



Exploring how musical jamming sessions shape social bonding and student identity among university students

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Final Year Independent Research Project 2026

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Abstract

This study examines how musical jamming effects the students of a particular university to bond socially and build the student identity, keeping the research locale to Forman Christian College University (FCCU) setting. Music is traditionally viewed as a social and cultural activity that unites people and determines the experiences of the group. This research is specifically an analysis of the way students can be involved in musical activities like singing, playing or performing casually with the peers on the campus. These creative interactions helped students' express identity, communicate and form relationships that make them feel connected to the campus environment. Following the theoretical assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism, the research was designed as a qualitative one. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation used to collect data among 10 students of FCCU who participate in informal music activities. Thematic analysis gave rise to similar patterns and meanings of identity, creativity, and social connection.

Introduction

Music is not just a source of entertainment but a social process through which individuals navigate their identity and form meaningful relationships. In educational institutions where students are constantly navigating new social environments and academic pressures, interactive music activities like jamming helps an individual to fully express themselves and offers opportunities for constructing one's identity and social bonding with peers (MacDonald et al; 2002). Research has shown that even a little musical interaction can promote social bonding. In an experimental study some researchers found out that the act of synchronizing rhythms produces a sense of belonging that comes naturally within minutes of jamming session (Mansell et al; 2024). This “icebreaker effect” – that makes people feel closer together- as a result of a jamming session- has been quite noticeable in community singing groups (Launey and Peace; 2020).

Within higher education, jamming activities function as a powerful force for student development and well-being. When a group of students are sitting together, and singing in the jamming session, this allows peers to come together and socially connect with each other. So, such communities create a hidden curriculum of learning where exchange of musical knowledge contributes to shaping of the individual's identity and strengthening of social relationships (Czech; 2015). Furthermore, such groups provide a break from pressures of academic life and gives them a safe and inclusive space where they just forget everything and just relax, enjoy and breathe for a moment (Higgins; 2012).

This study provides a valuable framework in order to understand how jamming sessions help students to shape their musical identities and makes them more confident, creative and socially connected individuals – without any sort of anxiety and competition associated with, for instance, typical formal music competitions (Freer and Bennett; 2012). This study therefore, aims to address the following research objectives: 1) to explore how university students participate in jamming sessions on campus; 2) to understand how engagement in jamming activities shapes students' sense of identity and self-expression; 3) to examine how jamming contributes to social bonding and student communities.

Background of study

Universities are not merely academic but dynamic social environments where creativity, expression, and interaction are fundamental in the formation of the identity and

relationships of the students (Bennett; 2000). Music is one of the most effective of the cultural practices by students, linking individuals of various differences in terms of background, discipline, and interest. In campuses, music takes place as a form of structured activity, e.g. performing in an official society competition or an event, and in an unstructured, improvised activity, e.g. jamming with their peers (Halfyard; 2025). This paper is devoted to the latter: casual music jamming sessions that are fun, spontaneous and peer driven (North and Hargreaves; 2008). A good example would be that of group of students singing or playing different musical instruments on campus).

These musical activities are part and parcel of the campus life of Forman Christian College University (FCCU). Groups of students meet, carrying various musical instruments such as guitars, and perform in groups. These activities happen either in lawns, E block, Campus Centre, or the cafeteria - places that become elements of communication and creative activity. Although these activities may appear casual and informal in nature, but they do present an opportunity to communicate, cooperate, and build a community that surpasses social institutions (DeNora; 2000)

Building on this background, this study is guided by clear set of objectives and research questions. The following section outlines specific aims followed by relevant research questions. Together they provide a structured framework for exploring how jamming sessions shape identity and social bonding among university students.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the proposed research was to examine the relationship between musical jamming sessions and social bonding and student identity amongst the FCCU students. The research revolved around the interpretation of social meanings of musical jamming activities and the effects that such experiences have on self-expression and community-building among the participants. Specific aims included:

1. To explore how university students participate in musical jamming sessions on campus.

2. To understand how jamming activities shape students' sense of identity and self-expression.
3. To examine how jamming activities contribute to social bonding and community-building among students.

Research Questions

1. How do university students engage in jamming activities with peers?
2. In what ways do jamming sessions affect students' self-perception and how others view them?
3. What is the role of jamming sessions in creating a sense of community on campus?

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because of several reasons. First, it makes a contribution to sociology of art by establishing how creative activities such as music affect social relationships and student culture. It lays emphasis on informal as opposed to formal musical education; on the informal, self-devised creative and interactive activities students create in their everyday lives. These spaces are important in promoting important values such as inclusiveness, self-identity and belonging, which most institutional research studies on student life overlook.

Secondly, the research provides beneficial meaning to the various learning institutions. It advocates the value of creative expression as a means of student engagement and community building by demonstrating how musical jamming sessions can cause students to socialize better among themselves. Construction of social life through music could be applied to the development of policies that would support creative and inclusive campus communities.

Finally, this paper provides a subjective and reflective view. Being a student researcher and a participant of jamming myself, I do have an insider view which makes it possible to empathize more and understand the experiences of the participants better. This reflexivity improves the credibility of the information besides taking into consideration the interpretive aspect of qualitative research.

Literature Review

This literature review examines existing sociological research on music, identity and social bonding, with main focus on music activities such as jamming. It draws on symbolic interactionism (Blumer; 1969) and concept of musicking (Small; 1998) to understand how shared music experiences shape meanings, identities and social ties. It begins by exploring how young people use music as an identity resource , then discusses how collaborative music making activities enhance social competence and emotional co regulation (Kreutz; 2014) and lastly examines empirical studies on group singing and social binding in order to identify the research gap that this study addresses.

Youth, popular music and identity

The study on youth and popular music has always demonstrated that musical practices are important in shaping the identity of youth. Young people employ music in order to express individuality as well as group memberships. Tastes and culture in music indicate memberships to specific peer groups, or subcultures. The same block e can be applied to the case of university students, who can negotiate their identity and feeling of belonging by engaging in creative activities together (Bennett; 2000). Zanardelli (2021) in his study also found that adolescents actively use music as an identity resource constructing their social identities through shared musical preferences or performance experiences within peer groups.

This social categorization is influenced by music preferences as individuals of the same musical preferences are regarded as more likable and relatable. Jamming is therefore a social inclusion technique that helps students form friendships and a community among

themselves through symbols of appreciation (Hargreaves et al; 2001). The creative spaces in Pakistan are usually characterized by the bigger cultural needs and requirements. There can be institutional or social boundaries to formal music performances, but in the case of jamming which is more casual, a group of people can express themselves through casual singing or instrument- playing. This helps provide students with a chance to be creative and express themselves, without any sort of judgement, making a socially inclusive space for all.

Music is a form of symbolic interactionism, where mutually constructed meanings are established via sound, rhythm and performance. Symbolic Interactionism theory implies that people behave based on the meanings that they constitute in social realms - meanings constructed and reproduced in the interaction (Blumer; 1969). This argument continues by thinking that anything done which is related to music, in terms of either doing it (performing) or simply being there creates relationships which are also social (Small; 1998). Therefore, jamming sessions in a university among students is reflective of their tendencies of cooperation, innovativeness and identification with a group.

Collaborative Musical Activities and Social Competence

It has been proven that social and emotional understanding is enhanced through collaborative music-sessions. The ability to listen, to adjust and empathize are the fundamental skills in social life, which may be learned by the students through jamming activities (Hargreaves et al, 2002). In this regard jamming activities may become a source of amusement, alongside being a process of making music together. This interaction through music is directly connected to increased social competence in many ways. First, the need to be an active and attentive listener to other players develops what Miell and MacDonald refer to as auditory social cognition - the capacity to detect subtle changes in timing, dynamics, emotional outbursts just as vital in verbal communication and interpersonal interaction. Second, the necessity to always fit oneself into the group by, for instance, changing rhythm and harmonizing melodies, forms what has been described as *interpersonal flexibility*- and that is an ability that can help one successfully adapt socially

to different situations (MacDonald et al: 2002). It has been argued that collaborative music making activities such as jamming have positive psychological effects on individuals (Kreutz, 2014). According to this study only 30 minutes of group singing leads to positive emotional and psychological well-being leading to more social trust and a feeling of belonging. In addition, research highlights that the emotional aspect of musical cooperation is especially important to social growth (Hargreaves et al; 2002). This study reveals that the common emotional process in music-making, which they describe as emotional co-regulation, generates neural mechanisms that boost the empathic comprehension. This *affective mirroring* in music occurs when the different people are involved in the music unconsciously matching their emotional state (MacDonald et al; 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer; 1969)

This study was based on symbolic interactionism which views these jamming activities as something that constitutes meaning, identity and social cohesion among students. The meanings that people create through social interaction with peers are the main focus of symbolic interactionism (Blumer; 1969). According to this theory individuals behave according to the meaning that is created during social engagement and interpretation. Communication and shared experiences are the means of constantly negotiating and redefining these meanings. Symbolic Interactionism was beneficial in the interpretation of the perception and experience of jamming, as an important social activity by students. When students are singing, or playing any musical instrument together, they are not doing just that, i.e., playing the music, but are also communicating symbolically. Every single action corresponds to a shared feeling of identity and belonging.

The theory of looking glass self (Cooley; 1902) says that the identity of a person is reinforced through communication with his or her peers, and that identity is a social product and hence cannot develop in isolation. And that collective reflection provides an actual

feeling of belongingness. Therefore, being in such collaborative creative environments, the students form their own personal, and social identity within campus environment. (Hargreaves et al; 2002).

Therefore, jamming acts as an interactive social space students are able to express themselves, build relationships and forge identities. As per the framework, identity is not a fixed trait but a process that is constructed through ongoing process of social interaction. So, by observing, participating and studying how students are engaged in the process of jamming, this study will seek to determine the symbolic meanings that guide their creative and social activities.

The musically inclined students who play instruments, sing or have an acquired understanding of music usually receive some level of symbolic regard and social appreciation from their peers. Such appreciation leads to confidence, expressiveness and creativity among peers. Music has been identified by sociologists as a social power-organizing feelings, relationships and culture. Bringing the idea that music is a technology of the self, it has been argued that individuals apply it to manage their feelings, create identities, and live in society (Denoro., 2000). Not only does music mirror society, but it influences the way people think and respond to each other. In the same way, music is not only expressive, but it provides a direct experience of identity through both creation and consumption i.e., listening (Frith; 1996). In universities, music acts as a social and a reflective process. Music is a way used by students to identify, be creative, and convey common values. Jamming sessions and informal performances make way for a social space in which one finds new friends and sustains the ones existing. Such experiences show that creative performances can create a sense of belonging and social unity, and this aligns with concept of musicking (Small, 1998); which holds that music is not a product but an activity.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to explore how musical jamming sessions shape student identity and social binding among students of FCCU. A qualitative

exploratory design was chosen to capture the lived experiences, meanings and social processes that participants give to interactive jamming activities (Braun and Clarke; 2006). The chapter describes the research area, sampling strategy, data collection techniques (semi structured interviews and participant observation), data analysis, ethical considerations and data retention protocols. This chapter thus aims to assess the credibility and transferability of findings in order to ensure transparency of the research.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Forman Christian College University (FCCU) in Lahore Pakistan. FCCU acted as an ideal location due to the presence of a wide student population, a good campus culture. Areas such as Elahi block, Main Ground, and Jim Tebbe Campus Center (JTCC) were specifically chosen for data collection because most observable creative activities including impromptu singing, and jamming sessions happen in these locations at FCCU. This helped me explore the role of jamming in shaping personal identities and social bonding among students on a deeper level.

Research method

The study was based on qualitative exploratory design in order to gain in depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences, and social interaction with others, something that quantitative study can't capture alone. An exploratory design is really necessary when it comes to under-researched topics such as jamming sessions in Pakistani universities as it provides flexibility to discover emerging themes and patterns that are not predetermined by existing theory.

Sampling Method

A total of 10 participants were recruited using the purposive snowball sampling. A few students who I knew took part in casual music sessions on campus were selected first. After

I had interviewed them, each individual was invited to suggest three other students who they made music with, and they were requested to suggest someone who could have had a different experience or viewpoint. In this process, I have kept a record of the students involved, and proactively sought students with diverse experiences, to ensure that I receive many perspectives. By doing that, I was able to get the participants based on their social networks without losing the diversity of the jamming community.

Step-by-step process:

Step 1: I purposely chose 2 participants initially from a number of campus spaces (for example, jamming activities in Elahi block, Main University Ground, and Student Campus Center).

Step 2: Conducted interviews and asked for referrals.

Step 3: Repeated interviewing until thematic saturation was reached.

Data Collection

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews collected were individual, and they were used to understand experiences and interpretation of jamming by participants. The interviews were approximately 40 minutes long and were audio-recorded (with consent).

The interviews were held in a relaxed environment (Campus Center, Elahi-block and Main Ground) so that the participants would feel free sharing their experiences in a natural manner.

2. Participant Observation

The data collection included participant observation. I was there to observe as well as participate in those musical jam sessions in these campus spaces: Campus Center, Main Ground, and Elahi block.

These observations were based on:

- *How individuals showcase their musical taste, skill and creativity during jamming*
- *How peers react and how that recognition shapes that individual's recognition, sense of identity (personal and social) and social bonding with the group*
- *How individuals communicate, cooperate, show support and build sense of community.*

As part of these observations, I focused on how individuals showcased their musical taste, skill and creativity during jamming sessions; for example, the type of songs they chose to sing and play on guitar with their peers. The interaction patterns between the participants were observed, such as how the musical roles were negotiated, and the way in which the verbal and non-verbal communication were used to promote collaboration and social bonding. The jamming activity was observed along with peer reaction towards the individual doing the jamming, for example, peers frequently gave applause, smile, and encouragement. The group communication styles were examined with a specific focus how group members supported each other; for example, peers singing favorite songs along. An interactive social environment was noticeable; evident emotional expression - joy, excitement- was documented, and the degree of collaboration and inclusion among the group members was measured, as well as how a sense of social belonging was established.

Such an approach helped offer the much-needed ground-level view of the very social processes of student identity and social bonding which were the prime focus of my research questions.

3) Systemic Data Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Thematic Analysis Model was applied using Braun and Clarke framework (2006). The process included:

Phase 1: Familiarizing with Data:

- Transcribed interviews verbatim
- Read and re-read transcripts
- Noted initial observations and patterns
- Example: Noted repeated phrases like "feeling connected" or "being myself"

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes:

- Labelled key phrases and concepts
- Used participants' own words
- Created comprehensive code list
- Example codes: Identity validation in music, Role negotiation in jamming, Social bonding in jamming.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes:

- Group related codes into potential themes
- Identify patterns across participants
- Create thematic maps
- Example Theme Development:
- Codes: "confidence building", "peer recognition," social identity"
- Potential Themes: "confidence and self-growth," and "recognition and social identity"

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

- Compared themes with entire dataset.
- Made sure that themes are a proper representation of data.
- Refine, combine, or split themes

- Example: Merging "group harmony" and "emotional synchrony" into "*Collective Emotional Experience*"

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

- Wrote comprehensive descriptions of each theme.
- Made scope and boundaries clear.
- Chose interesting theme names.
- Theme: *The Art of Jamming: How is student identity and social bonding formed by music jamming sessions?*

Description: How the musical roles are adopted by students to express and create their identities.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

- Integrated thematic analysis into story.
- Selected vivid data extracts
- Connected findings to research questions
- Example Structure: Identity Construction Process

Social Bonding Mechanism

- Community Formation Patterns

Final guiding analytical question:

What is being constructed here in terms of meaning and how is it defining the selves and social ties of the participants?

Ethical Considerations:

As part of ethical principles, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and respect was maintained throughout the research process. The participants were told about the purpose of the study and they were given an option to withdraw at any time. All documentation was anonymous by use of pseudonyms. The data was safely stored and will be used within academic purposes only. The study also excluded questions touching on the sensitive or personal mental health problems. It considered the creative and social experiences of the jamming process.

Data Retention And Secure Destruction Timeline:

Consent was obtained when taking the audio recordings. The information obtained in the process of the research (i.e. audio recordings, interviews and observational notes) is safeguarded in the digitized folders and it is saved safely in password guarded hard drive of my laptop to prevent any data leakage. In addition, none of the data transcription, notes and audio recordings, signed consent forms will leave my possession until I am completely finished with my thesis and until it is successfully published, according to standard academic practice. The audio recordings remain locked up in my hard drive until my thesis is complete and published. To monitor my data being deleted/ removed, I am and will keep tracing my data with the help of data log that has all the data destruction information.

Findings

The literature has demonstrated how jamming activities creates an overall pleasant environment and helps in shaping identity. Mead, one of the most recognizable theorists in symbolic interactionism, has stated that human society is based on symbolic naming, and that we are in an all-time mental conversation with people where we assume how they may view us and how they may respond to our actions (Griffin, 2012). These are the symbols

that assist us in exchanging information, identity markers and social identity through social interactions.

This research shows that jamming sessions act as an important force that promotes social bonding and student identity among students of the FCCU.

The results demonstrate that:

- Jamming sessions are social arenas in which students are free to communicate without restrictions of academic or social boundaries.
- The musical cooperation fosters peer connection and familiarity.
- Engagement into such activities helps build group identity and create a sense of community and inclusion.

Demographic Table (shows all 10 “male” participants)

Participant #	Age	Gender	Skill Level	Frequency Of Jamming
1	23	Male	Intermediate	4 times
2	23	Male	Advanced	7 times
3	22	Male	Intermediate	3 times
4	22	Male	Intermediate	5 times
5	23	Male	Advanced	6 times
6	23	Male	Intermediate	4 times
7	23	Male	Intermediate	5 times
8	22	Male	Advanced	4 times

9	23	Male	Advanced	6 times
10	23	Male	Intermediate	4 times

A sample of 10 qualitative interviews was carried out among FCCU students who are active participants in jamming activities with their peers. The effect of jamming sessions on identity and social bonding were discovered through thematic analysis. The interviews show four main themes that were emphasized and were the most prevalent among the participants:

- Theme 1: Confidence and Self - Growth
- Theme 2: Community and Belonging
- Theme 3: Recognition and Social Identity
- Theme 4: Expansion Of Social Circle

Shaping Individual's Identity

The first part of my research explores how an individual's *identity* is shaped through jamming. Two main themes come under the category:

- 1) Confidence and Self growth
- 2) Recognition and Social Identity

Theme 1: Confidence and Self-Growth

The most common theme across all participants was confidence and personal growth. Most were of the view that jamming activities help them grow personally and socially as individuals, make them more confident, increase their social interaction with others and help provide relief in times of academic stress. Overall, their self-perception was also given a boost because of this meaningful interactive activity.

One participant said:

"I believe that it makes me feel good because the stress of school work gets relieved to some degree when I have fun on such sessions. You are aware of how life in the university is - assignments, quizzes, presentations, all that stress. When I sit and have my friends and we listen to music, all that... just... disappears a bit. It functions as a re-boot button to my brain. I am lighter, happier. It is not only about the music, it is about the entire experience. The laughing, the mistakes which we make, the inside jokes appearing. It makes me feel I am not merely a student, you see? As I have this other side to me that is creative and expressive". (Participant 9)

This is an example of a participant who felt more relaxed, happier and confident as a result of these jamming sessions. It shows that jamming is not merely an activity that students do in their spare time but an experience where one constantly grows personally and socially- all the while making the atmosphere more enjoyable and inclusive for everyone.

Similarly, one participant shared the exact same notion describing jamming as a way of meditation:

"Uh alive I must say and that's a way to meditate, breathe and take stress out of me." (Participant 7)

The data also shows that confidence is not just internal; external validation plays a role here as one responded said:

"The confidence boost and the recognition and all the love and applaud from the listeners. I think becoming a part of a musical group has been one of my best decisions for shaping myself." (Participant 4)

Moreover, it was also noticed that the jamming experience at FCCU is inclusive and non-hierarchical which also gave these people more confidence regardless of where they were in skill level in music.

For some participants, music became a tool for processing difficult emotions and maintaining mental well-being, and they found jamming as a way to feel safer and more accessible. One participant noted:

"It has also helped me become more confident. I can express a different side of myself like a more creative one. Whenever I'm sad I play music." (Participant 8)

Therefore, the Confidence and Self-Growth theme shows that jamming events at FCCU are not just recreational events. They are essential areas of personal and emotional growth, and provide that self-confidence that permeates various areas of the lives of students.

Theme 2: Recognition And Social Identity

The second theme that was commonly observed was how an individual social identity on campus was shaped as a result of jamming. Most participants noticed being relatively better known and in the spotlight as a result of jamming. This helped shaped their personality as a whole and how others approached them.

One of the participants described this transition in the following way:

"Well at first nobody knew that I had a taste in music, I sing or I do music, after getting spotlight everyone came to know and people use to approach me to sing two words if possible... being brought in the spotlight after getting so much love from people from different ethnicities and backgrounds gives one a great boost in confidence." (Participant 1)

So, this shows how the participant felt more recognized through jamming. The phrases like *being brought in the spotlight* shows the love and support the participant had gained from his peers and students at campus who get together to attend or participate in those engaging musical sessions.

Another participant described the experience in the following words:

" This is because people now know me, and they call me whenever there is an event or an open mic event that is going to take place and this is an indication to me that I am an important personality among people. My self-esteem is steadily growing with each passing day and that has assisted me not only in FCCU but also in everyday life " (Participant 2)

The word 'important personality' here is quite an impressive one, as it does not only imply recognition but also a certain increased visibility, a more prominent appearance in the social spectrum of the university. To others, this awareness was accompanied by a feeling of obligation to live up to some image or way of life. One of the participants remarked:

"People begin to call you by some names - Khan Sahib, Rockstar, various kinds of names. So to live by that, I need to completely change my whole lifestyle. Not change, but this way will be my lifestyle. Respecting people, because an artist is always known by respect. When people respect him, then only his work will prosper."

This quotation brings out a significant aspect of social identity- it is not simply a label that is bestowed by people but a sense of identity that has to be perpetuated through the regularity of actions. The participant explains how he or she internalizes identity in a way in which the desired lifestyle becomes mine.

Another respondent indicated the way this recognition resulted in a positive feedback loop:

"At this stage you are getting a lot of attention, as the participant said: When you are at this stage you get a lot of attention such as people like your energy, basically interact with you basically appreciate you and that I how I became friends with half of the campus." (Participant 7)

The use of ‘half of the campus’ phrase is effective in bringing the meaning of increased social access which recognition provides and even that recognition serves to render the individual more accessible and socially assimilated. So, by examining these examples this theme illustrates that jamming sessions are not just a mirror of already existing identities but actually form new ones. Members are identified in certain manners and the form of identification determines how others will view them, and how they will perceive themselves. The musical identity is a social capital which leads to more connection, prospect, and belonging.

Social Bonding Through Jamming

The second significant category examined that jamming sessions help people connect socially and establish enduring relationships. In this classification, two themes were noted:

- 3) Community and Belonging
- 4) Social Circle Expansion.

Theme 3: Community and Belonging

The universality of all interviews was the feeling of community and belonging that participant had in jamming. All respondents characterized their jamming group communally, as either a community, family, circle, or tribe, with intense emotional attachment and support.

This community feeling was frequently referred to as something beyond friendship to make something deeper. One of the participants expressed this in a very eloquent way:

“Yes, we have one community and we have become one community ourselves... some old faces and there are new people every day but there are core people that formed the group and remain the same and sit down and do music daily... this actually brings more people

together... I view it as a family that gathers up at the time of dinner, we are more of a family that is diversified and has come together at one place.”

Another interviewee stressed the importance of diversity upon which the community was established:

It is a very diversified community as everybody has a different musical taste i.e. some people would like to hear other genre and others would like to hear different genre so I believe that the circle has a diversified taste. Lack of strict roles/ hierarchies is what makes jamming informal and this informal nature allows openness and vulnerability to happen. This transparency, in turn, enhances community ties.

Some respondents provided a complex definition of community as it applies to jamming:

“Yes, because you need coordination to make music that sounds good and feels good, and because you need to be a community so that you can achieve a shared goal right?... Communities mean that you have a shared goal of jamming and making others happy.”

This participant directly relates the notion of community to common purpose, in this instance, the purpose of making music that makes people happy both those involved in participating actively and the audience. The community is not only who they are but what they want to accomplish together.

In a nutshell, the theme unveils that jamming sessions form some strong communal ties that the participants feel like family who are supportive to their social and musical lives. These groups are diverse, have common intention, self-help and the feeling of oneness which members refer to as something sacred.

Theme 4: Expansion Of Social Circle

The second major bonding theme, present in 9 out of 10 interviews, concerns how jamming facilitates the expansion of social networks. Participants consistently reported that

jamming helped them meet new people, form friendships across diverse groups, and significantly broadened their social circles beyond what would have been possible through academic interactions alone.

The most vivid description of this phenomenon came from a participant who described the organic growth of jamming circles:

"When we randomly jam especially in ground, some people stop and a circle starts forming and it gets big and bigger... that is how we interact and get to know each other. We share our thoughts and perspective of music." (Participant 1)

The image of a circle "getting big and bigger" perfectly captures the magnetic, inclusive nature of jamming. Unlike formal performances with clear boundaries between performers and audience, jamming invites participation and blurs these distinctions.

Another participant traced the numerical growth of their musical community:

"We get to meet and know new people through music, when we first started we were 4 people and now we are more... People have different taste... There is great diversity and we love it we get to know more and more people." (Participant 2)

The progression from "4 people" to "more" to "great diversity" illustrates how jamming functions as a social accelerator, constantly bringing new people into the circle.

The role of campus spaces in facilitating this expansion was highlighted by one participant:

"Once you start doing a random jam, mostly in CC, a lot of people come. Most of them were singers. All the proper singers in FC, I know a lot of them. But they also know me from these jam sessions." (Participant 3)

This demonstrates the nature of social expansion aided by musical activity. Jamming is a form of social bonding and it brings people who have similar tastes together, which

subsequently leads to deeper and more meaningful and sustainable relationships. The growth did not just stop at intra campus relationships. This shows that the social networks that are established by jamming may not be limited to FCCU but establish inter-university networks and the wider musical communities.

Music is a ready-made subject of discussion and a basis of interaction that makes the first meetings less awkward.

One participant elaborated:

"I've had so many people approach me just because they saw me playing or singing somewhere. Even if we don't become close friends, we at least have that connection now. Next time we see each other, we say hi. That's valuable in a big university." (Participant 9)

The phrase 'valuable in a big university' is meaningful--it references the need to stay familiar, form connections, in big universities, and how jamming assists in meeting that need by enabling shared experiences. Overall, the theme shows that jamming sessions are a very effective network growth mechanism. They help make strangers turn into friends and acquaintances, and social networks turn into bigger and more diverse groups. This growth occurs naturally, does not need any special work on the part of the participants and has a way of spreading beyond the university itself.

In addition, though gender analysis was not the main focus of my study but it was surprising to notice during the findings that all participants in my study, who were involved in jamming, were predominantly male and not a single female jammer was there. As a result, these findings ignore how musical jamming sessions shape social bonding and identity of female students.

Discussion

By applying the qualitative exploratory method, I could observe the breadth, context and lived experience of the individuals in a non-numerical manner but rather in the sense that the students ascribed to their creative and social experiences. The findings of this study were justified by the use of symbolic interactionism and they reveal how jamming activities shape student identity and social bonding among FCCU students. There were four major themes that emerged from the data.

- 1) Confidence And Self-Growth
- 2) Recognition And Social Identity
- 3) Community And Belonging
- 4) Expansion Of Social Circle

All these themes collectively demonstrate that jamming is something that shapes overall personal and social identity of an individual, creates valuable relationships and social networks, and provides a sense of community and belonging.

1) Identity Formation Through Jamming

Confidence and Self growth and Recognition and Social Identity

The two themes – Confidence and Self-growth and Recognition and Social identity show how jamming gives an individual identity and recognition through participation and how that results in confidence and overall growth of the individual. Participants consistently reported that jamming enhances their self- confidence, reduces academic stress and reveals their unique or creative side beyond “just being a student”. Like one participant regarded jamming as “one of the best decisions for shaping myself” because it gave that “confidence boost and recognition” from listeners (participant 4).

This finding aligns with conceptualization of music as “technology of the self” where individuals use music to develop unique identities, confidence, recognition and navigate their social lives (DeNora; 2000)

The theme of recognition and social identity shows how participants were recognized on campus through frequent jamming sessions. Like one participant said that people now “recognize me and they call me whenever there is an event happening”. This shows how you even start to get more opportunities too once you get recognized by more people. (Participant 2). So, this aligns with symbolic interactionism theory; particularly of *looking glass self* (Cooley, 1902) which explains that individuals form their identities and self-perception based on how others see/ interact with them. The applause and the smiles from peers become symbolic affirmations that participants internalize leading to positive self-affirmations which enhances their self-perception.

Moreover, this constant shaping of one’s identity highlighted by participants reflects the concept of “possible selves” (Freer and Bennett; 2012). In formal musical events or singing competitions there is this aspect of competitiveness and perfectionism. Whereas these fun interactive jamming sessions have no such standards and make individuals feel care free and full of hope and positivity, because their purpose is to make individuals confident, creative and socially valuable. It also makes him/ her as well as the listeners feel good, develop deep social and emotional connection and shared connectiveness in that social space (Freer and Bennett; 2012).

2) Social Bonding Through Jamming

- **Community and Belonging and Expansion of Social Circle**

The last two themes Community and Belonging and Expansion of Social Circle show how jamming fosters social cohesion and expansion. Participants consistently used words like ‘family’, ‘community’ or ‘social circle’ for jamming circles which suggests how jamming acts as a second home for students. One participant, for instance, regarded jamming as “diversified family gathering” and he stated further that harmony of oneness as a result of jamming “creates magic” (participant 2). This finding aligns with recent research study that argues how participation in group music activities among college students is positively linked to positive social connections and peer support and that how

music based social interactions strengthens psychological mechanisms that enhance mutual trust and cooperation (Yang et al; 2025)

The expansion of social circle through jamming also reflects symbolic interactionist process. When a person starts a jamming session and rest of the people join in, a social welcoming community is created because people gather for a shared purpose. For instance, one participant said, “whenever we randomly jam in ground, some people stop and a circle starts forming and it gets bigger and bigger”. This shows how social interaction keeps growing once its initiated through continuous negotiation of inclusion and belonging (Blumer; 1969). Participants also viewed jamming as a “social magnet.” A research study also highlighted that collective free improvisations during jam sessions serve as a meaningful support system in university setting that extends beyond immediate family circles (Halfyard; 2025). This also helps people learn skills from one another because jamming is also a form of learning, a “profoundly collective and improvisational matter.” (Brinck; 2014)

In addition, the findings reveal that jamming is non- hierarchal process in FCCU. It was described as inclusive and welcoming to everyone regardless of skill level. Symbolic interactionism argues an individual identity is shaped through collective coordination and the status is negotiated momentarily through musical interaction (Gibson;2010). The data collected for present qualitative study also shows this clearly. In addition, a research study found that these creative adolescent jam sessions also give a safe space to participants to express themselves and form friendships. It gives them “a potent mix of refuge, catharsis, and transformation of their individual identities, and their friendships.” (Pignato; 2017)

Limitations Of The Study

The research was limited to one university i.e., FCCU only, and hence the results are not applicable to other universities of Pakistan since it’s not a comparative study. Moreover, snowball sampling method was applied that is convenient in the case of the hidden populations, but it possesses a great number of potential biases because the method

introduces the homogeneity bias where the respondents are largely homogenous in terms of social networks and do not represent some groups of people such as music preferences or social groups. Also, since I also engage in jamming occasionally, so interpretive bias may exist. I have pondered over the way my personal responses and judgments might have interfered with the interaction afterward. Social desirability bias was a significant methodological risk in the study since respondents are likely to be vulnerable to social desirability bias, or respond in a manner that they perceive to be socially acceptable or desirable rather than respond in a manner that would reflect their true feelings and experiences. The respondents might have emphasized the positive aspect of their music-related experiences, which will make it appear that it is about harmony, bonding, and self-development and reducing or eliminating conflicts, feelings of exclusion, and disappointments. The academic semester was short so it didn't allow extensive interaction with the participants and examination of seasonal changes in the musical activity. Although limitations do exist, but there are various strategies that were used to make the best of the research quality given the present constraints. I tried to utilize flexible timetables and a variety of communication networks to help me access music jammers. I performed triangulation using participant observation so I can cross validate the attitudes shown by the participants. The use of retrospective interviewing methods helped it give some longitudinal outlook despite the cross-sectional nature of the study. Moreover, snowball sampling was especially useful to access more intimate musical groups.

Implications Of Research

Future research should address the limitations of this study and extend its findings. First, comparative studies across multiple Pakistani universities would help determine whether the non-hierarchical, inclusive character of jamming observed at FCCU is present in other universities across Pakistan. It is also worth noting that all participants in this study were surprisingly male so the findings primarily reflect male student experiences ignoring the female participant perspectives. As a result, this limits the generalizability of findings to

female jammers whose experiences might differ. Thus, it is also important that future research expands on this research and explores barriers to female inclusivity in jamming sessions so that essential strategies are there for creating female friendly jamming spaces and female experiences are also explored in depth. In addition, the longitudinal design following student jamming groups across different semesters would capture how musical and social identities evolve over time. The mixed-methods research with larger, purposive samples could test the generalizability of the four themes and examine the causal relationships between jamming participation, mental health indicators, and academic retention.

Recommendations

The findings carry many practical recommendations for universities in Pakistan. Universities should encourage and make sure that creative spaces are there for students so that they can carry out their jamming sessions easily. Because jamming is also a form of art, and art is vital for the well-being of the students. Jamming sessions take place in universities in Pakistan but they are still limited due to the strict policies of educational institutions. This research, therefore, gives sufficient information and data to future researchers on interactive musical activities, such as jamming, so that institutions can ensure provision of safe space for students for such activities. They need to make their policies more accommodative, welcoming and responsive to the students since art is vital to any institution. Even education systems can make their policies compatible with the PERMA (Positive engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment) model to quantify the overall well-being of students (Muhammad, 2024). In addition, these such creative activities (it may be jamming or any creative activity that involves art) should not only be restricted to outside spaces but also inside classes as well so that interactive activities also occur inside the classrooms.

Moreover, my study also revealed that boys were predominantly more involved in taking part in jamming but as that was not the main focus of my study, future research can dig deeper into this to ensure jamming can be more inclusive for female students too.

Furthermore, as the current study was restricted to jamming activities at FCCU, it should be followed by a comparative analysis of jamming activities in other universities in Pakistan to gain an even deeper insight. The generalizability of four core themes to larger student sample includes the possibility of quantitative data collection as well.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was able to demonstrate that musical jamming at FCCU is a powerful means of symbolic interaction. Through symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), the four themes-confidence and self-growth, recognition and social identity, community and belonging, and social circle expansion- are not merely descriptive categories but manifestations of core interactionist processes: the looking-glass self, significant symbols, and the social construction of meaning. Jamming provides students with a social arena in which they can experiment with and solidify identities, form meaningful bonds, and develop a sense of belonging that is negotiated in every rhythm, gesture, and song choice. The non-hierarchical, inclusive character of FCCU jamming further illustrates Blumer's insight that social life is emergent, fluid, and continuously redefined by participants. This study contributes to symbolic interactionist scholarship by extending its application to these jamming sessions in the under-researched context of Pakistani higher education. Universities that understand jamming as symbolic interaction, and not merely entertainment, can better support the creative, social, and emotional lives of their students.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Letter

Title of Study: Exploring how musical jamming sessions shape social bonding and student identity among university students

Researcher: Ushna Zia

Institution: Forman Christian College University

Purpose of Study

This research was aimed at investigating the contribution of musical jamming sessions towards social bonding and identity formation among students of the Forman Christian College University (FCCU).

The observational study focal point will mainly be group music jamming whereby the observation was in semi-public areas in the campus such as main university ground, lawns, E-block, university cafe, campus center, etc.

Confidentiality:

All information shared during this study is strictly confidential. Your name wasn't disclosed, and pseudonyms are used. Moreover, the data collected during research (i.e. audio recordings, interviews and observational notes) are protected in the digital folders and is stored securely in password-protected hard drive of my laptop to avoid online upload and data breach. If I would have taken any physical notes, then that would be also kept in a safe locker accessible only to me but in this case I haven't taken any physical notes.

Voluntary Participation

Although this study is based on creative experience: jamming, your participation is completely voluntary and **NOT** without your consent. In case you feel socially awkward, distressed or uncomfortable due to research-based participation, then you are free to pause/ skip or stop the interview. There is no penalty at all.

Consent:

I have read and understood the information above.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Consent Protocols for Observation in Shared Spaces

Title of Study: Exploring How music jamming sessions shape identity and social bonding among university students

Researcher: Ushna Zia

Institution: Forman Christian College University

The study was very briefly introduced and explained to the organizers of the jamming event, the performers (e.g. person singing or playing guitar) and the participants attending the music circle, before the session starts. Their verbal consent was obtained and then the research/ participant observation proceeded.

I also explained to everyone through an announcement why data collection will be done and my role as a researcher and that they can always choose not to participate in it, but that the jamming sessions targeted in this research will be free to everyone and will be carried out in semi-public areas, the problem of privacy will not arise. People passing by or sitting close would not be bothered since many times people are interested in such activities and since they were not directly involved in the research process, they would not be actively informed about the research.

Appendix C: Semi-structured Questionnaire

1. *Can you describe a typical music session you've participated in at FCCU?*
 . کیا آپ ایک عام میوزک سیشن کی وضاحت کر سکتے ہیں جس میں آپ نے FCCU میں شرکت کی ہے؟
2. *How did you first get involved in informal jamming sessions with other students?*
 3. پ سب سے پہلے دوسرے طلباء کے ساتھ غیر رسمی جیمنگ سیشن میں کیسے شامل ہوئے؟
4. *What kinds of music do you usually play, and how does the group decide what to play?*
 5. عام طور پر کس قسم کی موسیقی بجاتے ہیں، اور گروپ کس طرح فیصلہ کرتا ہے کہ کیا بجانا ہے؟
6. *How does being part of these music sessions make you feel about yourself?*
 . ان میوزک سیشنز کا حصہ بننا آپ کو اپنے بارے میں کیسا محسوس کرتا ہے؟
7. *Do you see yourself differently now compared to before you started this?*
8. کیا آپ اپنے آپ کو اس سے پہلے کے مقابلے میں اب مختلف انداز میں دیکھتے ہیں 5.
9. *How do you think other students perceive you because of your involvement?*
 . آپ کے خیال میں دوسرے طلباء آپ کی شمولیت کی وجہ سے آپ کو کیسے سمجھتے ہیں؟
10. *In what ways has making music with others helped you connect with fellow students?*
 7. کن طریقوں سے دوسروں کے ساتھ موسیقی بنانے سے آپ کو ساتھی طلباء سے جڑنے
11. میں مدد ملی ہے؟
12. *Would you consider the people you make music with a community? Why?*
 . کیا آپ ان لوگوں پر غور کریں گے جنہیں آپ کمیونٹی کے ساتھ موسیقی بناتے ہیں؟ کیوں؟
13. *What is it about making music together that helps create bonds between people?*
 . ایک ساتھ موسیقی بنانے کے بارے میں کیا ہے جو لوگوں کے درمیان بانڈز بنانے میں مدد کرتا ہے؟

14. *Have you faced any problems while jamming on campus? How could the experience be improved?*

یا آپ کو کیمپس میں جیمنگ کرتے ہوئے کسی پریشانی کا سامنا کرنا پڑا ہے؟ تجربے کو کیسے بہتر بنایا جا سکتا ہے؟

15. *Do you think the campus environment encourages or discourages jamming sessions? Are there certain places on campus where jamming feels more comfortable and meaningful?*

کیا آپ کو لگتا ہے کہ کیمپس کا ماحول جیمنگ سیشن کی حوصلہ افزائی یا حوصلہ شکنی کرتا ہے؟ کیا کیمپس میں کچھ ایسی جگہیں ہیں جہاں جیمنگ زیادہ آرام دہ اور بامعنی محسوس ہوتی ہے؟


16. *If jamming sessions stopped happening on campus, what do you think would be lost?*

اگر کیمپس میں جامنگ سیشن بند ہو جائیں تو آپ کے خیال میں کیا ضائع ہو جائے گا؟

17. *What does jamming mean to you personally – just music or something more?*

پ کے لیے ذاتی طور پر جیمنگ کا کیا مطلب ہے - صرف موسیقی یا کچھ اور؟

Appendix D – IRB Certificate



FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE
(A CHARTERED UNIVERSITY)

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

IRB Ref: IRB-923/11-2025


Date: 20- 11- 2025

Project Title: Exploring how musical jamming sessions shape student identity and social bonding among university students.

Principal Investigator: Ushna Zia
Supervisor: Taqveem Ashraf

The Institutional Review Board has examined your project in the IRB meeting held on 20-11-2025 and has approved the proposed study. If any changes occur during your research related to participant risk, study design, confidentiality or consent, or any other change, then IRB must be notified immediately.

Please be sure to include the IRB reference number in all correspondence.




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