

Singing Our Songs in a Strange Land:
A Phenomenological Study of Black Male Music Educators

Wayne Mallette

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in
Teachers College, Columbia University

2023

© 2023
Wayne Mallette
All Rights Reserved

Abstract

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of five Black male music educators (BMMEs) in the northeastern United States. Of the four million educators across the country, recent studies show that only 1.9% identify as Black males, which is a decrease from six percent in 2008. The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influences and lived experiences of these Black male music educators, with the goal of creating music educational spaces within schools that better support Black male musicians. The researcher conducted a series of three interviews with each educator, which focused on their K-12 formative musical experiences, their collegiate music education, and their work as classroom music educators. In addition to two focus group sessions with the five educators, the researcher conducted three teaching observations. The theoretical framework for this study was Critical Race Theory.

The study took place in the span of four months in the fall of 2022. The interviews and classroom observations were analyzed by finding themes within them and reading them in the context of the entire interview to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the participants. The findings illustrated the participants' lived experience through a series of primary themes: family support, strong mentors/teachers, talent identified by others, resilience, isolation, Black church music influence, high expectations in teaching, and creating community.

Keywords: Music Education, Black Male Music Educators, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Critical Race Theory

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
List of Tables and Figures	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Chapter I Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement.....	3
Research Questions.....	3
Overarching Purpose.....	4
Overview: History of Blacks and American Education	4
Historical Context of Black Music	8
Early Black Music Education	9
<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>	10
Theoretical Framework	12
The Permanence of Racism.....	13
Interest Convergence	14
Whiteness as Property.....	15
Whiteness as Property in Music Education	16
Counter-Narratives or Counter-Storytelling.....	18
Plan of Research, Methodology, and Overview.....	19
Participants.....	19
Data Collection	19
Data Synthesis	20
Role of the Researcher.....	20
Conclusion of Chapter I.....	20
Chapter II.....	21
Literature Review	21
Black Educators.....	22
Black Educators' Pedagogy.....	22
Black Males in the Classroom.....	24
Black Males and the Stress of Access	26

Black Males Who Desire to be Educators	28
Gender and the Role of Educators	29
Gender and Music Education	31
Black Masculinity in Music Spaces.....	32
Black Bodies in White Educational Spaces	33
Racial Barriers to Access	35
Critical Race Theory and Black Male Educators	36
Chapter III	41
Methodology.....	41
Introduction.....	41
Design and Instrumentation	42
Hermeneutical Phenomenology	43
The Hermeneutic Circle.....	44
Study Design.....	45
Observations	46
Semi-Structured Interviews.....	47
Participants and Settings.....	48
Procedure	49
Classroom Observations	49
Interviews.....	49
The Focus Groups	50
Location of the Focus Group Sessions.....	50
Pilot Study	51
Participants.....	52
Analysis.....	53
Synthesizing the Meaning.....	53
Community	53
Representation.....	54
Culturally Responsive Teaching	55
Revisions After the Pilot Study.....	56
Data Collection and Instrumentation Plans.....	57
Synthesis.....	58
Teaching Observations	58

Interviews and Focus Group Transcripts	59
Final Synthesis and Analysis.....	59
Counter-Narratives.....	61
Qualitative Rigor	62
Researcher Bias.....	62
Journal Maintenance.....	63
Reflexivity and Positionality	63
My Counter-Narrative	64
Conclusion of Chapter III.....	65
Chapter IV	66
Results.....	66
Introduction.....	66
In a Strange Land.....	67
Settings: A Strange Land.....	67
Setting One.....	68
Setting Two	68
Setting Three.....	69
Setting Four.....	69
Setting Five.....	69
Participant Demographics.....	70
Charles Lake.....	71
Ian Brooks.....	72
Chris James.....	74
Kelvin Lawrence	75
Quentin Miller	77
Data Collection.....	79
Analysis.....	80
Findings	81
Themes	81
Family Support	82
“But It’s Complicated”.....	84
Strong Mentor/Influential Teacher.....	86
Talent Identified by Others.....	88

The Only One (Isolation).....	90
Resilience and Perseverance in the Face of Adversity.....	93
Church Music Influence.....	96
High Expectations (Teaching Style).....	97
Charles	97
Chris.....	100
Kelvin.....	101
Ian.....	103
Quentin.....	104
Creating Community	106
Research Questions Addressed	111
Delineating the Data: The Hermeneutic Circle.....	119
Dasein.....	121
The Participants' Dasein.....	122
Credibility and Confirmability	123
Conclusion of Chapter IV.....	124
Chapter V.....	125
Discussion.....	125
Introduction.....	125
Interpretation of the Findings.....	126
Isolation and Stress.....	126
Black Male Bodies in Music Education	128
The Intersection of Race and Gender Norms	130
Pedagogy and Practice	132
Culturally Relevant Teaching.....	133
Critical Pedagogy.....	134
Critical Race Theory	135
Interest Convergence.....	136
Whiteness as Property in Music Education	137
The Permanence of Racism.....	140
Counter-Narratives.....	140
Assumptions Narrative.....	141
Assumptions.....	142

Conclusion of Chapter V	144
Chapter VI.....	145
Conclusion of the Study	145
Singing Our Songs.....	145
Limitations.....	147
Recommendations for Future Research.....	147
Implications Counter-Narrative:.....	148
Of Our New Day Begun.....	148
Implications.....	156
Conclusion	157
Epilogue	159
References	162
Appendix A.....	167
Interview Protocol.....	167
Appendix B.....	170
Observation Template:.....	170

List of Tables and Figures

		Page
Figure 1	Hermeneutic Circle.....	45
Table 1	Dissertation Timeline.....	46
Table 2	Research Question Synthesis.....	61
Table 3	Hermeneutic Circle: Confirmations or Revisions.....	120

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, to God be the glory for the great things He had done for me. To my parents, Alvin and Wayneitha Mallette, this dissertation is dedicated to you. You loved me and taught me just as much as you did your own students. I do not know if I will ever have the right words to express my gratitude. Thank you for everything you have taught me—I stand on your shoulders.

To my brother, Alvin Mallette II. You taught me how to ride a bike, and you taught me how to really drive when mom wasn't looking! You have always had my back and been the best older brother I could ask for. To my sister-in-law Kyla, niece, Jasmine, and nephew Andrew. I love you! You always remind me that family will be there and always support you. To the entire Mallette and Brown family—every Aunt, Uncle, and cousin. You are supportive and a constant source of stability for me, and I love you all! To my ancestors and loved ones who have gone on before, I am because you were.

To Dawrell Rich, my partner. You love me fully and completely, as only you can. You bring joy and laughter to my life, and I could not ask for a better life partner. Thank you for allowing me to be me.

My village of friends, colleagues, and students has expanded over the years to include a diverse and valuable group of people. Your love has bolstered me in multiple ways and I am in your debt. To my friends who have been sounding boards for my rants and my personal “stand up comics” when I need to laugh and be a human. Thank you for the health and wellness checks!

To my dissertation committee. My sponsor Dr. Kelly Parkes, your wisdom and guidance has been absolutely crucial to my success through this program. You have taught me so much about being an academic and the importance of maintaining a work/life balance. Dr. Joseph

Nelson, Dr. Lori Custodero, and Dr. Bob Fecho. Each of you contributed to this final product in important ways, and this is a better dissertation because of you.

To Doc Seminar team 4, this has been quite a journey, and many of you have been there from the beginning. Maurice Limon, you are such an inspiration, and I want to be just like you when I grow up! To the OG team 4 members, Renee Duncan and Maureen Yuen. It has been an honor to learn with you and from you. And to Jamie Gunther, you were the perfect accountability partner, and I cannot thank you enough. Your friendship may be one of the best things I have gained through this process.

To the participants in this study—the Black male music educators (BMMEs). You trusted me with your stories, and I am forever grateful for saying yes. Your vulnerability and resilience inspire me. I hope I made you proud and did your story justice.

Finally, to every Black male educator, music or otherwise. While this is centered on these Black male music educators, this dissertation is a love letter to every Black male educator in the United States. To those I know and to those whom I have yet to meet, thank you. We need you. Please keep up the good fight.

Chapter I

Introduction

*“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long way from home, a long way from home.”*

“Motherless Child” (African American Spiritual)

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), non-White teachers are vastly underrepresented in the United States teaching force. With 82% of the country’s four million educators being White, only nine percent are Hispanic or Latin American, and seven percent are Black or African American.¹ There is also a stark gender gap, with 76% of educators identifying as women and 24% as men (no other gender identities were surveyed at the time of this research). What may be an even more alarming statistic is the number of teachers who identify as Black males—currently, only 1.9% (Bristol, 2020). Between 2008 and 2012, there was a four-percent drop in the number of Black male educators (Bristol, 2020). This rapid decline has caused many to wonder about experiences that Black male teachers might have had that could explain the trend.

While there is a growing body of research on Black male educators, there is almost no research specifically on Black male music educators. Further, instructors in the music classroom and in ensembles utilize one of the most Eurocentric models of education. To become a music educator, one must audition with music that is drawn from the Western Cultural Archive (WCA). In order to succeed at these auditions, aspiring music educators must perform their pieces using

¹ The terms “African Americans” and “Black Americans” will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

stylistic nuances that are rooted in traditional Eurocentric vocal and instrumental techniques. The pedagogy and the curriculum of most university or conservatory music education programs include Western music history, music theory, primary instrumental study (voice or instrument), and general musicianship (ear training and sight-singing)—all of which are taught from a Western European perspective (Koza, 2016). There are few to no requirements for the study of African American music, ethnomusicology, or music that is not centered in the WCA. With little to no priority given to non-WCA music or curricula, how do Black males who choose music education navigate a field that does not represent their musical and cultural roots?

This hermeneutical phenomenological study attempted to answer that question by exploring the lived experiences of five Black male music educators (BMMEs). The areas of focus were, but are not limited to, their K-12 music education, their university music training, and their current teaching experiences. This study is intended to help its readers understand the lived experiences of BMMEs, which will help music educators, administrators, and university music-education curriculum designers learn how to best support Black males in navigating the field of music education.

I began this chapter with an overview of the racial and gender demographics of teachers in the United States. Next, I will present the problem statement and research questions, followed by an explanation of the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory. Following that, I will provide a counter-narrative, describing my formative musical experiences, to provide context as to why this area of research is important to me as the researcher. Finally, I will explain the plan of research and the methodology.

Problem Statement

Only 1.9% of the four million teachers in the U.S. teaching force identify as Black males. The exact number of Black male music educators (BMMEs) in the United States is not known. However, Elpus (2015) found that of the music students taking the Praxis one year, 86.2% of the candidates identified as White, and seven percent as Black, which aligns with national teacher averages. Through a systematic search of the literature, using all available search engines at my disposal, I discovered that while there is a growing body of research on Black male educators, there is little to no research specific to BMMEs. To add to the research body on BMMEs, this study focuses on the lived experiences of BMMEs in Eurocentric music educational spaces

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this hermeneutic phenomenological study:

1. What formative musical experiences of Black males influenced their decisions to become music educators?
2. How do Black male music educators (BMMEs) describe their collegiate music education?
3. How do BMMEs negotiate their Black identity in Eurocentric music education?
4. In what ways do BMMEs encounter racial injustice in K-12 music education?
5. How do BMMEs' lived experiences inform their teaching practices?

The research questions for this study were chosen to focus on specific portions of the music educators' careers—their K-12 music training, collegiate music experience, and current teaching experience. The questions were selected based on what I believed I could most thoroughly answer.

Overarching Purpose

Understanding the lived experiences of BMMEs is a crucial step in creating more professional pathways for them, along with spaces in which they feel comfortable working. This study elevated the experiences of Black male music educators in order to learn about the types of environments that may be conducive to Black male musicians' success in music classes and ensembles, and as future educators. It is my hope that administrators, researchers, teachers, and other BMMEs will read this study. The information can be used to reshape K-12 classrooms, university and K-12 curricula, and audition processes to create more pathways for future BMMEs. I also hope that this study will both highlight and help alleviate some of the isolation that music educators of color, specifically Black males, face. By highlighting these counter-narratives, the music education field will have to look in the proverbial mirror to see what it has become, and how it must change to be more viable and transformative.

Overview: History of Blacks and American Education

Black Americans have long had a contentious relationship with the United States educational system (Givens, 2021; Butchard, 2010; Span & Anderson, 2005). Prior to the Civil War, many states instituted laws that made educating Blacks, or even the act of a Black person reading, illegal (Butchard, 2010; Span & Anderson, 2005). In the mid-18th century, many Southern states, including Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Virginia, and North and South Carolina, made it illegal to teach the enslaved how to read and write. With 90% of Black Americans living in the South at that time, these laws had a detrimental impact on the overall Black population of the United States (Madkins, 2011). Anti-literacy laws throughout the South also made establishing schools for free Blacks or selling writing material to the enslaved illegal. Where Black literacy was not explicitly against the law, it was customarily banned (Butchard,

2010). Those who were caught teaching enslaved people to read and write were subject to punishments such as fines, whippings, and prison sentences (Span & Anderson, 2005). Blacks who were caught learning to read or write were subjected to extreme abuse and torture; some reported being publicly beaten or having their forefingers cut off for the act of reading. In states like Maryland, Mississippi, and Missouri, the public gathering of Blacks, free or enslaved, for educational purposes was outlawed (Span & Anderson, 2005).

As an act of resistance, many enslaved individuals taught themselves to read and write in secrecy. Many of the Black educators and school administrators in the post-war South were people who had learned how to read and write during their enslavement (Anderson, 1988). At the time of the Civil War, only about one in 10,000 Southern Blacks were literate (Butchart, 2010). Their widespread desire for education is reflected in the words of one formally enslaved person in Anderson's (1988) account: "There is one sin that slavery committed against me, which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education" (p. 5). Many people in positions of power believed that reading and writing would expand the consciousness of Black people and present the possibility of liberation, which was an outcome that they feared (Butchart, 2010; Span & Anderson, 2005; Bell, 2004; Anderson, 1988).

After the Civil War and the subsequent abolition of slavery, Black Americans' deep desire to read and write intensified. If they were going to be able to function in society and have the possibility of social mobility, they understood that literacy skills were essential. For formerly enslaved people, educating their children and creating a literate Black society were priorities, and the demand for education from freed Blacks soon outweighed the supply of educators and classrooms to accommodate them. Almost 400 Black schools were created in the year following the Civil War's end (Butchart, 2010). For many years after slavery, through Reconstruction and

into the early 20th century, it was fairly common to encounter Black-controlled schools throughout the South; typically, they were funded either through public means or by Black churches. In the 1860s, cities like Alexandria, Virginia; Savannah, Georgia; and New Orleans, Louisiana saw a rise in the number of Black-run schools and boards of education (Anderson, 1998).

In Black schools in the South, all of the teachers were Black, and funding came from Black people in the community. This stood in contrast to the public schools in the North, which were funded by taxpayers, and in which the teachers were primarily White. It should also be noted that among Northern Black teachers, there were almost equal numbers of men and women (Butchart, 2010). After the Civil War, organizations such as the Freedman's Bureau were created to assist the formerly enslaved Blacks in establishing Black schools. While Northern White benevolence was important to the rise of universal schooling in the South, it was the determination and self-reliance of Black people that made it a reality. Many teachers, for instance, worked for months with no pay until the students' parents could cover their tuition. To aid teachers, the Bureau began coordinating with other agencies to pay their salaries. However, the financial support was inconsistent, and did not become a reliable source of income for teachers. When administrators were unable to pay the rent on schoolhouses, some independent Black schools were forced to close.

Enrollment in Black schools continued to surge throughout the late 19th century, bringing with it a need for Black teachers. In the first generation after the Civil War, freed Blacks and Northern organizations such as the Union Army and the Freedman's Bureau created 125 schools in the South intended for the professional training of Black teachers. There were also normal schools established throughout the country to train college graduates as teachers; these were

derived from the “normal school” model, and were designed to shape the most advanced Black students into future educators. Universities such as Fisk University and Hampton University also began to offer these normal classes, which were focused exclusively on training future Black educators in existing Black schools before sending them out to establish new schools (Butchard, 2010).

Although there were still limitations in the Northern states, many Black educators received credentials from both Black and White institutions. Black colleges such as Wilberforce and Lincoln were producing scores of Black teachers who would teach in both the North and South. Predominantly White colleges like Dartmouth, Harvard, and (most notably) Oberlin were also among the schools that educated future Black teachers. According to the Freedmen’s Teacher Project, between 1861 and 1876 there were 4,140 (35.5%) Black educators and 4,702 (40.3%) White educators, with a close-to-even split between male and female (the other 24.2% are unidentified). Regionally, there were more Southern Black educators than White: 1,251 Southern Black female and 2,081 Black male educators, compared to 674 Southern White women and 926 White men (Butchard, 2010).

Ultimately, the Reconstruction period devolved into a time of violent backlash and terrorism towards Blacks, in society and in the field of education. Southern Democrats gained legislative power and began dismantling state-level education departments. Budgets were slashed, and education for Black students began to suffer as substantial disparities began to emerge. School years were cut in half, teachers were unpaid, and schools were closed due to lack of funding (Butchart, 2010). White terrorist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, committed numerous acts of violence against anyone invested in educating Blacks during that time. Black and White teachers in Black schools were threatened and killed, and Black schools were

vandalized or burned. This resistance to Black education was seen as an attempt to retain White supremacy. As Butchard (2010) explains, “It was not only, nor even primarily, an attack on educational opportunity. It was rather an assault on a dream, the dream of black independence and freedom through education. The dream of the fullest emancipation through literacy and knowledge” (p. 154). Acts of violence against teachers in Black schools occurred throughout the United States, including in the North. In this context, we can begin to understand the hostile environment that Black Americans had to navigate in order to gain an education.

Historical Context of Black Music

Tracing the musical roots of Black Americans to West Africa, researchers have found that music played an integral part in their lives. Southern (1983) explains that almost every activity in the lives of people from West African nations involved music. It played a role in ceremonial installations of royalty, hunting expeditions, and even religious rituals. Aspects of everyday life, such as working in the fields or the marketplace, were also infused with music (Costen, 2004; Southern, 1983). Equiano the African (as cited by Southern, 1983, p. 7) stated: “We were all a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets.” African music extended far beyond just singing and drumming, with records of rare wind instruments, such as aerophones, and different types of flutes being found in parts of the continent. Among the Bantu people and those in Gambia, the xylophone was a primary instrument (Costen, 2004; Southern, 1983). People also made horns and trumpets from elephant tusks, and used them as talking instruments like drums (Southern, 1983).

This affinity did not cease when some Africans were enslaved and brought to the United States. Music continued to be a rich part of Black Americans’ everyday lives: for worship, entertainment, and other forms of lively expression. In towns across the country, people

established music schools and dancing schools. In day-to-day life, music was also prevalent, including as part of Black church services and work songs in the field. Notably, runaway slave advertisements frequently used the instruments the slaves were known to play as a way to identify them. For instance: “Run away...a Negro Man about 46 years of age...plays on the violin and is a Sawyer [Virginia Gazette, April 17, 1766]...CEASAR: Absented himself from my Plantation...plays well on the French horn. [South Carolina Gazette, April 19, 1770]” (Southern, 1983, p. 28). This musical acumen continued to be a prevalent skill for Black Americans as they continued to flourish in the United States.

Early Black Music Education

One of the first Black American music educators that historians have identified was Newport Gardner. It is not known where in Africa he was taken from, but eventually, he was sold to Caleb Gardner of Newport, Rhode Island (Southern, 1983). Records of Gardner’s life show that he had a great interest in music, and his master’s wife arranged for him to study singing at the singing school in Newport. He also taught himself to read, and became quite skilled at music after only a few lessons.

After winning money in the lottery, Gardner was able to purchase his and his family’s freedom. He also used some of the money to pay for a small room in a house in Newport, where he started a singing school. Along with his teaching duties, Gardner wrote music for the church and for concert halls. He was not the only early Black American music educator, either; records show that there were several Black singing schools established in the U.S., including one in New York and another in Philadelphia started by John Cromwell (Southern, 1983). Although little is written about these programs, it is important to note that they were funded and organized by Black Americans, much like Black schools.

Brown v. Board of Education

In response to the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution, individual states began to pass legislation meant to subvert the federal laws that abolished slavery and gave the rights of citizenship to Black Americans. Referred to as “Jim Crow laws,” after a Black minstrel character, these included restrictions on where Blacks could work, where they could live, and even whether or not they were eligible to vote. Most of the Jim Crow laws required the legal separation of Blacks and Whites in public spaces; Louisiana’s Separate Car Act of 1890, for instance, required all railways to provide different seating for Black and White passengers. Laws legalizing separate bathrooms, schools, and even textbooks were pervasive throughout the South. Despite these obstacles of violence and segregation, Blacks continued to make progress in establishing and controlling their own schools. In fact, before 1950, there were 82,000 Black teachers in the United States (Madkins, 2011).

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) became a leader in combating the growing violence and legalized racism toward Black Americans during the 20th century. They took several landmark cases before the Supreme Court, including cases focused on lynchings, the destruction of Black homes and businesses, and racial segregation in housing laws (Bell, 2004). W.E.B. Du Bois, the editor of the NAACP magazine *The Crisis*, published a study on the financing of Black schools in Southern states, with the goal of exposing and dismantling the legalized implementation of racism in the public square. It showed overwhelming disparities between how much public schools spent on Black students compared to how much they spent on Whites. For instance, “Georgia in 1926 had an average per pupil expenditure of \$36.29 for whites and \$4.59 for blacks, and average teachers’ salaries of \$97.88 per month for whites and \$49.41 for blacks” (Bell, 2004, p. 15). These states were thus in

violation of the requirement to provide separate, but equal, accommodations. Thurgood Marshall, the lead lawyer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and his team combined four cases to come up with the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which addressed that finding. They argued that Black schools were not and could not be made equal, thus denying the plaintiffs equal protection under the law as dictated by the 14th Amendment (Bell, 2004).

Not everyone in the movement celebrated the decision to argue for desegregation instead of equal funding for separated schools. Du Bois (1935) questioned whether the “Negro needed separate schooling” (p. 328), arguing that different schools were actually necessary for the proper education of the Black race. Black students in America, he explained, were being educated by Black teachers, and White teachers were educating the few Black students who attended mixed schools in the North. In Du Bois’s view, a “proper education of any people includes a sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil” (1935, p. 328), as well as knowledge of the student’s background and culture. Given the country’s longstanding, extreme racial tension, Du Bois asserted that “there would be no softening of hostility and prejudice from white people towards Black people in the United States” (p. 335).

In May of 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down the landmark *Brown* decision, which declared legal segregation in the country unconstitutional. A year later, a follow-up decision presented the timeline in which the desegregation of schools was to occur. The Court ruled that it should proceed with “all deliberate speed,” which essentially made for an extremely slow and hostile move toward desegregation (Bell, 2004, p. 91). Soon after this decision, White parents who refused to send their children to schools with Blacks began to flee urban neighborhoods (a trend referred to as *White flight*), and private schools began to see an increase in enrollment from White students. Black students faced extreme violence and hostility in their

attempts to integrate into White schools, and Black teachers began to lose their jobs at an alarming rate: “Nearly 39,000 Black teachers in 17 states lost their jobs from 1954-1965” (Madkins, 2011, p. 419). Most of these Black educators were either not hired at newly integrated schools, or were fired after only a few years at their new placement (Anderson, p. 156). This was despite the fact that “many of these Black teachers were highly educated and had advanced degrees” (Madkins, 2011, p. 417). Du Bois’s fear of Black students losing their Black teachers was becoming a reality. Today, only seven percent of teachers in the United States are Black.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT emerged in the 1970s as a response to critical legal studies, a line of legal scholarship that purports that the law is developed by people in power to maintain power (Bell, 1992). Though critical legal studies is a robust and effective school of thought, legal scholars like Derrick Bell felt that there were gaps in it because it failed to consider the impact that race and racism have on legal and societal structures. To understand CRT, it is crucial “to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination for people of color have been created and maintained in America...a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it” (Crenshaw et. al, 1995).

Ladson-Billings (1998), believing that race was undertheorized in education, used CRT as a framework to study its intersections with race and the law. She asserts that although there are no biological benefits to being White, the advantages that Whites enjoy can be seen in the preferential treatment they receive in almost every aspect of society, including education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Using CRT as a method of activism in education can help scholars insert new vocabulary into our dialogue, as it enables a shift in thinking and reframing of the

concept of Whiteness as normative. Four tenets of CRT used in this study to understand and frame the lived experiences of Black male music educators (BMMEs) are: (a) the permanence of racism, (b) interest convergence, (c) Whiteness as property, and (d) counter-storytelling.

The Permanence of Racism

One of the central tenets of CRT, the permanence of racism, is the idea that “racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society” (Bell, 1992, p. xxi). Critical Race Theorists often situate themselves ideologically between conservative and liberal scholars. While they disagree with conservatives about the impact that race and racism play in society, they critique liberal scholars on their often-idealist belief that victory over racism can be won through the legal system. Derrick Bell, for his part, asserts that racism can never be completely eradicated, but—even though it will always be in existence—one must be resolute in fighting it.

Bell (1992) further argues that “despite undeniable progress for many, no African Americans are insulated from incidents of racial discrimination” (p. 3). While there are no longer “Whites only” signs and segregated schools, racial bias in hiring, microaggressions, and underserved predominantly-minority schools are still prevalent in the United States. This “racial schizophrenia” (p. 8), as Bell describes it, is not restricted to the service industry; it finds its way into every area of society. When it is “advantageous, profitable or at least cost-free to serve, hire, admit, or otherwise deal with blacks on a nondiscriminatory basis, [White people] they do so” (p. 8). When it is not convenient or will cause other Whites to feel uncomfortable, discrimination will soon follow. Because of the permanence of racism, “civil rights gains will be temporary and setbacks inevitable” (p. 12). Knowing that, one must be diligent in combating racism. Acknowledging the permanence of racism, Bell explains, “is not a sign of submission, but an act of ultimate defiance” (p. 15). Put differently, understanding that racism will never cease to exist

does not mean that anyone should resign themselves to not fighting it; rather, it is a call to clarify the goal of the struggle.

Interest Convergence

Bell (1980) first introduced the concept of interest convergence in *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma*, defining it as the notion that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 22). He then uses this theory to examine the 1954 *Brown* decision, which ended segregation in public schools. While the ruling is considered a monumental advancement in the struggle for civil rights, the original impetus for the case was not school desegregation. Though Black people had seen segregation as harmful to Black children for years, the original objective in *Brown* was to advocate for equal funding for Black schools and students. But ending legal segregation at that moment in the United States, Bell (1980) argues, was an “economic and political advance at home and abroad for whites” (p. 22). Instead of arguing for equal funding of Black schools, the NAACP decided to argue against the separation previously sanctioned by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. In theory, Bell (1980) asserts, White people agree that segregation and racial discrimination are harmful to Blacks, but “few are willing to recognize that racial segregation is much more than a series of quaint customs that can be remedied effectively without altering the status of whites” (p. 22). When the advancements of Blacks is not in the interest of Whites, change will not occur.

According to interest convergence, if an advancement for Black people will take away exclusivity or a privilege a White person enjoys, it is likely that White people will fight that change, or even that it will not occur. This could be clearly seen in the angst many White parents displayed after the *Brown* decision. Milner (2008) describes this as “a loss-gain binary” (p. xx):

the fear that gains for people of color will result in the loss for White people of “power, privilege, esteem, social status, linguistic status, and their ability to reproduce these benefits and interests to their children and future generations” (p. 334). Emerging from this point of view is the concept that something must be taken from those in power when people from underserved communities gain access to previously restricted spaces.

Whiteness as Property

Not only is racism embedded in American society, but it is part of what makes our society a prosperous one (Bell, 1992). Slavery was present in the United States before it even became a nation. Thus, when laws were constructed to govern the colonies and later the country, race-based slavery was embedded into them (Anderson, 1988; Bell, 1992; Harris, 1993). With enslaved people considered property, it was in society’s financial interest to weave racial discrimination into the laws. When Native Americans were removed from their lands and murdered by the original colonizers, the property rights of Whites were asserted over those of Native American tribes (Harris, 1993). After the early colonizers took possession of Native lands, they began colonizing human souls in 1619, when the first enslaved Africans were taken to the United States.

As early as 1660, many U.S. laws and codes reinforced the idea that enslaved people were to be considered property. Among other restrictions, Blacks were “not permitted to travel without permits, to own property, to assemble publicly, or to own weapons—nor be educated” (Harris, 1993, p. 278). At the Constitutional Convention, when lawmakers were deciding how to proportion representatives in the House, Black enslaved people were ultimately counted as “three-fifths of all other persons,” since they were not considered humans; rather, they were property to be bought and sold at the decision of their masters. When thinking of property, one

will often think of tangible items, such as houses or clothing. However, Harris argued that since “slavery was contingent on and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be ‘white,’ to be identified as white, to have the property of being white. Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings” (1993, p. 279). Property can then be considered a right, rather than a physical object (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). In the United States, even if you did not own property, being White guaranteed you access to freedom.

Harris (1993) asserts that the relationship between property and the privileges that come with it is highly significant. The law protects property; thus, one expects to have their possessions protected. In essence, a person can expect that property to be leveraged for money if necessary. Since it is the government that has created and enforced these laws, they are not natural laws. Harris continues to argue that in this racialized society, where race and property became synonymous, expectations came to be associated with race. If you were White, you could own property; thus, “whiteness became the quintessential property for personhood” (Harris, p. 281). These expectations imply that Whiteness guarantees an individual certain privileges.

Whiteness as Property in Music Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) use the expectation of property in education to illustrate the privileges associated with Whiteness in American schools. The absolute right to exclude individuals from a space or an organization, they assert, is a benefit that only White people have. Prior to the 1950s, Jim Crow laws made it illegal for Blacks and Whites to attend the same schools. After the ruling in *Brown* made segregation illegal, White educators have exercised the right to exclude through “resegregation via tracking, the institution of gifted programs, honor programs, and advanced placement classes” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). Dixson and

Rousseau (2005) find that African-American and Latinx students are “disproportionately placed into the lowest tracks and afforded fewer educational opportunities as a result” (p. 8). Frequently, advanced placement classes and honors programs are seen as crucial preparation for higher education.

In music education, Whiteness as property through the absolute right to exclude is displayed in selective groups such as All-State, regional, county, or national music ensembles. These often have auditions that include stylistic requirements taken from standard Western European literature, and judges who are trained exclusively in this style. The absolute right to refuse individuals from these ensembles may leave those who do not make it into them at a disadvantage in later years; for instance, when it comes to accessing university music programs or conservatories with similar requirements.

An Audition Counter-Narrative

In my junior year of high school, I was practicing piano in the choir practice room when one of my friends came in to chat with me. It randomly came up in conversation that I had told her I was thinking of being a music teacher. She asked me if I was going to major in voice or piano, but I had no clue I had to pick an instrument to major in. When I told her I wanted to major in voice, she told me I should get a voice teacher and recommended her own, who was a professor at a university an hour away from me. Fortunately, my parents said they would let me take voice lessons from her, but I had to pay for the classes since they were paying for my piano lessons. I had just started a part-time job, so I could afford it. Had it not been for that chance conversation my junior year, I would not have been prepared for auditions.

During our lessons, my new voice teacher, who was White, helped me get ready for the auditions for which I had not even known I needed to prepare. I remember asking her if I could

sing a musical theater or a Gospel song, since those were styles of music about which I was passionate. She told me a musical theater song would not be appropriate for a college audition, but I could do a spiritual. I am grateful that, in that way, she helped to connect me to my cultural heritage.

Counter-Narratives or Counter-Storytelling

“Counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). Delgado (1995) argues that many scholars of color have been excluded from legal and academic publications. For instance, noted historians and sociologists such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Kenneth Clark were often denied opportunities to contribute to law reviews and academic journals, thus excluding the perspectives and voices of marginalized communities. Delgado continues to assert that when the life experiences of writers of color are excluded from the narratives, the “cost is generally imposed disproportionately on minorities and lower-class whites” (Delgado, 1985, p. 51). In education, the lack of voices of color can lead to unfair disciplinary practices and a non-representative curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

My audition counter-narrative serves as a method to expose a racial blind spot in the college audition process that almost derailed me from becoming a music educator. Had I not had that chance conversation, I might not have had the information needed for a successful college audition. Similarly, many of the stories of Black music students are not shared in research. Therefore, telling or lifting up counter-narratives, as they will be referred to in this study, that are not part of the White hegemonic narrative in the music education experience is an essential part of CRT. In this study, I will construct a counter-narrative in the implications section using the stories that the BMMEs have shared, in the spirit of CRT scholars.

Plan of Research, Methodology, and Overview

This study used a qualitative research approach of hermeneutic phenomenology. To gather data, I employed interviews, classroom observations, and two focus group sessions—one at the beginning, and one at the conclusion of the study. All observations occurred in person, and the interviews took place after each observation either in person or via Zoom, depending on the schedule of the participants. The focus group sessions were also held in person, with four participants attending in person and one via Zoom due to illness.

Participants

There were five participants in this study. The criterion for participation was to identify as a Black male who has taught music for at least four years in a school. The selection process will be discussed further in Chapter III. All participants are from the northeastern region of the United States. When the IRB approval was granted, each participant was contacted via email to invite them to take part in the study. Each participant received a pseudonym, and any identifying features, such as the school name and names of other individuals discussed, were changed to protect anonymity.

Data Collection

All data were collected in person, using three classroom observations, three one-on-one interviews before or after each classroom observation, and two focus group sessions including all five BMMEs—one at the beginning of the study, and one at the end. To ensure accuracy, interviews were recorded using QuickTime Player audio if the interview was live, or Zoom if the interview was virtual. I took classroom observation notes using an observation template (see Appendix B). Finally, I recorded the focus groups using QuickTime Player audio.

Data Synthesis

I synthesized the data using the hermeneutic circle, which is a process of reading the data with fore-sight² present, gaining new knowledge, and using that newly acquired knowledge during the rereading of the data. Themes were explicated from the interviews and observations.

Role of the Researcher

I am a Black male music educator with 20 years of experience in the public school system. For 14 years, I was a high school choral director; currently, I am the K-12 Supervisor of Fine and Performing arts for an upper-middle-class suburban district. My insider role as a Black male music educator may have helped the participants feel a level of comfort when discussing their experiences with race in Eurocentric music spaces.

Conclusion of Chapter I

This chapter was designed to frame the historical narrative of Black Americans in Education and Music Education. This will give us a firm footing in order to see how the existing literature displays how scholars and researchers have understood the lived experiences of Black male educators and music education spaces.

² Fore-sight is the term that Martin Heidegger, the originator of hermeneutics, used to describe preconceived knowledge.

Chapter II

Literature Review

*“Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swingin’ in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hangin’ from the poplar trees”*

“Strange Fruit,” Billie Holiday (1959)

The purpose of this literature review is to show how the United States educational system has treated Black Americans, and in some cases Black males, particularly in music educational spaces. To receive a degree in music or music education from a university or conservatory, one must traverse a traditionally Eurocentric educational model. Nearly all of the core classes required at the university level are taught with curricula from a Western European perspective (Koza, 2009; Lundquist & Simms, 1996). The individuals who come through these programs then become the next generation of music educators, and continue to teach according to this Eurocentric model (Lundquist & Simms, 1996).

This literature review will begin with a discussion of Black male educators’ experiences in educational spaces. The next section will focus on gender in education and music education specifically. In the following portion, the literature reviewed will focus on Black males in Eurocentric music education. The final section will discuss how the theoretical framework for this study, Critical Race Theory, can be used to understand the experiences of individuals of color in Eurocentric music educational spaces. Due to a lack of research on Black male music educators, most of the literature review will be centered on Black male educators, or on Black educators of all genders. This study aims to close this gap in research on Black male music educators. Therefore, the literature review will conclude with Critical Race Theory which I

believe will best help the music education field create more pathways and amenable spaces for Black male music educators.

Black Educators

Women are overrepresented in the United States teaching force, with the most recent data showing 76% of educators identifying as female and 24% as male. Of those males, only 1.9% identify as Black males, which is a six-percent decrease from 2008 (Bristol, 2020). Traditionally, the teaching profession has primarily been seen as a field for females. Many consider teachers to be caring and nurturing. By contrast, most men, and especially Black men, tend not to be recognized for their compassion, but rather for their ability to keep students in order (Lynn, 2006; Ferguson, 2000). Black women, however, have often found a home in the teaching profession (Bell, 2004; Madkins, 2011). Several studies have investigated the relationship between Black female educators and their pedagogy.

Black Educators' Pedagogy

In her study of two African American female teachers, Ware (2006) found that, consistent with previous research on Culturally Responsive Black educators, the women she studied tended to have a “no excuses” policy. Their students, for instance, were expected to rise to the academic expectations regardless of their socioeconomic status. Furthermore, Ware found that their intense expectations were matched by their deep compassion for their students. These teachers educated and supported both their students and their families, helping parents navigate the school system and even assisting them with managing their homes. The tendencies toward “other mothering” and being a “warm demander” (p. 432) that Ware outlines are consistent with Ladson-Billings’ (2009) assertion that teachers should focus on building relationships with the

students and the community in which they live. In this way, they raise expectations for students in a way that is both nurturing and demanding.

In many societal spaces, the presence of Black male bodies has historically been a source of fear (Ferguson, 2000; Douglass, 2016; Lynn, 2006). Ferguson (2000) asserted that images representing “Africans as savage, animalist, subhuman without history or culture” (p. 79) helped to rationalize slavery and the violent oppression of Black bodies after its abolition. This imagery has also helped to further the stereotype of Black men as enforcers and disciplinarians (Ferguson, 2000). Some see teaching as a caring and nurturing profession that is traditionally a natural fit for women, and that goes against common stereotypes of Black males (Ferguson, 2000; Lynn, 2006; Madkins, 2011).

To understand the impact that Black male educators can have on student achievement, Lynn (2006) studied the practices of three Culturally Responsive Black male teachers and found similar traits among them. This study also specifically sought to close the gap in research on Black male educators that existed at the time. Using portraiture, Lynn showed how these Black men connected with and advocated for their students of color. They exhibited a combination of “tough love, discipline, and care” (p. 21), which was critical to the success of their students. Lynn’s findings are consistent with the ones from Ware’s (2006) study, which described Black female educators as “warm demanders.” This commitment to high standards, order, and structure was a consistent theme with Black teachers. Lynn also found that these Black men exhibited a kind of “passion and commitment to African American youth in urban schools [that] is simply irreplaceable” (p. 23). The teachers focused on using education as an act of liberation, and they were invested in helping students connect to their cultural heritage. Further, they saw teaching as a way of giving back and liberating the community. Ladson-Billings (2009) confirms that

“teachers with culturally relevant practices see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encouraged their students to do the same” (p. 41). Lynn’s study not only provided a counter-narrative to the stereotypes of Black men, but it also gave a glimpse into the emotional connections and pedagogical practices of Black male educators.

Black Males in the Classroom

Since Black men are vastly underrepresented in the field of education, Black male teachers often have to work in settings where they are the only person of color and, in some cases, the only men as well. Understanding this isolation helps paint a more complete picture of their experience. Bristol (2020) used a theory of social isolation to highlight the challenges Black men encounter when teaching in either a predominately White faculty or as part of a faculty with more Black educators. These two groups had vastly different workplace experiences. Bristol referred to Black men who taught in predominantly White spaces as “loners,” and noted that they felt unable to be their true selves. They often resisted responding to hostility because they feared being labeled an “angry Black man,” and their concern with this perception sometimes inhibited their ability to advocate for their students. “Loners” also felt very disconnected from staff, and often thought they lacked a voice in both informal and formal settings. These factors can lead to social isolation, which may contribute to the departure of Black men from the teaching field. By contrast, Bristol referred to the Black male educators in districts with more Black men teaching as “groupers.” Those individuals felt free to be themselves, and did not have to “put on any faces” (Bristol, 2020, p. 301). They also experienced deeper bonds with staff members, including White women. Bristol posited that a possible reason for these stronger connections was the degree of contact the White staff had with Black men, including Black administrators and Black students, which led to an increase in positive interracial interactions.

The findings from Bristol's (2020) and Lynn's (2006) studies are consistent with research that Callender (2020) conducted in the United Kingdom, in which he described Black male educators in predominantly White educational spaces as frequently feeling like they lacked a voice in decisions that were made. They also recounted instances of constant conflict with White teachers, who saw them as "aggressive, intimidatory, and hostile" (p. 1094); this stood in stark contrast to their relationships with their students, which were positive and warm. Bristol (2020) similarly showed that Black men often experience tension and conflict in educational spaces with their White colleagues and administrators. The concept of the "angry Black man" may have helped to foster the stereotype that Black male educators are disciplinarians. However, Lynn's (2006) study shows that Black male teachers exhibit high levels of care and compassion for their students. In the settings where they were in the minority, Black male educators were disconnected from staff members, and never allowed to be their true selves. If Black men cannot be seen as nurturing individuals who can be excellent educators, as in Lynn's study, then those in positions to hire them, along with people who work with them, will never be able to create an environment where Black male educators can thrive. This contradiction and racial tension may be a reason for the decrease in Black men joining the field.

Bristol and Goings (2012) used a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of 27 Black male educators in an urban district that was part of the Boston Public Schools. To frame the understanding of the Black male teachers, they used the theory of *boundary heightening dynamics*, which states that when individuals identify as the racial minority in a work space, some may respond by negatively exaggerating the differences between the dominant culture and the minorities; act in ways that further "others" them; or work in isolation, even from other people of color (Bristol & Goings, 2012). Among their findings, the researchers noted that

some Black male educators reported their colleagues perceiving them as either overqualified or incompetent when it came to teaching, which resulted in a constant need to prove themselves. One of the participants had a White colleague who did not warm up to him for a year because they thought the Black male educator was a spy from the department of education, believing him to be “too good” to be a teacher. This teacher and several others in the study had to devise strategies for working with unwelcoming White colleagues. Bristol’s (2020) study on Black male educators in predominantly White districts highlighted a similar sense of not belonging.

Taken together, these studies show that Black male educators have a deep desire to give back and mentor students (Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Lynn, 2006; Lynn, 2002), yet appear to encounter obstacles when working with White colleagues (Bristol, 2020; Callender, 2020). It may be unfair to assume that they never encounter racial injustice in teaching White students, but the research highlights Black teachers’ conflicts when working in predominantly White educational spaces.

Black Males and the Stress of Access

Black males who traverse predominantly White spaces in higher education report encountering higher levels of stress compared to their White counterparts. Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) conducted a study of Black men that explored whether these increased levels of educational attainment could exacerbate the effects of societal problems and racial microaggressions on what the authors called their “mundane, extreme, environmental stress.” Black males in the United States, the researchers noted, are the most vulnerable to every major health condition of any population group. Although risk factors for these diseases typically decrease with educational attainment, Smith et al. found that Black males who pursued higher levels of education experienced *more* racialized stress as they gained access to these spaces. The

stress was a result of constant exposure to “racial microaggressive conditions [that] produce emotional, psychological, and physiological distress or racial battle fatigue” (p. 64). Racial battle fatigue can manifest as anger, shock, anxiety, and hopelessness following constant racist encounters. Educational attainment drew these Black males away from traditionally Black spaces, where they were raised, and exposed them to predominantly White spaces, where they experienced racial microaggressions and outright racism. In these environments, they also had to discern the intentions of Whites who may or may not be concerned with their safety. Notably, Smith et al. (2011) found that these racial incidents contributed to approximately 40% of the mundane, extreme, environmental stress the Black male college graduates in the study experienced.

These findings are consistent with Smith, Allen, and Danley’s (2011) study of 36 Black males from predominantly White educational institutions, who reported experiences with psychological stress that accompanies racial battle fatigue, marginalization, and stereotypes. The participants also reported hyper-surveillance, which was consistent with Callender’s (2020) research on Black male educators in predominantly White institutions. Simply walking around these campuses could prove fatal if they wandered into the wrong area or encountered a person with a fear of Black men. One participant reported being unfairly detained by campus police for simply being in the college student center. While he did not fit the description of any criminal, the police interrogated him and checked his identification. Though the Black males in this study were largely successful, Smith et al. (2011) found that the environments of their predominantly White schools were hostile for them, and caused them needless stress based on their race.

As Black men gain access to predominantly White institutions, their presence in these spaces makes them the target of racism and microaggressions. Thus, as Black male music

educators (BMMEs) attain more education, they will be able to access more majority-White spaces. Given that certain universities, conservatories, and K-12 educational spaces are predominantly White institutions, the researcher sought to understand the ways in which BMMEs encounter racial injustice in K-12 music education.

Black Males Who Desire to be Educators

The message (or stereotype) of what a teacher is and what they look like can be seen in the ways that students and prospective educators discuss who can pursue teaching. In their study, “Pathways to Teaching Course (P2T),” Goings and Bianco (2016) interviewed and observed 22 Black 11th- and 12th-grade male students who were enrolled in a course designed to prepare Black men to become teachers. These young men believed that messages about who should and who should not teach were ingrained early. Even at home their career objectives were not fully supported, because their families believed that working in education would not help them achieve financial success. Despite their perception of low expectations from some White teachers, however, these young men commented that their “access to caring teachers was an impetus for them to consider entering the teaching profession” (Goings & Bianco, 2016, p. 637). They also saw teaching as an opportunity to give back to their community, explaining that they believed seeing a teacher of color would help students connect better with school. This desire to give back and serve as mentors is consistent with Lynn’s (2006) findings.

Even though they had caring Black teachers, the participants in Goings and Bianco’s study still saw education as a field for White women, because that is what the majority of the teachers they encountered looked like. Black males may not see teaching as a viable field because they do not see themselves at the front of the classroom. It is also important to note that Black male students have long had a contentious and troubled relationship with educational

settings (Callender, 2020; Ferguson, 2000). These historical negative experiences in schools, and the inability to envision themselves as teachers due to stereotypes, may be contributing factors to the low number of Black male educators.

Goings and Bianco (2016) further showed that these Black male students looked to teachers as role models and sources of inspiration, but did not see enough instructors of color who could serve as such role models. In a similar vein, in a survey of over 100 Black students across the upper Midwest, Walker and Miller (1993) found that 70% believed there were not enough Black teachers in their schools. Notably, 7.8% of the students surveyed cited their music teacher as their role model, and six percent of them reported that their music teacher was Black. The study also showed that 75% of Black female students surveyed had a teacher role model, with 31% saying the role model was of the same race and gender. By contrast, 53% of Black males surveyed had a teacher role model, with only 8.8% stating that their role model shared their race and gender. This would suggest that Black male students have proportionally fewer teacher role models than Black female students. If Black males are going to succeed in school, and in turn become educators, they need to see more Black men in leadership and educator roles to help break down these barriers to success.

Gender and the Role of Educators

The concept of male teachers acting as role models for students is not universally seen as positive. Martino (2008), for instance, sees the emphasis on the idea of the male role model in education as problematic because of the narrow construct of what a man was supposed to be in the early 20th century. The lack of male teachers, especially at the elementary level, has long been a concern. However, Martino asserts that this focus on finding more male teachers is tied to political efforts toward the “re-masculinization” of boys in school (p. 190). He attributes it to the

intersection of homophobia and hegemonic masculinity, which has “feminized” education, which in turn may have contributed to the lack of male educators. Martino also points to previous historical eras in which there were calls for more male educators to teach boys, and notes that such messaging will continue to reinforce the idea that teaching is “women’s work” without a more complex argument about the impact of male teachers.

While not specific to Black men, Martino’s study makes a compelling argument for the need to recognize the pedagogical benefits that Black male educators can bring to the field. According to Lynn (2006), Black males are not always recognized for their pedagogical expertise; rather, they are more commonly praised for merely being enforcers who can manage difficult students. While recruiting Black male educators generally, and music educators specifically, is important, one must understand *why* we are recruiting them and not merely asking for more Black teachers.

Brockenbrough (2012) was more specific in his examination of how Black male educators navigate power and workplace politics in education. Using a Black Studies conceptual framework, he observed and interviewed 11 Black male educators from urban centers on the East Coast to better understand their experiences working in a predominantly White female field. Three themes that were discovered from the study included the participants’ inattention to their own male privilege, their contentious encounters with female teachers and administrators, and their desire for more male-centered spaces in education. The contentious relationships between White teachers and administrators that Brockenbrough describes are similar to the conflicts that Bristol (2020), Bristol and Goings (2016), and Callender (2020) found in their studies. However, this study highlighted discord with White women specifically; furthermore, the tension the participants experienced with White female administrators felt particularly combative toward

them. They described the conflicts as demeaning and emasculating, and Brockenbrough (2012) compared their experiences to the emasculation of enslaved Black men when separated from their families. While the research questions of this study do not focus specifically on gender differences, I did ask about the participants' perceptions of being among the few males in their respective educational spaces.

Gender and Music Education

Certain educational content areas, including music, have come to be widely viewed as feminized subjects, and thus possibly less desirable for male educators (Koza, 1993; McBride, 2016; Roustin & Mills, 2000). In their study, Roustin and Mills (2000) looked at how two male teachers worked with male students, and how they approached their roles as music educators. The authors assert that music classroom spaces have become feminized, and that men must constantly display their masculinity to maintain credibility; certain sociological and biological causes may explain why that is. Singing, Roustin and Mills explain, is not considered to be a masculine activity, and the vocal changes that males go through due to puberty can act as a deterrent to their participation in music classes. The authors also cite homophobia as a reason for the aversion to males in music spaces (Roustin & Mills, 2000).

Roustin and Mills (2000) further found that some male music educators often have to overcompensate, or even use toxic language and stereotypes, to attract and motivate male students. One of the subjects described how he would react after students sang a musical line correctly: "I, I did it from a very jock perspective. It's OK guys and we'd give each other high fives you know I'd say 'Alright! You were [claps hands] singing in-tune!' you know like nothing prissy" (p. 232). This was to cloak the activity in a shroud of masculinity, and avoid any homosexual or feminine undertones in the class. Notably, the male music educators in this study

saw themselves as role models to boys who may be troubled, which could explain the need to exert a greater level of masculinity in efforts to connect with them.

Music teachers are often tasked with recruiting more boys into their classes (Koza, 1993; McBride, 2016). In order to do this, male music teachers may attempt to exhibit overtly masculine behavior, and possibly to display hegemonic masculinity, as could be seen in this study. When men have to do this, they may be sacrificing their own identities, in order to hide any hint of homosexual or feminine undertones.

Black Masculinity in Music Spaces

The exertion of masculinity in music spaces was consistent with Carter's (2013) account of four Black gay males who participated in the marching band at various historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Carter used the method of participant inquiry to explore how these men viewed their experiences as gay men while they were members of HBCU marching bands. He also sought to understand how the participants identified and negotiated these spaces. Carter notes that music spaces have not always been safe for those identifying as LGBTQ; in particular, marching bands and university bands have historically excluded those who do not fit into heteronormative gender roles. Accordingly, three men in the study spoke of the need to appear, or "pass" for, straight among their band members. One participant, Derek, even chose to be in the percussion section because playing the snare drum was perceived as the most masculine of the instruments, and was popular with the girls. Another participant, Darrell, talked about acceptance as well, but more along the lines of color. Because of his lighter skin, he was more easily welcomed into fraternities and the marching band. However, that acceptance changed when he came out as gay to his friends and family; for him, even good looks and lighter skin could not overcome the stigma associated with homosexuality.

Discussing another one of the findings from his study, Carter noted that there was an absence of leadership from the school marching band director. Teachers have a significant impact on an ensemble's ethos, and Carter (2013) calls into question the effect of leadership on the band's sense of acceptance and community. His findings also touched on the reasons why students chose to participate in the band. For one participant, Darrell, it was about the sense of community. He stated, "I had never thought of it, but band was not about the music, it was about the community—coming together for a common purpose" (p. 37).

Both Carter (2013) and Roustin and Mills (2000) cited the presence of homophobia and hegemonic masculinity in music spaces. Prospective teachers who do not fit the heteronormative description of a man, Martino (2008) asserts, may not be seen as the "ideal" teacher when based on the need for male role models. Thus, prospective BMMEs, in addition to fighting the stereotype that teachers are only White women, must also deconstruct the societal barriers that say they must conform to the heteronormative construct of a man.

Black Bodies in White Educational Spaces

Concerned about the lack of diversity in the U.S. teaching force, Abramo and Bernard (2020) conducted a collective case study of prospective music majors of color in two urban public high schools, both in cities with a high minority population. The first school, Collective Arts High School (CAHS), was an arts magnet school with 650 students and four full-time music faculty members. The second school, Mountain Grove High School, was a traditional public high school with 979 students and one music teacher; band and general music were the only music courses offered: "This school (Mountain Grove) and the teacher have a strong tradition of sending students to become music and music education majors in college" (p. 13). Researchers interviewed music faculty members from both schools in a semi-structured format, and observed

40 hours of music classes. They also conducted focus groups with students from each school. Through this process they identified a number of common themes among the students.

The first two themes that the researchers identified touch on what the students and teachers deemed important in their musical community. Both the teachers and the students valued the high standards of their ensembles; they worked hard to perfect the fine details of musical pieces, and maintained a high-paced level of excellence. Students appreciated, too, how much time the teachers took to help them understand the non-musical aspects of performance, such as presence, concert attire, and being personable. It was through these performances, that the students were connected to the community outside of the school walls. They participated in community events where they played popular music that garnered them additional exposure.

Abramo and Bernard's (2020) next four themes focused on the perceived barriers to music schools. The first that emerged was that the "audition process did not reflect the students' abilities or values in music" (p. 16). Some students did not like the repertoire required for their target school's audition, and others did not like the idea of playing a solo audition piece, since they spent much of their time learning to play as part of an ensemble. Still others perceived the prerequisite of private lessons and participation in honors ensembles as barriers; indeed, fewer than five students in each school took private lessons due to scheduling and cost-related challenges.

Through their findings, Abramo and Bernard (2020) showed that there was "an opportunity gap, not an achievement gap, for the students of color in those programs" (p. 20). The students exhibited both passion and talent for music, but they clearly did not think that there were university-level music programs that had a place for those talents; specifically, the steps required for success in them did not align with the values they had come to appreciate. As

mentioned earlier, most university music programs' audition requirements are centered on the Western European style of music. Later, I will use the lens of Critical Race Theory to explain how racism has been embedded in American school music curricula and pedagogy, university music programs, and preservice music experience.

Racial Barriers to Access

To become a music educator, an individual must graduate from a four-year college with a bachelor's degree in music education; included in this is a music preservice experience, also known as a student teaching practicum. Following that, they must pass the state exam(s) required for music education certification. First, in order to be accepted to an accredited four-year college with a music education program, most individuals must audition. As stated in Chapter I, auditions typically require people to perform 1) scales (instrumental) or a musicianship test (vocalist and instrumentalist), and 2) a solo on the individual's instrument or voice. While these requirements are meant to be objective and to create a standard of acceptance, the very nature of the scales and the solos are limited to a Western, Eurocentric style of music performance. As Koza states: "Not only is this repertoire and style of singing within the reach of certain bodies, but it also does not leave room for other bodies" (2009, p. 61). The standard does not look or sound like students who are not White. Thus, it creates a homogenous music space and produces teachers who will further continue this pedagogy and curriculum—one that is designed for, and meant for performance by, White people.

Koza (2009) explains how university-level music education programs have become increasingly exclusive. These programs have very limited space, and only the very elite students who have scored high on standardized tests have even been let through the university gates to audition. She goes on to describe how restrictive the audition process itself is; the cultural

capital, then, belongs to the most elite, financially and educationally. Conservatories have an unspoken expectation that prospective music majors should study privately in preparation for their auditions. If a student in high school decides they want to be a music teacher, unless their teacher tells them or an adult in their life has this knowledge or cultural capital, like me, the student will not understand the importance of preparation for auditions. Koza (2009) states that most university audition criteria include “two art songs to be sung by memory. (Do not audition with jazz, pop, rock, folk, or other musical theater repertoire.) Thus, knowing and loving any kind of music is not sufficient; only one musical language is permitted” (p. 86).

Critical Race Theory and Black Male Educators

This section of the literature review will examine how Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used to describe inequities in the United States educational system. As stated in Chapter I, CRT first emerged as a legal framework in the 1970s. Ladson-Billings (1998) believed that race is undertheorized in education. Although there are no biological benefits to being White, the advantages that Whites enjoy can be seen in their preferential treatment in almost every aspect of society, including education. To that end, Ladson-Billings used CRT to begin to analyze the impact that race had on education.

In this spirit, Lynn (2002) used CRT to gain a deeper understanding of Black male educators in the Los Angeles Public Schools. He selected three schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District that had a substantial Black student population (near or above 50%), and that also had a sizable Black male teaching staff. Lynn then conducted short ethnographic interviews with 36 Black male teachers in these three schools; participants were all Black men who “believed that their racial identities informed their pedagogy and how their identities as

Black men teachers affected their linkages to their students” (Lynn, 2002, p. 124). The goal, for Lynn, was to see how the men related their work to their community.

The three major themes that were extracted from the interviews were that Black male teachers saw themselves as change agents, felt a responsibility to act as role models, and thought it was important to be able to relate to their students. They saw teaching as a means to change lives, with one commenting that it was a “tool for social and economic advancement...and would have the overall impact of improving his students’ lives” (p. 125). Another strategy the participants described for enacting change in the classroom is to revamp the curriculum to more closely resemble the students and their interests. This understanding of the need for activism and social change is in line with Crenshaw et al. (1995) and Matsuda’s (1991) belief that CRT is activist in nature, and will bring social change and justice. One of the questions this study will seek to answer is what influences BMMEs to become music educators.

In 2009, Lynn and Jennings took the study further and investigated the pedagogical practices of two Black male teachers in Los Angeles, using portraiture to create richer narratives and gain deeper insight into the connection between CRT and Black educators. The community in Los Angeles where their participants lived, Strivers Point, has been a site of “political and social action for African-Americans in Los Angeles” for years (Lynn & Jennings, 2009, p. 182). All of the schools in the area are considered Black, with more than 75% of the students identifying as such. For their study, the authors chose South Central High School and Strivers Point Middle School. One teacher from each school was then chosen to participate in the research. The criteria for selection were similar to Lynn’s (2002) study; these teachers had to be “committed to helping children develop a critical consciousness while attaining academic success” (p. 183).

Both participating teachers had a deep commitment to their students and the surrounding community. Using a CRT analysis of the condition of their schools, each teacher constructed “both pedagogies of dissent and affirmation” (p. 191). Both teachers provided safe spaces for students to raise their voices and to see themselves in the curriculum. They also were involved in dismantling the structures of oppression that could deter the students from a successful life beyond school. To this point, Lynn and Jennings (2009) assert that CRT pedagogy is as much about dissent as it is about affirmation: to “affirm the culture of their student and fail to oppose unequal school policies or speak out against unfair social policies illustrate a kind of passiveness that is necessary for a White supremacist patriarchy to thrive” (p. 192). Similarly, one of this study’s questions will explore how the BMMEs’ lived experiences impacted their teaching practices. Will the data from the study show similar pedagogical or teaching practices to the ones Black male music educators displayed in previous research?

Hayes (2014) uses an autoethnographic/counter-narrative approach in his article “What I Know About Teaching, I Learned From My Father.” He draws on his father’s pedagogical practices as well as his own to provide possible methods for preparing teachers to draw on the knowledge of their students. To do so, he uses three formal, semi-structured interviews with his father, Cleveland Hayes, Sr., and synthesizes lessons with a CRT method: counter-narratives. Hayes (2014) comes from a long line of male educators, from his father to his paternal grandmother, and so his research is aimed at understanding how “we view our work and roles as Black male educators” (2014, p. 249). More specifically, he sought to show the reader how he and his father constructed an anti-racist pedagogy and combated the detrimental effects that racism has had on the success of young Black children.

The major theme that emerges from Hayes' work is the concept of transformative pedagogy, which "refers to an approach or philosophy of teaching accompanied by practices that enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to navigate within, provide a socio-political critique of, and foster democratic change within conditions of historical white supremacy" (p. 256). Within that, there are three main components: equity, activism, and social literacy. Both Hayes and his father were intentional about using them all, even if they did not label them as "transformative." If we are going to bridge the education gap between White and Black students, Hayes believes, teachers will have to set and create this new path for their students of color to succeed. Doing so will require educators to be what Hayes calls "warm demanders," using Ware's (2006) term to describe his father's approach to his students. Each student must know how important education is for them, and we must make that explicitly clear.

If educators, administrators, and curriculum and teacher-preparation program designers examine and construct educational systems based on the tenets of CRT, it will help to inform their decisions to better serve teachers and students of color. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) state that these tenets are powerful because:

Researchers are able to uncover and unmask the persistent and oppressive nature of the normativity of Whiteness, and co-option and distortion of oppositional discourses, and the ways in which policies that are offered as remedies to underachievement and education disparity may not be in the best interests of marginalized groups, but rather serve the elite. (p. 30)

In this study, I use a CRT theoretical framework to examine the pedagogical practices of Black male music educators (BMME). As Lynn (2002), Lynn and Jennings (2009), and Hayes (2014) did, I will observe BMME in classroom settings to answer this question: "What is unique about

the pedagogy of African-American [Black] Teachers?” (Lynn & Jennings, 2009, p. 181). The quotes and lived experiences of each BMME are lifted as a counter-narrative. Looking to the “bottom of the well” (Bell, 1992) to learn from these individuals, I look to them to see how they connect to their students and communities, and how they approach and implement their curriculum as a means of activism and social change (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Matsuda, 1991; Crenshaw, 1995).

This literature review displayed the lived experiences as well as the complexities of Black male educators. The lived experiences of Black male music educators have not yet been displayed in research. This study is the first step in closing that gap. Concluding in this open-ended manor is an invitation to other researchers and scholars to join in this work of closing the gap.

Chapter III

Methodology

Wade in de Water
Wade in de Water, children
Wade in de Water
God's gonna trouble the water.

“Wade in the Water” (African American Spiritual)

Introduction

I will begin this chapter by discussing the design and instrumentation of the study, which examines the lived experiences and pedagogical practices of Black male music educators (BMMEs). I will describe the participants and the settings, alongside the procedures employed. Then, I will examine the pilot and its implications for this study. Following that, I will discuss the instrumentation and data collection plans, along with the plan for analysis. Finally, I will explain my positionality as a researcher. As I have embarked on this journey of my own understanding as a BMME, I hope that this study will help researchers, educators, and policymakers understand the experiences of BMMEs as told directly from their perspective.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and pedagogical practices of K-12 Black male music educators (BMMEs). Five primary research questions guided it:

1. What formative musical experiences of Black males influenced their decisions to become music educators?
2. How do Black male music educators (BMMEs) describe their collegiate music education?

3. How do BMMEs negotiate their Black identity in Eurocentric music education?
4. In what ways do BMMEs encounter racial injustice in K-12 music education?
5. How do BMMEs' lived experiences inform their teaching practices?

Design and Instrumentation

This study used a hermeneutical phenomenological method design. Phenomenology focuses on the lived experience of individuals, and does not attempt to categorize or organize the phenomena within a particular theme. Put differently: “Phenomenology is a study of people’s conscious experiences of their life-world” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 26). Qualitative research is aimed at understanding a phenomenon or group of people. Understanding how individuals have constructed knowledge and experience their lives will give insight into how they navigate and make meaning of the society in which they reside. It is important to note that I did not attempt to code or place emphasis on the perception of the participants’ experiences, but rather extracted the experiences as points of reference to better understand the phenomenon. The participants were free to discuss how they previously or currently felt about an experience, as feelings are different from perceptions. When an individual has an experience or an encounter with someone, it typically will elicit a feeling—positive or negative. How one interprets the feeling is their perception, and perceptions are necessary for meaning-making, which is “essential to phenomenological inquiry but only within the construct of experience” (Peoples, 2021, p. 3). Focusing on these events will allow the reader of the account to imagine what it was like for the participants to live them. There was also an emphasis on how each experience informed the knowledge or the consciousness of the BMMEs.

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a form of qualitative research, originating with Martin Husserl (1859-1938) (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, when using a framework for a

phenomenological study, one must also use a philosophical underpinning to broaden the understanding of the phenomenon. There are two primary philosophical frameworks employed in phenomenological studies: *transcendental*, which Husserl used, and *hermeneutic* phenomenology. While both phenomenological methodologies focus on understanding the essence of a thought or a phenomenon, hermeneutic studies consider the context of the phenomenon and the researcher.

The experiences of Black males are layered and complex. The methodology of phenomenology was specifically chosen in order to display the lived experiences of BMMEs. Letting the stories and quotes of the participants stand on their own in this study will put a greater responsibility of interpreting the data on the reader of the researcher. This will hopefully impact the reader in such a way that they will be compelled to make the changes to music education that are required to make more amenable pathways for future and current BMMEs.

Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology, which first originated with Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) (Peoples, 2021), is the philosophical framework that this study will employ. Researchers using this methodology must adhere to the belief that it is impossible to bracket our experiences, because our mere presence in the world means that we cannot separate ourselves from it. Heidegger (1962) refers to this state of being as *dasein*. *Dasein*, translating to “self” or “being there,” is the individual, and all of the “foreknowledge that the individual possesses at that moment, who interprets the phenomenon that occurs” (p. 27). When gathering data, the researcher must understand that they are in the situation as well, and that they bring their previously obtained knowledge to their observations. They should use that insight to inform their questions and better explicate the data (Gadamer, 1975; Peoples, 2021).

The word *hermeneutics* comes from the Greek word for “interpretation.” Whether theological or philosophical, hermeneutical studies are “an attempt to understand what the human sciences truly are, beyond their methodological self-consciousness, and what connects them with the totality of our experience” (Gadamer, 1975, p. xxii). Those subscribing to the hermeneutic phenomenology methodology believe that our understanding, or our “fore-sight,” must be acknowledged and used in the process of data collection and data synthesis. Heidegger (1962) asserted that our “fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conceptions” (p. 194) must be understood before the researcher reads the data and then uses them to gain new insight when rereading. This *fore-sight* (which is how it will be referred to in this study) must be used to understand the phenomenon being observed; its context, and that of the researcher, must be fully understood in order to comprehend the phenomenon. In reading and understanding the data, I will rely on this fore-sight, and my initial reading will produce new knowledge that will be used in the rereading of the text. Gadamer (1975) referred to this as a “description of the way interpretive understanding is achieved” (p. 269).

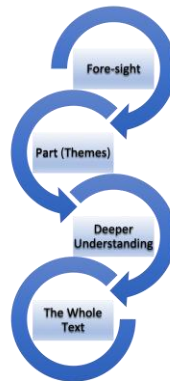
The Hermeneutic Circle

Heidegger (1962) refers to the process of revision as new knowledge is gained as a circle; Gadamer (1975) furthered this concept by referring to it as the *hermeneutic circle*. Throughout the process of interpretation, the researcher will continually move between the parts (codes and themes) and the whole (entire transcript) of the phenomenon in order to determine the meaning of both. One may understand what a concept means, but it is imperative to take the concept and interpret it in relation to the entire text. When using the hermeneutic circle (Figure 1), the researcher must bring their fore-sight to the initial reading; by doing so, they will gain more knowledge as they analyze the data. They must go back to the original text that was analyzed

with their newfound knowledge, which then becomes new fore-sight that they use to understand the data. Put differently, it involves “reading a text so that the intention and meaning behind appearances are fully understood” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 5).

Figure 1

Hermeneutic Circle



Study Design

Data for this study consisted of three classroom and participant observations, three semi-structured interviews, and two focus group sessions. I designed the protocol for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) as a part of A&HM 6041, *Interview Design and Analysis in Music Education Research*. The study took place in five sessions over the span of one semester: September through December 2022. At the start, I brought all the BMMEs together for an initial focus group. Following that meeting, I began the first round of observations and interviews. The 2022-2023 school year began in early September in each of the districts; thus, the first round of observations occurred during the first few weeks of school. The observations were followed by a 45-minute to one-hour semi-structured interview to discuss the designated area of each participant’s music education, or to touch on any topics that may have come up from

the observation. There were a total of three (3) observations, and three (3) one-on-one interview sessions (see Table 1). Each session’s interview focused on a particular moment in the participants’ journey as music educators. The interviews moved chronologically through their experiences as novice student musicians in their K-12 years, then moved to their college or preservice music years, and concluded with their most recent musical teaching work. During the fifth session, in December 2022, I conducted the final focus group session, which included a collective conversation with all five of the BMMEs.

Table 1

Dissertation Timeline

Session #	Anticipated Time Frame	Activities
Session One	September 2022	Initial Focus Group
Session Two	September 2022	Classroom Observation/Semi-Structured Interview
Session Three	October 2022	Classroom Observation/Semi-Structured Interview
Session Four	November 2022	Classroom Observation/Semi-Structured Interview
Session Five	December 2022	Final Focus Group

Observations

Observations allowed me to see the BMMEs’ teaching practices, and to examine firsthand how they connected with students and the school community. I paid particular attention to how the BMME interacted with students, how the music was taught, and how the students responded to the BMME and the music. The data from these interviews were recorded as “thick rich descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, p. 7), which are vivid details of the observations that allow the researcher to connect cultural patterns and social relationships. Observation will only enable the

researcher to infer the interactions between the BMME and the students as the music is taught. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were necessary for the participants to also add in-depth descriptions to what I observed.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Kavale (2007) defines a semi-structured interview as “an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewer with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 8). I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the five BMMEs during which they could discuss their formative musical experiences, along with their teaching practices and influences. A deeper explanation of the BMMEs’ encounters with race and racism in their formative music training and preservice music training allowed me to see how racial barriers, negative experiences, and positive experiences impacted their teaching practices.

Focus Group Sessions

One of the aims of this study was to allow BMMEs to converse in an environment that fosters a sense of collegiality and sanctuary, which they may not normally experience, and which helps to break down barriers of isolation. This is why all five BMMEs met together at the beginning and the end of the study to participate in a two-hour focus group. During these sessions, they had conversations with me and the other participants about their experiences in the study and their perceptions of how their race had impacted them as they navigated music educational spaces. Focus groups have their foundations in marketing, and can be traced back to the 1950s (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While I conducted my interviews in one-on-one settings including just me and each participant, the data gathered from focus groups was socially constructed from the group interactions. As the only Black male in most of my educational and

professional settings, I sought to use methodologies that can break down the barriers that isolate Black male teachers. More often than not, BMMEs are the only male educators of color in their schools.

Participants and Settings

The five BMMEs were from the northeastern region of the United States. The following criteria were used to select the participants:

- Must have been a music teacher for at least four years.
- Must identify as Black or African American.
- Must biologically identify as male.

So that I could give a fuller picture of the lived experience of these BMMEs, I wanted each participant to have already spent several years teaching in the music classroom. Researchers consider most teachers to be novices for three to five years (Kim & Roth, 2011; Petty et al., 2016); therefore, each BMME must have been a music teacher for at least four years. To reflect the broad diversity that exists among BMMEs, the goal was to select participants from urban and suburban schools, instrumental and vocal disciplines, and elementary and secondary teaching settings. The classroom observations occurred during an ensemble (band, orchestra, or choir) practice, a small-group lesson, or an after-school rehearsal.

I selected participants by using snowball, or networking, sampling—after three were found, they recommended others (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). After initially recruiting three participants through personal knowledge, I chose two additional people based on recommendations from a participant in the pilot study. Once each man agreed to be a part of the study, I emailed a consent form to him. Participants signed and returned the consent forms prior to beginning the first interview.

Procedure

Classroom Observations

I recorded data from the classroom observations using a field notes template (see Appendix B), which had three columns. The first column was for the objective descriptions of what I observed in relation to the research questions, and for recording vivid descriptions of the setting. In the second column, I could write comments in which I reflected on what was observed. Finally, there was a column for the themes that I discovered as I read and reread the observation notes. Activities that were recorded included, but were not limited to, classroom setting and community, the teacher's interactions with students, the students' reactions and interactions with the teacher, and pedagogical practices. I also recorded teacher dialogue with students and instructional cues (verbal and physical).

Interviews

The interviews were recorded using QuickTime Player audio on my laptop. I then used transcription software, Otter.ai, to convert the audio into text. The questions from the first session (formative experiences) focused on initial musical influences and mentors, K-12 teachers and peer relationships, and influences outside of school. During the second session, the questions focused on, but were not limited to, college ensemble experiences, relationships with professors, and experiences with the college curriculum. Finally, the third session focused on their current teaching practice, their interactions with staff and administrators, and their work with students and community members. Within each session, there were questions on how race and gender impacted their experience in these settings.

The Focus Groups

I recorded the two (2) two-hour focus group sessions using QuickTime Player audio on my laptop. Prior to the final session, I asked each participant to reflect on their experience in the study. The focus groups followed a similar semi-structured interview model, with the goal of generating conversation that allowed for a free flow and exchange of ideas. Additionally, this session permitted the BMMEs to have a group discussion about their experiences. The interactions were socially constructed, thus allowing for the data to be collectively constructed among the group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, the sessions provided an opportunity for individuals to talk with others who may understand the complexities that come with working as a marginalized individual in a Eurocentric music space. After recording, I also transcribed the sessions using Otter.ai.

Location of the Focus Group Sessions

Black people have often had a contentious relationship with education and educational spaces (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 2010; Morris, 2016). In particular, Black males have long been overrepresented among students against whom disciplinary action is taken (Ferguson, 2000; Lopez, 2003). Numerous institutional barriers have also led to their underrepresentation in higher education (Douglas, 2016; Ferguson, 2000). It should be noted, too, that Black people have often experienced trauma at the hands of researchers (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014; Douglas, 2016). Therefore, I wanted to hold the focus group sessions in a location that did not reinforce this trauma; rather, I wanted to find a place that could facilitate liberation, healing, and a free flow of ideas.

In the Black community, there have traditionally been places outside of schools that have been spaces for learning. Douglas (2016) posits that churches, barbershops and beauty shops,

sports clubs, and the neighborhood “have served as community-based pedagogical spaces” (p. 23). Black churches, in particular, have been places of education for Black people since their inception (Cone, 1985; Douglas, 2016). Emdin (2016) asserts that teaching practices and preaching styles from the Black church, or “Pentecostal Pedagogy” (p. 50), can be used as a model for engaging with students of color. Many Black musicians, too, can trace their early musical development to their experience in Black churches (Douglass, 2016). Similarly, Wright believes that many Black men “are as comfortable in the barbershop as they are at home” (1998, p. 2). Knowing that, I decided that the focus groups would be held at either a Black church or a Black barbershop. The participants were asked beforehand if they had a location preference, so that I could be confident that I was choosing a setting that would be conducive to the focus group. Three of them had no preference, and two of them mentioned they preferred it to be in a Black church. Therefore, I selected an African American Baptist church as the location for both focus group sessions.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in the fall of 2020 as part of the course *Interview Design and Analysis in Music Education Research*. During this process, the researcher interviewed two BMMEs in two one-hour sessions. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol, and contained additional questions based on the interviewees’ responses. I had known the participants for several years, which allowed for a comfortable exchange of questions and feedback. I then used the feedback to refine the research questions and protocol.

Once I had determined what the questions would be, I developed the protocol. I divided it into three sections: formative or foundational K-12 music education, preservice music education training, and current teaching experience. The protocol was designed to encourage the

participants to share their stories, and I found it to be effective. During the interviews, stories were shared, lessons were taught, and old wounds were explored. I participated as an active listener and engaged with the men, but I let them tell their own stories.

I scheduled each interview via text, and confirmed it via email. The participants were emailed the consent forms, and returned them before their interviews. I found that they were very open to sharing their experiences through this format, and they responded promptly with options for interview dates. Each agreed to meet via Zoom, since this was at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the interviews on the platform were recorded. Each participant received a pseudonym: Darius and William. The names of their schools, educational institutions, and any other identifying features were changed in order to ensure anonymity.

During the pilot study, I had yet to determine that I was going to use hermeneutic phenomenology as my methodology. After I gained a deeper understanding of how phenomenology can help to display an individual's lived experiences, I decided that it would be my preferred methodology for the full study. Instead of attempting to analyze codes from the data, I would generate themes, meanings, and narratives focused on the lived experiences of each participant.

Participants

I had known the first participant, Darius, for 10 years at the time of the pilot, and he considered me a mentor. He is a 28-year-old American-born BMME of Jamaican descent; his family came to the United States before he was born. Darius is poised, and has a very calm and charming demeanor. He grew up in a racially diverse suburb in the Northeast, and attended a predominantly White institution (PWI) for his undergraduate music education. Darius has been

teaching choir and music theory for five years in an ethnically diverse city in the Northeast. He is also a choir director and music coordinator for an African American Protestant church.

William is a 62-year-old BMME who grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood in the Northeast. He is charismatic and has an upbeat personality. I met William almost 20 years ago when I was an undergraduate, and he was a cooperating teacher for some of the instrumental student teachers. Although I was not an instrumental major, William still mentored me throughout my college years.

Analysis

The process of analysis took several days to complete. I generated transcripts of the interviews through Otter.ai. After the software performed the transcription, I reviewed the meeting transcripts to correct spelling and grammar. I read each interview several times before beginning the process of coding: “Coding involves attaching one or more keywords to a text segment in order to permit later identification or a statement” (Kvale, 2007, p. 105). I highlighted sections that stood out, and identified themes that started to emerge using Google Docs.

Synthesizing the Meaning

I found three central themes after reading the text: *community*, *representation*, and *culturally responsive teaching*.

Community

The concept of community was a major theme that I discovered for both Darius and William when describing their formative musical experiences. When Darius spoke of his home church, he noted that the musical community he found there also influenced his choices for college and beyond. The Black heritage choir at his college that he participated in during his preservice training gave him a similar sense of belonging, and it gave him language to use when

teaching this traditionally Black music. In college, Darius also found a group of other Black music students. Each of them looked out for the others, and they held each other accountable. Darius paraphrased an African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” in his description of this setting. Clearly, the concept of community is one that Darius takes personally.

For William, his sense of community came from the school band that he was part of as a child. He fondly recalled the students’ antics and energy, but noted that when it came time to make music, they were serious about it. It was also clear that the trips the students took outside of the community were impactful for him. When William spoke of the band’s trips to Virginia and Canada, he commented that they “meant a lot to this group of poor Black students.” Another noticeable point was the fundraising he and his friends did outside of his community in neighboring towns. It would appear that these external glimpses, with his friends (community), helped shape his foundational musical experience.

Representation

William spoke of the impression it had on him when, in high school, he saw a performance from a university wind ensemble, which happened to be from an HBCU. These students looked like him, and they were making great music. For William, representation was important because he felt it was “harder to achieve a goal when you have never seen anyone do it before.” It is notable that the phrase William used here is similar to the title of Goings and Bianco’s (2016) study: “It’s Hard to Be Who You Don’t See.” Participation in this band served as a gateway for William to go to college, which was something that he had not previously seen any Black men in his life do. His high school band director Mr. Sanders, a Black man, also served as a representation of what he could become.

For Darius, this representation came in different forms. His first music teacher was a Black woman, and she impacted him by helping him see what he could become. Darius also had musicians in his family; among other places, they played at his church. Clearly, his concept of representation is also tied into the aspect of community. Another form of representation was a male student teacher he had in high school; he was instrumental in steering Darius toward his future university, and also helped him with his audition. Taken together, moments like this led to Darius entering college as a music major. Other forms of representation were found in college, where he cited his private vocal teacher (a Black woman) and his two White male choral professors as impacting his own teaching the most.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Both Darius and William displayed characteristics of culturally responsive teaching, although neither one of them referred to it as such. To begin, each exhibited strong mentorship of their students, which their own teachers had modeled for them. Culturally responsive teaching aims to “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). Put differently, how a teacher decides to structure their classroom will determine whether students can maintain their cultures or not.

As stated in Chapter II, Lynn (2006) observed the practices of three culturally responsive Black male educators and found similar trends. These teachers utilized a combination of “tough love, discipline, and care” (Lynn, 2006, p. 21), which was crucial to the success of their students. He also found that these Black men exhibited a kind of “passion and commitment to African American youth in urban schools [that] is simply irreplaceable” (p. 23). The male teachers Lynn interviewed focused on using education as an act of liberation. They were particularly invested in

helping students connect to their cultural heritage, and they saw their teaching as a way of contributing positively to and liberating the community. Ladson-Billings (2009) states that “teachers with culturally relevant practices see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same” (p. 41).

When asked what kind of teacher he was, Darius said he was “tough yet loving.” This is almost verbatim how Lynn described the teachers in his study. William’s response to that question was more nuanced. He began to talk about what his former students meant to him, and commented that he was tough on them about the concepts that mattered, but also ignored some of the unimportant ones. One concept in culturally responsive teaching is “questioning, (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exists in society” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 140). Teachers who follow this method will often practice a subversive pedagogy in their questioning. Givens (2021) also refers to this subversive teaching style as *fugitive pedagogy*; the text or the material that these teachers use may not be school board-approved, but they teach their Black students what they believe they need to make it. William clearly followed this concept, as illustrated through one account of his subversion: instead of telling a student to play the scales perfectly, he encouraged them to learn how to play the scales with feeling and energy—or “soul,” as he put it.

Revisions After the Pilot Study

After the pilot study, several questions were removed from the protocol. The original set of questions included ones specifically about the 2020 murder of George Floyd and the reaction of the BMMEs’ community. Since the murder had occurred over two years ago at the time that I began the full study, I thought it would be better to replace these questions with more general inquiries about responses to issues of racial injustice. It also became clear that there were too

many questions in the initial protocol. Thus, some questions in the protocol are optional, or are included as guidelines that can inform the line of questioning.

Data Collection and Instrumentation Plans

Data collection for this study occurred in three phases over four months, beginning in September 2022 and continuing through December 2022. In *phase one*, participants were observed in their classrooms in three different sessions. During *phase two*, they participated in three semi-structured interviews after each observation session. To maintain the confidentiality of the data collection, the interviews took place in a private space—either an office or the teacher’s classroom, or virtually using Zoom. Finally, in *phase three*, all of the participants gathered for two (2) two-hour focus group sessions; one at the beginning of the study, and one at the conclusion of it.

Kvale (2007) describes the interviewer as a miner seeking to “unearth the valuable metal” (p. 19), and also a traveler on a journey to a distant land who returns with a story to tell. While these metaphors are applicable, one must be careful not to dehumanize the participants, particularly when the research involves marginalized communities. Issues surrounding race and racism can be traumatizing for Black males. Therefore, as a researcher, I used great care in conducting the interviews. Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) assert that using our human senses will help to humanize research. “Ideological struggles” (p. 27) occur when the researcher truly listens to the participants, and recognizes that there are multiple worldviews that get constructed in a negative light. Researchers must also commit to “seeing more deeply, realizing the importance of others’ words (and names), utilizing speech and action, and collaborating for transformational and fundamental principles by which to deploy and deliberating, listening to and with others” (p.

27). In order for the results to be authentic to the BMMEs' experiences, I was careful to utilize the same speech patterns, slang, and colloquial terminology that they did.

Synthesis

In most dissertations, this section would describe the analysis of the data. In phenomenological studies, however, the researcher is not looking to analyze their information, but rather to “investigate the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Peoples, 2021, p. 57). Therefore, I will label this section as “Synthesis,” to illustrate more accurately how the data will be explicated and then displayed.

Teaching Observations

I collected data from the classroom observations using notes maintained according to my field notes template (see Appendix B). The observation notes have three columns: one for what is seen, another for the observer's comments, and another for the themes that emerge. It is important to note that in phenomenology, codes or themes must not be separated from the entire text. As in the hermeneutic circle, “the parts inform the whole and the whole informs the parts” (Peoples, 2021, p. 57). Therefore, I explicated the themes for the purpose of understanding the whole text. In the first notes column, I provided a minute-by-minute description of what was happening in the classroom. I focused on the conversations and interactions between the teacher and students, the physical gestures of the teacher, the classroom environment, and the classroom's organization (setup, posters, size of classroom, and functionality of the space). I also focused on the teaching style and instructional techniques that the teacher employed. The purpose of this column is to be as objective as possible; merely recording what is observed, and not what is interpreted.

The second column displays my interpretation of what was observed. It will allow me to provide what Geertz (1972) refers to as “thick rich descriptions” (p. 7) of the data, or the meaning behind what I saw. Once human behavior or gestures are seen as symbolic actions, the question is whether culture has patterned it, or whether it follows an individual’s way of thinking. Culture cannot be hidden, because it is public, and its meaning is public. Thus, its many meanings and interpretations are also public. The observations column served as a space where I could record the gestures of and interactions between the teacher and students, and the teacher and the music, to see how the culture manifests.

Interviews and Focus Group Transcripts

I conducted three (3) one-on-one semi-structured interviews after each observation. As previously stated, each interview phase focused on a different period of the participants’ developmental musical experiences: formative K-12 music experiences, collegiate or preservice music training (college years), and current teaching (pedagogical practices). I designed the interviews with a goal of understanding how the BMMEs perceived their *dasein* in Eurocentric music classrooms as well as their own Black identities. The focus group convened for two (2) two-hour discussions, which focused on the experiences of Black males in Eurocentric music educational spaces.

Final Synthesis and Analysis

Once I had gathered all the data from the interviews, observations, and focus group sessions, I began synthesizing the text (transcripts and observation notes) to find themes and shared experiences. As a part of the synthesizing process, I displayed how the participants’ *dasein*, or being in the world of the music classroom, manifested in the observations and interviews, including whether they ever realized their own *dasein*. I looked through the

transcripts for examples of the BMMEs' realization of their own Blackness in a predominantly White space, or times when they spoke of experiencing racism. In Chapter IV, I will illustrate how each participant displayed a connection to Black music and culture by intentionally sharing it with their students. I will also show how certain instances, including racist comments and incidents, increased in frequency as they gained access to predominantly White Eurocentric music spaces, indicating a negative reaction to their Blackness.

I explicated the data from the interviews and observations by using the hermeneutic circle (the process of using part of the text, or a theme, to influence the entire text, and vice versa) to reveal common or individual themes to answer the research questions. The themes that I discovered, or fore-sight, then impacted the subsequent readings. As a researcher, I brought my own fore-sight to the interviews and observations. As I gained new knowledge through the interviews, my own fore-sight allowed me to revise questions and develop new fore-sight through reading the transcripts.

I also used the hermeneutic circle to construct questions for the final focus group, during which I asked participants how they would revise or reconstruct their own experiences of race and gender in the music classroom after going through the interview and observation process. As part of that, I explained the process of fore-sight, including finding new fore-sight, to each participant. During the final focus group, I also asked each BMME how his own dasein, or being, was affected by being in the study.

I read through the transcripts and went line by line after each question. I assigned descriptors in the text when I would find a theme. For example, when a participant would use certain words to describe their collegiate college experience, I assigned the word college to the line. Then I would highlight the word or the phrase they would use to describe their experience,

such as “we had fun” or “alone”. That word would become a theme. If there were similar words in another participant’s transcript, that would be a common theme that I would note in my journal. This process allowed me to construct the overall themes that I discovered which best allowed me to answer each research question.

The following table shows which form of synthesis answers each research question.

Table 2

Research Question Synthesis

Research Question	Synthesis
1. What formative musical experiences of Black males influenced their decision to become music educators?	Semi-structured interviews and focus group
2. How do Black male music educators (BMMEs) describe their collegiate music education?	Participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group
3. How do Black males negotiate their Black identity in Eurocentric music education?	Participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group
4. In what ways do BMMEs encounter racial injustice in K-12 music education?	Semi-structured interviews and focus group
5. How do BMMEs’ lived experiences inform their teaching practices?	Semi-structured interviews and focus group

Counter-Narratives

An African proverb states that “until the lion learns how to write, the story will always glorify the hunter.” The narratives that have traditionally been told about Black males have been overwhelmingly negative, and riddled with hopelessness and despair (Toliver, 2022; Douglass, 2016; Ferguson, 2000). In this study, I sought to use the stories of the BMMEs as a narrative, or as counter-narratives: to inform the field about their lived experiences, and as a means of

resistance to counter the traditional narratives about Black males. As detailed in Chapter II, counter-narratives are a tenet of Critical Race Theory.

A final counter-narrative is constructed in the implications section, in Chapter VI. This reflects the data from the interviews and observations. Since the narratives of each participant will have their own complexities, it is important to use a critical research epistemological lens; here, the researcher is not the only owner of the knowledge about the lives of the participants. I constructed this in order to display a narrative about the particular sessions, in the participants' own voices.

Qualitative Rigor

Researcher Bias

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that eliminating bias is not possible in qualitative research; consequently, it is essential to “identify and monitor them in relation to the theoretical framework and in light of the researcher’s own interest, to make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data” (p. 16). It is important to note that human bias is a certainty, because the researcher will serve as the instrument through which the information is to be reported.

To ensure accuracy, I employed member checks, asking the participants to read the results chapter that reported their quotes from the interviews and my descriptions of the classroom observations. The quotes I used from the interviews were word-for-word transcriptions, thus eliminating the researcher’s interpretation. I also used prolonged engagements (Peoples, 2021) of four months with the participants in observations and interviews, which allowed them multiple opportunities to follow up with questions. In order to

avoid confirmation bias, I employed multiple sources of data, also known as triangulation; this allows for a broader view of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

Journal Maintenance

Milner (2007) suggests that researchers of color are researching themselves every time they engage in research related to their community. Therefore, they must be willing to investigate themselves in relation to those they are in a relationship with; engage in reflection and representation; and, finally, contextualize themselves and their ideas in broader concepts of sociological frameworks. Milner recommends that we as researchers wrestle with questions of personal identity as it relates to culture, to make participants aware of “known (seen), unknown (unseen), and unanticipated (unforeseen) issues, perspectives, epistemologies, and positions” (p. 395).

In order to help me keep my fore-sight present and wrestle with my bias, I maintained a journal throughout this research process. After each interview, I made notes in the journal of any biases or personal interpretations. I kept this journal with me as a part of the synthesis process, and often referred back to it while writing the results of this dissertation.

Reflexivity and Positionality

I identify as a Black male music educator. I taught for 14 years in an upper-class suburban community before becoming a music and art curriculum supervisor in a nearby suburb. During this time, I have frequently been the only Black male in predominantly White Eurocentric music educational spaces, and have had to learn how to navigate them while staying connected to my cultural heritage. To this study, I brought an understanding of the hyper-visibility and the hyper-invisibility of being a Black male. Many times, being the only Black person in a space, one tends to stand out. However, because the Black person does not share the

same experiences as those from the dominant culture, there is also a pervasive invisibility when they experience microaggressions or racism. This is part of the fore-sight that I bring to this research, and it allowed me to uniquely position myself to study this topic. Douglas (2016) believes that we as researchers should use our positionality to “push us to ask new questions about the people, possibilities, and problems that are most pressing for understanding and disrupting impediments to the health of marginalized communities” (p. 7), and I chose to do this, rather than avoiding or denying my experience.

My Counter-Narrative

While there were multiple styles of music that would play in my household when I was a child, Gospel music was the one we listened to most. My parents raised my brother and me in a Pentecostal church. These churches are known for their powerful, vibrant music. In my childhood church, it would always involve a massive choir singing full-throated songs while being accompanied by a full band, which included a Hammond B3 organ, bass guitar, and drums. I remember going to church and being completely captivated by the singing, shouting, and preaching. The people in the congregation would sing along with the choir, and would not hesitate to beat the tambourine or dance in the aisles as the spirit would move them. There was something in the sound of the instruments and the choir that always left me wanting more.

In my parents’ living room, we had an organ that resembled the Hammond B3 organ in church. It had belonged to my grandmother, who used to play it, but when she needed to make room in her house, she gave it to my parents. I was fascinated by the two rows of keys and the foot pedals on the bottom of the organ, and so I tried to play it. I was not playing anything recognizable, but I loved the way the notes sounded when played together, and I would sit on the bench for hours creating songs.

It was not long before my parents signed me up for piano lessons, seeing my love of the organ. Those lessons were very conventional; I would play scales, arpeggios, and traditional beginner piano pieces. However, there was a part of me that was still searching for a fuller, more gospel-like sound. I started to teach myself melodies by ear and brought them to my lessons. My piano teacher was polite about it, but she told me that I should focus on reading music, and not spend my practice time learning by ear. She may not have been aware that all of the Black church musicians I knew learned music by ear, rather than by reading notes. I had many influential music teachers, and today I am a music educator partly because of them, but they only immersed me in traditional Eurocentric music culture. I had to sacrifice a part of my Black heritage to succeed in my musical training. My musical aptitude had to be viewed through the lens of a Eurocentric perspective, as opposed to my Black heritage. Du Bois (1903) refers to this as double consciousness: “Always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 14). When the tape measure of success is framed in a culture and heritage that is foreign to someone, then success will always seem like a distant image that can never be fully achieved.

Conclusion of Chapter III

This chapter detailed the methodology; the participants and settings of observations; the pilot study; and the procedures, instrumentation, and final synthesis. The next chapter will display the results using the method of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Chapter IV

Results

*Lord, I keep so busy workin' fer de Kingdom
Keep so busy workin' fer de Kingdom
Ain't got time to die
'Cause when I'm feedin de po'
I'm workin' fer de Kingdom
Ain't got time to die*

“Ain't Got Time to Die” (African American Spiritual)

Content Warning

This chapter contains racially sensitive language and discriminatory terminology describing members of the LGBTQ community. There is also a depiction of a suicide attempt. This language and depiction may be triggering for some readers.

Introduction

In Chapter IV, I will present the research findings and connect them to the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. This chapter will begin with a description of the setting of each of the schools, and of the context in which the BMMEs work. After outlining the demographics of the five study participants, I will describe the data collection process and the analysis of the themes. The findings will be described in the context of the answers to the research questions. I will explain the themes that were excavated from the observations and interviews using quotes and observation data. Next, I will directly answer the research questions using the participants' quotes and observation data. Finally, I will explore the hermeneutic process of my own dasein and that of the participants.

In a Strange Land

African Americans have long found a kinship to the Israelites of the Bible's Old Testament (Gates, 2021). Many years after Moses freed the Israelites of the scriptures from their captivity in Egypt, they were exiled from Jerusalem and held captive in Babylon: "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion...How could we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (New Revised Standard Version Bible, 1989, Psalms 137:1&4). In this study, the strange land is the Eurocentric music spaces that Black male music educators (BMMEs) must traverse. Whether it is the classroom in which they teach, or the university or conservatories in which they matriculated, BMMEs must continue to make music and sing their songs in this strange land.

Settings: A Strange Land

The study was conducted from September to December 2022. It began and ended with focus group sessions, which brought the participants together in a communal space that was intended to provide a connection to their African American roots. I held these sessions at a Baptist church, on a Sunday afternoon after the morning worship service. The church is in an urban neighborhood and seats up to 300 congregants. It is an African American congregation, and it is deeply involved in social justice and community service; for instance, through clothing drives and food programs. As mentioned in Chapter III, the participants were asked if they had a preference between a Black barbershop and a Black church for the focus group; all of them either preferred the church or had no preference.

Four of the five participants arrived at the church in the early afternoon on a Sunday in September. The fifth participant had car trouble, and could not join the others at the first focus group session; during the week of the final focus group, that same participant contracted

COVID-19. However, he joined via Zoom and participated in the conversation for the second focus group. Between the two sessions, I observed each participant at his school three times, and also conducted a one-on-one interview. These interviews were done either in person right after their observation, or later online (via Zoom), depending on the participant's schedule.

Setting One

The first school was an elementary school in an upper-middle-class suburb. It is located in the center of a neighborhood, surrounded by homes and a large park with a playground. Its student body is very diverse, with an almost-equal split of African American, Hispanic, South Asian, and White students. The building was well kept, and the classrooms had fairly modern technology. The classes that I observed were instrumental music lessons, held in a dedicated music space near the center of the school building, about a two-minute walk from the entrance.

Setting Two

The second school was a high school in a middle-class borough with a large Hispanic and African American population, just a few miles from a major interstate highway. The neighborhood in which the school is situated is populated with homes, and is located directly off the borough's main street. There was no parking lot, as most students either park on the street or walk to school. During my observations, I found parking was readily available for me on the street. There was an athletic field directly behind the school. At the time of the study, the school's music program was gaining more widespread attention throughout the state due to the choir director's involvement in state music education organizations. The choir room was large, and had been recently converted into a choral music classroom. The building was older, but maintained well; recently, the auditorium had been renovated, and it is used for choir, drama, and musical theater performances.

Setting Three

The third school was a performing arts high school in an urban community. It is located several minutes from a major highway, and across the street from a housing complex. The building's construction is very modern, and includes a state-of-the-art performing arts theater and classrooms. In the same hallways as the music classes, there is a large theater set-building classroom, where students construct sets for the school musical theater productions. The building was extremely well maintained. The neighborhood appeared to be going through a gentrification phase, with many older buildings and homes situated near new construction. The community was primarily African American, and also has a growing Hispanic population.

Setting Four

The fourth school was a high school in a middle-class suburb. It was recently built, and situated in an open area quite a distance from the surrounding homes. The school building was large and sprawling, set back off the road in a grassy campus setting, surrounded by a parking lot. It has all-new, modern technology, including a state-of-the-art performing arts center. The choral classroom was large, with risers along the back wall where the students sat during choral rehearsals. There were mirrors along the front of the classroom, which students use to look at themselves while they are acting or practicing solos during vocal technique classes. The classroom was located far away from the main entrance, in an area of the building that has less student traffic than others. Similarly to the first location, there is an even split among African American, Hispanic, South Asian, and White students.

Setting Five

The fifth setting was an elementary school in an urban community. The school is located in the center of the city, which is bustling with cars and street traffic. Parking was available in a

nearby parking garage, which all of the staff members use. The school building was large, as it contained kindergarten through eighth-grade students, and situated across the street from a housing complex with an older playground in front of it. It was an older edifice with modern educational technology, including smart boards and modern sign-in equipment. The community was majority Hispanic, with a smaller percentage of African American and White individuals. The school was located in a neighborhood with a large Colombian population, so many of the students spoke Spanish as their primary language and spoke only polite English. In addition, the school had a large special needs population. The music classroom was located downstairs, directly next to a stairwell. A makeshift eating area for students was right outside the classroom; during one of the observations, it was noisy and active as students ate lunch.

Participant Demographics

Each participant brought a diversity of life experiences to this study. Their stories and rich descriptions of their lives underscored the diversity and complexity of Black males within the United States educational system. There is a broad range of teaching experience represented, from novice to veteran, and spanning elementary through high school. Participants and other individuals who are named in this study have all received pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The participants are discussed in order of their agreement to participate in this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Age Range	Setting of District	Years Teaching	Grade Level/Concentration
Charles Lake	Mid-20s	Suburban	5	Elementary/Instrumental
Ian Brooks	Early 30s	Suburban	8	High School/Vocal
Chris James	Early 60s	Urban	31	High School/Instrumental

Kelvin Lawrence	Mid-40s	Suburban	20	High School/Vocal
Quentin Miller	Late 30s	Urban	4	K-8 Vocal/General Music

Charles Lake

Charles was in his mid-20s, and currently teaching elementary instrumental (band and orchestra) music. He was in his fourth year at his current school, and had taught for one year in a different district prior to that. Charles has a self-admitted strict teaching style that is balanced with a warm relationship with his students, and he showed an affable demeanor with both students and fellow colleagues. During the final interview and observation, his principal came to the class to introduce herself to me, and declared how highly she thought of Charles. A consummate trumpet player, Charles was an assistant director of the district’s high school marching band; in addition, he serves in the Army Reserves, and plays trumpet in the Army Band.

Charles is of average height, with a slender build, and wears glasses. He is clean-cut with a serious demeanor. His mother, aunt, and a very supportive extended family raised him in a religious home, and he attributes his strict teaching style to growing up in a COGIC church³. From an early age, Charles was a serious musician. He grew up in the southern part of the state, with an influential music teacher who noticed his strong affinity for playing the trumpet. When his family moved to a different town in the northern part of the state, he rose through the ranks of his high school music program to become a standout section leader, and eventually drum major in the school’s marching band. In his senior year of high school, he was awarded a national scholarship that paid for his college education all the way through to his doctorate.

³ Church of God in Christ (COGIC) is the largest African American Pentecostal denomination in the world.

Initially, Charles thought that he was going to be a pharmacist, or that he would pursue a career in medicine. However, one day after a rehearsal, his high school band director told him that he should consider a career in music. With that prompting serving as a confirmation of his deep desire to be a musician, Charles decided to go to school to study music education. He started his undergraduate music education studies at a university in another state, but after his first year he transferred to a university that was closer to his family, and he completed his schooling there. Currently, he is looking at doctoral programs where he can continue his studies.

At the first observation, I was greeted at the security desk by a friendly security guard who then offered to walk me to Charles's classroom. Walking through the hallways, I saw students actively engaged in schoolwork. I noticed many students of color, primarily Black and Hispanic, in the classrooms. Outside the door of the instrumental music room, I saw instrument cases lined up along the hallway. As I entered the classroom, Charles was working with a group of violin students. He was very clear and straightforward with his students, but also had the ability to draw them in with his kindness. Even though the students saw me enter, they did not break focus with Charles until he greeted me with a smile. After Charles introduced me to the students, he showed me where to set up, and immediately went back to the lesson without missing a beat. I sat at his desk in the back of the classroom and set up for the observation.

Ian Brooks

Ian is a medium-height, muscular Black male with a vibrant and commanding personality. While there was a lightheartedness to his demeanor, he approached his teaching with seriousness. Ian was in his 30s, and had been teaching for eight years at the same high school since he graduated from college. He taught all of the choral ensembles, the keyboard class, and the music theory class; in addition, he was heavily involved with the spring musical, for which

he was the musical director. Ian attended a performing arts high school, where he concentrated in acting. He had considered being an actor, but like Charles, his school choir teacher told him that he had a lot of potential as a music teacher. She told him, “I see a lot of me in you.” Even though he continued to do some acting and solo vocal performances, Ian went all in with his current vocation, and has fully embraced being a choral music educator.

The classroom Ian taught in was on the third floor of the building, on the opposite side from the entrance. Upon entering the classroom, you face the risers where the students sit for class, and there was an upright piano in the center. Next to the piano, there was a desk with a computer on it; above the desk, there were scores of pictures of Ian with his current and former students. On the other side of the pictures, there were Google Classroom codes and instructions for ordering choir uniforms. The bulletin board had Playbills from musicals displayed for everyone to see.

Ian went to a university in the northeast, where he majored in vocal music education. While his mother did not know what being a music major entailed, she supported him in his journey; to this day, she and his grandmother still come to his performances. The choirs at Ian’s high school were in existence before he got there, but he has nurtured them to the point where they have received recognition outside of the community. Recently, the choral groups have performed at the state music conference and at area music festivals. Ian’s teaching style is collaborative and focused. During the first observation, he was playing hip-hop music over the loudspeakers as students entered the classroom. Shortly thereafter, the class took on a traditional choral method style, as students were trained in music theory and vocal techniques through vocalizing and choral music. There is a strong sense of community among the students, and they

clearly had a great deal of respect for Ian. His teaching was evenly paced, and he kept all of the students' attention.

Chris James

Chris was the study's veteran participant, in his 60s with 30 years of teaching experience. His many years in the field inspired Chris to be rather loquacious when elaborating on his answers to the questions. A classically trained oboist, he was a performance major in college; having played with a number of professional orchestras, he was on a path to becoming a professional orchestral musician. However, a chance encounter with a district's music supervisor while substitute teaching led him to get his teaching certification.

Growing up in an urban community in the late 1970s, Chris remembers being intrigued by his downstairs neighbor's piano lesson. One day, he asked if he could sit in on the lesson, and the teacher allowed him to watch as his neighbor learned the piano. When Chris was allowed to choose an instrument in school, he chose the flute; he liked the way it sounded, and it served as a natural transition to his current instrument, the oboe. He excelled at music, and eventually earned a spot in his city's prestigious performing arts high school. Later, Chris was recruited for a spot as an oboe major at a world-renowned music conservatory in the northeast, but the high cost of commuting, the cost of food, and the lack of student diversity led him back to his home state to finish his degree. Like some of the other participants reported, Chris's parents were not aware of what a career as a professional musician would look like, but they were unwavering in their support for him, and he was the recipient of many scholarships and a good deal of financial aid. Both of his parents passed away when he was in college, but his older siblings continued to support him financially and emotionally so he could continue his training.

It was clear that Chris had a deep passion for orchestral and wind band music, and he consistently conveyed it to his students, whether he was teaching the after-school jazz band or directing the wind ensemble. He taught at a performing arts high school in a community that had similar demographics to the one in which he grew up. Chris's style of teaching was both fast-paced and intense, which fits the students he teaches; the students have to audition to get into his school, and they work hard to stay there.

Chris is of average height with a slim build, and his gray-and-white hair was cut short. When he stepped onto the podium, one could almost forget his height, as he took on a commanding presence in front of the classroom. He gave corrections, cues, and instructions in a fast-paced manner. Students actively made music throughout the class, and were clearly paying attention to every word of his instructions. Chris chooses his words carefully, and does not waste any time when instructing students. He was dressed in a shirt and tie on the days I observed, and he carries himself like a seasoned professional.

A significant difference between Chris's school and the ones where the other study participants taught was that every secretary and administrator there was Black. Every poster at the entrance and in the main office has a famous Black person on it. Chris's classroom was filled with posters of Black musicians and composers, and even one depicting President Barack Obama. Chris was very adamant about getting his students, almost all of whom are Black or Hispanic, prepared for a conservatory musical experience if they choose to pursue that course of study.

Kelvin Lawrence

Kelvin is an extremely confident and driven music educator who teaches high school vocal music. He was in his mid-40s, and had been teaching for 20 years. Kelvin is tall, with a

slender build, and he wears stylish glasses. His mother was a choral music educator, and from an early age, he would sit in her classroom and sing with her high school choral ensemble before and after school. Today, Kelvin credits his mother with being the driving force behind his performances and his love for music. When he reached high school, his choral director took him under her wing and convinced him to go to school for vocal performance instead of taking a year off, as he had originally planned. He had contemplated going to a historically Black college or university (HBCU) for undergraduate, but his brother and mother convinced him that he should attend a predominantly White institution (PWI). Once in school, Kelvin performed extensively, and found a community of performers that helped shape his musical identity.

At the urging of his former high school choral director, who asked him if he was looking for a job, Kelvin became an educator. His former teacher convinced him to apply for a middle school choral job in his former neighborhood, and he has been teaching in that same community ever since. As an educator, Kelvin is artistic and demanding. There is a strong commitment to the performing arts in the school community, and his theatrical and musical productions are well attended. Kelvin teaches choir, songwriting, and vocal techniques, and he directs the fall play and spring musical. His passion for music and theater is almost tangible, and he places high demands on his students that they readily meet. Typically, Kelvin dresses in a polo shirt or in a nice collared shirt, as I noticed during observations, and he gives off an air of creative energy. His nails are always painted and neatly manicured, too.

Much like Ian, Kelvin was heavily involved in the school drama department; however, he served as the head director for both the fall and spring productions, making for a heavy workload. The fall play was in production during the time of the study, which made Kelvin's schedule quite hectic, and the morning of the first observation was slightly upended when he had

childcare issues. He arrived slightly late to class, but sprung into action the second he walked in the door. Even though it was the beginning of the school year, students knew exactly what was expected of them, and they were ready to begin class.

Kelvin described his teaching as artistic, and commented that it was all about connecting. He had a soft side to him, and said his students would describe him as a teddy bear. However, Kelvin also had a clear standard of excellence from which he did not waver. When he taught, he was typically sitting at the piano; he was laser-focused, and did not let up until he got what he was looking for from the singers. Whether working with small groups or a larger ensemble, he made personal connections with students, and found ways to relate the pieces they were working on to relevant styles of singing or music.

Quentin Miller

Quentin was perhaps the most colorful of the participants. He has a gregarious personality, and his love for his students was evident from the moment I met him. In his late 30s, Quentin taught elementary general music in an inner-city school; typically, he dressed in jeans and wore a hoodie, and explained that he intentionally wore sneakers and clothes that were familiar to his students. He is mixed race—Black and Puerto Rican—but throughout the study and in the pre-study conversations, he self-identified as a Black American. Quentin grew up in what he described as a toxic environment; his mother was a drug dealer, and his father was a womanizer. When they were getting a divorce, he was sent to live with his aunt in another state, and while there, he remembers being involved with his aunt's church. Quentin recalls singing in their choir, and even having a solo in church.

When he returned home to live with his mother, Quentin attended an inner-city school that did not have a music program for students until he was in fourth grade. The fourth-grade

music teacher was a Black male, and he remembers finding a role model in him. The teacher allowed Quentin to write rap songs, and connected him to the music that he enjoyed. Later, he got into the local performing arts high school and found a teacher whom he still credits with changing his life, Ms. Shelia Thompson—a Black woman and a force of nature. She would take the students to perform in a variety of different locations throughout the state, including for television specials and with renowned musicians. Ms. Thompson instilled a love for choral music in Quentin, which drew him to apply to become a vocal performance major. His mother put her trust in Ms. Thompson, and allowed Quentin to perform with the choir any time she needed him. However, Quentin and his mother had conflicts when it came to his emerging sexual identity. When he came out as gay, she said, “Yo, ain’t no fucking faggots in my family. You’re my son and my son is no faggot.” Despite this conflict, Quentin believes she taught him the resilience that he still has today.

Quentin received scholarships and financial aid, and became the first person in his family to go to college. Unfortunately, he had a number of conflicts at the university he attended. While he was a very capable singer, he was not able to navigate the complexities of a Eurocentric music conservatory and university expectations. After he dropped out of school, he continued to work jobs to support himself, but ended up getting involved with drugs and alcohol. Shortly thereafter, Quentin’s mother and father passed away. At his lowest moment, he attempted suicide, but this attempt was thwarted when he decided that there was more he had to look forward to in life. He immediately remembered how much music meant to him, and he got back into it. After several attempts at school, Quentin eventually got his associate’s degree and went on to receive his bachelor’s degree. He became a teacher through the alternate route program, as Kelvin and Chris did, and began working in the same community where he grew up.

Quentin's teaching style and curriculum combine hip-hop culture with traditional choral music. As the most novice educator of the participants, he is still attempting to establish a community of musicians that resemble his own style of classical music and the context of the community. He has a very relaxed, conversational communication style, and often attempts to connect with his students by periodically speaking in Spanish, since the school population is predominantly Colombian. Quentin also uses very contextualized contemporary phrases, such as "Don't make me get ratchet today," or "Who you talking to like that?" The students respond to him with laughter, and are drawn to him even if they do not always do what he asks of them. It was also evident that Quentin is extremely concerned about his students' wellbeing, and he constantly reflects on the difficulty they are facing outside of school.

Data Collection

The first focus group session took place in September 2022 at an African American Baptist church. I recorded it using QuickTime Player audio, and stored it on my password-protected computer. The first set of classroom observations occurred the week after the focus group, with all of them taking place at the participants' schools. Their duration ranged from 45 minutes to one hour, depending on the length of the class period. However, one participant also invited me to observe an open dress rehearsal of the fall play he was directing, which gave me an additional opportunity to see how he interacted with community members and invited guests. I recorded my observation notes using the observation template (see Appendix B) that was described in Chapter III.

I conducted the participants' interviews at different times after each observation. Due to the schedules that some of them had, it was sometimes more convenient to do the interviews after the school day using Zoom. I recorded the Zoom interviews in order to retrieve the

transcripts, and used QuickTime Player audio to record the in-person interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The final focus group session was held in early December 2022, after all of the interviews and observations were completed. It took place at the same church as the initial meeting, and was recorded using QuickTime player. I used Otter.ai to generate transcripts from the audio of all the interviews and the focus group sessions.

Throughout the study, I kept personal notes and interpretations gathered during the interviews and observations in a journal. The journal was also used to maintain my own *dasein*, which is the phenomenological terminology for self or being there. I also depicted my initial assumptions, revisions, or confirmations in this journal. Often, I would often arrive at the observation site early and sit in my car, writing down my initial observations concerning the neighborhood and my first impressions of the school grounds.

Analysis

After each observation and interview, I read through the transcripts and observation notes to make any preliminary notes about what I observed. My observation style as a district curriculum administrator was challenged when I did the classroom observations, because part of my role involves conducting classroom observations of teachers in my district. Thus, when entering observations, I had to make conscious decisions to only record what I saw, and not make pedagogical judgments about the lesson. During one of the focus group sessions, a participant did mention that my position as a district administrator had stood out to him, but it did not hinder his teaching when I observed him.

Following my initial reading of each interview transcript and observation notes, I made notes to inform the questions that I would ask the participants during the subsequent interviews. I would also link practices they used in the classroom to remarks that they made during their

interviews. Next, I read the transcripts again to begin extracting themes that I discovered from the interviews. The themes were used to answer the study's research questions. I read the transcript of each participant's interview multiple times in order to continually familiarize myself with what we had discussed. Whenever I identified a theme, I would reread the entire text with the extracted theme in mind. As part of the hermeneutic circle, the themes must be analyzed as part of the whole, or the entire text. Each time I read the notes I would listen to the recording of the interviews to ensure accuracy, as well as to listen for anything that the participant emphasized in particular.

Findings

Research Questions

This study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What formative musical experiences of Black males influenced their decisions to become music educators?
2. How do Black male music educators (BMMEs) describe their collegiate music education?
3. How do BMMEs negotiate their Black identity in Eurocentric music education?
4. In what ways do BMMEs encounter racial injustice in K-12 music education?
5. How do BMMEs' lived experiences inform their teaching practices?

Themes

Each theme in this section will give insight into the BMMEs' lived experiences. Throughout the study, I discovered several consistent themes as I got to know the participants. I then used these themes to answer the research questions, and also to help shape the overall narrative illustrating these men's lived experiences. Some themes were consistent among several of the participants' interviews, while

others were exclusive to only one or two. Some of the exclusive themes will not be discussed. In this section, I will share and discuss the themes explicated from the transcripts of the interviews and my observation notes.

When seeking to answer the question about what formative musical experiences these Black males had that influenced their choices to become music educators, the emerging themes that would best support that answer are *family support*, *a strong mentoring teacher*, and *being pointed out*. Below, I will discuss each of them in more detail.

Family Support

Most of the participants shared that they had some degree of parental or family support during their formative musical training; for instance, family members who would take them to rehearsals, and attend performances. The level of support varied, but the thread of family support was evident in all of the BMMEs' answers. Charles, for instance, was raised by his mother, his aunt, and a very involved extended family, and he felt as though they always supported him: "You know, they made sure that I had everything. Especially because we were so close. Yes, they were very supportive, you know, they were at every concert."

Because Kelvin's mother was a music teacher, her support of his performing during his K-12 formative years was very direct, and she was a large part of his musical training:

She taught high school vocal music. I was with her all the time. Especially after school, we would leave the Lutheran school [which he and his siblings attended] and walk to her school. And she would have after-school activities. Or in the morning she had an early-morning choir. So I would sing with the choir; I would just be singing with the choir because I had nothing else to do.

Kelvin recalled what happened after he expressed to his mother that he wanted to go to college to study vocal performance:

She was good with it because she knew what it was like, what it was going to be like to become a music major. Because people think, 'Oh, I'm gonna go to school for music. I'm gonna sing all day. I'm gonna play my instrument all day.' So she tried to make sure that I knew theory, aural skills, composition, and piano training. She wanted to make sure that I knew what I was getting into.

One sub-theme that I discovered from the broader idea of family support was that most of the participants' relatives did not know what being a professional musician or majoring in music education entailed. However, their support did not waver. As Ian stated:

They might really not know what that stuff is or what that stuff means, but they'll go and support you. Because it's you and that's for your family. But they don't really know what it is. My mom and my grandma would always come and support me. To this day, they come to my concerts, as a choir director. In high school, I did community theater. They had to take me to rehearsals. Late-night rehearsals they would pick me up, and things like that. My grandma would take me, or my sister would pick me up. Or my cousin would pick me up, but they all helped out.

Chris recalled being in fourth grade and telling his parents that he wanted to start taking private lessons on the flute, his first instrument:

So I think one of my friends was taking lessons at the Community School of the Arts. So I went down to the school, got the paperwork, took it back to my parents, and said, 'I want to take lessons on the flute.' And they said, 'Well, don't you take lessons during the school day?' I said, 'Yes, but I'm going to need more lessons. I'm going to need private

lessons. And this school gives you private lessons throughout the week, and even on Saturdays.’ So they filled out the paperwork, financial aid forms, and all that.

Later, when Chris told his parents that he wanted to be a music major, their support was consistent, even though they did not know what that entailed. Chris remarked:

They [his parents] really didn’t have much input. Their view was, ‘What do you want to do? You have our support, but we don’t know about this music thing. We don’t know much about it, you have talent. Go for it. Just pursue what you want to be,’ so it wasn’t a discussion when we were talking about financial aid. They would fill out the paperwork. But the details of it, they weren’t really involved with. So that’s kind of how they said they were going to support you.

Quentin did not engage in formal music training or participate in any performances until he reached high school. His high school choir teacher, Ms. Thompson, would pick him up and take him to the venues where his group was performing. According to Quentin, his mother, who primarily raised him, trusted Ms. Thompson, so she let him go anywhere his teacher was taking him:

So like, if Miss Thompson had told my mom Quentin is going to audition for something, my mother would say, ‘Okay, make sure he’s back by this time.’ Or she would say, ‘Okay, don’t worry about it.’ My mom, she knew, but I don’t think she quite knew what I was doing with the performances.

In this sense, Quentin’s mother’s support was passive; she let him do whatever was needed, but was not necessarily there.

“But It’s Complicated”

While each of the participants received some degree of help from their families, it sometimes came with complications. Charles, for instance, was raised by his mother and his aunt. He did not

mention his birth father, but he did tell me that his mother got remarried. Later, Charles cited conflict with his stepfather as a reason for initially wanting to go away to college rather than attending a local university, although he eventually ended up there when he transferred. Kelvin mentioned that his mother thought she was solely Black her entire life, until she did a DNA test later in life and discovered that she was also Native American and French Canadian. His mother had attended an HBCU, and raised her children with a strong connection to African American traditions. While Kelvin never mentioned his birth father, either, he did mention that his stepfather was not supportive of his decision to go to college for music:

My stepfather was from the Caribbean. So he was like, you need a trade. He also wanted me to be a lawyer. So the day I graduated college, we went to lunch, and he gave me a *wonderful* gift. That gift was a pair of cufflinks, and the cufflink[s] were of the scales [scales of justice]. So I was between two places. My mom wanted me to perform; she said, 'If you want to perform, then you perform.' And my stepfather wanted me to be a lawyer; since I was always arguing my point, I should be a lawyer. I chose music.

Adding a further layer to the familial complications, Kelvin mentioned that his brother has never attended any of his performances as an adult, despite the fact that he very much wants him to. His decision to go to college at a PWI instead of an HBCU was a result of his seeking approval from his brother: "He felt as though I would get funneled. Because why would someone pick an HBCU graduate over someone who went to a school that was not predominantly Black, so I let that influence my choices." Kelvin got into Morehouse, and wanted to sing with the Morehouse Glee Club; later, I will discuss how conflict with his family influenced his decision not to attend the school.

During the final focus group, Quentin remarked that his mother was his biggest supporter, but noted that his siblings did not understand the life he was building:

And when I graduated from college, my two brothers and my older sister came to the graduation ceremony. They complained about it being too long. My other friends wanted to take me out to dinner, but my older brothers and my sister didn't have any money. So then I said to them, like, 'I'll pay for you guys to come out,' and they were like, 'Nah, we didn't come here for all that.' So I don't know. I didn't have their support.

Strong Mentor/Influential Teacher

Each of the participants could identify a teacher who played a pivotal role in their formative music education. In many cases, those teachers inspired them to become music educators themselves. Some of the role models were more direct in their impact than others, and an interesting commonality is that, other than Charles, all of these adults came from a non-dominant culture.

Kelvin credits his mother as his initial inspiration for performing. However, his high school choir director Susan Sudeikis also played an instrumental role in his musical development. He mentioned her during the focus group, and when I followed up on the topic during our first one-on-one interview, Kelvin immediately started to tear up, and his voice quivered with emotion. For two years while he was an undergraduate, he explained, he lived with Ms. Sudeikis and her family while his mother paid his tuition:

So she was pretty much my second mom, my second music mom. When I graduated, I was going to take a year off and go to cosmetology school, because my family didn't have the money to send me to college. So she and her husband Steve sat me down. They said, 'We want you to come live with us.'

Ian had a teacher in middle school who took note of his acting talent. This teacher was transgender, and she helped encourage his pursuit of the performing arts: “She guided me through it. She took a liking to me and helped me out. She came over to my house and talked with my mom. She said, ‘You know, he can be an actor.’” Ian continued, “She worked on my audition with me to get into [arts] high school.” His high school choir director, Jennifer Devine, was also an influential figure: “Mrs. Devine was kind of the driving force as to me going into music education.” She helped him choose his music, and assisted him with preparations for his college auditions.

Quentin credits his high school choir director, Ms. Sheila Thompson, as a positive force in his life. As Quentin describes her, Ms. Thompson, who was Black, “was probably one of the most talented musicians I’ve ever seen in my life.” She took on a motherly role for him and the other students in his class, and was also able to book performances for the choir in many prestigious venues across the state. When Ms. Thompson discovered that many of the students in Quentin’s class wanted to become college music majors, she helped prepare them for their auditions: “She took classroom time to teach us certain arias so that we can have a chance to start building that repertoire, you know, in our song bank. And she taught all of us ‘Steal Away’ and an Italian song.”

Charles recalled that his earliest musical influence was his middle school band director, Mr. Smith. His middle school band program was very advanced; in eighth grade, the students would perform music that high school wind ensembles traditionally played. They were also talented enough that they formed a marching band, which was often booked to perform for local events. Given the level of rigor, the middle school band had section leaders, and Charles was chosen to head the trumpet section. He still remembers writing out fingering charts for his fellow trumpet players so that they could all learn their scales more effectively. Charles formed a special bond with Mr. Smith, who would allow him to put his trumpet in his office during the school day instead of leaving it in his locker like the other students. He

also credits the teacher with the success of the ensemble: “It was a good experience. Definitely, I put it all on the teacher. He set the culture for that program. You have to have high expectations. And a lot of trust as well.” Later in this chapter, we will see that the high expectations the participants have in their own classrooms were another common theme.

Talent Identified by Others

Most of the participants told stories of how mentor teachers or other individuals pointed out their musical potential. Some had not previously seen themselves as professional musicians or potential music educators, and so it took a mentor or another adult during their formative years to point out that they had something in them that would make them great teachers.

Ian attended a public high school that specialized in the performing arts. While he was there, his choir teacher, Mrs. Devine, noticed his vocal talent, and encouraged him to audition for the regional honor choir as well as the All-State choir. Having his talent pointed out for him like this made Ian begin considering a career in music education. After he ranked in the top tiers of these groups, his choir teacher told him,

‘I see a lot of me in you, so maybe you should take the education route.’ And she would let me lead warm-ups for the choir. She would let me lead warm-ups in some sectionals for the musical. And I was just getting that experience, and her allowing me to get those experiences kind of helped me forge that path of music education.

Charles credits his middle school band director with setting an example of what great teaching looks like, but it is his high school band director, Mr. Smith, who noticed his talent among the other students in the marching band and pointed it out. The summer before he started high school, Charles’s family moved, and he had to start all over with a new band. He recalled being in band camp that August when his new teacher pointed him out. During the practice, the teacher, Mr. Franz, stopped the rehearsal,

“and he points at me and says, ‘Who are you, and where are you from?’ He continued and said, ‘I don’t know where you’re from. But you’re exactly what this band needs. And then everybody’s applauding.’ Charles had considered a career in medicine or science, but Mr. Franz steered him in the direction of music. He recalls a conversation during his sophomore year when the teacher told him, “Some people have it, and some people don’t. You have it.”

Chris was self-motivated, and knew from an early age that he wanted to do something in orchestral music as a career. However, after he finished his master’s degree, he was encouraged to substitute teach to make money while waiting on jobs to open up. While he was substituting, the music supervisor of the district happened to see him teach: “She [the music supervisor] saw how the students responded to my instruction. So she was very impressed, and she thought that I had a gift to work with students and teach instrumental music.”

Kelvin was an undergraduate when his college choral director indirectly pointed him out in his choral conducting class. It was at this moment, he explained, that he realized he could actually see himself teaching:

And we were singing a spiritual, ‘Hold On.’ And he kept messing up the end. I was like, ‘Dude, like, I don’t understand how you don’t understand it’s one and two and three and four’ [motions his hands in a four-beat conducting pattern]. He said to me, ‘Why don’t you do it for me?’ So I just did, and they [students in choir] were like, ‘Yeah, you do it!’ So I got in front of the choir. So here we are, at our concert, I forget which concert it was, he looked at me and he asked me to conduct it in the concert.

This moment allowed Kelvin to see himself in a role he had never envisioned himself playing before. Another came after he finished graduate school, when he went back to his former high

school and ran into his former choir director, Ms. Sudeikis, who had supported him in so many ways: “And I saw Sue at graduation, because everybody who graduated knew they could come back to graduation ceremonies. So I went back and I said, ‘Hi.’ And she said, ‘Are you looking for a job?’ I said, ‘I sure am.’” Shortly after that, Kelvin sent his resume to the music supervisor, and soon he was offered a job in the district where he grew up.

The Only One (Isolation)

When describing their K-12 and undergraduate music training, it was clear that each of the participants had encountered various levels of teacher support and community, along with racism. While experiences varied, each of them attended universities where they were the only Black students in their classes. As each participant began to traverse into more competitive musical spaces, these also became predominantly White, and centered on music from the Western Cultural Archive. Some of them encountered racism for the first time in their lives in these places. In terms of how the BMMEs negotiate their Black identity in such spaces, the following themes can be used to answer the question: *being the only one*, or *isolation*, and *resilience*.

Both Chris and Quentin attended public schools in predominantly African American communities, with Quentin being in a Hispanic and African American neighborhood. Kelvin and Charles attended extremely diverse schools for their K-12 years, while Ian was at a diverse school until he was accepted into the performing arts magnet high school. Once each BMME left these diverse settings, they attended a PWI. When they arrived at these institutions, they all recalled being the only Black male, or one of just two, in many (if not all) of their classes. Each of them told stories about having to prove themselves, being the “token,” encountering racism, or hearing racial microaggressions.

Kelvin remembers being asked to perform at so many events in college because, according to him, he was the token:

I remember being one of two people who looked like me...And I worked my butt off, just so that I can maintain a B average, because I need to keep scholarships. I'm doing a lot of performing. I was the token, so I was performing for everything and everybody.

Charles initially attended college in a rural setting, and was the only Black person in many of his classes and musical rehearsals. It was this lack of diversity that prompted him to begin looking into transferring schools. He remembers that he would often have to confront racism from the students on campus. While he was able to educate some of his friends about why certain racist jokes and comments were not appropriate, some situations were not resolved so positively:

At the focus group, I mentioned Yik Yak, which is like anonymous Twitter. You could say whatever you wanted. It was based on the ZIP codes; you put in where you're at. And you can see all the people tweeting in the area. And that was around the time of Mike Brown and Eric Garner getting killed. So the Black student union was marching. And then there were tweets, or yaks, calling us monkeys.

Ian encountered the most blatant form of racism when he was in high school. During a chance encounter with a fellow student while they were at a play rehearsal, a White cast member called Ian the N-word⁴:

This White student called me the N-word. In school, I was just so shocked. I honestly didn't know how to react. So I kinda just walked away from the

⁴ Ian referred to the word "nigger" as "the N-word" because of the trauma from this experience.

situation. And after the kid apologized, several times, but like, it just sat with me. Oddly, like, wow, people kind of still see you that way and still use that language. And he said it to my face. And there were people around. And they were like, ‘Oh my God, like, what?’

Ian never told any adults about the situation, and he was unsure as to what he could even do about it. He also encountered being the only one while he was in the All-State chorus, and even beyond that:

So, you know, again, you were like the token Black guy. And obviously, a lot of conductors like to do a spiritual because they’re fun or something like that. And they look at you to sing the solo. I remember in college, I was told [vocal emphasis added] to learn the solo, like, even if I didn’t want it, I never expressed interest. Oh, learn that solo, because you’re gonna sing it. So, but again, going back to all-state and honor choirs, it was predominantly White. It was just a handful of Black people.

Quentin decided to go to a prestigious college in the northeast where, for the first time, he was not in the racial majority. There, he was part of a summer on-campus college preparation program for students from underrepresented communities: a program called Educational Opportunity Fund, often referred to as the EOF program, and funded by the government. The EOF program connected Quentin to many other students from similar backgrounds; however, after he transitioned to the music conservatory, he was one of only a few Black students in his classes.

While each of the men were isolated during their time in college, they ultimately succeeded and became music educators. The pathway for most of them was a continuous path,

directly from college to teaching in the classroom. Even for those who did not have that continuous transition, they ultimately persevered through the adversity of isolation.

Resilience and Perseverance in the Face of Adversity

In discussing their educational pursuits, most of the BMMEs recalled facing obstacles, which ranged from mild to significant. During the first focus group, the participants stated that they had to be resilient. Some mentioned that they got this message of resilience from their family, while others credited their faith for instilling it in them.

Kelvin recalled that he had a very positive experience in both undergraduate and graduate school. However, there were a few teachers that he clashed with, one in particular being his sight-singing teacher. Kelvin felt very competent in school when it came to singing and performing, but he struggled in his diction classes with IPA, also known as the International Phonetic Alphabet. One day when he was in diction class, he recalled, his teacher exclaimed to him in front of the entire class:

‘Well, we all know why you’re here.’ Yeah, I just remember her saying. ‘Well, we all know why you’re here.’ And I was thinking, ‘Wow!’ I was like, ‘I’m here because I’m singing.’ I was a naive child. Because I was not exposed to that.

Kelvin was unsure if the teacher’s remark was about him being the only Black student, or if there was some other reason for it. Further, he felt that his naivety stemmed from his mother having raised him and his siblings to have respect for people of all races.

Later, when Kelvin was in graduate school, he had a voice teacher with whom he could not connect. Many of his classmates felt that he was not properly matched with this teacher because the instructor typically had White students who sang Baroque music. When the two began working together, the voice teacher would constantly tell Kelvin that he needed to sing

lighter and brighter. A breaking point happened when the teacher said that he “physically hurt” when Kelvin sang. Kelvin felt like crying, but held in his tears. He distinctly remembers calling his mother after the lesson: “I go and sit outside on the bench, and I called my mama on the phone. She said, ‘Don’t let that man have your tears.’ And I got up.” At that point, he found the courage to change voice teachers.

Of all the participants, Quentin had the most tumultuous experience with the educational system. After dropping out of the conservatory as a freshman, he attempted to go to a community college, but later dropped out of that school due to an inability to comply with the health requirements for graduation. It was shortly thereafter that his ailing estranged father, who he and his mother were caring for, passed away. After he attempted to get his life on track by getting a job, Quentin’s mother passed away. With all of these setbacks, Quentin sank into a depression. He recalled attempting suicide after his mother’s passing:

And I’m, like, literally about five feet up in the air with a belt wrapped around my neck crying. And I could still remember the fucking heat from the tears dripping down my face. Ready to kick a chair from underneath me and just end it all. And something within me said, like, ‘There has to be something more to life. I have to try to find happiness in life somehow. Like, this can’t be the end of my story.’

When Quentin decided to change course, he was able to alleviate his student loan debt, and soon enrolled in a state school. He eventually got his undergraduate degree, and then decided to start graduate school as well. When I asked him where this sense of perseverance came from, he said, “Maybe God, maybe life. My mom taught me, ain’t nobody gonna help you.” Quentin continued, “You need to learn how to figure it out and how to help yourself. If you don’t know how to take care of yourself, no one will.”

Although Charles grew up in a supportive family, his mother had questions about his career choice. He remembers his mother asking about his backup plan, and telling her, “I don’t need a backup plan, I know the steps I need to do for it. But also, pray about it, too.” Charles was very clear that he wanted to be a music major, and he knew what he had to do, even if his mother did not. He also knew that money was tight, and he was determined to figure out how to pay for school. He recalled how one night he was sitting in Bible study at church when he heard one of the other young people testify about how he had gotten a full scholarship to college through a program, the Bill and Melinda Gates Scholarship. It would pay for his entire education; not just undergraduate, but his graduate and doctoral studies as well. That night, Charles went home and applied for the scholarship. He believed that God had planned for him to be at church that night, because for some reason his marching band rehearsal had been canceled. Months later, Charles found out that he was selected to receive the Gates Scholarship.

During our interview, Charles would constantly refer to “praying about it.” When I asked him to explain more about how this worked, he explained that his faith in God has continued to help him, even today:

I find myself being more resilient and able to persevere more because I know that weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. I know I could put all my trust in Him. I have all these scriptures that get me going with faith. It’s like, I know God’s gonna get me through this, it’s only temporary.

Being the only Black person in these music spaces required many of the participants to figure out ways to navigate these strange lands while still preserving their culture. Several of the BMMEs also cited their connection to Black music through the church as an early source of

musical inspiration that has stayed with them. In many cases, this lived experience informs their teaching.

Church Music Influence

Charles mentioned early in his interview that he grew up in a Pentecostal church, playing music in the children's church and frequently attending Bible study. Later, he commented that this upbringing informed his teaching. As he described his church:

It was like, 'You're gonna do this. You're gonna go to this Sunday school, you're gonna help this woman down the stairs.' You know, 'You're gonna get up and clap. You're gonna recite or memorize these 10 commandments. You're going to do that.' It's not as stern. I'm just saying, it was just the atmosphere. And if you don't do that and you make a mistake, we will get you together. And that's just okay. And that's honestly how I teach. It's like, 'You may get down, but I'm not gonna let you get away with it.'

Almost all of the participants mentioned that their upbringing in the Black church had had an influence on their teaching style or their musical selections. Chris did not grow up attending church, but his neighbors often brought him to church with them, and from a young age he was often hired as a musician to play in churches. Ian stated that he grew up in a Baptist church, and remembered attending frequently up until he got to high school. While it is not the only style he is adept at, Ian commented, "I definitely have a specific sound that I go for. I definitely gravitate to more Gospel or Spirituals, obviously, because that's a good home base for me. I know I'll be successful at a Gospel piece or a Spiritual." Kelvin also believes that the music of the Black church has informed his own musicality: "I think the church definitely trained

my ear to stuff that people don't understand. I can just hear something, and I can harmonize any three parts like that.”

Kelvin's church music training also proved useful when he started teaching in his current district, as one of the schools had an extracurricular Gospel Choir. When he was hired, he began teaching at the middle school, and also came one day a week in the afternoon to direct the high school Gospel Choir. Kelvin fondly remembers his first couple of years working with that group. They primarily sang inspirational contemporary Gospel songs from artists such as Donald Lawrence and Quincy Jones, along with some traditional Gospel songs from artists like James Cleveland, which Kelvin learned from his mother. Ultimately, he decided to stop directing the choir after students began skipping rehearsals. However, he mentioned in the focus group that he wanted to reinstitute the Gospel Choir, noting that he had previously recruited a number of boys from it for his curricular choirs.

High Expectations (Teaching Style)

A common teaching trait that the BMMEs displayed and spoke about was creating a classroom of high expectations. They all recalled that their musical mentors had expected a great deal of them and their groups. Charles, in particular, placed a high premium on teachers in his life that had high expectations, and he displayed great competence in creating a structured classroom. Through the classroom observations, each of the participants demonstrated their own commitment to encouraging their students to aim high.

Charles

When discussing the teachers who had made the biggest impact on his teaching, Charles outright stated, “They had high expectations for us, or they were very competent.” By contrast, he described the teachers that he did not care for, such as the trumpet teacher at his first college

and his orchestra teacher in middle school, as disorganized and sloppy. Charles displayed a no-nonsense attitude in the classroom, and expected his students to follow suit. His language when teaching is very direct, and he has no problem correcting a student if they do not have their instrument or music for class. When asked about his teaching style, he immediately said, "I'm fairly strict, especially in the beginning. I worked really hard to set the routines and procedures and expectations so that later in the year, I can be more relaxed." As mentioned earlier, his students appear drawn to this approach. They like to joke with him at the beginning of class; after lessons, the more advanced students often come up to him to show him other musical techniques or songs they are working on.

Charles's lessons are very structured. He often uses military terms to describe how students should position themselves. When students were supposed to be in a rest position, for instance, he would say, "At ease." Watching him was like watching a compassionate drill sergeant at work. In the final interview, Charles discussed his experience in the Army Reserves, which is where he gets much of his terminology. During the first observation, the students had a moment of free experimental time with their trumpets. When Charles was ready for them to come back and work as a group, he said, "Okay everyone, grab your trumpets and go to the position of attention. Who remembers the position of attention?" The students were unsure, and so Charles continued, explaining, "Trumpet on the right leg." The students immediately shifted their trumpets, and moved the bells to their right thighs. "Now, when I say 'press and tap position,' I mean just pressing the button down." The students followed along, and pressed the buttons of their trumpets down.

The walls of Charles's classroom are lined with posters depicting famous Black musicians, such as Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. He also displays posters of well-known

artwork from Black artists, including Romare Bearden's *The Piano Lesson*. This imagery of Black musicians harkens back to the idea of representation and subversive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Garvis, 2021). In a follow-up interview, Charles confirmed that he intentionally puts up posters of African-American musicians because he wants his students to see artists that represent the student body.

On the right wall of the classroom, there is a laminated poster entitled *The Musician's Creed*. During the final interview, Charles explained that he created that poster himself, adapting the soldier's creed from his military experience for his music students. The students often cite it, and use it as a reference point when working through tough passages in the music, which creates a positive and affirming culture of learning. One exchange during the final observation showed how strongly Charles's students tend to support each other. That day, all of the students were able to play a line from their lesson book that had previously eluded them. When one student played it successfully, Charles came over to him and told the students to give them a musician's applause. The students all stomped their feet. Charles said to the male student, "Remember when you said you couldn't play it? See now, you're doing it, just believe in yourself." The students joined in with cheers and phrases like, "Yeah, nothing is impossible." When asked about this musician's creed in the last interview, Charles said,

It's something we say at every band rehearsal. To get in the right mindset. To me it's accountability, it's about responsibility. [He begins to recite it] I'm a musician, I'm a dedicated member of a team. I will always put the ensemble first. I will never accept defeat, I will never quit. I will believe in myself. I will encourage my buddies, I will practice my instrument. I'll perform with focus and great musicality. I can accomplish anything with hard work. I'm a musician.

The students even recited the creed at the spring concert, which Charles told me garnered a standing ovation from the audience and accolades from his administrators.

Chris

Chris has a slightly more collaborative style of teaching, but his expectations of excellence and high standards are similar to Charles's. As previously stated, his classroom has Black musicians along the wall, just as Charles's classroom does. On the board, he always has the pieces and the warm-ups that are going to be rehearsed. Prior to the start of class, Chris will spend a few minutes walking around the room, helping students get their instruments together or tuned. When he steps up to the podium, Chris approaches the music much like a professional conductor. He moves quickly, and stops to correct musical articulation or phrases fairly often. While he is not aggressive, he is very demanding, and he communicates his displeasure in a direct yet kind way. In one rehearsal, Chris spent several minutes aligning the phrasing and dynamics, starting with one student in the clarinet section and continuing until it was just right. He then added students to the same phrase until it sounded correct. The students were focused, but you could tell that they really just wanted to play the rest of the song. By the end of the rehearsal, Chris let them perform the piece from that section to the very end. As he was pleased to see, they played the phrases in question just the way he wanted.

One area in which Chris has high expectations for his students is their appearances. During the first observation, one young man had the hood from his hoodie over his head. Chris told the student to take it off, and the student balked, because he did not like the way his hair looked. Chris told him to take it off anyway, and when he did, Chris remarked, "See, it's not so bad!" The students laughed, but kept going with rehearsal. During the second rehearsal, Chris stopped to talk to the students about how they should dress for an upcoming concert. One had

incorrect posture, and Chris told the students that proper posture would improve the sound of the performance as well as the presentation. He then talked for several minutes about how the audience's perception of an artist will be negative if they see that artist has poor posture: "See, if I walk out on stage with my head down [he slumps his head and rounds his shoulders forward], people are going to wonder if I know the music. It looks like you're scared." A student interjected, "Yeah, it looks unprofessional." Chris pointed at the student and continued: "Exactly! See, when we are on stage, we have to look a certain way. We have to dress professionally."

When asked about his teaching style, Chris said, "I describe my teaching as student-friendly with rigor. I think students should feel comfortable when they enter your room. They should think, 'I can learn here. I feel comfortable.'" He continued, "And one of the things I tried to instill in them is confidence, so I want them to feel comfortable, but yet they know they're in a place where I'm going to push them." After I asked how his students respond to that rigor, Chris commented:

I think that I get them to feel better or more confident. My goal is excellence. If you have an instrument in your hand, you should be able to play it well. And you're going [vocal emphasis added] to play well.

Kelvin

Kelvin has fond memories of his mother, and remembers watching her teach when he was a child. Asked to describe her style, he said:

I remember her style. Yes, she sat at a podium, and she had erasers lined up. You could not sing, but you could not do anything but sing in her class, because if you did, she would throw erasers at your forehead. [Laughter] What I do remember

the most is her taking her choirs out to perform community events. I remember singing with her choir at the World Trade Center in front of the elevators. I remember going to this mall and that mall.

While Kelvin does not throw erasers at his students, he certainly has a no-nonsense attitude when teaching.

At the first observation, I noticed that Kelvin wasted little time transitioning from one piece to the next. His pacing was even, but he certainly moved things along quickly. While working with the basses, he began to sweat, and immediately wiped his brow before continuing to rehearse. When the male students were not singing with enough energy, Kelvin questioned them: “Is that all you have for me this morning? Did you eat your Wheaties? Okay, let’s try it again.” After they tried it again, they were still not giving it the vigor that Kelvin wanted to see, and he was unrelenting in his pursuit of that higher level of energy: “On a scale from one to 10, where are you on energy this morning? I’m almost on Kirk Franklin!” Some of the students responded with some lower numbers. One male tenor said, “I’m about a five.” Kelvin asked, “Can you get it up to seven?” He told them to put the music on their chairs, and had them stand up. “Next, we’ll go to singing while doing jumping jacks! If Beyoncé can sing in heels on a treadmill, then you can do this.” The students erupted in laughter. Their energy level was much higher, and their intonation locked in.

When asked to describe his teaching style, Kelvin did not have a definitive answer. However, he made it clear that he sees it as more emotional in nature, and that it is based on telling a story or communicating a message: “But it’s an emotionally-based teaching style. Singing is all emotional. And you have to be able to connect with that in order to sing, because that’s how we express ourselves.”

Ian

Ian describes his teaching style as being not as stern and direct as other choir directors with whom he has worked. He explained that he is interested in building relationships and creating a community with his students. However, his rehearsal techniques were every bit as demanding as those of the other participants. As previously stated, Ian plays hip-hop instrumental music over the loudspeakers when his students walk in the room. He greets them at the door, and often holds conversations with them as they are entering. During the first observation, Ian introduced rhythmic sight-reading to the students. At first, he let them work on deciphering the rhythm independently; then, he brought the entire class together to work on the exercise. It was not too difficult, but Ian was very precise in how he wanted things performed. He then put on a new hip-hop drumbeat for the students to perform the rhythm underneath. Though he started the rehearsal at a slower pace, eventually he became more intense, particularly once they started rehearsing the choral music. Even when students struggled to learn a line, Ian never appeared frustrated; instead, he became more focused on correcting it, and on bringing the choir to a more professional level of performance.

The students were very comfortable with Ian, but they never were disrespectful and never talked out of turn. During the second observation, I watched Ian work with his honors choir, which is a smaller ensemble for which students must audition to gain entrance. His relaxed manner was consistent, but he was certainly more exacting with these students when it came to intonation and dynamics. In the middle of this rehearsal, one student raised his hand to ask, “I don’t mean to be rude, but who is he?” while pointing to me. The student continued, “Yo, I need an introduction.” A female student looked at me with a smile and a head nod in an upward motion. The other students laughed. Ian told the students that I was observing him as part of a

study. When Ian explained that I was getting my doctorate, the students clapped for me. A male student who was seated nearby nodded his head at me, saying, “Yo, that’s what’s up!”

Quentin

Quentin’s teaching style was the most animated of all the participants. As previously stated, he would often employ language that the students in the community use; having been raised in a similar community, it is fair to say that this colloquial language is common to him as well. It is also important to note that Quentin is the only participant that teaches general music. He does not have a separate choir class, but he teaches choir music during his general music classes to prepare students for the holiday concert and sing-a-long. When Quentin conducts general music classes, he has his students seated at desks in straight rows while he teaches from the smart board. However, when he teaches choir music, he has the students gather around the piano to conduct warm-ups and highlight vocal techniques. I noticed changes in Quentin’s mannerisms and demeanor when he began teaching choral music; he became stricter, and more demanding. During the second observation, he shifted from a general music lesson on the notes of the treble staff, and started to teach a song entitled “The Moon.” He told the students to leave the rows and come around the piano, saying, “I would like to have a half a circle around the piano.” After that, Quentin took the time to arrange the students in a semicircle, in the middle of which he was seated at the piano.

The accompaniment was minor, with an ominous, yet pretty, modality. To warm the students up, Quentin had them sing the numbers one, two, three, four, and five using the first five degrees of the minor scale. When demonstrating how they should sing it, Quentin sang it for them using an exaggerated British accent; as the students repeated it after him, they used the same accent. A few of the male students who were seated closest to me kept laughing. Quentin

quickly switched his demeanor, placing his hands on his hips as he said, “If I have to tell you again, I’m going to give you a warning, and two warnings mean no recess for the week.” The students stopped laughing, though they did so again periodically throughout the song. Quentin stopped the students frequently to remind them to use the “taller vowels,” as he had asked from the very beginning of the warm-up. These frequent corrections, with Quentin explaining how to produce the sound he asked for, were indicators of his high expectations.

During the third observation, Quentin focused exclusively on music for the upcoming winter concert. He had the students sing around the piano as he did in the previous lesson, and they rehearsed “Silent Night”; he used the same exaggerated British vowels, but this time they sang on a neutral syllable of “oo.” What stood out in this lesson was Quentin’s use of the second half to have the students sing a Christmas rap song. After he ended “Silent Night,” he opened YouTube and played “Christmas in Hollis” by Run-D.M.C., exclaiming, “Who remembers this from last year?” Going to his closet, he pulled out several fake gold chains, and put them on two students. Eagerly, the students began to rap along with the song. Last year, Quentin had had them sing the song for the concert, and they were excited about the possibility of singing it again this year. Several male students started to clamor for the gold chains. As the music started, five boys began dancing at the front of the classroom; one in particular was executing the dance moves extremely well, and rapping along with them. Everyone then started to sing the lyrics as the song continued. I noticed that the students were engaged during both parts of the lesson. However, the boys in the class were not as disruptive when they got up and started dancing. While the classroom energy was different, students were executing the song with the same precision and excellence as they did “Silent Night or “The Moon.” Evidently, “Christmas in Hollis” had a deep level of meaning and connection for them.

Quentin described his teaching style as “all over the place, a little bit of super classical, and very modern music production. I’m trying to find a happy medium.” After he listed some of the modern music styles that he incorporates into his lessons—such as rap music, reggaeton, and R&B—along with classical bel canto singing, I asked him if it would be fair to call his style “hip-hop student-centered, with a touch of classical.” He laughed and said that sounded good to him. It was evident from Quentin’s insistence on taller vowels, and his use of bel canto singing techniques, that he was incorporating the style of training that his high school choral director had used, and that he had seen during his first semester of college.

It was clear from my observations that each of the participants exhibits respect and care for their students, and that respect is returned to all of them. They raise the bar for each class or rehearsal, and the students meet it, displaying a longing to please their instructor.

Creating Community

All of the participants told me that they strive to create a sense of community in their classrooms. During the first focus group, they each talked about how important it is for the students to feel like they have a space to be themselves, and to discuss things that may or may not have to do with music. Each participant also mentioned that their students encounter stressful situations outside of the classroom that can result in trauma. Notably, the study took place two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increased racial tensions surrounding the George Floyd murder. Chris spoke of times when he has to call what he referred to as a “family meeting” of his students, stopping a rehearsal for or even starting off the class with a conversation about what is going on with everyone. The other participants stated that they do something similar, though they do not label it as a “family meeting,” but they loved the term so much that they said they might start using it. This longing for, and creation of, community in the

classroom appeared to take priority for the BMMEs, or at least to be of equal importance as music making. Ian commented that he has frequently brought up tragic events that have happened in the world, and often his students have remarked that his class was the first time they had a chance to talk about it. Giving the students a chance to express their feelings helps create the classroom that Ian aims for: “I think having that rapport with the students really adds to that collaborative environment,” he noted.

Even though Charles has a strict classroom environment, he manages to make time to connect and create community with his students. He created squad leaders, which are modeled after his military training; those students are like section leaders, and their fellow students have to report to them when they get to band rehearsal. Charles even takes the time to make light jokes with the students in order to find common ground with them. During the third observation, as a group of students came into the classroom and walked up to Charles, they started singing “Jiggle Jiggle,” by Duke and Jones: *My money don't jiggle jiggle, it folds*. Charles started singing along with them, and they started laughing and cheering him on. He attributes this connection to the students to the time he spends with them outside of class:

I always have lunch duty with them. Okay, so I see them outside of this. I see them a few times. I see them every day at lunch and recess. So that's automatically rapport right there, because it's me walking around. That was the first time at lunchtime when they talked about that song, ‘My money went to jiggle jiggle,’ or whatever. So I get to build rapport with them outside of the classroom.

This longing for community should also be viewed in light of the conflicts that some of the participants experienced with their own culture or community in their formative years.

Kelvin, for instance, told me that he has a very open relationship with his students, referring to his life as “an open book” to them. This was evident during the first observation, when he came to school with his two young children, whom he was planning to drop off at school after he finished first period. The students all waved to the children and shouted out their names.

Discussing his relationship with his students later, Kelvin commented, “With the male students, I feel like I’ve gotten better, because for the longest time, I didn’t always feel 100% about me. I didn’t feel like I was a role model.” Elaborating on that, Kelvin mentioned that there had been tension with the people around him, including his family, when he began to express his sexuality. As we began discussing this topic, it led to some of the most vulnerable conversations I participated in during the entire study.

Recounting his undergraduate experience, Kelvin mentioned that almost all of his school’s music majors were White, but that there was a Black student union on campus. However, he did not socialize with these students, because he did not always feel that they accepted him. I asked Kelvin to explain this further:

I was still trying to figure out who I was. And I was trying to be the closeted gay boy, DL boy,⁵ because that’s what was in fashion at the time. I was, you know, figuring out who I was. And that was a thing that I felt ashamed about for a long time, through church and my upbringing. And I think I might have mentioned that at one point, my mom didn’t want me to go to Morehouse, because she thought I was going to be gay. So it was like, there was a lot of talk in my world, and trying to be me without letting people see who I truly was.

⁵ DL is short for “down low.” It is a slang term for a male, typically Black, who presents as heterosexual but secretly participates in same-gender sexual and romantic activity.

Even as he recalled painful memories, Kelvin radiated a level of confidence and self-assurance. After this exchange, he told me, “It’s my story. I can share with whomever I want. I own it. And they can’t take it away from me.”

Later, when he was in Boston for graduate school, Kelvin did find a community of people with whom he was able to connect:

But yeah, I found my people in graduate school. Because we had to find each other. In undergrad, it’s not that I didn’t have to. They weren’t accessible to me. In graduate school, they were accessible to me, and I knew for myself that I needed to find my people. So I could understand who I was, how I was, and how we get down. And two of my friends that I met, Diatta and LaTasha, they both went to Spelman, so I would have known them if I went to Morehouse. So it was just like this, those are my girls and, and we all love to sing. We love the color that we started to hear in each other’s voices. We would say to each other, ‘You better go with it.’ We celebrated each other, and I was in my glory!

During the final focus group, both Chris and Quentin recalled times when they faced conflicts with certain communities. When participants were asked to discuss their feelings about the influence of the Black Church in their musical experiences, which I discovered as a running theme throughout their interviews, Quentin mentioned that he fondly remembers church, but also noted that it was a conflicting space for him. His mother sent him to church when he was younger, but when he was old enough to start going to other churches, he found that he did not quite fit in at any of them. This conversation was the first time that Quentin referred to himself as biracial:

I kind of felt like, maybe I wasn't Black enough to be in, because I'm biracial. Or maybe I didn't quite understand that type of setting, because like I said, I came from a small church house and then went to a Baptist church where the choir was in the pew. And although I absolutely wanted to participate in that choir, I didn't quite know how.

Quentin continued, telling the group that when he found a church community to make music with as an adult, he did not feel like he was a part of the church musician community because of the differences between church musicians and singers.

Chris connected Quentin's conflict with his own disagreements with HBCU band directors: "That's just how I feel, like I've never really been part of that group. And that is very unfortunate, because we all can give a lot to each other." He mentioned that when he would go to conferences where he encountered these directors, he never felt able to connect with them. Throughout our discussions, each BMME expressed a similar longing to be a part of communities to which they could connect. Each participant's teaching style and classroom ethos also demonstrated how much they valued that sense of community, along with their desire to make their classrooms spaces where all students can flourish.

Table 2

Summary of Themes

Theme	Charles	Ian	Kelvin	Chris	Quentin
Family Support	x	x	x	x	
Strong Mentor/Teacher	x	x	x	x	x
Talent Identified	x	x	x	x	
Isolation (the Only One)	x	x	x	x	x

Resilience	x		x	x	x
Influenced by Religious Community: Black Church	x	x	x		x
High Expectations	x	x	x	x	x
Longing for Community	x	x	x	x	

Research Questions Addressed

What formative musical experiences of Black males influenced their decisions to become music educators?

The participants in this study highlighted a variety of experiences that influenced their decisions to become music educators. Common reasons why they chose to pursue careers in music education included having strong mentor teachers, being “called” or having someone point out their acumen to be a music educator, and having family support.

How do Black male music educators (BMMEs) describe their collegiate music education?

These BMMEs had varied experiences with their undergraduate music education. It is important to note that three of the five participants did not have the traditional preservice music education training; instead, they became teachers through the alternate route education program, which is a certification program enabling college graduates to get their teaching certificate by taking additional teaching classes while teaching in a public school. Both Charles and Ian, by contrast, went to their undergraduate schools with the intention of being music educators. Each of them spoke of having positive experiences with their training, and of having connected to teachers along the way. Concerning his music educational preservice learning, Ian mentioned several times that there “was a lot of European-centered learning. It was definitely at the top of

their musical hierarchy.” He still felt successful, and credits his undergraduate experience with effectively preparing him for a teaching career—but although he loved his classes and the music they sang in choir, he did not feel connected to the music.

Charles had conflicts at his first college due to the lack of diversity on campus. He also clashed with his trumpet studio teacher, because he was unable to diagnose a performance deficiency that was hindering his playing. Charles was neutral in his assessment of his teachers at the second university he attended. However, he attributes a lot of his success as a teacher to his student teaching experience:

That [high expectations] I learned from my co-op teacher I had during student teaching.

That was the best experience I’ve ever had. But she said it: if you have a group that operates at a high level, students will want to be a part of it.

Kelvin, for his part, consistently expressed his love for his undergraduate music experience. When talking about his time in the university choir, or even spent in his voice studio, he would say, “We had a good time.” He loved to perform, and both his undergraduate and graduate schools afforded him many opportunities to do so. As previously mentioned, Kelvin directs both the fall and spring drama productions at his school. Fusing together his mother’s rigorous high school performance schedule with his own theater background, he has created a high-stakes performance experience for his students.

Although Kelvin loved his undergraduate years, he did note that he felt unprepared in several aspects when he entered his college music program. His mother and his high school teacher had helped to prepare him beforehand, but he still struggled in his diction class. Due to a scheduling error on the part of the university, he was placed in French diction during his first semester of freshman year:

I just remember being put in that class and not knowing anything. And not feeling like I was equipped to even make it through that course. Because I was like, ‘I don’t know what these symbols are. I’ve never heard of this. And no one’s ever mentioned this.’

This class was also the class in which the professor said to Kelvin, “We all know why you’re here.” He recalled, too, that he struggled with his aural skills class because it was taught by a professor who was blatant in his belief that singers were just *singers*. Later, Kelvin had the same professor for his classical history literature class, and he struggled in it as well. For Kelvin, it was the ethos of those classes that set up a difficult learning environment for him.

How do BMMEs negotiate their Black identity in Eurocentric music education?

This question provoked the most complex responses of all of the research questions in the study. No ethnic group can be considered a monolith, and it is important to highlight the complexities and layers of each individual in a study that aims to look at their lived experiences. Each BMME, I noticed, expressed their own unique style of Blackness when existing in the “strange land” of Eurocentric music education.

During our conversations, all of the participants mentioned intentionally diversifying their concert repertoire, which represents curriculum decisions. Chris, for instance, told me that he purposely chooses Black composers’ music when selecting wind band literature for his students; he explicitly tied this to Culturally Relevant Teaching. For his part, Kelvin stated that he will select diverse literature, but only from composers who are of the same background as the music they compose: “If we’re going to perform a spiritual, why shouldn’t it be written by an African American composer?” Kelvin also strongly identified with the music and the experience of the Gospel Choir he directed when he first started in his teaching position, which he regrettably had to disband because of the students’ lack of commitment. Still, his ability to

connect the music of his culture to the lives of his students helped shape a mutually rewarding experience for everyone. As previously mentioned, this choir served as a recruiting method to get more male students to take his class, where Kelvin uses the music of his Black identity as a gateway to reach more students through music that they connect with as well.

When discussing his time as an undergraduate, Ian commented:

Everything didn't have to be so European. There's so much out there that I didn't get out of my college experience, because maybe they hadn't had that experience.

So I felt that I didn't get that full experience, [like I would] had I gone to an HBCU or something like that.

It is important to reiterate that Ian felt his undergraduate preservice experience prepared him very well for teaching, but also that he did not connect with it. Today, he teaches in a very diverse school district, and he maintains a strong relationship with all of his students. Reflecting on his bond with his Black students, he mentioned that he sees a difference in the way that they respond to him compared to his White colleagues: "I think they know they're in a comfortable space, because, you know, they recognize there are not many Black educators, let alone Black male educators. I feel like they definitely connect on a different level."

Quentin grew up in a community where he was in the racial majority, and he continues to teach in a community with similar demographics. He connects with his Blackness through his attire and his communication skills, with clothing and language that are intentionally more relaxed and similar to those of his students:

I'm dressed, like I'm in the street, like I got Jordans on or jeans or something. But

I'm intentionally doing that so that I could connect to my kids in a different way.

I'm wearing the fliest Jordans, I always get the ones who are the least engaged in

my classroom coming up to me like, 'Yo, Mr. Miller son, you're gonna get it.'

And I'm like, 'Yay,' and I'm like, speaking their lingo.

Quentin was also very relaxed in his mannerisms when talking with me during the interviews; frequently, he would speak in a very casual manner, with no pretense. He used the word "nigga" very comfortably when telling me different stories. For instance, when describing the first Black male teacher he had, he said, "And he was a music teacher. And I love this man. I think I was in love with this man. Oh, my God, this nigga was fine. But this is me as a little queer." I interrupted and asked Quentin how old he was at the time. He continued, "Oh, eight, nine. Yes, he looked good and he was attractive and all those other things. But this was also someone who looked like me. Who had brown skin and coarse hair."

In contrast to the way Quentin utilized language, Ian would not even use the word itself when referring to the student who called him a "nigger" in high school; instead, he referred to it as the N-word, and told me he did so because of that incident. He recalled how on his first day of teaching, a Latina student said to him, "What's up, my N-word? You're the teacher. Oh, word!" Ian sent her to the office that day, and as it turned out, she had many home challenges; eventually, Ian was able to connect with her, and they never had this issue again. Still, as he told the story, he was visibly shaken by it. Some believe that Black people use the word "nigger" in order to reclaim it as a source of power despite its historical traumatic associations (Jeshion, 2020). However, Ian's refusal to use the word may be his way of sanitizing the space that he operates in, so that he can ensure that his students do not encounter the trauma that he experienced.

Quentin is intentional about embracing his Black identity through hip-hop clothing and linguistics, using them as a means to connect to his students who look like him. In contrast to

Quentin's choice to dress more "street," Chris dressed neatly in every one of our interviews. As previously stated, there was one rehearsal I observed when he mentioned the importance of dressing nicely for the concert: "We have to dress professionally. When you're with your parents and your friends, you can dress how you want, but on stage, we have to look professional. Shirts, ties, tuxedos; ladies, no spaghetti straps." While there is a certain expected style of concert dress that professional musicians follow, professional dressing is also connected to the African-American cultural experience. Chris appears to practice and promote what Higginbotham (1994) would describe as *respectability politics*—a belief, dating back to the early 20th century, that Black Americans should present themselves in an extremely polished manner in order to combat the negative stereotypes thrust upon them by the dominant culture of White supremacy. During the Civil Rights Movement, protesters would intentionally dress in suits or dresses in order to show their humanity and professionalism. Chris may be connecting his Black identity to the high expectations he has for his students when it comes to their performance and attire. It should also be noted that the students in Chris's school have to follow a district-wide dress code, requiring them to wear khaki or tan pants, slacks or skirts, and white or black collared shirts or blouses. I noticed that many of the students would dress in suspenders and ties, which added more to the attire. Taken together, these differences among participants show the multiplicity of ways that BMMEs navigate and connect to their Black identity in Eurocentric music educational spaces.

In what ways do BMMEs experience racial injustice in K-12 and collegiate music education?

Each participant grew up in a racially diverse environment. However, when they entered more predominantly White Eurocentric spaces, they all encountered more racial injustice and microaggressions than they previously had. Kelvin experienced microaggressions when he was

told to “sing lighter and brighter,” or when his diction professor said, “We know why you’re here.” Ian encountered blatant racial aggression, including when a White student called him a nigger during a rehearsal in high school. He also had to grapple with racial microaggressions during his undergraduate years, when his choral director constantly chose him to sing spirituals. For his part, Charles found himself having to battle racially motivated comments from White classmates in college. He also told me about a racial microaggression from his current supervisor, who bragged to Charles that he, the supervisor, had done a good job with hiring that year because he recently hired “two Blacks and a gay guy.”

It should be noted that neither Quentin nor Chris reported any direct encounters with racism in music educational spaces. However, Quentin did tell me that he had perceived he was treated differently at both his undergraduate and his graduate schools because the professors did not have any students who were like him. He did not cite any specific incidents, but he explained that he simply felt as though his professors did not understand the plight of students of color.

How do BMMEs’ lived experiences inform their teaching practices?

Each BMME approached teaching in his own nuanced manner. However, there are several similar traits, such as high expectations and community building in their classrooms, that I observed in all of them. Charles was the most explicit with his commitment to high expectations, with parallels that can be drawn to his strict Pentecostal upbringing as well as his military training. Chris had undergone very rigorous orchestral training with high expectations, which was reflected in his teaching style. He is committed to preparing students in his class for a professional musical career should they choose to take that path.

Kelvin’s own experience in the performance world is a strong indicator that he has those same high expectations for his students. When observing his teaching, I saw that he consistently

exhibited lofty standards, and he did not relent until they were met. For our second observation, I attended a voice class that Kelvin designed; its structure was similar to that of a college-level vocal lesson, except for the fact that there were multiple students in it. Each student faced the mirror along the front wall. Kelvin taught them vocal warm-ups and reviewed the repertoire; some pieces were classical European-style songs, and some were popular modern music. Ian, who also considered a career as a performer, displayed a very similar commitment to high expectations and a performance-driven classroom structure. During an after-school interest meeting for the musical that I attended, Ian showed students his old audition binder, which he still had from his years of auditioning. As he displayed it, he told the group that they, too, must have a similar binder for their audition music. Clearly, Kelvin, Ian, and Chris were preparing their students for professional careers if they chose to pursue them.

Quentin's experience in high school clearly impacted his teaching style, too. His teacher, Ms. Thompson, had an especially profound effect on him. When I observed Quentin as he was working with the fifth-grade students in his general music class, I noticed his demeanor becoming stricter as he started working with the choral music. In this way, the high expectations he associated with a choral sound became the expectation for all of his students.

Finally, the strong emphasis on community was evident in my observations of every participant, and in the stories they told me. Even though Chris was the only one to label the non-music-related class discussions he had with his students as "family time," each of the participants expressed their own commitment to creating a safe classroom environment where students are affirmed.

Delineating the Data: The Hermeneutic Circle

When analyzing the data in a phenomenological study, one must display their fore-sight and rely on it during the data collection and data synthesis processes. Heidigger (1962) believed that researchers must understand their “fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conceptions” (p. 194) before reading the data. Fore-sight, which is how I will refer to it in this study, is the knowledge the researcher has about the phenomenon being studied. The fore-sight should be displayed in a manner to which they can refer back, as the initial data reading will produce new knowledge that will be used when rereading the text.

Before the first focus group, I detailed my assumptions and fore-sight about Black male music educators in a journal, which I kept on hand at all times during the focus groups, interviews, and observations. This journal also served as a space where I would write my interpretations of what I observed, as well as make note of any topics I wanted to explore with the participants. When I read each interview for the first time, I simply edited it while listening to the recording, to make sure that Otter.ai had transcribed everything correctly. Then I read each interview a second time, and began to extract themes, keeping my journal and list of fore-sight on hand. Next to that list, I would add updates on my fore-sight as I gained new knowledge. I would also note whether any of the participants spoke of incidents or scenarios that confirmed my fore-sight. Throughout this study, I read the data several more times to update my fore-sight, and that reading and rereading of the transcripts helped finalize the themes that were explicated.

I read each theme alongside the entire transcript, and never separated it from the text as a whole. As stated in Chapter III, this process of interpretation is one in which the researcher will continually move between the parts (themes) and the whole (entire transcript) of the phenomenon in order to determine the meaning of both; it is referred to as the *hermeneutic*

circle. Some of the fore-sight that I wrote about in my journal before I began the study included the isolation of Black males in White spaces, normalized traumatic racism, absence of Black male educators in formative years, strong musical ties to Black churches, and lack of cultural capital in Eurocentric music spaces.

As I spoke with the participants, hearing about some of their experiences caused me to revise my fore-sight. Chris, for instance, told me that he had several Black male educators during his formative elementary years. Another revision I made involved the strong musical ties to Black churches. While each of the participants spoke of having a deep connection to the music of the Black church, none of them considered themselves to be “church musicians.” Charles, who had the deepest connection to a Black church of all the BMMEs, described being able to hear things that musicians in church were playing, but not being able to perform them himself. One difference lies in the fact that all of the participants were taught in a musical-literacy-centered pedagogy, while many Black church musicians learn music by ear (Costen, 2004).

Table 3

Hermeneutic Circle: Confirmations or Revisions

Fore-sight	Confirmed or Revised
The isolation of Black males in White spaces	Confirmed
Normalized traumatic racism	Confirmed
Absence of Black male educators in formative years	Revised
Strong musical ties to Black church	Revised
Lack of cultural capital in Eurocentric music spaces	Confirmed

Dasein

The fore-sight that I have as a Black male music educator influenced my *dasein*, or being, in the study. My own experiences with racial microaggressions, and the lack of connection I felt to the Eurocentric music that was emphasized in my own music education, allowed me to craft questions that got to the center of many of the participants' stories. There were also moments when I, as a Black male, experienced connections with the participants, or heard words that inspired me to probe them for more details.

One example of this came when both Charles and Kelvin told me they prayed about their decisions before going to college, and my own *dasein* of a Black male musician who grew up in a Pentecostal church led me to ask for further explanation. Charles's frequent use of Bible verses to explain his persistence reminded me of conversations that I heard growing up in church, and I admittedly use some of these passages today. This sense of recognition prompted me to ask Charles more about growing up in the Black church, which led to a deeper understanding of his *dasein*. My consciousness, as a Black male who grew up in a Black church, allowed me to see traits of his teaching that are similar to the ones I encountered in the Black church. When all of the students in Charles's class were verbal in their encouragement and response to their classmate's success, it was reminiscent of my experiences in a Black church, where congregants can be very spontaneous and exuberant in their response to something with which they agree. Thus, my *dasein* in Charles's classroom was connected to my *dasein* of being in the Black church.

My fore-sight of normalized racial trauma that I brought to the study was confirmed when Ian was discussing the traumatic experience that he had in high school, when a White male student called him a nigger during a musical rehearsal. I have experienced several racial

incidents during my years in White spaces, but no one has ever directly referred to me as a nigger. While listening to this story and reading the transcript, I could hear the emotional trauma reflected in Ian's voice. Later, when I took his account and read it as a part of the entire text, it gave me more insight into his refusal to use the word nigger. My own fore-sight regarding racial trauma was confirmed, but it was also enhanced, because this part of Ian's story displayed clearly how damaging such traumas can be.

After Ian concluded with this part of the story during our interview, I posed a few follow-up questions to gain more insight into it. At the end of his account of the high school incident, I asked if he was able to continue, and he said yes. I also expressed to him that I was sorry that he went through this. My own being in the interview took on a new level of sensitivity to Ian's racial trauma, along with my own, as I grappled with what he had told me.

The Participants' Dasein

The focus group allowed me the opportunity to ask each participant about their own dasein as they went through this study. It also served as a way to avoid personal bias, which will be explained in the final section. Each of the BMMEs confirmed that they had never had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences as Black males in Eurocentric spaces.

Charles wondered if he "was taking advantage of me being a Black teacher? And how am I treating them, my Black students? It also made me think more about examining my procedures in the classroom." Kelvin agreed, commenting that he had begun to consider the ways he is treating the Black students he comes across in his school. His dasein as a BMME made him aware that he is one of the few Black male educators that his students will encounter there. Ian mentioned that his consciousness after this study made him more aware of the music he was selecting for concerts. I mentioned during the final focus group that my own dasein had been

affected in a similar way to that of Charles and Kelvin. More specifically, I had started to intentionally connect to Black students in my own district, because they do not see many Black teachers or authority figures of color during their educational experiences.

Chris commented that he knew that he was isolated as a BMME, but until he met the other participants, he did not realize how isolated he was. He spoke of going to music education conferences, where he is often the only person of color in sessions; now that he knew a few more BMMEs, Chris remarked that he felt more positive about his own being as a Black male. Quentin described his isolation similarly, but it varied from Chris's in other ways. He stated that he had never been asked to consider his being in Eurocentric spaces. Quentin teaches in a school where there are several other teachers of color; however, when entering spaces with other music teachers, he often felt uneasy and unprepared. After participating in the study, he understood that he was feeling that pressure because he was the only teacher of color in those spaces. Quentin also spoke of being part of a group for music educators of color on a social media platform, which helps him feel a sense of connection.

Credibility and Confirmability

To avoid personal bias, I noted my presumptions in Chapter III, and described my own fore-sight in my researcher's journal. During the observations and interviews, as I would notice traits or hear remarks that I had an opinion about, I would make a note of them in the journal, and use them as reflection points rather than something to report in the final study. I clarified my bias, and even expressed it to the participants when asking follow-up questions that were shaded by my own experience. The final focus group allowed me to ask questions to the BMMEs to ensure that I was interpreting everything correctly. In addition, the hermeneutic circle allowed me to reflect on the themes that I was explicating, and reread them as a part of the entire text in

order to view each theme as a part of the participants' stories.

Spending time with each educator before and after all of the interviews also allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of who they were as individuals, and not just participants in the study. At the focus group, there was a deep sense of camaraderie among the participants and me. We were able to talk through my interpretations of their interviews and observations, gaining a fuller picture of their lived experiences as Black male music educators.

Conclusion of Chapter IV

The results chapter gave a clear picture of the lived experiences of BMMEs. In addition, the themes were used to answer the research questions. Using the themes to create a thread for the reader to follow will allow for a thematic reading of Chapter V, the discussion.

Chapter V

Discussion

*Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus.
Steal away, steal away home, I ain't got long to stay here.
My Lord, He calls me. He calls me by the thunder;
The trumpet sounds within my soul.
I ain't got long to stay here.*

“Steal Away” (African American spiritual)

Introduction

This study explored the lived experiences of Black Male Music Educators (BMMEs). In this chapter, I will use the participants' stories to share recommendations about the kinds of learning environments that could create more pathways for potential BMMEs. I will also elevate the particular pedagogical practices of BMMEs in an effort to understand how their Black identity informs their teaching practices.

It must be reiterated that the experiences of BMMEs are too complex to be expressed with broad-brush strokes. Knowing that, I chose a phenomenological methodology, so that I could both present the details of the lived experiences of the BMMEs in this study and avoid sweeping generalizations about Black males. The themes extrapolated from the study's findings can help inform educators, administrators, and community stakeholders in the field of education about ways to create more pathways for potential BMMEs. Among those themes were family support, strong mentors or influential teachers, potential being pointed out, isolation, resilience, Black church music or church impact, high expectations in teaching, and longing for community.

In this chapter, I will present the findings from this study in a discussion format, alongside information from the existing research. I will compare and contrast those themes with

previous literature, in order to gain a better and more thorough understanding of the lived experiences of BMMEs.

Interpretation of the Findings

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What formative musical experiences of Black males influenced their decisions to become music educators?
2. How do Black male music educators (BMMEs) describe their collegiate music education?
3. How do BMMEs negotiate their Black identity in Eurocentric music education?
4. In what ways do BMMEs encounter racial injustice in K-12 music education?
5. How do BMMEs' lived experiences inform their teaching practices?

Isolation and Stress

As discussed in the results from Chapter IV, the strange land of Eurocentric music education can be a place of isolation for many BMMEs. Many of them were the only individuals of color in their auditions, their university music classes, and their rehearsal spaces. Each of the BMMEs recalled being the only Black student, or one of just a few, in predominantly White music educational settings. One participant was the only Black student attending his performing arts high school, which was not in his neighborhood. Another found himself, for the first time, as the only Black male in a music space when he was accepted to the All-State band in high school. As each of the BMMEs began to gain access to more exclusive Eurocentric music spaces, they were cut off from their Black peers. They described these settings as places of simultaneous joy and isolation. For most of the participants, these were the places where they first experienced racism and microaggressions.

These observations are consistent with those of Smith et al. (2011), who found that as Black males obtained higher levels of education, the numbers of racist encounters and racial microaggressions they experienced increased as well. This resulted in higher stress levels, or experience with mundane, extreme, environmental stress (MEES). Increased emotional burdens, such as considering the authenticity of acceptance by the dominant culture and discerning when to resist oppression, contribute to the racial battle fatigue Black males find in higher education; Smith et. al define this as the “emotional, psychological, and physiological distress” (p. 64) resulting from the racial microaggressions that individuals of color endure in historically White spaces. For BMMEs, this may happen when they have to sacrifice their Black identity due to the Whiteness of Eurocentric music education. Two participants in this study spoke openly of the emotional toll of being a BMME. When asked directly about being a BMME in predominantly White music spaces, one said, “It’s scary, because you feel like you have to validate and encourage yourself.” The other three participants did not use the terminology of stress, but they expressed frustration with the Whiteness of music education and the lack of care for students of color. This did not surprise me, as I have encountered many other Black music educators who have spoken of irritation and heightened stress levels with teaching within the Eurocentric music educational space. Thus, I realized my *dasein* within the study as I heard the participants’ stories of racial battle fatigue.

Brockenbrough (2012), Bristol (2020), and Bristol and Goings (2016) found that Black male educators often had contentious relationships with White administrators and frequently felt emasculated when working with them—in particular, with White female administrators. By contrast, the participants in this study told me that they had relatively positive relationships with their administrators and colleagues. At the conclusion of one of the observations, the principal

came into the class specifically to let me know how much the district loves the BMME. While the relationships were generally cordial, one participant had conflicted feelings about his administrator, noting that the supervisor occasionally used microaggressions during conversations with him. Another participant told me that he had some issues with his principal, who was Black, over funding for one of his after-school groups. Those tensions could be described as more subtle, and this study did not find that the BMMEs had contentious relationships with administrators. In fact, most of the participants got along well with their school leaders, and found that they respected them.

Black Male Bodies in Music Education

There is likely no greater description of the duality of Black Americans' experiences in White spaces than W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois (1903) asserts that Black Americans are gifted with a second sight: the ability to see themselves from the viewpoint of Blacks, but also Americans. He refers to this as "double-consciousness" (p. 14). Black people examine their existence and judge their success by the tape measures of others, while still existing in their Black bodies. For some, this can be a source of distress.

Most participants in this study successfully navigated the Eurocentric conservatory training they received while earning undergraduate music degrees. Additionally, they taught in traditional Eurocentric school music settings, such as music ensembles or general music classes. The conflicts they encountered did not appear detrimental to their perception of their teaching ability. Each of them, however, seemed to successfully function in a Eurocentric model of music education while still maintaining their Black identity and even incorporating it into their teaching, where it manifests itself in various ways that I observed. Clearly, none of the participants were willing to sacrifice their Black identities, and they all intentionally incorporated

the music of the Black American experience into their concert programming. Some used cultural connections to hip-hop music in their lessons, and while teaching music and practices. Others posted images of Black musicians and thought leaders throughout their classrooms. The participants appeared to be merging the “two unreconciled strivings” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 140), of their Black identity and the Eurocentric model in which they teach, with a standard of excellence or high expectations.

The participants sang their songs in this strange land in a manner that is authentic to who they are; they are driven to lift all of their students, including and in some cases especially their students of color, to be better human beings and musicians. Du Bois (1903) explained that Black Americans are a problem to the White American world—a problem that has yet to be solved. He further posited that some have succeeded, and it has baffled the White world. Still others have internalized themselves as the *problem* and are angry, asking, “Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” (p. 14). This study’s participants did not appear to see themselves as the *problem*; by contrast, they were actively working to solve the issues of access to advanced musical education or professional music experiences that their students were facing.

Participants shared that the key to expanding access is helping their Black students connect with and see themselves as a part of the professional music world. Some BMMEs, for instance, intentionally provided students with pathways to regional and All-State music ensembles by giving them more intensive training in music theory or piano skills. As some participants commented, one solution to the access problem was to prepare their students for careers in the professional music industry if they choose to pursue them. According to Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010), some Black male educators see themselves as a representation of what their Black male students can become. As previously mentioned, some participants believe they

have deeper connections to their Black students than their White peers; many also use representation to show their Black students that they can become professional musicians. They intentionally highlight Black images of musicians in the classroom, or include Black music in class and performances.

The participants gifted their knowledge of Black music and Black culture to their schools, in order to make their classrooms and concert halls better places for their students and communities alike. This giving of the Black experience to the Eurocentric music world aligns with Du Bois's (1903) characterization of the three gifts Blacks have brought to America. A gift of story and song can be found in melodies of the enslaved and freed Black people, and seen here in the participants' intentional programming of music depicting the Black American experience. The sweat and brawn that forged this country in the wilderness of the early foundations is reflected in their stress and their perseverance. Lastly, Du Bois wrote of a gift of the Spirit, which included prayers and sacrifices that Black Americans made on the altar of God. Each participant has brought their gifts to the strange land of music education, and is making it more liberating and less strange for future generations.

The Intersection of Race and Gender Norms

The intersection of masculinity and race presents another complexity within the strange land of Eurocentric music education. Participants in this study did not describe specific conflicts that stemmed from being the only males in predominantly female educational spaces. Instead, most cited their Black identity as the primary source of any lived professional disagreement. None of the participants cited any issues with their female colleagues or administrators due to their male identity. They all felt comfortable relating to female and male students, and told me they had good relationships with students of all genders. Roustin and Mills (2000) found that in

order to make music appear more masculine, some male music educators created toxic or hypermasculine classrooms. There were no mentions or observations of toxicity or hypermasculinity among the BMMEs in this study. By contrast, many made extra efforts to ensure that their classes were safe spaces; some had LGBTQ-affirming posters displayed in the classroom. In one of the after-school rehearsals I observed, a male student walked into the room and gave another male student a long hug, placing his head on the other young man's shoulder. The open physical expression between the two males suggests a liberating ethos established by the BMME. While there was no explicit discussion of efforts to create affirming spaces, the educators' desire to build relationships and community among their students is a clear driving force behind the openness of these settings.

I did not observe any of the tension that Carter (2013) found among the Black gay men in his study of the HBCU marching band community in the educational spaces where this study's participants worked. Without any prompting or direct questioning, two of the participants identified themselves as gay. They did not describe any adverse reactions to their sexual identity in their formative or current educational settings; by contrast, they characterized their formative musical educational spaces as having been liberating and life-saving. In their current teaching positions, the openly gay BMMEs, Kelvin and Quentin, are open and transparent with their students. Kelvin told me that his life is "an open book," and that he does not hide anything from his students; his sexuality did not appear to negatively impact his relationships with them, either. Both men, however, told me about conflicts they experienced that involved family dynamics and their sexuality. Kelvin experienced these tensions with his family members and his church, and Quentin when he came out as gay to his mother. Interestingly, this discord occurred in predominantly Black spaces.

BMMEs must navigate both heteronormative expectations and racial stereotypes in educational spaces. Martino (2008) asserted that the idea of male teachers as role models is problematic because some do not fit the heteronormative notions of masculinity. Black men are traditionally seen as enforcers, and when they are heralded for their ability to be role models, it is not necessarily because of their pedagogical prowess (Ferguson, 2000). Contrary to Martino's (2008) finding, this intersection of race and gender norms was not a source of conflict for the participants in this study. Each BMME appeared to be at ease while teaching, and they all conducted themselves in a natural manner around students. Sometimes, a Black male music educator who does not conform to the heteronormative standards of masculinity can create another layer of complications. But in this study, the Eurocentric spaces either accepted the gay BMMEs or did not create conflict surrounding their sexuality.

Pedagogy and Practice

Ware (2006) posited that Black female educators display a mix of tough love and high classroom expectations. These teachers did not lower their standards of excellence, and were proven successful in reaching their students of color. Frequently, they are referred to as "warm demanders," a term used to describe educators who practice Culturally Relevant Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009). They have rigorous standards and defy assimilationist teaching, or the idea that one must fit their knowledge into the confines of pre-existing knowledge. Both Hayes (2014) and Lynn (2006) found that Black males also exhibited an extra level of care, and maintained high expectations for their students. This style of being a warm demander is consistent with the BMMEs in this study, who were concerned about their students' wellbeing, and considered their classrooms places of refuge and community. They also balanced that extra care with high musical expectations; it can be deduced that they saw an orderly, structured

classroom and high standards as ways of caring for their students. Each participant had routines and expectations, and my observations confirmed their verbal commitment to musical excellence. They were precise and clear when teaching music; there was little time wasted during rehearsals, and the expectations were clear from the beginning of the lesson. Abramo and Bernard (2020) noted that both teachers and students appreciate ensembles' high standards. If we look to BMMEs to learn about the pedagogical practices that could benefit the profession, the participants displayed an unyielding commitment to musical excellence.

One pedagogical practice that Hayes (2014) refers to is transformative pedagogy, which includes equity, activism, and social literacy. While none of the participants described their teaching as such, they each displayed qualities that aligned with it. In terms of equity, Hayes (2014) believed that despite economic or opportunity gaps, transformative pedagogy, when operationalized, will cause an educator to go above and beyond to provide opportunities for their students. Most of the study's participants described how they constantly make extra efforts to help their students access extracurricular performing opportunities and musical instruments. In terms of activism, one BMME, Kelvin, helped his Black students petition the school's administration to allow them to perform "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," also known as the African American National Anthem, at their high school graduation. Each participant believed that teaching must go beyond the classroom and impact students' daily lives in order to be effective.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Another pedagogical practice illustrated among the BMMEs in this study is Culturally Relevant Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009). One participant even mentioned it by name when asked to describe his teaching style. While there have been many revisions to this pedagogical practice and different terms for it, including "Culturally Responsive Teaching" (Gay, 2002) and

“Culturally Sustaining Teaching” (Paris, 2012), at its core, Culturally Relevant Teaching is the notion of empowering students to learn at their optimal capacity through cultural, social, and political norms (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally Relevant teachers can also center Black ways of knowing in their teaching practices. Each study participant sought to engage students at a cultural level that was normal to them, but which still centered their identity as a Black male as a driving force in their teaching. All of the BMMEs included music from Black composers in their programming, and prominently displayed Black faces on posters in their classrooms. They did not exclude music from the Western Cultural Archive; rather, most participants intentionally included, and in some cases centered, Black music.

Another trait of Culturally Relevant Teaching is the aspect of challenging norms. Challenging the norms of Whiteness and the dominant culture is crucial when helping students of color excel in educational settings—one must be willing to examine, criticize, and confront educational standards (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Most of this study’s participants made it clear that they were not satisfied with their students merely regurgitating knowledge. In alignment with their high standards, the BMMEs challenged students; asked them to dig deeper into their music and performance presentation; and, in many cases, demanded that they display a confident demeanor. Almost all of the participants stated that discipline was not a problem: their expectations were so high that students had to push themselves to reach them.

Critical Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant teaching can be categorized as a form of critical pedagogy, which challenges norms of suppression and dominance and teaches students to confront these systems. Lynn and Jennings (2009) found that Black male teachers in urban settings displayed traits of critical pedagogy; they decentralized their power, and pushed for a more communal classroom

environment. While Lynn and Jennings (2009) assert that these qualities are common to Black male teachers in urban settings, I posit that each BMME in this study, regardless of their community, displayed traits of critical pedagogy. Perhaps because each of them understood that the ways in which they were taught reinforced systems of oppression, these BMMEs used their classrooms as places of learning and liberation. Not only did they help students change school systems, but they also created more democratized classroom structures, participated in racial justice protests, and pushed the boundaries of the music performed to include more works by Black composers. None of the participants relinquished their authority to their students, either; it was clear that each was very much in control of his classroom. Still, their abilities to bring students along, create choices for students, and give them a voice in the decision-making process helped create a classroom experience embodying critical pedagogy.

Each of the study participants also displayed a pedagogy of affirmation. Lynn and Jennings (2009) similarly found that their participants provided safe spaces for African Americans. Most of the BMMEs in this study characterized their relationships with their Black students as positive, commenting that those students trusted them more than their White colleagues. In that way, the BMMEs exhibited an extension of this pedagogy, providing a community and a safe space for all their students, and not just their Black students. Their implementation of “family time,” and other moments of openness for everyone in the class, illustrated the ways in which these BMMEs display critical pedagogies.

Critical Race Theory

The theoretical framework for this dissertation is Critical Race Theory (CRT), a legal theory scholars employ to examine how race and racism intersect with the United States legal system. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) later used CRT as a lens to understand how racism has

shaped educational structures. I assert that CRT is a useful perspective from which to examine how race and racism have impacted the field of music education. Each of the study's participants has navigated predominantly White, Eurocentric educational spaces on their journey to becoming music educators. Understanding how race and racism have affected their musical education and current teaching experience will help researchers better understand how structures can be dismantled and restructured to support BMMEs. While each participant had a unique experience in music educational settings, CRT provided a theoretical underpinning to their stories, which others in the profession can use to understand their lived experiences better.

Interest Convergence

One of the tenets of CRT, interest convergence, is the belief that rarely—if ever—will the dominant culture make significant changes to a system in order to right a racial injustice unless the change would also benefit the dominant White culture. Most participants commented that their status as the only Black males during their college years made them the “token” Black people in music spaces. In their view, this tokenism afforded these BMMEs the opportunity to perform in a number of spaces, because having a person of color prominently displayed would make the institution look good. By accepting them into their university, those in authority could highlight them as their minority students. They could go to college not exclusively to benefit themselves, but as a benefit to the institution, too.

Interest convergence appeared in various ways when the BMMEs described their teaching experiences. In their teaching roles, they were often the only Black males in their schools; many of them told me that they served on different committees, including ones focused on Black history or that studied the school's racial climate. Often, school districts will highlight the existence of these committees to show that they are addressing school racial issues. The

BMMEs in this study stated that no real change comes from the committees, but also commented that if they do not serve on them, they do not know who will speak up for their Black students. As the only Black educator in many predominately White educational systems, I, too, have often been asked to be on committees that address race within the school. Therefore, this dialogue with the participants confirmed my fore-knowledge.

Another example of interest convergence could be seen when participant Charles mentioned that an administrator told him, “I did good. I hired two Black guys and a gay guy.” The claim of “I did good” points directly to how he, the administrator, benefited from hiring these Black and gay teachers. As he described it, these people were not hired to correct the lack of Black or openly LGBTQ educators, but rather to make him as an administrator look good.

Interest convergence can be either blatant or subtle in the educational system. Within music education, some of the most visible teachers in many districts tend to be music instructors; whether at school concerts or community events, they and their students are often called upon to perform and represent the school. If a district has a BMME as the conductor of these ensembles, the presence of the Black male body will become a visual benefit for administrators.

Whiteness as Property in Music Education

Whiteness as property can be defined as individuals using their Whiteness to include or exclude others from places of power (Harris, 1993). Historically in the United States, individuals were forbidden to obtain property if they were not White. Whiteness gives an individual access to property, and also allows them to exclude others from gaining access to it. Creating criteria as a means to exclude others from entry or access to a space is central to the idea of Whiteness as property.

Adhering to the CRT tenet of Whiteness as property, music school auditions provide administrators with an “absolute right to exclude” (Harris, 1993, p. 283) people from the school who do not fit their idea of a successful musician. All of this study’s participants excelled in musical performance in their formative musical experience, including through successful auditions for university acceptance. Prior to those auditions, each BMME was the beneficiary of guidance from their high school music teachers—people with cultural capital and an understanding of how to navigate White, Eurocentric music spaces. Along these lines, the participants felt that the curriculum and the music performed during their collegiate years were Eurocentric. One also commented that he did not feel particularly connected to this music.

At the same time, it should be noted that most participants enjoyed the music they performed in college. They believed that it challenged them, and recalled that they loved learning it. For some, difficulties arose when they felt that their professors did not understand or connect with the music they valued, or the ways they learned the music of their culture. Some participants cited the Black church as a major influence on their musical formation and pedagogical styles. However, when matriculating in Eurocentric musical spaces, they found that the music and the ways they learned it in these traditionally Black spaces was not honored. In order to gain access to and be successful in college, the BMMEs had to sacrifice a significant part of their cultural identity.

None of the BMMEs described the audition process to gain university entrance as challenging. Each of them was accepted to multiple universities, and recalled that the faculty members were highly complimentary of their auditions. However, they all mentioned finances as a reason why their options were ultimately limited. One participant told me that he had studied privately before college, but needed financial aid to do so. It should be noted that most of the

BMMEs mentioned that their parents assisted them in any way they could to get them to auditions, and supported them through that journey. However, they also spoke of how their parents did not know what being a music major or professional musician entailed; given that, their parents were willing to trust the school music teacher and their child's instincts. Had they not been as persistent as they were, this lack of cultural awareness could have been a barrier for the BMMEs.

Three of the participants did not take private lessons, which Koza (2009) states are an unspoken requirement for prospective music majors. I also noted that three of them were accepted into performing arts high schools, which provided them with insights into the expectations for the college audition process. Two of the BMMEs mentioned that while they received a significant amount of training on their respective instruments, they had less preparation in the area of music theory, which made their undergraduate experiences more arduous.

Abramo and Bernard (2020) found that the barriers for the students of color in their study included a lack of knowledge about or cultural connection to the *process* of auditioning, rather than a dearth of content-related knowledge. I concur that the BMMEs in this study could have fallen into the same category. Each participant reported that they were exceptional in their performance skills and musical ability. It brings to mind an African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child." Each of the BMMEs did, in fact, have a village of strong music teachers, supportive parents, and inner resilience that enabled them to be successful in their pursuit of careers as music educators.

The Permanence of Racism

The permanence of racism is a CRT tenet that Bell (1992) identified: that racism, no matter how subtle, will always be a part of our society. Whether overt or less noticeable, each of the BMMEs experienced racism at some point in their music educational training—some from their teachers, peers, and direct supervisors. Each participant expressed a deep love for all styles of music, including that from the Western Cultural Archive. However, some spoke of being pigeonholed into only singing spirituals or music from Black composers while they were in college. Though they had a clear desire to perform the work of Black composers, which connects BMMEs to their racial identity, a part of them also wanted to work with all musical styles. Boxing a student into one genre because of their race shows a director's inability to conceive of a Black person as a versatile performer capable of performing music from multiple traditions. We see a re-emergence of Du Bois's (1903) double-consciousness in the lives of the BMMEs. At their core, they do not want to eliminate their Black identity or eradicate their American culture. They want to be "both a Negro and an American...without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (p. 14).

Counter-Narratives

In CRT, the principle of counter-storytelling, or counter-narratives, is crucial to the reframing of knowledge. Historically, many researchers from underrepresented communities found that their scholarly work and narratives were excluded from academic journals and other places of knowledge. With that history in mind, counter-storytelling is used to assert a new epistemological lens. These counter-narratives can be true retellings or fictional stories used to create a new lens for the reader. In the implications section of Chapter VI, I will share a counter-narrative of the experiences that BMMEs could have in music education if they were given the

advantages of the dominant culture. I will ground my assumptions in the next section with a true-life counter-narrative.

Assumptions Narrative

When I first became an administrator, I attended a three-day conference at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City with several music teachers and my assistant superintendent. I was the only Black participant. The night before, several attendees received credentials and identification badges, but many did not, including the other attendees from my school district and me. When we entered the lobby of the illustrious Metropolitan Opera House, we had to register and then stand in line for a security check. After going through the registration, four of my colleagues, all White females, went through security with no issues. When I encountered the security officer, who was also White, he stopped and scolded me: “Show me your ID. Where is your badge?” After I told him I had not yet received it, he replied, “You’re not getting in here.” I raised my voice and exclaimed, “None of the four people you just let in had an ID badge. Why are you stopping me?” The guard responded, “I don’t care. Where’s yours?”

My colleagues stood there, mouths agape and speechless, as the scene unfolded. Finally, after I continued to raise my voice, the organizer, who had just checked my name off, came over and vouched for me. I stared at the security guard with disdain. However, my shame and embarrassment overshadowed my contempt for him and the situation. As we walked into the theatre, my colleagues were silent. I remember saying to myself, “It doesn’t matter how many degrees I have. To some people, I’ll just be another nigger.” I realized that no matter how educated I am, racism will always find me. Therefore, I am committed to finding it and exposing it before it finds me. I use moments and stories like this to help position my assumptions, as a

Black male music educator who has encountered racism and continues to work toward racial justice.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions with which I approached this study. As a Black male music educator who went through a traditional Eurocentric music education, I've had many of the same experiences as my participants. However, each individual also shared a part of his story that countered mine. My first assumption was that each participant identified as Black, and would not have any other racial identities. That was challenged during the interviews, when two of the participants, Kelvin and Quentin, revealed that they had multiple racial identities, even though they perceived themselves as Black. Kelvin fully identified as Black, perhaps because his mother had identified as Black until she realized through a DNA test that she was not—in fact, his mother was Native American and French. Quentin taught in a predominantly Hispanic community, and often speaks Spanish to communicate with his students. Clearly, the Black American experience is a rich tapestry of many races. Although these findings did not change the study's results, I do believe that including another lens—one of multiple races—enhanced it.

My second assumption was that most participants would feel a heavier burden for their Black students. Initially, when I asked about their connection with their Black students, Charles and Kelvin asserted that they felt the need to relate to all of their students regardless of race. In the first focus group, all of the participants agreed that they felt a burden for all of their students. However, at the final focus group, each BMME mentioned that after concluding the study, they began to wonder if they were doing enough to connect with or bolster their Black students. Their own *dasein* after participating in a study that focused on their racial identity appeared to have caused them to examine their relationship with their students.

Another assumption was that each participant would have been the only Black student, or one of just a few Black students, in his college music classes. This was confirmed by the interviews that focused on the college experience. The audition material for prospective college music majors is taken almost exclusively from the Western Cultural Archive. Knowing this, and seeing the small (if not nonexistent) representation of Black male applicants when interviewing potential music teachers, led me to this assumption. The limited number of Black male educators, a mere 1.9% nationwide, heightened the probability that these BMMEs had experienced isolation. Although all of the participants were musically exceptional, each of them had also had moments of racial tensions or isolation with which others in school may not have to contend. Since these BMMEs were from diverse communities, the racism and isolation they experienced while attending predominantly White institutions (PWI) made their culture shock harsher; during their interviews, both Ian and Charles described the particularly negative effect it had on them.

One unexpected common trait was that four of the five participants were raised by their mothers and other family members, with no involvement from their biological fathers. My experience being raised in a two-parent heteronormative household may have clouded my assumption in this area. Kelvin and Charles recalled conflicts with their stepfathers, but never classified them as significant sources of tension. Quentin was raised in what he considered a toxic environment. Although both of his parents had their share of complications, he credited his mother for rearing him, even though she was a drug addict. Chris mentioned his parents as influences in his life, but both of them passed when he was in his 20s. Ian mentioned that his father was not in his life. When rereading his interview transcripts, I was struck by how much that absence impacted him. Ian told me a story about his high school senior-year showcase, when

he realized that singing transported him to a different world. He recalled singing a song about a father singing to his son. As he performed, Ian imagined that this was what it would be like if he had a present father. While singing, he broke into tears on stage, which proved to be a breakthrough moment for him. Each time I heard Ian tell his story, it brought me to an emotional state that I had not expected. Clearly, for one of the BMMEs, the absence of a parent had an impact on some musical experiences.

One final presupposition that was extremely personal for me was that the participants would have experienced blatant racism during their music education or in their teaching settings. This was confirmed when Ian told his story of a student in high school calling him a nigger. While I have never experienced anything so verbally violent, as previously stated, I have encountered racism at each stage of my musical training and teaching. The microaggressions that Kelvin and Charles described were more aligned with my own experiences, so I was able to easily read through those. However, Ian's story of being called a nigger really shook me. As I read and listened to it again, I could hear his voice cracking, and I realized how traumatizing this incident had been for him.

Conclusion of Chapter V

This chapter outlined how this study interacts with, confirms, contradicts, and in some cases expands on the existing literature concerning Black male educators and Critical Race Theory in education. In the final chapter, I will highlight the study's implications for the field, and discuss how this work can be expanded in order to enhance music education. I will discuss creative solutions that this study could generate for the field of music education when it comes to creating more pathways for Black male music educators.

Chapter VI

Conclusion of the Study

*Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun, of our new day begun.
Let us march on till victory is won.*

“Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” the Negro National Anthem
(Johnson, J. R., & Johnson, J. W., 1921)

Singing Our Songs

I designed this phenomenological study to help me understand the lived experience of Black male music educators (BMMEs). The formative encounters with music that each of the participants had, and that inspired their work in the field, revolved around the idea of community. They all described influential music teachers and mentors, who identified their talent and helped nurture the musical gift inside each of them. Not only did some of these educators guide the BMMEs through the preparation process for college, as Ian and Chris’s teachers did; in some cases, they also walked that journey with them, like Kelvin and Quentin’s teachers. Some, but not all, of those music teachers were also from marginalized communities, further heightening the connection the participants felt with them.

The concept of community is an overarching theme for African indigenous people (Gyekye, 2002; Menkiti, 1984). For some participants, this community had more ancestral roots, as they cited family support as having been a guiding force in their lives. I saw this when Kelvin talked about his mother, of whom any mention of still brings tears to his eyes. And I saw it with Chris, whose parents passed away while he was in college, but whose siblings paid for plane tickets so he could perform with professional musicians in far reaches of the country. Chris

quoted a widely known African proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child,” when describing the multiple forces in his life that supported and influenced his musical journey.

Due to the nature of this study, that village grew a bit more. The participants got to connect with fellow Black males from similar backgrounds, each different and deeply layered, but still a part of the same story of Black male music educators. After the first focus group, the participants exchanged numbers and started a group chat. At the end of the final focus group, they hung around afterwards and talked to each other. We ended the session with a group photograph that included all of the BMME participants and me.

The stories these men told about negotiating their Black identity in Eurocentric spaces were as nuanced as the Black experience itself. Some of the participants continued to hold on to vestiges of the Black American experience through Black churches, while others infused hip-hop music and culture into their everyday teaching practices. At the same time, some of them expanded those connections to Black American composers of non-idiomatic orchestral music. All of them spoke of intentionally introducing their students to the music of Black composers, and of elevating the images and music of Black people. Each participant displayed pedagogical practices associated with Black educators, such as Culturally Responsive Teaching and critical pedagogies. Some of their teaching styles even mirrored those of Black Pentecostal preachers. All of them strive for a sense of authenticity and connection to their Black identity, whether through their dress, speech, or presence in the classroom.

The ways in which these BMMEs embraced their Black identity manifested in various ways, but they all appeared to display it confidently. Their *dasein* in the study allowed them to reflect on their lived experiences, and to discuss how they used their Black identity and their position as educators to impact all of their students. Even when their reflections forced them to

revisit spaces of blatant racism or subtle microaggressions, the participants demonstrated their resilience, which they variously credited to their families or faith, to persevere and become stronger music educators. Above all, the BMMEs in this study sang their songs of joy and sorrow, and showed those in their world just how powerful they are.

Limitations

This study was centered on BMMEs, and was conducted in the northeastern region of the United States. One of its limitations is that regional scope. If I were to explore the experiences of BMMEs in other parts of the country, I could unearth different themes, and possibly find deeper meanings or layers in some of the study themes. Research focused on BMMEs in more states and various regions of the United States could prove useful when it comes to expanding our depth of understanding of the BMME experience.

The time frame of this study was another limitation. While it was intentionally narrow, conducting a longitudinal study of BMMEs could have identified additional themes. Looking beyond the limitations of the current time frame, an ethnographic study of BMMEs over the course of a full school year would allow for a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of Black male music educators.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the research done in this study, other scholars in the field should consider the following recommendations for future research:

- Studies focused on Black male music educators in specific demographic contexts, such as predominantly Black or predominantly White school districts.
- Studies centered on the intersectionality of Black Queer or same-gender-loving music educators.

- Studies exploring racial fatigue, stress, and Black male music educators.
- Studies on Black female music educators.

Implications Counter-Narrative:

Of Our New Day Begun

August 25, 2025: Move-in day at William Grant Still School of the Arts

It is a hot summer morning, and the new students are arriving at Carter G. Woodson University for move-in day. Woodson University is in a major U.S. city, and its campus is set off on about 800 acres of an agriculturally rich and bustling community. The students arrive on campus through the solid brass gates, which have a sign welcoming the Class of 2029.

A Black male student named Darius arrived on campus with his father and his sisters, who were helping him move in. Darius's father and mother were alumni of the CWU engineering program, and were extremely proud that their son would be following in their footsteps at their alma mater. However, Darius was not going to the engineering school, but rather to the music school: William Grant Still School of the Arts. He took after his mother, who left engineering to become a performing artist. "G Still," as the students call it, has a reputation as one of the country's most competitive, yet community-oriented, music schools. Darius was gregarious, and could hold a conversation with any person he came across; as his father always remarked, Darius had never met a stranger in his life! As they pulled up to the dorm, the Marian Anderson Dormitory House, students from the resident life program met them to help unpack their car. A junior named Trey, also a music major, came to greet Darius as well; G Still always paired upperclassmen with first-year students to help make their transition to college life as smooth as possible. Trey was a part of the Black Music Student Union: a campus collective of

Black musicians and music majors who meet regularly to create a space for Black music students to connect.

After moving his belongings into the dorm, Trey took Darius and his family on a campus tour. Darius remembered some of the buildings from his audition day, but as an accepted student, he had a different feeling. He was happy to see so many other students who looked like him, along with many others of different backgrounds. Indeed, the student body was a genuine mix of students from every nationality, with an even balance of Black, White, Asian, and Latinx students. Many came from economically disadvantaged communities. Darius and a number of other students had also received government scholarships under the recently enacted United States Reparations Act, which provided half or full college scholarships for people from communities whose ancestors had been displaced, colonized, or enslaved by citizens or the government of the United States.

Darius received a partial scholarship from the Reparations Act, but the rest of his tuition was paid for by the Elijah McClain Scholarship, which G Still instituted in honor of the young Black male from Colorado killed by police officers in 2019 while he was walking to the store to get an iced tea. McClain was an accomplished violinist, and so the scholarship was awarded to young Black string players attending G Still. Darius came from a performing arts high school in Maryland, where he received intense viola and piano training. The school prepared him well for a musical career in the performing arts, and he had also received music theory training beginning in his freshman year of high school. Darius was inspired to play viola by his third-grade string teacher: Mr. Boykin, a Black man and an accomplished cello player who taught beginner and intermediate strings. In middle school, Darius decided that he would be a professional viola

player after his orchestra teacher, Ms. O'Connor, encouraged him to play a solo in the school talent show.

When Darius got to the music building with Trey, he talked with some of the other music students. He ran into one of the other freshman music majors, Malik, whom he remembered from his audition, and the two began to reminisce about them. G Still has an extremely rigorous audition process; in order to gain admission, students have to complete several audition rounds. In the first, students are expected to audition with three vocal songs or instrumental pieces. One song must be from the African American tradition: a gospel piece, a spiritual, a jazz standard, a rhythm-and-blues piece, or a rap song. For vocal majors, the second song must be in a language other than English, which can include modern popular Spanish or reggaeton songs. For instrumental majors, the second selection must be an instrumental piece performed in the hip-hop style of either rap or house music. The third song must be of an American form, such as Broadway, hip-hop, or jazz. Students may also select art songs or an excerpt from an orchestral piece as one of their three numbers.

Prospective G Still students may also audition in groups: as part of a duet, a trio, or a quartet. Their audition pieces will be judged according to the same criteria described above, and the students must be able to work effectively with other musicians to create a community of performers. This grouping option was how Darius and Malik met. Malik, a baritone, sang Terrance Blanchard's "Peculiar Grace," from *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House when Malik was a freshman in high school. Darius played piano to accompany Malik, but he also sang harmonies, demonstrating his remarkable ability to improvise and harmonize with another singer.

During their auditions, G Still candidates must also take an aural skills test, in which they learn a song by ear and exhibit their ability to work with others to produce a collaborative piece of music. Darius and Malik had taken that test together as well. Malik grew up learning singing in his father's church, where the choir director taught songs by ear; though Malik had also learned how to read music, if he heard a song just once or twice, he could decipher his part and the part of the other singers with ease. This proved helpful to him during the audition process.

Darius decided to come to G Still when he met the string faculty. The department's chair plays with the Vitamin String Quartet, which is famous for their string arrangements of pop songs; some of them have been featured on *Bridgerton*, one of Darius's favorite Netflix shows. Even though he is a music education major, Darius is interested in playing as a professional musician while he continues to teach. He wants to contribute to the community he grew up in by becoming a teacher while also maintaining a professional performance career.

The members of the G Still faculty are among the most accomplished and sought-after musicians in the world of performing arts and popular music. Each department has a diverse faculty, including some former performers from the fields of jazz, gospel, hip-hop, and Broadway. Students must take lessons on their primary instrument for all four years of college. Along with their primary instrumental studies, they also must study for a full year in the style of Black American music; for example, singing or playing their instruments in the Black gospel tradition. This was appealing to Malik. He felt that he could learn an array of other musical styles, while also continuing to enhance his cultural competency in his gospel music roots.

CWU's performing ensembles are modern and diverse in their repertoire selection. These internationally recognized groups perform on some of the most prestigious stages and in the best-known concert halls worldwide, including in South Africa, Egypt, and Ghana. Each year, the

orchestra plays a major symphony selection from a composer outside of the Western Cultural Archive. Trey, Darius's mentor, is a member of the Chariot Singers, the college's premier choir, which performs music of the African Diaspora experience. Last year, gospel artist Richard Smallwood joined the faculty as the director of the Chariot Singers. When Malik saw the group perform at his high school two years ago during a tour, he knew he wanted to be a member of that choir.

Jazz guitarist Poranguí has recently become the chair of the Billie Holiday Jazz Institute. The Holiday Institute centers jazz music from Black and Latin composers, with an emphasis on the true jazz roots of the Americana art form, which originated with Black Americans in the southern region of the United States. Since Darius's secondary instrument was the piano, he knew he wanted to work with the faculty at the Jazz Institute. Even though he was a classically trained violist, he had a deep love for jazz music, and was seeking to expand his knowledge by training with the Holiday faculty.

The G Still curriculum also displays a deep commitment to music from the Caribbean, including through a steel drum band, a reggae and ska group, a calypso ensemble, and a salsa band. The latest addition to the CWU roster of performing ensembles is the hip-hop collective, which is made up of performers majoring in digital music production and audio engineering. Students are taught how to construct their own rap songs, and they show off their skills in the technique of freestyle rapping in competitive improvisational rap battles that occur once a month. Last year, the hip-hop collective joined the university hip-hop dance troupe and students from the August Wilson Theater School to present a performance of *Compton*. This immersive theatrical production tells the history of the rise of rap music in Compton, California.

After their audition, Malik and Darius were invited to an impromptu jam session with students from the hip-hop collective. It was there that they first tried their hand at freestyle rapping. Malik seemed to have a natural flow to his rapping, but Darius was more skittish in his attempt. Despite his fear, Darius felt that the other musicians completely embraced him after he finished his verses. One group member told the two prospective students that they had to try the hip-hop collective for at least one semester if they came to G Still. Malik and Darius both loved the work of hip-hop musicians like Kendrick Lamar and Dr. Dre. They knew that they each would have busy schedules as music education majors. However, they made a pact to take *Freestyle Rapping (Level I and Level II)* during their junior year, so that they could be a part of the hip-hop collective's immersive theatrical performance by their senior year.

All of G Still's performance groups have garnered international acclaim for their riveting and soulful work. As members of them, students are expected to balance a rigorous academic and rehearsal schedule with many performances. However, CWU ensures that the groups' excellence never take priority over emotional health. Each student is offered comprehensive mental health services, and there is a full roster of racially diverse therapists who can meet with students weekly to help them transition to college and life beyond it. There are also a variety of support groups, and some members of the faculty focus specifically on racial trauma and racial battle fatigue. The degree to which CWU prioritizes mental health benefited Trey, whose older brother was killed in a robbery three years before he began college. Trey always blamed himself for not being able to help his brother that night, but the campus support group he joined has helped him process the trauma surrounding the murder, along with conflicts stemming from his own sexual identity.

During their freshman year, instrumental and vocal students must begin internships with area jazz musicians, which includes performing with them four times that year at local nightclubs or jazz festivals. G Still hosts the state's Summer Jazz Festival, and musicians from around the world come to perform at it. The school's students play a crucial role in helping to organize the festival, assisted by several professional artists who stay on staff each year to share their professional expertise with the students. In their sophomore year, all students do gospel music internships with Black churches throughout the state. Students go to their rehearsals, and sing or play with the choirs on Sunday mornings. No student is ever required to join a church, or to adhere to any religious tradition; instead, they learn how to play and teach music by ear, in the traditional gospel style.

The G Still Department of Music Education curriculum is centered on critical pedagogies, including Culturally Relevant Teaching and its modern iteration, Culturally Sustaining Teaching. Students are taught how to think critically and challenge norms of oppression and domination. Their professors hold them to high expectations, and also teach them how to maintain a connection to their culture. Both graduate and undergraduate students are given access to Critical Race Theory classes, to help ground their teaching philosophy in uncovering systems of oppression as they begin to form their own practices. Students also must take classes entitled *Community Building in Your Classroom* and *Choosing Diverse Music for a Diverse Student Body*. In addition, they take a wide variety of music history courses, starting with the music of the African Diaspora, and including the music of West Africa and the Caribbean. The history curriculum expands to include European music in each student's junior year. The hip-hop Institute and the Holiday Jazz Institute also have history classes related to their particular art form; these are open to all students, regardless of their major.

Along with its curriculum, G Still is well known for its Village Institute: a free summer program that prepares students to become professional musicians. Teachers and CWU professors identify participants from the surrounding high schools, and rising G Still juniors and seniors teach the courses and conduct the ensembles. Village Institute students also partake in Saturday programs during the year, with the junior and senior G Still students mentoring them. Notably, this mentoring relationship includes private music instrumental or vocal lessons. Trey was a Village Institute student, which is how he discovered his passion for music. While he had grown up singing with his friends in school and his cousins at home, he never knew that he could get training to become a professional musician. Once he enrolled at CWU, Trey became a Village Institute teacher, giving participants private vocal lessons.

By the end of their senior year, most music education students will have job placement opportunities at schools throughout the country. Many build communities within their schools that foster critical pedagogies and create safe spaces for their students. G Still performance majors are among the music industry's most sought-after producers and performers. Knowing this, Darius and Malik are excited to embark on their new adventure. They feel like they are now a part of a larger music community that values their culture as an important source of knowledge for the music education profession.

As they made their way back to the dorms, Darius's father walked behind his son and his new classmates, Malik and Trey. He knew he had given Darius many tools to succeed in school, but he also knew that his son was in good hands at his alma mater. Darius and his friends were going to be a part of a community that had high expectations for them, and that valued everything they offered to society, both musically and culturally.

Implications

The lived experiences of the Black male music educators in this study offer a glimpse of both the challenges they experienced and the joys they found in their profession. With Black men accounting for only 1.9% of people working in the education field (Bristol, 2020), spaces of affirmation and opportunity, where Black male music educators can connect and share ideas, can help to eliminate the isolation they might experience. K-12 schools and universities can create these settings, and can help ensure that they are healthy spaces for Black male music educators. None of the study's participants told me that they had ever had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences as Black males in Eurocentric music spaces. Creating affinity groups like the ones participants experienced in this study, whether in person or online, can have a positive impact on Black male music educators. These groups are also vital for these educators' emotional well-being. Few people understand the hyper-visibility that accompanies their professional isolation, and allowing Black males to convene with people who may have shared similar experiences could help to revitalize career pathways and serve as a community centered retention effort for Black male music educators.

Serious consideration should also be given to reshaping university and conservatory curricula in order to shift focus to teaching practices and performing styles that value the contributions of Black and other marginalized communities. The implications counter-narrative, "Of Our New Day Begun," shows what a university would look like if it were designed with the music of Black musicians and teaching practices at its core. Centering musicians, along with performance styles of the African Diaspora and their modern iterations, will allow Black students to see themselves as the creators of music, and not just the consumers. This will benefit all students. Critical Race Theorists emphasize the need for people from the dominant culture to

learn to “listen to spirituals with a new ear” (Bell, 1995) in order to appreciate them fully. The newfound enjoyment students feel will help inspire more authentic performances of all music styles. Universities should also elevate these curricular changes as a method of recruitment for potential BMMEs.

In addition to centering Black musicians’ musical heritage, we should also learn from their pedagogical practices. Watching the participants in this study, I noticed that they exuded an energy that captured the imagination of their students. While some of this may be stylistic, practitioners and curriculum designers should pay attention to their teaching practices. Educational institutions should highlight their techniques, and use them as examples of the ways in which Black males have inscribed their own narratives into the music classroom.

Finally, three of the study’s five participants became teachers through their state’s alternate route program. With the lack of Black male music education majors, K-12 school administrators and boards of education should investigate their internal policies on hiring alternate route candidates. They should also make a greater effort to connect with area musicians, whether novice or professional, in order to foster relationships that could help them obtain their teaching certifications. This will be a creative solution to recruit more BMMEs. Since Black males may not be in the current pipeline, we must draw them into the field using creative methods.

Conclusion

While there had been substantial pain in the life of each participant, there was an equal, and in some cases more abundant, amount of joy. This combination of pain and joy adds to the richness of the Black experience in America. Their songs are as complex and nuanced as the strange lands in which they sing. These Black male music educators love the profession they

traverse, and give so much to further the field. Their experiences are worth being valued, listened to, and researched. I hope this study did them justice as we continue to march on, till victory is won.

Epilogue

*In the morning when I rise,
In the morning when I rise,
In the morning when I rise,
Give me Jesus.
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.
You can have this whole world, give me Jesus*

“Give Me Jesus”
African American Spiritual

The final focus group took place on Sunday, December 11, 2022. The start of this focus group was different than the first session, in that all the participants had at least one interaction with each other. I observed them talking after the session and exchanging contact information. Chris, the most veteran of the participants, suggested we all take a group photo. I wanted the focus group format to be a space of community for these Black male music educators, and this desire was becoming a reality right before my eyes. I kept this photo on hand as I wrote this dissertation. It served as a reminder of the duty that I had to portray the lived experiences of these individuals as true to life as best I possibly could. We owe it to them to create more spaces of affirmation like this. We also owe it to them and the Black students they teach to create more pathways for Black male educators so they can see an image of what is possible for them.

This study took place in the fall of 2022, two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic upended virtually everyone in the world, the effect it has had on the teaching profession has been especially detrimental, with teachers leaving at record levels.. Many teachers are leaving the field and also report levels of stress. I believe that the education profession is at a crisis point. Allow me to take a page from the tenet of Critical Race Theory, Interest Convergence. Since we need to reimagine the field of education in order to fill the gap of teachers in the United States, we should focus our recruitment on potential Black male educators.

Winston Churchill said, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” This professional crisis presents a unique opportunity—an opportunity to reimagine the field of education and, in this case, music education.

This study is a clarion call for substantial changes to the music education field. K-12 and university administrators and curriculum designers should reshape aspects of music programs to reflect the potential Black male music educators they hope to recruit. For too long, the conservatory model has worked how it intended to operate. It has shut those out who do not fit a certain archetype and has promoted a singular measure of what is an acceptable image and style of music education. Many universities assert that they want to diversify their study body but yet they continue to subscribe to this conservatory model. If they really want to diversify their student body, the audition process and the curriculum must reflect the Black students they desire to attract. Every facet should be examined to include the music of Black Americans, including the audition process and what courses are offered. Spirituals, Gospel Music, Jazz, or hip-hop should be required for students auditioning for a music education program. This will change the message to potential Black students that they belong in these programs. Classes should be required to study these genres of music as well, including audio production and non-western performance ensembles.

In K-12 school music programs, it is important to make changes that will invite Black students into their classrooms. A goal of school administrators across the United States should be to have every child in their school have at least one Black male music teacher during their K-12 experience. Additionally, the music and the performances that occur in these classrooms must reflect Black students. In order to help teachers properly perform the music of Black Americans, administrators must commit to professional development for teachers and engage with authentic

culture bearers to help equip educators to teach the music of Black Americans. This will not be an inexpensive undertaking, but it is time to invest in this change. *This is worth it.* There is an opportunity to revolutionize the music education field—seize the moment and do it.

To be absolutely clear, this change is the responsibility of the dominant White culture. Even if individuals of color attain positions of power, no lasting change is able to occur until the dominant culture commits to the changes. The dominant culture must listen to the Black male educators who are in the system. They have something to say and practices that need to be observed. Listen to them and let them lead you.

In some classrooms, there is a potential Black male music educator waiting on those in power to disrupt the system. They need to see that music education is a possibility for them. There is a Darius, Trey, or Malik who is waiting on this change. Waiting on universities and K-12 classrooms to open the curriculum doors wide open to include them. Do not let this crisis go to waste, because we can no longer wait.

References

- Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. Hachette UK.
- Bell, D. (2004). *Silent covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform*. Oxford University Press.
- Bristol, T. J. (2020). Black men teaching: toward a theory of social isolation in organizations. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(3), 288–306.
- Bristol, T. J., & Goings, R. B. (2019). Exploring the boundary-heightening experiences of Black male teachers: lessons for teacher education programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 70(1), 51–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487118789367>
- Bristol, T. J. (n.d.). Black Men of the Classroom: A Policy Brief for How Boston Public Schools Can Recruit and Retain Black Male Teachers. Retrieved from <http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/TravisBristol-PolicyBrief-BlackMaleTeachers.pdf>
- Brockenbrough, E. (2012). Emasculation blues: Black male teachers' perspectives on gender and power in the teaching profession. *Teachers College Record*, 114(5), 1–43.
- Bryan, N., & Milton Williams, T. (2017). We need more than just male bodies in classrooms: Recruiting and retaining culturally relevant Black male teachers in early childhood education. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 38(3), 209–222.
- Butchart, R. E. (2010). *Schooling the freed people: teaching, learning, and the struggle for black freedom, 1861-1876*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Callender, C. (2020). Black male teachers, white education spaces: Troubling school practices of othering and surveillance. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(5), 1081–1098. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3614
- Clandinin, D. J. (2016). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Routledge.
- Cone, J. H. (1985). Black theology in American religion. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 53(4), 755–771.

- Costa-Giomi, E. (2004). Effects of three years of piano instruction on children's academic achievement, school performance and self-esteem. *Psychology of Music*, 32(2), 139–152.
- Costen, M. W. (2004). *In spirit and in truth: The music of African American worship*. Westminster John Knox Press.
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE.
- Delgado, R. (1995). The imperial scholar: Reflections on a review of civil rights literature. In Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (46-57). New Press.
- Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 7–27.
- Douglas, T.-R. (2016). *Border crossing brotha: black males navigating race, place, and complex space*. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (2015). *The souls of black folk*. Yale University Press.
- Elpus, K. (2015). Music teacher licensure candidates in the United States: A demographic profile and analysis of licensure examination scores. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 63(3), 314–335.
- Elpus, K., & Abril, C. R. (2019). Who Enrolls in High School Music? A National Profile of U.S. Students, 2009–2013. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 67(3), 323–338.
- Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folk who teach in the hood...and the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. Beacon Press.
- Ferguson, A. (2000). *Bad boys: public schools in the making of black masculinity*. The University of Michigan Press.
- Gates, H. L. (2021). *The Black church: this is our story, this is our song*. New York, Penguin Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.

- Givens, J. R. (2021). *Fugitive pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the art of black teaching*. Harvard University Press, 2021.
- Goings, R. B., & Bianco, M. (2016). It's hard to be who you don't see: An exploration of Black male high school students' perspectives on becoming teachers. *The Urban Review*, 48(4), 628–646.
- Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 8(106), 1707–1791.
- Hayes, C. (2014). What I know about teaching, I learned from my father: A critical race autoethnographic/counternarrative exploration of multi-generational transformative teaching. *Journal of African American Males in Education (JAAME)*, 5(2), 247–265.
- Higginbotham, E. B. (1994). *Righteous discontent: The women's movement in the Black Baptist church, 1880–1920*. Harvard University Press.
- Jeshion, R. (2020). Pride and Prejudiced: on the Reclamation of Slurs. *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 97(1), 106–137.
- Kim, K., & Roth, G. (2011). Novice Teachers and Their Acquisition of Work-Related Information. *Current Issues in Education*, 14(1), 1-28.
- Kinloch, V., & San Pedro, T. (2014). The space between listening and storying: foundations for projects in humanization. In D. Paris & M. Winn (Eds.), *Humanizing Research* (pp. 21–42). SAGE.
- Koza, J. E. (1993). The “Missing Males” and Other Gender Issues in Music Education: Evidence from the “Music Supervisors’ Journal,” 1914-1924. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 41(3), 212–232. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3345326>
- Koza, J. E. (2009). Listening for whiteness: Hearing racial politics in undergraduate school music. In Regelski, T., Gates, J.T. (Eds.), *Music education for changing times: Guiding visions for practice* (pp. 85–95). Springer.
- Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews*. SAGE.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7–24.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers college record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Lopez, N. (2003). *Hopeful girls, troubled boys: Race and gender disparity in urban education*. Routledge.
- Lundquist, B. R., & Sims, W. T. (1996). African-American Music Education: Reflections on an Experience. *Black Music Research Journal*, 16(2), 311–336. <https://doi.org/10.2307/779334>
- Lynn, M. (2002). Critical race theory and the perspectives of Black men teachers in the Los Angeles public schools. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(2), 119–130.
- Lynn, M. (2006). Education for the community: Exploring the culturally relevant practices of Black male teachers. *Teachers College Record*, 108(12), 2497–2522.
- Madkins, T. C. (2011). The Black teacher shortage: A literature review of historical and contemporary trends. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(3), 417–427.
- McBride, N. R. (2016). Critical moments: Gay male choral directors and the taking up of gender discourse. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 207-208, 63–79.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation* (4th Edition). Jossey-Bass.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, 36(7), 388–400.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 332–346.
- Morris, M. (2016). *Pushout: the criminalization of black girls in schools*. The New Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658>
- Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Petty, T. M., Good, A., & Putman, S. M. (2016). *Handbook of research on professional development for quality teaching and learning*.
- Roulston, K., & Mills, M. (2000). Male teachers in feminised teaching areas: Marching to the beat of the men's movement drums? *Oxford Review of Education*, 26(2), 221–237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713688523>
- Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2007). “Assume the position... you fit the description”: Psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(4), 551–578. DOI: 10.1177/0002764207307742
- Smith, W. A., Hung, M., & Franklin, J. D. (2011). Racial battle fatigue and the miseducation of Black men: Racial microaggressions, societal problems, and environmental stress. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(1), 63–82. DOI:[10.2307/41341106](https://doi.org/10.2307/41341106)
- Solorzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2000). Towards a critical race theory of Chicano and education. In C. Tejada, C. Martinez, & Z. Leonardo (Eds.), *Charting new terrains in Chicana(o)/ Latina(o) education* (pp. 35-66). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press
- Southern, E. (1997). *The music of black Americans: A history*. WW Norton & Company.
- Toliver, S. R. (2022). *Recovering Black storytelling in qualitative research: Endarkened storywork*. Routledge.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2016). The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>
- Walker, L., & Hamann, D. L. (1993). The importance of African-American role models in music. *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, 4(2), 64–69.
- Ware, F. (2006). Warm demander pedagogy: Culturally responsive teaching that supports a culture of achievement for African American students. *Urban Education*, 41(4), 427–456.
- Wright, E. (1998). More than just a haircut: Sociability within the urban African American barbershop. *Challenge Atlanta*, 9(1), 1–14.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Research Theme	Interview Questions
Introduction and Greeting	<p>Hi _____. My name is Wayne Mallette and I want to thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview. I am doing interviews with Black male music educators to get a deeper understanding of their racial and gender identities that influence their experiences as a music educator.</p> <p>If at any point you do not feel comfortable with the questions or want to end the interview, please let me know.</p> <p>First, just for clarity how do you identify racially and according to sex?</p> <p>What do you consider your primary instrument(s)?</p> <p>How many years have you been teaching?</p>
Early musical influences and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can you tell me about your favorite musical memory? ● Was music played in your household growing up? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What kind of music was played in the house? ● Can you tell me about some of your experiences in music classes in elementary school? ● Were there a lot of Black students in your school? ● What kind of music did you perform in class? ● Tell me about your music teachers in school? ● Did they ever encourage you to play the type of music that was on the radio or that you heard in your house? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did you ever play music in school similar to music you heard at home (church, community)? ○ What songs? ● Did your teachers ever ask you about your musical experiences outside of school? ● Did you have any musical mentors growing up? ● What role did your parent(s) play in your musical growth? ● Did you ever have any opposition from your parent(s) or from family members to your participation in music? ● How did your friends respond to your participation in music? ● Did anyone ever respond negatively to your musical pursuits? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tell me about a time when someone either

	<p>intentionally or unintentionally discouraged your musical pursuits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you think they responded to you that way because of your race?
<p>Music Education Training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When did you decide to become a music teacher? ● How did your parents respond? How did your music teacher(s) respond? ● Tell me about your college search? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How did you ultimately decide where to go? ○ Where did you go to undergraduate? ● Tell me about your musical ensemble experiences in college. ● Did you have any musical spaces in college where you performed music that was familiar to your upbringing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tell me how you responded to that experience? ● Were there other students who shared your racial identity in school? ● Did you ever experience any incidents of racial bias while in college? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Was it related to the music program? ● How would you describe your relationship with your private instrument professor? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did they ever acknowledge your Black identity in terms of the songs they gave you to sing? ● What were some of your favorite classes? ● Did you ever have any classes that focused on teaching non-traditional choral music? Such as Gospel, a cappella, musical theater, popular music, etc. ● How was your relationship with the Music Education faculty in college? ● Were there any faculty of color in college? ● How do you think your professors impact your current teaching style?
<p>Current Teaching Experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How would you describe your music teaching style? ● How do your students respond to your teaching style? ● As an educator, do you tend to be a strong disciplinarian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you ever had any negative responses to your disciplinary style? ● How do you choose the music you teach or perform? ● Do you ever incorporate music from your heritage or formative context in your music sections? ● What is the racial breakdown of your ensembles? ● What is the male/female ratio in your ensembles? ● Do you ever perform music that the students pick?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do your male students respond to you? ● How do your female students respond to you? ● How do your Black students respond to you? ● How do your white students respond to you? ● Have racial incidents in your school occurred since you've been here? ● Have anyone had any comments positive or negative about you as a Black male since you've been here? ● How does the community respond to the music your students perform? ● How does the school, in general, deal with issues of race? ● Do you ever feel added pressure to respond to issues of race?
Closings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What would you want your pre-college music teachers to know about your experiences as a Black student in their classes? ● Knowing what you know now about teaching, do you wish you could have any different classes in college which would prepare you for teaching choral music? ● Is there anything else you want to share with me about being a Black male music educator?
	<p>Thank you once again _____ for agreeing to do this. I will send you a transcript of this interview. Please let me know if there are any corrections that need to be made.</p>

Appendix B

Observation Template:

Date of observation:

Subject:

Lesson Topic

Participant/Teacher:

Grade Level:

Number of students:

Time Stamp:	Activity	Comments