to work toward disrupting the barriers that students might face in commencing this task? What are the moral and social implications of an educational environment in which students are free to explore identity constructions respectfully and supportively alongside their peers who are similarly engaged in their own self-construction?

To be clear, we are not calling for teachers to behave recklessly or to commit acts of disruption that they know will lead to being fired. The risks to teachers who question tradition and status quo beliefs in education are real and potentially severe, including being "labeled as a resistor or a cynical malcontent," risking "alienation from their peers; decreased administrative support," "being black-listed for promotions," and experiencing "corrective discipline" (Placha, 2007, p. 127). Teachers today face increased levels of surveillance from administrators and may be "given a hard time not just by their school board, staff and administration, but also by parents and the children they teach" in response to questioning an institution's curriculum or policies (Placha, 2007, p. 129). A variety of factors will inevitably impact the ways in which an individual or group of teachers may choose to demonstrate resistance to oppression that account for the specificity of their teaching communities and contexts. However, we suggest, as Plancha (2007) does, that at its core, disruption requires from teachers a commitment to "voicing their objections consistently and practicing non-compliance to policies that promote inequity and injustice" (p. 128).

What might disruption look like, then, for music teachers (including ourselves) to critically consider the ethical and moral implications of a music curriculum that is open enough for students to 'become'? In music education scholarship, we are encouraged by a variety of disruptions aimed at opening curriculum to become more open curricular spaces for students with marginalised identities, in particular, to grow and become in developing their ethical selves. For example, Adam Kruse (2020) disrupts the notion that teachers must always be leaders of music content knowledge and experiences, encouraging White teachers, in particular, to "take a back seat" in teaching Hip-Hop (p. 12); Juliet Hess (2015) and her music education students disrupt practices of "multicultural tourism" in elementary music curriculum in favour of a more egalitarian, comparative approach to multicultural music education. Joyce McCall's (2017) personal narrative disrupts the idea that Black doctoral students ought to stay away from writing about race in order to secure tenure-track positions in higher education. Nicholas McBride (2016) disrupts stereotypes about the sexual orientation of male students who sing in a choir by coming to terms with his own identity as a gay, male choir teacher, relinquishing his inclination to embody a more stereotypical "image of masculinity and strength" to his students in an effort to recruit more male singers (p. 40). In Scarlato (2022b), music teacher Charlie worked to disrupt a music curriculum colonised by Western Classical music by partnering with a local Indigenous musician who taught her music to students at a majority Indigenous population school. Each of these examples in scholarship illustrate ways in which music teachers might, to various degrees and in a variety of ways, disrupt the current curriculum in favour of creating spaces in which students might better be able to explore and construct their ethical selves.

What we offer in this article is a framework centred around the idea of identity-*construction* as an ethical endeavour with the acknowledgement that enacting this work in U.S. public schools (including music classrooms) might at times necessitate the disruption of educational practices that prohibit students' becoming. The central tenets of our argument are that 1) the development or 'becoming' of one's identity is an *ethical* endeavour, 2) negotiating identity space in both education and society at large is a *moral* endeavour, 3) acting upon both the ethical and moral dimensions of identity construction requires that individuals hold a form of socially-contextualised personal freedom, and 4) that practices and policies in education which privilege or marginalise individuals with particular identities ought to be questioned and potentially disrupted. Throughout our articulation of this central argument, we weave in contextualised examples from scholarly literature, recent events in U.S. news and politics, and autoethnographic reflections. To tailor these ideas more specifically for the music education-focused reader, we draw upon a variety of sources that emphasise settings in which students are prompted to explore and construct aspects of their identities through music.

Author positionalities

We are two American music educators residing in the Northeast—an early-career university music teacher educator (Scarlato) and an early-career music educator currently teaching K-8 general and choral music (Kelly). Most importantly, we are both music educators who are trying to figure out how to enact ethically-constructive education in music classrooms, particularly in schools that are

situated in politically-conservative communities. In many ways, aspects of our own identities have propelled our interest in this topic:

> I (Scarlato) am a White, middle-class, able-bodied music educator in my 14th year of teaching. Of the various identities I hold (many of which invoke privilege), my gender identity is one that I have reckoned with most often throughout my journey as a musician and educator. Although I use she/her pronouns, I perceive my own gender identity and expression as closer to the middle of a spectrum than toward the end of "woman." And yet, I am also aware of the ways in which being perceived as a "woman," has shaped my professional path: as a female trumpet player growing up, I was an outlier to the gendered norms of instrument selection (Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978); as an elementary music teacher—a subset of the field with proportionally higher rates of women (Gunther, 2022)—I resisted being characterised as what a colleague and I playfully described as "bubbly women who wore jean dresses and treble clef scarves"; when I entered academia, I was happy to leave the "Miss/Mrs./Ms." question behind in exchange for the more gender-neutral title of "Dr." Thus, my relationship to my own gender identity is complicated and perhaps contradictory in some ways: being viewed and treated as "female" is a part of my lived experience and consciousness; on the other hand, my "female-ness" has never been a part of myself that I have perceived as particularly important. In this sense, I view myself through a non-binary lens.
>
> I (Kelly) am a White, lower middle class, neurodivergent, disabled, non-binary music educator in my second year of certified music teaching. My name —Mx. Kelly—has often been a point of contention that has evolved with my own sense of self. Being the first non-binary educator in a school, I often face questions and confusion from teachers and students. Yet, I try to remain strong in the face of opposition for the students who, like me, are still exploring themselves—students who, also like me, have experienced a negative reception from their school communities on account of who they are. I realise that I am a model for students with a variety of marginalised identities simply by existing. While I am working to mitigate the pressure I feel to "represent" my identities well, I am also balancing the challenges of being a new teacher and leading a classroom. I am learning to consciously remind myself (and you, Reader), that I am more than a collection of identity categories. So while marginalised identities are integral to this paper and to the trajectories of our lives, I strive to remember that my sense of self is also more than the marginalisation I face.

In this article, we describe a variety of current events in U.S. news to illustrate the philosophical concepts and ethical conundrums present in our theoretical framework (ethics, morality, freedom). We aim to engage with politics in a similar manner described by Patrick Schmidt (2020), who suggests that "policy can and should be linked to ethical notions," and is concerned with "raising consciousness and understanding the context of rising tensions" (p. 12). Our purpose here is not to purport the ideas of a particular political party, but rather to show an ethical philosophy can be used

as both a lens with which to view ethical problems, and a tool to work toward solutions to such. Thus, we aim to demonstrate that philosophy—not a particular political affiliation—is what helps us form and refine our personal stances on the ethical dilemmas present in this article.

An invitation for the non-American reader

Although we are two American educators and writers, we propose a framework that we hope will also hold relevance for international scholars. We draw upon two philosophers who hold a myriad of divergent identities and lived experiences: Maxine Greene (a Jewish-American, native New-Yorker, female, educational philosopher) and Kwame Anthony Appiah (a Ghanaian-English, queer, male, philosopher of ethics). By no means do we suggest that these two philosophers represent all identities that readers might hold, and indeed, our descriptions here only highlight a few concrete examples of who these philosophers are. Our point in highlighting identity differences among these two philosophers is to suggest that the ideas in this framework need not be limited to residents of one particular orientation, nationality, or gender. In every country, there are those who take more progressive views on identity development and those who lean toward conservative stances. We draw upon current events and personal narratives that are specifically situated in the American political and education system to illustrate the framework because these are our stories to tell and to reckon with as authors. Yet in doing so, we invite readers from around the world to imagine their own politically-relevant stories, current events, and teaching contexts in response to our framework.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF IDENTITY REPRESENTATION AND MARGINALISATION IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The question of 'who' receives 'what' kind of education in the U.S. has always been determined at the intersection of a variety of identity-related factors, including class, social status, race, ability, and gender (Almeida, 1997; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Hochschild, 2003). In the1830's, Massachusetts legislator and state secretary of education, Horace Mann, began to advocate for the creation of public schools—formerly called "common schools"—that were designed to provide free education to all children. In championing this idea, Mann emphasised that a public investment in education would benefit the whole nation by "transforming children into literate, moral, and productive citizens" (Kober, 2020). In 1830, about 55% of children aged 5 to 14 were enrolled in public schools; by 1870, this figure rose to about 78% (Kober & Retner, 2020). Of course, this did not include *all* children since public schools were primarily made available for boys and white children (Mondale, 2001, pp. 11–17).

As schools evolved in the context of social change movements, women were eventually granted the right to a public education (once a glass ceiling) within the common school movement, but it wasn't until 1972 that Title IX was passed by federal legislators, officially recognising women's rights to education. Non-White (particularly Black) children were also excluded from public schools until segregation was federally banned in 1954 (Brown v. Board of Education). Although Black Americans were legally allowed access to the same public education as White students, schools were not fully integrated until 1968. Public schools for non-White children in the U.S.

were notoriously "inferior to their White counterparts during the segregation era" in which Black and White schools were thought of by some as of "separate, but equal" (Margo, 1985, pp. 1–2). Non-White children within these communities (i.e., Latinx and Asian American students) were also forced to attend segregated schools; many Indigenous children (called American "Indians" at the time) were sent to schools which forced students to assimilation to White culture in favour of erasing their native identities (Adams, 1995; Deloria, 1973).

The 1960s marked a decisive decade in public education in which national conversations around ethics and morality remained at the forefront of American politics. As a result of the federal mandate for integration and an increased public resistance toward the inclusion of prayer and Bible study in public schools, many religious communities in particular moved to create their own alternatives to public school, which Gaither (2008) refers to as "island[s] of segregation" (p. 6). Members of these communities created private "alternative schools" which served as a vehicle for segregation and while also receiving federal funds through voucher programs (Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008). Others withdrew their children from public and private schools altogether, creating "home schools communities;" both private school and homeschool communities were seen as ways to "resist secular culture" and preserve religious teachings in school" (Kunzman, 2010, p. 20).

Present day religious communities, however, have largely moved away from alternative schools and homeschooling their children and have instead directed efforts at installing their own moral views in public education. In particular, these groups push back against school initiatives centred around equity and inclusivity (Baker, 2023; Bouie 2023; Karni, 2023; Krugman, 2023; Saul, 2023). As the need for curriculum that explicitly addresses identity becomes more prominently highlighted in scholarship—making explicit the glass ceilings of marginalisation and glass escalators of privilege—an animated opposition to such from conservative groups has also risen to challenge these efforts.

Part 1: Ethical construction

In the process of writing this essay, it became clear to both of us that a fuller philosophical justification for education in relation to ethics, morality, and freedom is needed to bolster identity-related initiatives in schools. Rather than assuming justifications for such, we aim to articulate a stronger argument for how students might exercise their own freedom in identity development within the broader context of a democratic society. In our exploration of a philosophical framework for ethically-constructive education, we examine ways in which people construct their own identities in relation to others.

Through the guidance of Appiah's (2005) concept of identity-building as an ethical project in *The Ethics of Identity* and Greene's (1988) commitment to challenging educators and students to become with the world around them in *The Dialectic of Freedom*, we argue that people form their identities in dialogue with their social and experiential worlds, such that the more diverse and varied the menu of identities from which people have to choose, the more free they can become. In working toward ethically-constructive education, we are striving to maximise the individual freedoms of students that are bound up in their abilities to live ethical lives in the context of society at large. Most centrally, we argue in the context of an educational system for a concept of identity formation

(or *becoming*) as an ethical endeavour to which all students are entitled and the enactment of such in schools as a moral imperative.

Ethics, morality, and freedom

"I start always from the perspective of the individual engaged in making his or her [or their] life," Appiah (2005) explains, encouraging individuals to recognise that "others are engaged in the same project, and concerned to ask what social and political life means for the ethical project we share" (p. xvii). As is common in philosophy, we begin our discussion by clarifying several integral terms—ethics, morality, and freedom—as we explore the interconnectedness of each concept. In articulating a conceptual distinction between ethics and morality, Appiah draws upon Dworkin (2000), who suggests that ethics "includes convictions about which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead," and that "morality includes principles about how a person should treat other people" (p. 485). As terms, ethics and morality are often conflated in commonplace speech, yet because we live in societies, the obvious inseparability of ethics (the principles that one chooses to live by) and morality (the principles that guide our interactions with others) might in part account for the common confusion. [2]

Traditional narratives about American values highlight the ethical dimensions of a person's life, namely that "freedom" is individual, and ignore the moral dimension of the ways in which the ethical decisions we make in our own lives interact with those choices made by others. In considering identity, however, Appiah (2005) alludes to the inseparability of ethics and morality as he looks inward, acknowledging that "my life's shape is up to me, provided that I have done my duty to others" (p. xii). Similarly, Greene's (1988) work highlights a concept of ethical individuality that is founded upon "compassion for" and "solidarity with others" (p. 18). "A life has gone well if a person has mostly done for others what she owed them (and is thus morally successful) and has succeeded in creating things of significance and in fulfilling her ambitions (and is thus ethically successful)" (Appiah, 2005, p. 163).

In the culture wars that are being waged in American school communities, much of the conversation is being led by those who either misunderstand or refuse to acknowledge the interconnectedness of our ethical lives, ignoring the moral dimensions of the issues at stake. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, the "anti-mask," "parents' rights" groups advocated for the elimination of masks in schools, invoking arguments to the effect of: "It's my child's right to attend school without a mask," or "It's my right as a parent to send my child to school without a mask." The latter example includes elements of parent's rights in relation to children's, a complicated issue we will explore toward the end of this framework. In this example, parents invoked ethical rationales for challenging schools' mask policies while ignoring the moral dimension of the policy—that mask policies offer a degree of physical protection for all students from one another. The argument boils down to one person arguing that mask policies eliminate their child's freedom to take off their mask, while a person with an opposing view is arguing that non-mask

[2] Because American cultural values often emphasise individualism over collectivism, we suggest that individualised understandings of concepts such as ethics, morality, and freedom likely contribute to the conflation of these terms in that their commonplace understandings are centered around the individual rather than the relationships between individuals and society.

policies eliminate their child's ability to be protected from Covid-19. The former argument examines only the individual implications of the policy for one child, while the latter argument invokes an argument for individuals in the context of the social world they inhabit. Ethical acts, Greene (1988) explains, are "undertaken from the standpoint of a particular, situated person trying to bring into existence something contingent on his/her[/their] hopes, expectations, and capacities," such that "the world in which the person creates and works through a future project *cannot but be* a social world" (p. 18, emphasis added). Thus, we cannot talk about ethical individuality in education or society at large without also discussing the moral implications of individuality within our social contexts of residence.

Similarly, a conceptual understanding of "freedom," is commonly invoked by Americans with a careless or uncritical disregard to the moral dimension of life by those who wish to assert a kind of unbridled, unchallenged autonomy over their actions (e.g., "It's a free country, so I can do what I want"). The notion of an ethical self that is determined and lived apart from the moral dimensions of such cannot exist in the context of a democracy founded upon the ideas such as "all men [read: "people"] are created equal,"[3] and that the U.S. political system provides "liberty and justice for all"[4] who reside in "the land of the free and the home of the brave"[5]. If untethered autonomy is incompatible with the moral implications of democracy, then what of "freedom?" Similarly, unbridled autonomy—an ethical course of life that a person sets for themself with disregard for the impacts of their decisions on others—is not synonymous with "freedom." John Dewey theorised that "the democratic idea of freedom is not the right of each individual to do as he pleases, even if it be qualified by adding 'provided he does not interfere with the same freedom on the part of others'" (1937/1940, p. 341). Building off this idea, Green asserts instead that "the basic freedom is that of freedom of *mind* and whatever degree of freedom of action and experience is necessary to produce freedom of intelligence" (p. 43, emphasis added). In other words, 'freedom' represents the ability for humans to become—to grow, to change, to awaken to new perspectives—and to act on our intellectual becoming in ways that "make space for [ourselves] in the presence of others" (p. 56).

Greene (1988) warns of the dangers associated with uncritical assertions of one's own freedom:

> I believe it unthinkable any longer for Americans to assert themselves to be "free" because they belong to a "free" country. Not only do we need to be continually empowered to choose ourselves, to create our identities within a plurality; we need continually to make new promises and to act in our freedom to fulfill them, something we can never do meaningfully alone. (p. 51)

Greene's words reference what Antonio Gramsci (1971) referred to as "contradictory consciousness" within systems of oppression—when the identity narratives imposed by a governing

[3] Quote from the U.S. *Declaration of Independence* from England in 1776; see U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2020

[4] Quote from the *Pledge of Allegiance* to the U.S. flag, recited by students in U.S. public schools since 1892; the current version was revised in 1954; see 4 USC 4: Pledge of allegiance to the flag; manner of delivery.

[5] Quote from the United States National Anthem, "The Star-spangled Banner," written by Francis Scott Key in 1814 and adopted by President Herbert Hoover in 1931 as the U.S. National Anthem.

body directly contradicts citizens' lived experiences. I (Scarlato) am reminded of Jimi Hendrix and the Black men drafted to fight in the Vietnam war for American "freedom," all the while experiencing the racial discrimination that limited their own freedoms back in the U.S. (Scarlato, 2022a). Greene and Gramsci warn that if we uncritically accept the narratives handed to us instead of engaging with such consciously and in the context of our lived experiences and relationships to society (as we will explore in the next section), we forfeit our own ethical undertakings through giving up the freedom we might otherwise exercise in identity formation.

Social dialogue

We return to the central concept of this essay, identity, acknowledging that identity construction must always occur within the social world. We also assume that in democratic systems, we must strive to maximise and make equitable every person's ability to enact the ethical lives of their own choosing. Both Appiah (2005) and Greene (1988) acknowledge a kind of ethical, identity formation that is dialogic in nature. That is, the idea that we construct our identities, with varying degrees of consciousness, in *dialogue* or conversation with the world around us. Appiah (2005) explains:

> To create a life, in other words, is to interpret the materials that history has given you. Your character, your circumstances, your psychological constitution, including the beliefs and preferences generated by the interaction of your innate endowments and your experience: all these need to be taken into account in shaping a life. They are not constraints on that shaping; they are its materials (p. 163).

By this view, we can understand identity formation to be bound by the social contexts in which we reside. In other words, people construct their ethical selves from the menu of social identities around them, and our identities are limited to those which we are exposed. "A person's shaping of [their] life flows from [their] beliefs and from a set of values, tastes, and dispositions of sensibility, all of these influenced by various forms of social identity," Appiah (2005) explains—all of which constitute "a person's ethical self" (p. 163). This idea of self-construction through our interactions with the social world is, in part, what Greene references when she writes that freedom is primarily intellectual. While we Westerners might tend to think of "intellectual" through the humanist lens of Cartesian dualism—"I think, therefore I am"—such that the "intellect" signifies a person's mental capacity (Descartes, 1637/2012, p. 38), Greene is a phenomenologist, so her use of the word here is more accurately understood with reference to *consciousness*. A person's consciousness expands as they become aware of new identities and perspectives. Thus, the menu from which they choose their own ethical selves also grows. As our consciousnesses expand, Greene suggests, so does our freedom in choosing and acting upon the identities which define our becoming.

Appiah's and Greene's view of the world around us as constituting the materials from which we construct our identities causes me (Scarlato) to recall with a sense of humour some of the first identity-conscious conversations my peers and I had in grade school: "What's your religion?" we would ask each other in second grade—as if any one of my mostly-White peers at a suburban, midwestern elementary school would have replied, "I'm a Sikh," or "I'm a Hindu … how about you?"

"Oh, well I'm a Muslim." What we were really asking each other was, "What brand of Anglican, Judeo-Christian Protestantism are you?" Different versions of Christianity were the materials of my consciousness in elementary school, and in particular, that which my parents espoused. When American conservatives (and in particular, conservative Christians) complain about the "brainwashing" of their children by educational institutions, they're not actually complaining that schools are telling their children who they must become. What they're upset about is that a wider menu of identities has been made *available* to their children through engaging in the kind of intellectual freedom that Greene writes about. Herein lies the impetus for the forms of curricular censorship (which we will discuss in greater detail later): the assumption is that if students are not exposed to the idea that gay people exist, they won't "become gay;" if students are not exposed to the idea that transgender people exist, they won't "become transgender." The more a parent group might strive to assert control over the ideas to which students become conscious, the more they will supposedly be able to control who their children *become*.

Collective identities and democratic action

When I (Scarlato) hear American conservatives make amoral claims related to their individuality and sense of personal freedom (I say "amoral" because their claims do not account for the moral dimension of being in society)—e.g., "It's a free country, so I can do what I want"—I am struck by the irony that although these individuals project a kind of brazen, autonomous identity, they still function as and derive power through the much larger group of conservatives to which they belong and who espouse the exact same arguments and rhetoric. Just as Miles Bron's friends consider themselves "disrupters" in their seemingly carefree displays of individualism, they are ultimately unable to disrupt their collective need for Miles and one another. The extent to which people with similar views, values, beliefs, postures, and lived experiences might gravitate toward one another in this way illustrates what Appiah (2005) calls "collective identities" or "the collective dimensions of our individual identities" (p. 21). Because individuals form identities through the social materials available to them, this supposedly untethered brand of individualism actually just represents a learned pattern of behaviour nested within a larger social phenomenon. Collective identities, Appiah (2005) clarifies, "are not social just because they involve others, but because they are constituted in part by socially transmitted conceptions of how a person of that identity properly behaves" (p. 21). Our ethical selves are so inextricably (and subconsciously) wrapped up in the ethical selves of others that even in the face of claims that one's individuality ought to supersede any sort of social obligation, the community of individuals who espouse these views functions as a collective identity group. Thus, even the staunchest projections of autonomous identity are interconnected with others who proclaim similar identities.

In a democracy, political dialogue takes place as a function of the many collective identity groups asserting themselves and policy is enacted when one identity group garners a majority of citizens to support their cause. "To be a citizen of a democracy is, after all, to be a member of a particular kind of social group and each citizen has at least some interests and values that are, in part, a function of that group" (Moody-Adams, 2018, p. 202). The phrase, "identity politics," is often invoked in an effort to trivialise certain kinds of political disagreements (e.g., "school should be about learning, not identity politics"), implying that a more useful, "identity neutral" version of politics

exists. Yet, Moody-Adams (2018) contends that "at the core of the concept 'identity politics' is the simple idea that [it] is sometimes important, and sometimes justifiable, to mobilise political concern and action around some aspect of the identity of a significant social group" (p. 202). Appiah (2005, p.108) explains that "we live in societies in which certain individuals have not been treated with equal dignity" due to facets of their identit(ies), such as women, LGBTQ people, non-White people, transgendered people, or differently abled people. Identity politics within a democracy can allow for people with marginalised identities and their allies to mobilise collectively and advocate for policy change. "To claim that democratic politics is always identity politics is also to claim that the mobilisation of political concern and action in democracies is always, in some way, organised around the identities of social groups" (Moody-Adams, 2018, p. 204). Thus, collective identities allow individuals to work toward freedom in ways that might otherwise be impossible for an individual to achieve alone.

Within American society especially, I (Kelly) can see a vast array of people who place politics as a core facet of their identities. Many people online and in-person try to create their entire persona in relation to liking or disliking politicians, or supporting certain social groups over others. In the realm of personal and public politics, it no longer seems to matter that one has a conservative or liberal stance on particular policies; you are viewed either wholly as a Conservative (capital "C") or wholly as a Liberal (capital "L"). Opinions and thoughts become entire identities from which people might be immediately judged and placed within a collective identity box. I am not immune to this kind of thinking: admittedly, when someone mentions they are a Conservative I feel I must take a defensive stance, knowing that many Conservative policy makers and supporters would vote for initiatives that the purport erasure of who I am as a person. So while collective identities can be a positive force to help those of similar mindsets and backgrounds identify and stand by one another, we also acknowledge that they might just as easily become tools for division.

Part 2: The ethical and moral ends of democratic education

When we acknowledge that our identities are inevitably shaped by the social identities around us—that politics govern our individual abilities to shape our ethical selves—we must then ask ourselves how this might take place within the larger context of a democracy and the educational systems that teach citizens to maintain its functions (Appiah, 2005). Democratic educational systems typically function to accomplish two purposes: 1) ethical education by assisting the individual in their self-construction through providing pathways toward individual human flourishing (e.g., Brighouse, 2008)—the ethical end of education—and 2) moral education by preparing citizens to understand, participate in, and preserve the workings of a democracy (e.g., Dewey, 1916)—the moral end of education.

Yet, even when we acknowledge that the ethical and moral ends of democratic participation cannot exist independently from one another, we must always reckon with "the tension between tolerance and autonomy" in negotiating the moral implications of our ethical choosings (Appiah, 2005, p. 41). Amid the myriad of disagreements that arise among collective identity groups vying to negotiate identity space for themselves, a democracy founded on protecting the freedoms of all individuals to construct ethical selves and live meaningful lives should function to foster

a commitment to moral tolerance in citizens—to teach people to respect ethical processes by which other members of society construct their own identities. However, "if intolerance of other identities is built *into* an identity," Appiah (2005) clarifies, "we will be seeking, in public education, to reshape those identities so as to exclude this feature" (p. 211, emphasis added). Education has the capacity to play a special role in a democracy through helping students learn to carve out their own ethically-successful and morally-responsible pathways in life.

We return once again to the idea that people construct their ethical identities through the materials of the social worlds around them. Since children are not born with fully-developed ethical selves, the responsibility for shaping children's identities within a democracy falls in part on the shoulders of parents, and in part, on the shoulders of educational institutions. "We have to help children make themselves," Appiah (2005) suggests, "and we have to do so according to our values because children do not begin with values of their own" (p. 137). Parents and democratic educational institutions play different roles in this task of helping shape children's identities. Parents are responsible for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of their children, which might include endeavouring to pass on their own values to help children build their ethical selves in ways the parents also find acceptable. Educational institutions function to aid children in maintaining the autonomy of their ethical endeavours (in part through consciousness expansion) and help them negotiate such among others similarly engaged in the task.

Compulsory education and parental rights

Some parents view education as threatening or disruptive to their task of child-shaping because they feel entitled to "create" the identities of their children as they see fit. "If your aim is to produce children who will 'hew the luminous path of truth,' then talk about self-creation, or, indeed, individuality is unlikely to put you at ease," Appiah (2005) supposes of such parents; "You will think not about the construction of character, but [rather] about its corruption" (p. 200). Yet, in returning to our central concepts of the ethical task of identity formation and the moral imperative of respecting the ethical selves of others, we suggest that parents such as these might be reminded that although they exert powerful influence through the raising of children, no parent has the right (or ability, in the practical sense) to assert control over who their child becomes. "No system of compulsory education can sidestep such tensions altogether," Appiah (2005) assures (p. 203), explaining that "the greatest controversies about education in democracies, as we know, tend to occur when people feel that their own children are being taught things that are inconsistent with claims that are crucial marks of their own collective identities" (p. 208).

Journalists from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have recently reported on the strategic impetus with which conservative groups have begun to wage large-scale identity politics wars specifically at the localised level of district schoolboard meetings. Adam Nagourney of the *New York Times* explains, for example, that when legislation was passed by North Carolina lawmakers banning transgender *adults* from using bathrooms that correspond with their gender identities, public and economic backlash from businesses, sports teams, and artists ensued, causing lawmakers eventually to rescind the bill (Barbaro, 2023). However, what these conservative action groups learned from this case is that when lawmakers propose bills related to *children's* identities, they have generally been more successful in garnering public support for such legislation: "These

[conservative] groups have been casting around for how to deal with this [gender identity] issue and suddenly saw a clear path forward," Nagourney explains, "it involves kids," (12:27) and "social conservatives know that focusing on kids is an effective and powerful way to frame this argument and ultimately to win this argument" (22:57). When interviewed by *The Washington Post*, members of "Moms for Liberty" (a conservative, parents' rights advocacy group) expressed statements which illustrates this concept: "Our children are ours," one woman states, "and it's our decision what we do—what we feel is best for them" (Oremus, 2023, 5:47). In this sense, children (and the ways in which identity and school intersect) have become puppets for conservative adults who strive to enact their own desires for public censorship and suppression of identities that do not align with their own world views.

As we referenced earlier in this paper, some of the most contested topics in American educational politics right now address history textbook portrayals of systemic marginalisation of Black Americans, the inclusion of books written by and about LGBTQ+ individuals in school libraries, and transgender student athletes. Florida governor, Ron DeSantis has become a conservative icon for supporting policy that prohibits inclusive curriculum—a self-described "leading crusader against 'wokeness'" (Krugman, 2023, para 1). DeSantis is most known for supporting what progressives have labelled the "Don't Say Gay" bill, which prohibits discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in all Florida public schools (Parental Rights in Education, 2022; Pendharker, 2023). Florida legislature also targets publicly funded universities in the state, which DeSantis claims promote "'trendy ideologies' including Critical Race Theory" (Summers, 2023). Following suit, many conservatives around the U.S. have advocated for limits on classroom conversations around racism and the U.S. history of slavery, arguing that such discussions cause "discomfort, guilt or anguish" for White children (Gross, 2022).

"Should the focus [of curriculum] be on individuals or on social processes; on America's failures or her successes?" Appiah (2005) asks, acknowledging that "the real debates here, though, are not about what happened but about what *narratives* we will embed them in" (p. 207, emphasis added). The impetus for involvement in identity-related conversations in schools by conservative groups involves striving for control over the identity constructions to which their children become conscious—the narratives they will encounter (Appiah, 2005; Greene, 1988). Another member of the 'Moms for Liberty' group reported to *The Washington Post,* "I also object to telling some kids they're oppressed and telling other kids they're the oppressors … This is America. Nobody's being oppressed right now, in my opinion" (Oremus, 2023, 1:24). We suggest, as Paulo Freire (1970) famously argues, that contrary to the interviewed woman's view above—"This is America, nobody's being oppressed right now"—*children* and their freedom to engage in ethical self-creation are an overlooked group of citizens who are, in fact, experiencing this oppression.

The irony is that although these conservative parent groups often invoke the concept of "freedom," "parents' rights," or claim that they are "prioritizing education, not indoctrination" in justifying the control they wish to exert over their children's development (Bouie, 2023), the actions of these parents demonstrate that they are actually much less concerned about their children becoming free-thinking and free-choosing adults, and more concerned about propagating their own beliefs through their children. Thus, in protecting children's autonomy (or the extent to which they are eventually able to become autonomous individuals), a democracy might at times need to play the role of "protecting the autonomy of children *against* their parents, churches, and communities"

(Appiah, 2005, p. 138, emphasis added). In this sense, the role of educators is not to teach students to hold a specific set of beliefs, but rather to free them from being singularly conscious of such.

Roles of educational institutions

Amid these tensions—the array of collective identities vying for children's attention and directing teachers as to who they are and are not allowed to *be*—we suggest that a dialectical relationship necessarily exists between parent groups and educators with relation to children's identity formation in schools. While parents might advocate for the ability to control or influence their children, teachers in public schools must heed our collective moral imperative to protect the freedoms of students in becoming conscious of a wider variety of ways of being in the world than their parents might allow. Greene (1988) reminds us that education ought to provide the openness necessary for aiding children's sense-making of the world through ethical self-construction:

> It is through and by means of education, many of us believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed. (p. 12)

As Greene suggests, a teacher's commitment to openness and questioning (vs. conditioning, replicating, and dogmatising) will make way for students to engage in the free construction of their ethical selves. "The matter of freedom, then, in a diverse society is also a matter of power, as it involves the issue of a public space," which Greene (1988) suggests we can think of as the relationship between "finding one's voice and creating a self in the midst of other selves" (p. 116). Through investigating the ethical and moral ends of education, we ask with Greene (1988),

> How, in a society like ours, a society of contesting interests and submerged voices, an individualist society, a society still lacking an 'in-between', can we educate for freedom? And, in educating for freedom, how can we create and maintain a common world? (p. 116)

Ethically-constructive education

When public school teachers and educational leaders see their roles in society as upholding the freedoms of students in ways that allow students to develop their ethical selves while also becoming morally aware of their relationships with others, we open up possibilities for students to grow and become. When students are given the space to explore the spectrum of possibilities related to how they might choose to be and become in the world, they are exercising a freer version of the "freedom" we (Americans) supposedly have in the U.S. When students are aided in viewing gender, gender expression, and sexuality as a spectrum of possibilities, they are freer to explore and create themselves than when they are given binaries from which to choose. When students understand that family structures around them might look different but might revolve equally around care and

concern for one another, they are might understand the moral imperative of family is to provide one another with love and support, rather than to appear as mother, father, and children. When students begin to understand race as a complex system that intersects with identity, culture, and power, they might develop empathy for those whom systems have failed—those who have experienced marginalisation, oppression, and disadvantage on account of who they are or the circumstances into which they were born. Students might then begin to understand their moral obligations to others in society—to take action against oppression, rather than pretending that "this is America—nobody's being oppressed."

The idea that teachers ought to embody a consciousness toward the ways in which individual students think, act, and view themselves in the world is not new in education. Scholars have offered numerous frameworks to the field which centre around the uniqueness of individual learners on account of their identities such as "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995), "differentiated instruction" (Tomlinson, 2001), "culturally-responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), "pedagogies of recognition" (Jenlink, 2014), and "identity-conscious education" (Talusan, 2022). While there may be nuanced differences between each of these frameworks, they share the same underlying argument, expressing in a variety of ways that the uniqueness of individual learners requires curricular and pedagogical compensation for such. In other words, these frameworks acknowledge the moral imperative that in order to help students learn, teachers must endeavour to account for who students *are* and the glass ceilings they may face. In this essay, we have endeavoured to help the reader better understand and articulate this imperative—to acknowledge that the process through which we as humans endeavour to construct our ethical selves and understand our own moral relations to those with whom we share social space is all bound up in enacting freedom.

CONTINUING THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

As we conclude the final version of this framework, we are reminded of the fact that even within the year in which we have spent writing and revising this article, the political landscape in the U.S. has continued to shift further toward social conservatism and away from many individuals' abilities to become. Not only have politicians in states like Florida continue to advocate for and enact policies that limit individuals' abilities to construct their ethical selves, the majority of the country recently voted into office a populist felon (Brotess et al., 2024) who has continued to garner support over the past 12 years through promoting policy aimed at suppressing collective identity groups such as immigrants (White House, 2025b), Muslims (White House, 2025c), trans- and gender-expansive persons (White House, 2025a), and members of the BIPOC community, in particular (Kendi, 2025). One of his most prominently featured 2024 political advertisements featured a low, masculine voice declaring that his female, democratic opponent, "Kamala [Harris], is for they/them," while "President Trump is for you" (Nagourney & Nehamas, 2024). This advertisement emphasises the extent to which conservative politicians have continued to weaponise identity politics to suppress the ability of many citizens in constructing their ethical selves.

The resemblance between Miles Bron and Donald Trump is disturbingly perfect. They are both privileged, White, male, billionaires who garnered support through lies (Kessler, 2021), insults

(Quealy, 2021), bribery (Vogel, 2020), and thinly-veiled corruption (Editorial Board, 2025). Like Miles's companions, conservative politicians, business executives, influencers, and religious leaders have continued to tie themselves in knots of ethical compromise in order to maintain good standing with this cultish figure for the chance of garnering favours and avoiding political retribution. While Miles was carried by a metaphorical glass escalator to the top of the *Knives Out* universe, Trump famously announced his 2016 presidential campaign while riding a *literal, golden escalator* from his New York City residence to the White House[6] (Gabbatt, 2019). While the central conflict which leads to Andi's murder centres around Miles's careless branding and use of the unstable "Klear" hydrogen fuel, Trump as president emboldened a volatile mob which exploded into an attack on the U.S. capitol on January 6, 2021, and resulted in the death of U.S. Officer Brian Sicknick (Berry & Frankel, 2021; U.S. Capitol Police, 2021).

When Helen smashes the contents of Miles's *Glass Onion* vacation home, her actions can be interpreted by the viewer as busting up the glass escalator of privilege on which Miles cheats, lies, and murders his way to wealth and fame, taking away his power and influence. But perhaps more significant are the implications of Helen's actions for both herself and Miles's compatriots. In shattering their collective reliance on and binds to the billionaire, Helen sets the present company free from the glass ceiling of Miles's control, rendering them free to reconstruct the ethical lives of their choosing. The difference between the *Glass Onion* and the U.S. is, of course, that the U.S. has yet to be freed of this particular form of oppression. In fact, Trump's re-election shows that like Miles's companions, many Americans have chosen to reaffirm the oppression of citizens with marginalized identities, such as the aforementioned identity groups.

A central challenge for us in writing this article has been in toggling between understandings of large-scale oppression in U.S. education and its relationship to identity construction (censorship, "parents' rights," identity politics, concepts of 'freedom') and the localised music education contexts we share with students every day. As Casey and McManimon (2020) acknowledge, "confronting the monstrous, seemingly insurmountable system of exploitation and oppression" and endeavouring to work against such in individual music classrooms is a daunting, albeit imperative task (p. 67). Returning to the central questions of this article—"How might music teachers make space for students' ethical self-construction while actively working against the seemingly invisible barriers that prohibit students from enacting such in music classrooms?"—we conclude with a few autoethnographic reflections on how we are wrestling with this question in our own music education contexts and how this work of identity-construction propels our future endeavours.

Kelly

As a young voice student, deep within exploration around my own gender and sexuality; I was fascinated with performing songs that were meant to be sung by male vocalists: "Black is the color of my true love's hair," I would sing with fervour, "Her lips are something rosy and fair" (Niles, 1941/2015, p. 12). However, my voice teachers always expected me to change the song's female pronouns—the subject of the (straight) male narrator's desire—to masculine pronouns because the

[6] Home of residence for the U.S. president.

idea of a girl (me) singing about loving another girl was "risqué." "The prettiest face and the daintiest hands, I love the grass whereon *he* stands" didn't make sense to me on so many levels. Now as a voice teacher, myself, I do not ask students to change a song's pronouns and I am encouraged when I encounter voice teachers who share my view. At a recent studio recital, one of my female students requested to sing "Angelina," a love song about a girl trying to get over her ex-girlfriend: "Where did you go, Angelina?" She sings with enjoyment (McAlpine, 2021). "Why did you take my foolish heart?" While I am unsure if this student's musical expressivity and song preference reflects a deeper part of her identity, I am hopeful that the larger social assumptions around gender and heteronormative love are challenged by her performance of the song for her family. "I think you should know, Angelina"—I hear the student and my younger self in unison as she sings—"that I'd probably fall again if you wanted me to."

While I have only been teaching music full-time for a few years, I have learnt many times already that students crave safe spaces where they know they are free to explore expressions of their identities. Within each school where I have taught, students have found their way to my classroom not only in attending their weekly music lessons, but during lunch and recess, before and after school. I have become the "trusted queer adult" for many of these students who yearn to share questions, thoughts, and realisations about their own identities with an ally. I have had over twenty students come out to me in five years of teaching and the first thing most of them say to me after sharing this secret is, "I can't tell my parents." I understand why they feel this way—here's a perfect example:

Within one of the schools where I recently started working, the father of a kindergartener I teach demanded of the principal that his daughter be taken out of my music classes on account of my being openly nonbinary—I had yet to meet his daughter or even step foot in the school at that point. In this way, I have learnt that the simple act of *existing* as a queer person is itself a disruptive act. After the principal refused the father's request, he appealed to the district school board, which, thankfully for the sake of my employment, ignored his request to fire me. As I reflect on the incident, I am puzzled by the severity of the father's reaction. We never discuss the complexities of what it means to be nonbinary within a kindergarten music class. The only noticeable difference between me and a female-identifying music teacher is that his daughter calls me "Mx." Kelly instead of "Ms." It's strange to think that one letter—"x"—could have so much power to disrupt.

The *Glass Onion*'s culminating scene of smashing and shattering begins quietly when Helen allows the glass of whiskey to slip from her fingers, disrupting the party's silence as it fragments upon the marble floor: one woman, one glass, one act of disruption that sets the stage for the ultimate dismantling of Miles's power. Interestingly, the *mother* of the kindergarten student took it upon herself to email my principal after I'd officially started teaching at the school. "My daughter loves Mx. Kelly and so do I!" she explained. "I don't agree with my husband and I'm glad to have Mx. Kelly as her teacher." Like the other members of Miles's party who eventually follow Helen's lead, this mother picked up her own glass and joined in the disruption with her admission, bravely fragmenting solidarity with her husband on the issue. Although these examples of disruption are small in scope, they each contribute uniquely to the larger idea of making space in schools for students to construct their ethical selves. Even the smallest disruption is enough to cause a ripple effect.

Scarlato

In many ways, my own part in this work as a music teacher educator is much easier than that of my K-12 music teacher co-author. I teach at a large institution (Berklee) in one of the most liberal states in the country (Massachusetts)—the first in the nation to legalise same-sex marriage and among the first states to sanction recreational marijuana. I live in a large, urban city (Boston) that serves as one of the U.S.' cultural and academic hubs. I teach at a music school made famous by Black musicians in which our curricula emphasises to a greater degree than any other school in the U.S. musics of the African diaspora. When I teach, write about, or present on topics related to identity and inclusion, my words are generally met with enthusiasm and support. Most of my supervisors (chairs, deans, presidents' cabinet, etc.) are Black. The practice of sharing pronouns with one another is integrated into email signatures, zoom profiles, syllabi, and class introductions. When I walk across the street to grab a cappuccino between classes, a transgender woman shop owner hands me my beverage. I note these examples not to suggest that I live and work in some kind of "post-systemic oppression utopia"—there are always more barriers to be broken, voices to uplift, perspectives to which we must awaken—but for the purpose of acknowledging the privilege associated with being an academic at a private music college in a liberal state whose inclusion-oriented work is supported by people in positions of power.

I currently teach a course at Berklee called "Perspectives in Multicultural Music Education," in which we explore concepts of identity and culture in K-12 music education contexts. Although students are typically well-versed in their understandings of and ability to articulate arguments for multicultural curriculum with an emphasis on broadening curriculum toward inclusivity, versions of the sentiment in Kelly's question—"How much glass can I break before they fire me?"—often come up in this class. More specifically, students often ask, "What happens if my first job is in a district where words like 'equity' and 'inclusivity' are perceived as threatening? How do I teach multicultural music in settings when it is unwelcome?" And as Kelly also asked in our class together, "How can I teach for identity-construction in music when my own identity as a queer, nonbinary person is viewed as unacceptable in the first place?"

While answering these questions as a class is exceedingly difficult and context-specific, we do talk about ways to teach for inclusive ends without using the "trigger words" (e.g. "diversity," "equity," "inclusion," etc.) that typically elicit a negative response from conservative members of the community. One preservice teacher mentioned, for example, that they were not allowed to ask students in their practicum school what their preferred pronouns were, but that by introducing themselves and their *own* pronouns as teachers, they tried to signal to students that it was safe for them to share pronoun preferences as well. Another teacher volunteered that they often check in with individual students whose preferred name and pronouns are different from the school's official record before communicating with their parents—sometimes a student might be "out" as transgender or nonbinary at school but not at home. Thus, the teacher's confidence and sensitivity, as Kelly has described, are necessary for the student to feel safe exploring their identities. I am reminded also of Charlie from my dissertation research, who was forbidden by his principal from teaching Hip-Hop repertoire and histories to students: "I try to teach you the music you care about, but I can't teach you some songs you like because they're not [considered] school-appropriate,"

he explained to middle school students while pulling up a ukulele tutorial video on YouTube. "But what I want to do is help you figure out how you can learn those songs when you're at home so that you don't need me there to show you what to do" (Scarlato, 2021, p. 157). In demonstrating how to look up chord charts for their favourite songs and encouraging students to take the instruments home, Charlie endeavoured to resist what he viewed as unfair policy and help students explore the music of their choosing.

Throughout this article, we (authors) have invoked 'glass' as a metaphor in reference to the mostly invisible (though often obvious) barriers in education that constrain students—particularly those with marginalised identities—from exercising their freedom to engage in the ethical project of identity-construction with moral respect for others similarly engaged in such. We have articulated an argument for the necessity of building and preserving spaces in school curriculum in which students can explore and reach toward constructions of their own identities alongside others. We have called upon teachers to consider becoming 'disruptors' within educational systems that prohibit students' ethical development, particularly those students whose ethical selves are disparaged by political policy and social movements that are centred around the propagation of specific ways of being (read: White, heteronormative, Christian, and capitalist in the U.S.). What might it mean, we continue to ask, to make space in schools for students to engage in free, ethical self-construction? What might it mean for teachers to work toward deconstructing the barriers that students might face in commencing this task? Lastly, what are the moral and social implications of an educational environment in which students are free to explore identity constructions respectfully and supportively alongside their peers who are similarly engaged in their own self-construction?

Ultimately, we believe that the "answers" to the questions we pose within this paper are embedded within contextually-situated music teaching spaces—that the answers are in the stories of individual music teachers who, like Janelle Monáe-as-Helen, are striving to foster spaces in classrooms that allow for students to grow and become, constructing and reconstructing their ethical selves and moral orientations toward the world. It is stories such as these which give meaning to the philosophical framework we present in this article—stories that have yet to be told, lived, and experienced. And it is these stories that propel our research forward in light of this framework.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

«Πόσο γυαλί μπορώ να σπάσω πριν με απολύσουν;» Διαπραγμάτευση ηθικά εποικοδομητικής εκπαίδευσης σε ένα κατακερματισμένο πολιτικό τοπίο

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Εν μέσω των πολλών πολιτικών διαφωνιών που προκύπτουν μεταξύ των ομάδων συλλογικής ταυτότητας που διεκδικούν χώρο στο εκπαιδευτικό πρόγραμμα σπουδών, προσφέρουμε σε αυτό το άρθρο ένα θεωρητικό πλαίσιο εντός του οποίου υποστηρίζουμε ότι τα σχολεία βρίσκονται σε μοναδική θέση για να λειτουργούν ως χώροι όπου οι μαθητές μπορούν να διαπραγματευτούν τις ηθικές και δεοντολογικές ταυτότητες της επιλογής τους. Αντλώντας από το έργο της φιλοσόφου της εκπαίδευσης Maxine Greene (1988) και του φιλοσόφου της ηθικής Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005), προτείνουμε ότι: 1) η ανάπτυξη ή το «γίγνεσθαι» της ταυτότητας ενός ατόμου αποτελεί μια *ηθική* προσπάθεια, 2) η διαπραγμάτευση του χώρου της ταυτότητας τόσο στην εκπαίδευση όσο και στην κοινωνία γενικότερα είναι μια *δεοντολογική* προσπάθεια, 3) το να ενεργεί κανείς με βάση τόσο των ηθικών όσο και των δεοντολογικών διαστάσεων της κατασκευής της ταυτότητας απαιτεί από τα άτομα να διαθέτουν μια μορφή κοινωνικά-πλαισιωμένης προσωπικής ελευθερίας, και 4) οι πρακτικές και οι πολιτικές στην εκπαίδευση που ευνοούν ή περιθωριοποιούν άτομα με συγκεκριμένες ταυτότητες πρέπει να αμφισβητούνται και ενδεχομένως να διαταράσσονται. Καθ' όλη τη διατύπωση αυτού του κεντρικού επιχειρήματος, ενσωματώνουμε συγκεκριμένα παραδείγματα από την ακαδημαϊκή βιβλιογραφία, πρόσφατα γεγονότα της επικαιρότητας στην αμερικανική ειδησεογραφία και πολιτική, καθώς και αυτοεθνογραφικούς αναστοχασμούς. Για να προσαρμόσουμε αυτές τις ιδέες ειδικότερα για τον αναγνώστη που ασχολείται με τη μουσική εκπαίδευση, χρησιμοποιούμε μια ποικιλία πηγών από διεθνή περιοδικά μουσικής εκπαίδευσης που δίνουν έμφαση σε περιβάλλοντα στα οποία οι μαθητές προτρέπονται να εξερευνήσουν και να κατασκευάσουν πτυχές της ταυτότητάς τους μέσω της μουσικής.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

ταυτότητα, συλλογικές ταυτότητες, ηθικά-εποικοδομητική εκπαίδευση, ηθική, ελευθερία, διατάραξη, μουσική, τέχνη