

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

I Sing Because I'm Happy:

The Perceived Impact of Participation in Choral Music on the  
Identity Development of Young Black Men

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Marshaun R. Hymon

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This study sought to understand how the choral music ensemble contributes to the success of Black men in schools and how it supports them in overcoming challenges in school. Utilizing qualitative interviews, 13 young Black men residing in Los Angeles County who were enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble for at least one (1) academic year were interviewed.

Participants expressed that they perceived the community in the choral classroom to contribute to their success in school. Additionally, participants articulated that they perceived the choral music ensemble to contribute to the cultivation of future aspirations and the development of prosocial behaviors. While young Black men experienced challenges closely related to the intersection of

their race and gender, they reported that the choral music ensemble supported them in overcoming those challenges, leading to success in school. Findings also show that some young Black men expressed they were unsure how to cope with challenges surrounding race in school and often struggled connecting their participation in choral music to their success. Results affirm the importance of the integration of arts in education. Further, seeing that participants report an overall positive impact of this particular environment on their schooling success, findings suggests that we must better understand how to: 1) recruit and retain young Black men in high school choral music; 2) prepare music educators to take a more active role in the cultivation of identity in young singers; and 3) create similar spaces in schools that support the success of young Black men in schools.

The dissertation of Marshaun R. Hymon is approved.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Sabrina Denise Tape, for her unwavering love and guidance. I am all that I am because of her. She is and will always be my compass.

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Rosa Lee Baldwin, for her continuous support and the strong faith that she has cultivated in me. Her strength is greater than that of Sampson's.

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Terrance Lee Marshall, for his selfless acceptance of me at time when I needed it most. I am blessed to have a father's love like his.

I dedicate this dissertation to my little brother, Trevion Lee Marshall, for always thinking of me and coming on this journey with me. This is possible little bro...Dr. Marshall has a nice ring to it.

I dedicate this dissertation to the glory of my heavenly father, Jesus Christ, whom without, none of this would be possible. Romans 8:28-29 says that "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, the he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

I dedicate this dissertation to the #BlackLivesMatter movement. To Ezell Ford, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Philando Castile, Michael Brown, Frederick Perkins, Antonio Smith, Deangelo Rashad Martin, Steven DeWayne Haizlip, Emanuel Johnson, Louis Patrick Veal, Jamee Christopher Deonte Johnson, Taveonte Art Emmanuel, Trevon Martin, **George Floyd**, and to all the Black men that were killed due to police brutality in this country.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please see <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org> for all killings of Black Americans at the hands of police since 2013.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Why This Study?

As a successful Black man I am the first in my family to earn a Bachelor's degree. I am also the first to earn a Masters and Doctorate degree. While I am proud, I am also equally intrigued. I am the son of a low-income, single mother, the son of a formerly incarcerated Black man, the brother of a young Black, middle school boy, the cousin of a currently incarcerated young Black man, and the nephew of two low-income, Black single mothers. I constantly ask myself, "Why me?" As I reflect on my childhood and upbringing, I am reminded of the wonderful job my mother did to shield me from what many other family members have fallen victim to: the effects of racism and economic injustice in our country. The power of the Black single mother is insurmountable and pushes beyond the depths of the sea.

Second, my participation in church choir, elementary musicals and middle and high school choral programs were transformative experiences. Specifically, my membership in the high school choral music ensemble positively shaped who I would become as a student, a man and a Black man. I am convinced that, for me, the cultural experience in the choral classroom encouraged my ability to earn a competitive high school GPA and successfully matriculate into post-secondary education. I am hopeful that this study will provide data to determine whether or not the high school choral music ensemble can *actually* be a supportive space for young Black men as it were for me. Providing recommendations for parents, educators and educational leaders will assist in positively impacting the achievement gap.

## **Introduction**

Within the American public school system, Black<sup>2</sup> students and Black men in particular, have consistently underperformed in comparison to their White, Latinx and some Asian counterparts (NCES, 2017a; NCES, 2018a). When considering strategies to reverse these disparate outcomes, research has shown that extracurricular involvement tends to have a positive impact on the schooling success of students. Within extracurricular involvement, research regarding the impact of music on schooling success is also available (Hamann and Walker, 1993; Marsh, 1992; Phillips, 1969; Solorzano et al., 2013). While research regarding music and its impact on young Black men has begun to surface, sample sizes are meager and research is heavily quantitative. My qualitative study will determine what factors, if any, Black men who are enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble perceive has impacted their schooling success.

## **Statement of Problem**

### **State of the Blunion in America**

Black<sup>3</sup> students in the United States have consistently underperformed in comparison to their counterparts. In addition, with regards to behavior and discipline data, Black students are 4.6 times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their White peers. This number has increased from 3.9 in the 2007/2008 school year. While there has been a decrease in suspensions among Black students over the years, suspensions for White students have decreased

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<sup>2</sup> “A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation, the term Black will be used rather than African American. Quite often, many races or ethnicities will consider Black to be derogatory and/or disrespectful to the Black race. Using this term is intentional in an effort to normalize its inclusion in our vocabulary. Please see Chapter Two for further explanation.

disproportionately (NCES, 2017b). Voluntary or involuntary absenteeism directly correlates to lower Grade Point Average (GPA) and results in low academic performance (NCES, 2016b).

Specifically, according to the most recent data, Black students are 7% less likely to graduate with a standard high school diploma than their White counterparts (NCES, 2018a). Furthermore, Black students are less likely than their White and Latinx counterparts to enroll in a post-secondary institution upon completion of high school; 14% and 13%, respectively (NCES, 2017a).

### **State of the Blunion in California**

In the State of California, the above-mentioned statistics are reinforced. Black students also lag behind their counterparts in many areas. Regarding high school completion, the most recent data shows that Black students fall 11 percentage points behind the state average. They are approximately 16% less likely than their White counterparts to graduate from a California public school with a standard diploma. They are also less likely to earn a high school diploma when compared to two other races: Asian and Latinx; 19% and 6% respectively (State Report, 2014).

Regarding discipline data, Black students are 6.6% more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. And while there are 75% more White students enrolled in California public schools, Black students are still 10% more likely to be suspended more than once (California Department of Education, 2017a).

### **State of the Blunion in Los Angeles County**

When considering local data and looking closely at California's High School Exit Exam, during the 2014-2015 school year, 74% of Black students in Los Angeles County passed the exam, which is 20% less than their White counterparts (California Department of Education, 2015). Factoring in other measures of success to determine college/career readiness, it is reported

that only 29.8% of Los Angeles County's Black students are considered "prepared" upon exiting the California public school system (California Department of Education, 2017b). When compared to other ethnic groups, Black Students' Asian peers surpass them by approximately 40%; their White peers surpass by 17%.

Similar to national and state data, discipline practices are not equitable in Los Angeles County. In comparison to their White counterparts, Black students are 5% more likely to be suspended and 13% more likely to be suspended more than once (California Department of Education, 2017c). Despite the fact the White students' enrollment in Los Angeles county schools are double that of Black students, this problem still persists. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus on Black students, more specifically Black men,<sup>4</sup> and discuss support structures that might impact their success in school.

**Gender Gaps.** In terms of gender differences within the Black race, Black men tend to fall behind Black women in regards to academic achievement. The most recent national data shows that in comparison to Black women, Black men are 13% more likely to be suspended or expelled and subsequently less likely to earn a standard high school diploma. Black men are also 3% less likely than Black women to matriculate into a post-secondary institution and earn a four-year degree (NCES, 2015; NCES, 2016b). Considering the State of California, Black men are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended (Wood, Harris III, & Howard, 2018). This number is highly reflective of national data. Terriquez, Chlala and Sacha (2013) found that approximately 66% of young men in California, who have been the victim of suspension or expulsion, never report

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this dissertation, man and woman will be used rather than male and female. This is done to recognize that gender is not a dichotomous phenomenon, but in fact a spectrum. Please see Chapter Two for further explanation.

enrolling in a four-year college. Absence from the post-secondary environment may lead to involvement in the criminal justice system.

### **The School-to-Prison Pipeline**

In short, the school-to-prison pipeline posits that the institution itself creates an environment that shepherds students from classrooms directly into the criminal justice system. Research has shown the educational disparities experienced by poor students and students of color in Los Angeles County (Education Commission of the States, 2017; Renee, Welner & Oakes, 2010; Rogers & Freelon, 2012). The disparities consist of uncertified and/or low-performing teachers, outdated textbooks and materials, poor physical environments, etc. This imbalanced educational experience is compounded by teacher bias, lack of sensitive pedagogical practices, high counselor to student ratio, poor classroom management, and disproportionate disciplinary action (Education Commission of the States, 2017; Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Lynn et al., 2010; Perna et al., 2008).

The salience of young Black men's gender and race in this cultural context are further exacerbated by home environment, poor self-concept and perpetual anxiety and stress (Condrón, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). The school-to-prison pipeline is a well-documented phenomenon; poor school attendance, poor academic performance and disproportionate exclusionary discipline can lead directly to prison (Alexander, 2012; Biegel et al., 2015; Howard, 2008; Howard, 2010; Clark, 2015; Tatum, 2017; Wood et al., 2018).

### **Background of the Problem**

As mentioned above, largely, Black men are not experiencing success in our American school system. In almost every case they are one of the lowest performing subgroups. While we do see incremental improvement in some areas, other subgroups (Whites & Asians) are showing



disproportionate improvements. Many scholars (Anderson, 2016; Flennaugh, 2016; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Rolland, 2011; Steele, 1997) have hypothesized and studied why performance data of Black men may have arrived at this current state.

### **Identity Development**

Flennaugh (2016) and Steele (1997) explore how identity development and the integration (or disintegration) of the school environment into one's identity actually impacts Black men's ability to perform. Fordham & Ogbu (2016) & Tatum (2017) support this notion by explaining how Black students will directly or indirectly push against academic success because it is often associated with Whiteness. These researchers cite numerous accounts of culturally insensitive pedagogical practices and/or physical spaces that are not conducive to the learning and development of young Black men. The minimal representation and unintentional cultural exclusion contribute to the creation of a kinship, which can exponentially and inauspiciously impact academic development.

**Perceived Belonging and Teacher Care.** To briefly explore the notion of belonging and care, I draw upon the research of Lynn et al. (2010) and Howard (2010). In Chapter 4 of Howard's (2010) *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools*, the author discusses the importance of teaching through culture, disrupting Eurocentric ideals of normalcy. When Black men are not able to see themselves within the institution (structurally and pedagogically), they begin to assign racial labels and compartmentalize. This compartmentalization then determines whether or not they will engage or identify with school (Fordham & Ogbu, 2016; Johnson Jr., 2016; Walker & Greene, 2009). Considering engagement, Lynn et al. (2010) discusses the reciprocal process of student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy, and its impact on the academic achievement of Black men. Low academic performance may result in disidentification with school.

## **Extracurricular Involvement**

Past and contemporary research shows the positive impact of extracurricular involvement on the schooling success of Black men (Clark, 2015; Flennaugh, 2016; Montgomery, 2010; Rolland, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2016). Three overarching themes emerge when considering literature on this topic: community, self-concept and accountability.

First, participation in these activities creates a sense of belonging and assists in building a community of support for Black men. Strayhorn (2006) and Freeman (2017), among many others, have documented the importance of a sense of belonging on the schooling success of Black men. Second, this sense of community directly contributes to a positive self-concept. Researchers discuss the meaning-making process regarding confidence, advocacy, resilience and their impact on the schooling success and persistence of Black men (Clark, 2015; Condrón, 2009; Lareau et al., 2018). Third, through the relationship with the Black man's coach, club sponsor, arts director, etc., these young men are guided and taught the importance of hard work and dedication to themselves and the community. This deeper accountability and sense of focus positively influences their success in the classroom (Clark, 2015; Montgomery III, 2010; Posner & Vandell, 1999; Seow & Pan, 2014). At the intersection of belonging, positive self-concept and accountability rests success in school.

**Performing Arts.** Within extracurricular involvement, the performing arts is another area that has been shown to inspire positive success in school (Barry, Taylor & Walls, 1990; Foster & Jenkins, 2017; Harland et al., 2000). Current research generally shows mixed results with regard to student involvement in the performing arts, but findings display a positive impact on students, academically and socially. More specifically, research shows a positive impact on general self-

concept, positive and prosocial behavior, on taskness, critical and higher order thinking, expressive skills, cultural sensitivity, dropout prevention, and post-secondary aspirations.

**Music and Schooling Success.** Within the performing arts, there activities such as music, dance, drama and art. For the purposes of this dissertation, we will focus on music. While limited, a few studies have discussed and shown the positive impacts of participation in school music on students, and specifically Black students' educational experiences. (Hinds, 2017; Morrison, 2001; Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004; Sweet, 2010; Walton, 2015). Michael and Dorothea (1973) discuss general music instruction and its impact on students. Additionally, Marsh (1992) drew upon data from the *High School and Beyond (HSB)* survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics, and discuss music's impact on post-secondary enrollment. Hamann and Walker (1993) support Marsh (1992) and shows a connection between music educators and their students' post-secondary aspirations. Lastly, Demorest and Morrison (2000) connect enrollment in high school music to students' SAT scores. The researchers are very clear in saying that findings do not show a causation; however, findings remain consistent across all four years of high school enrollment.

**Black Students, Choral Music and Schooling Success.** Few studies have shown the influences of music on the schooling success of Black students. Within music, only two empirical studies have focused specifically on the cultural space of the high school choral music ensemble.<sup>5</sup> Considering once again the finding of Hamann and Walker (1993), of the 292 music teachers included in the study, 45% of the teachers who were identified as role models were choral directors. While research shows that Black students typically prefer and are more

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<sup>5</sup> A group of people coming together to produce vocal singing for a specific purpose or cause (Chorus America, 2003).

comfortable with Black educators (Harris, 2015; Howard, 2010; Howard, et al., 2013; Lynn et al., 2010; McAdoo, 2018; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010; Walton, 2015; Yosso, 2005), it shows that even in schools where Black teachers are highly underrepresented compared to Black students, the choral environment, without Black educators, still encourages Black students toward success. Regarding gender gaps referenced above, Thomas's (2011) quantitative study found a statistically significant impact of the choral music ensemble on the schooling success of Black men.

### **Gap This Research Will Fill**

The two empirical studies referenced above suggest a positive connection between Black students, the choral music ensemble and success in school. However, we need to know more. Considering the choral music ensemble, only one qualitative study has been conducted specifically with Black men in the choral environment. However, Johnson Jr.'s (2016) qualitative study was conducted from a Belongingness perspective, rather than with an identity development focus. Thus, Black men's perceptions of development in extracurricular involvement such as the high school choral music ensemble and its impact on success in school needs further exploration. Therefore, my qualitative study examined the potential that choral music might have in positively impacting Black men's schooling experience. I built upon previous findings to privilege the voices of Black men to determine what factors, if any, they perceive impacted their success in school.

### **Research Questions**

1. According to young Black men who are enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble, what factors do they perceive have impacted their schooling success?
  - a. How do they describe the role that choral music played in their success?

2. What challenges have these young Black men experienced, and how has participation in the choral music ensemble supported them to deal with those challenges?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Statement**

In an effort to uplift social-justice and unapologetically embrace inclusivity, throughout this dissertation, with regards to language, I have chosen to be intentional about two concepts: race and gender.

#### **Race**

To normalize and celebrate culture, the term Black is used rather than African-American. However, Black does encompass all persons that identify as a part of the African Diaspora. While unfortunate, the effects of slavery are still pervasive; the origins of many Black American families are unknown. However, I urge those in this particular space to be encouraged by Collins's (2011) conceptualization of the *Stockdale Paradox*. We must confront the brutal facts of the current reality (being unsure of origins), while maintaining faith that re-unification with the motherland is inevitable. Also, Black is capitalized. This is intentional and purposefully pushes against notions of White supremacy.

Second, throughout the course of this dissertation, I have chosen to use the terms "man" and "woman" rather than "male" and "female." To explain this concept, we must explore the differences in gender and sex.

#### **Gender Versus Sex**

In much medical and legal research, sex refers to biological (assigned) traits at birth. The genitalia received at birth is not a choice (Oldehinkel, 2011; Hagen & Galupo, 2014). In recent years, in critical theoretical literature and diversity discourse, there has been a push to recognize the distinction between sex and gender. Unger (1979) expresses that gender "...serves to reduce assumed parallels between biological and psychological sex." Simply put, how one is born and

how one identifies may not intersect. Slattery (2007) and Spade (2011) affirms this finding and understanding by explaining that gender expression allows societies and cultures to define what it means to them. Within this framework, there is freedom of expression.

Although man and women still ascribes to the notion that gender is a dichotomy, this is one step toward acknowledging that it is in fact, a spectrum. While the above concept has little implications toward the current study, it is important to display transparency regarding the shift in language. Thus, man and women will be used exclusively.

### **Introduction**

Within the American public school system, Black, Latinx and some Asian students have consistently underperformed in comparison to their White counterparts (NCES, 2017a; NCES, 2018a). More specifically, the academic outcomes for Black men are not improving at the same rate. (NCES, 2017b). Support structures that may reverse the low academic achievement of Black men include extracurricular involvement, which have been shown to positively impact the academic environment. Additionally, within extracurricular involvement, research shows that music positively impacts Black students' success in school (Lomas, 2016). This study will determine which factors of the schooling experience, if any, Black men perceive to impact their success while enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble.

The review of literature begins by discussing the theoretical framework through which I position my argument. Next, the achievement gap and elements of identity development that impact Black men's schooling success will be discussed. Third, to shift the current narrative, I discuss positive impacts on the success of Black men in school. For the purposes of this dissertation, we will focus on extracurricular involvement, and more specifically, the performing

arts. I end by discussing how music contributes to dismantling the achievement gap for young Black men.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this dissertation draws on self-concept, identity, and the threats and supports for the identity development of young Black men.

#### **Self-Concept**

Self-Concept is defined as one's perception of self, which is informed and impacted by past experiences, environment and current cultural context (Shavelson et al., 1976). Further, this concept is described as an internal process combining one's general feelings (self-esteem) and one's response to those feelings (Gifford et al., 2006; Guay et al., 2003). Phillips (1969) provides an additional perspective stating that, "...Self-concept develops from what an individual learns to think about himself by observing what others think of him" (p. 32).

The researcher expounds upon this definition, in an attempt to clarify, with five aspects that influence general self-concept: 1) The current perception of self; 2) the future self one hopes to be; 3) the self that one believes others perceive them to be; 4) the current self that one hopes to be; and 5) the self that one hopes not to be (King & Price, 1979; Phillips, 1969, p. 32). Shavelson et al. (1976) build upon Philips' research and discusses three components that contribute to general self-concept: social self-concept, emotional self-concept and physical self-concept, and provides examples as to how aspects of life such as peers, significant others, physical ability, etc. contribute to general sense of self.

Surveying the literature on self-concept, we see that there is not much research regarding the development of self-concept with Black men (Flennaugh, 2011; Thompson & Zand, 2007; Walton, 2015). However, researchers (Fordham, 1988; King & Price, 1979; Steele, 1997) begin



to discuss the subtleties that appear when considering Black students, and Black men in particular. In a quantitative study of 20 Black adolescents (15 men and 5 women), utilizing the *Tennessee Self-Concept Scale* and a researcher constructed *Black Self-Concept Scale*, the researchers found a significant relationship between positive racial attitudes and high self-concept. King and Price's (1979) findings are supported by Twenge & Crocker's (2002) findings, whose meta-analysis of 712 studies (n = 232,997) show that Black participants reported the highest self-concept scores. The above findings also contradict the findings of other researchers (Beglis & Sheikh, 1974; Kenny & McEachern, 2009) who purport that Black students present a low self-concept and subsequently poor socialization.

Seeing the somewhat unstable conceptualization of self-concept, the contradictory findings and the limited research specific to Black men, it is clear that understanding of self-concept for this population needs further inquiry. Perry et al. (2003) supports this sentiment stating that, "...I would argue that there are extra social, emotional, cognitive, and political competencies required of [Black] youth simply because they are [Black]" (p. 4).

### **Academic Self-Concept**

Academic Self-Concept (ASC) is tied to general self-concept but it is specific to the schooling experience (Guay et al., 2003; Marsh & Martin, 2011). How a student *feels* about his ability to perform well academically is closely connected to his ability to perform well academically (Marsh et al., 1988; Matthews, 2014).

There are three leading schools of thought with regards to ASC: the self-enhancement model, the skill development model and the reciprocal effects model (REM). Considering the self-enhancement model, it is believed that self-concept is the primary determinant of academic achievement. More plainly, a student with a positive ASC, possessing the confidence and self-

esteem necessary to persevere through an academic task, will most likely perform well. Further, a high performance will encourage a higher, positive ASC and vice versa (Calsyn & Kenny, 1977; Scheirer & Kraut, 1979). For example, Scheirer & Kraut (1979) purport that the low achievement of Black students may be due to a low ASC. In Calsyn & Kenny's (1977) quantitative study of 556 8th through 12th grade students, they found a statistically significant impact of ASC on academic achievement of women. Their findings support the self-enhancement model.

In contrast to the self-enhancement model is the skill-development model. This model claims that ASC is impacted by academic performance. Therefore, positive performance on an academic task will positively impact academic self-concept; performance must come before a shift in ASC. More plainly, prior academic achievement will impact subsequent ASC, positively or negatively (Byrne, 1984; Calsyn & Kenny, 1977; Marsh & Martin, 2011). Again, considering Calsyn and Kenny (1977), contradicting evidence was found. Men's ASC tended to be impacted largely by prior academic achievement. This substantiates the skill-development model.

While many studies have explored the legitimacy and strength of the self-enhancement and skill-development models, yet a third model has emerged: the reciprocal effects model. What is remarkable about this model is that it recognizes the work of both the above models. REM states that prior academic achievement has a direct effect on subsequent ASC *and* prior ASC has an effect on subsequent academic achievement; both impact each other. Marsh and Martin (2011) further substantiated REM by performing a meta-analysis of available research; "...55 publications, including 60 independent samples and 282 separate effect sizes" (p. 66). With this meta-analysis they found that this model was significant overall and found a strong, positive trend from 90% of the studies reviewed.

Further, Marsh and Martin (2011) reviewed literature in an effort to test cross-cultural generalizability and provided findings and implications for other areas of self-concept, such as athletics and involvement in the arts. These areas also demonstrated that REM was most applicable. Specifically, looking at a 10-week longitudinal study of gymnasts, Marsh, Chanal, Sarrazin, and Bois (2006) found that the athletes' self-concept and performance influenced and were influenced by each other. Seeing that REM has been expanded to test its effect on multiple cultural groups and several academic areas, for the purposes of this dissertation, REM will be acknowledged.

Considering the purpose of this study and the focus on music, research (Lisella & Serwatka, 1996; Lomas, 2016; Morrison, 2001; Parker, 2014; Pineda, 2017; Thomas, 2011; Walton, 2015) has shown that Academic (music) self-concept can positively impact general self-concept. As discussed above and as I will examine below, seminal scholars (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 2016; Steele, 1997) present findings that demonstrate that positive general self-concept is a substantial, significant factor that contributes to Black men identifying with the schooling environment and experiencing success in school. Perry et al., (2003) purport that Black men must believe that they belong before they will ascribe to *effort optimism*: the belief that if effort is put forth (if I try), I will succeed.

### **Identity Development**

A large factor that has shown to impact Black men's success in school is the development of an identity as someone who can be successful in school, and as discussed above this is influenced by their self-concept. Many scholars have explored this phenomenon (Bratton, 2018; Flennaugh, 2016; Fordham & Ogbu, 2016; Hunter & Robinson, 2018; Ransaw et al., 2018;

Rolland, 2011; Steele, 1997; Tatum, 2017; Voelkl, 2012; Walker & Green, 2009), and in particular what challenges and supports one's identity.

### **Stereotype Threat**

Stereotype threat is a significant challenge to developing sound identities for young black men. Steele's (1997) seminal research discusses how stereotypes can shape how one acts and how one sees themselves. This concept can be explained as the fear that one may confirm and/or reinforce a stereotype about a group in which the individual holds membership. The constant threat of reinforcing a stereotype may stifle true expression as one moves through the identity development process. Steele explains that when students are reminded of their particular group identification (e.g. being reminded of their race before beginning an exam), this action is enough to negatively impact their performance on the task at hand. In fact, when race was not made prevalent, Black students performed higher than White students.

Steele (1997) also discusses the importance and impact of identifying with the domain of schooling. A student that is considered domain-identified identifies with the academic environment, has a positive ASC and positive academic achievement is desired. Conversely, students that are considered domain-disidentified have rejected the academic environment, has a low ASC and does not typically achieve high academic success. Regarding domain-identified students, as expected, in the absence of stereotype threat, they will perform well. For domain-disidentified students, they typically do not perform well whether or not stereotype threat is activated. However, researchers (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 2016; Steele, 1997) explain that students that no longer identify with the domain of schooling may still exhibit a high self-esteem and positive intra-group relations. I will now discuss Fordham and Ogbu's 2016 research to further explore this phenomenon.

## **Kinship**

Building upon Steele's work, researchers (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 2016; Stewart, 2007) first discuss how domain identification and disidentification occurs, how it impacts identity development and subsequently, success in school.

Fordham (1988) introduces the idea of fictive kinship and defines it as a sisterhood and brotherhood. Fordham and Ogbu (2016) extend this definition and define it through an anthropological lens: members of a community not genetically related, but who have developed some sort of reciprocal social, economic and/or political relationship. Further, Stewart (2007) discusses the idea of kinship and explains that people of color, and Black families in particular, rely on extended family members and friends in addition to their immediate, "nuclear" families. The researcher references historical literature regarding the roots of the fictive kinship. She explains that due to historical marginalization, Black families have had to pool resources and rely on one another for continued growth and support. Because of this societal exclusion, kinships have advanced from support systems to cultural groups with strong, collective identities (Clark-Lewis, 1994; Stewart, 2007; Tatum, 2017). This collective identity permeates the walls of the school and may adversely impact Black men's success in this particular domain.

Fordham and Ogbu's research explains that through the development of a Black cultural identity, students may indirectly or directly push against academic success. With a strong kinship system in place, Black students may unconsciously adhere to the norms and cultural expectations of the group that, over time, negatively impact their success in school. More specifically, Fordham (1988) discuss strategies that Black students use to navigate through the academic environment.

In an effort to protect one's place in the kinship, Black men will present humor to "distract" friends and colleagues when in school. For example, an interviewee expresses that "[He] start saying some of my jokes...and make the class laugh and get things moving or something" (Fordham, 1988, p. 75). Another instance of indirect academic sabotage can be linked to a Black man refusing to register for an advanced placement course. Although teachers, counselors and administrators highly encouraged him to move forward with this opportunity, he elected to remain in the general population to protect his position in the kinship. Lastly, Black men will display "lunching" behaviors that would not align with the behaviors of an advanced placement student (p. 79). Lunching can be defined as pretending to not be "smart" in front of friends and/or acting differently in and out of the classroom. More specifically, Black men will lunch to distract their peers from their attempts to be successful or redirect their peers to other aspects of their lives. Unfortunately, at times, lunching detrimentally impacts their success in school.

Students' progress through the identity development process is heavily impacted by kinship cultural norms and therefore impacts schooling success. Although Black men's success in this environment may be negatively impacted, they continue to negotiate and strive to balance success and kinship expectations. Considering Steele's (1997) research, seeing that there is an *attempt* of some sort to achieve success, the above discussed students would be considered domain-identified. Considering the complex, inextricable system of self-concept at play, the cognitive dissonance that may surface during the identity development process may be insurmountable. Through consistent activation of stereotype threat and/or constant kinship negotiation, students may become domain-disidentified; they will no longer identify with school. Regarding empirical literature, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Tatum (2017) define this

disidentification as the development of an *oppositional cultural frame of reference*. Students considered domain-disidentified are discussed next.

For some Black men, the bilateral bargaining becomes too difficult and they will choose the kinship over schooling and academic success. They will deepen their commitment to Black cultural attitudes and fully ascribe certain behaviors (eg: success in school) to Whiteness. Because of this, Black men will actively push against those attributes and begin holding their peers accountable to expectations of the kinship (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Rolland, 2011; Tatum, 2017). Further, Tatum (2017) provides additional empirical evidence regarding the adverse impact of an oppositional cultural frame of reference. It is explained that even in *racially mixed* schools, if White students outperform Black students, Black students may push against academic success in an effort to prove one's Blackness.

Proving one's Blackness upon adopting an oppositional cultural frame of reference may lead to what is called, *cultural mistrust*. Irving and Hudley (2008) define this idea as "...not trust[ing] the public schools to provide an adequate education...educational services or access to the opportunity structure..." (p. 679). In a study of 115 11th and 12th grade Black men in a California public high school, Irving and Hundley (2008) found that cultural mistrust was a significant predictor of school outcomes. More specifically, the higher the students' mistrust (of the White community) the lower their expected academic outcomes. While previously discussed researchers outline how identity development can impact performance, Irving and Hundley (2008) were able to find a statistically significant impact on GPA. Further, in support of Fordham (1988), Fordham & Ogbu (1986) and Tatum (2017), Irving and Hundley (2008) found that an oppositional cultural attitude is also a significant predictor of poor academic achievement.

Yet, an additional aspect to consider is the further a student disidentifies, the less the domain is a part of their identity. More specifically, Steele (1997) explains that if schooling is no longer associated with an individual's identity, low performance will no longer impact their self-esteem. Empirically, Hare and Castenell (1985) support this notion. In their study examining self-perception of adolescent Black and White boys, they found that while Black boys performed poorer than White boys, their self-esteem was comparable, and at times, higher than that of White boys (Hudley, 2008; Ransaw et al., 2019; Rolland, 2011; Steele, 1997).

Here we see that the identity development of Black men, mediated by cultural experiences and responsibilities, directly impacts their success in school. Next, I will discuss a few additional factors that may impact Black men, their sense of self and their academic development in school.

### **Perceived Belonging and Teacher Care**

Researchers have well documented the impacts of teacher care on Black men in school, and further, how educators themselves influence Black men and their identity development. (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Howard, 2010; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn et al., 2010; Patrick & Ryan, 2007; Ransaw et al., 2019; Walker & Greene, 2009). Considering classroom environment and culture, Patrick and Ryan (2007) discuss that students' perceptions of teacher care influence their academic mastery and progress toward academic efficacy. In their study, they found that a student's academic achievement was fully mediated by academic efficacy. More plainly, if a student perceives the teacher to care, we can strongly predict that they will perform well academically. Walker and Greene (2009) support these findings and provide a belongingness perspective. The researchers discuss that if a student perceives that they are accepted into the particular environment, they are



more likely to exhibit “prosocial” behavior and engage in the task(s) at hand (p. 464). In their study of 249 high school students, they found a significant relationship between belonging and academic achievement. Additionally, as found by Patrick and Ryan (2007), Walker and Greene (2009) discuss that academic achievement was mediated by perceptions of belonging; as discussed above, students feeling that they belong and are cared for are more likely to perform well academically.

Lastly, the researchers discuss the idea of *instrumentality*. Instrumentality can be defined as students’ ability to connect school learnings to short- and long-term academic and life goals. When controlling for belonging, they found a statistically significant impact of instrumentality on academic achievement. In an attempt to determine instrumentality’s impact on achievement when also accounting for belonging, they indeed found a significant increase in students’ likelihood of positive academic achievement. Here we see that an educator’s ability to create an environment that assists students in incorporating school and the classroom into their identity, and to connect educational experiences to future goals, is crucial in leading to success in school.

Turning to Black students specifically, Lynn et al. (2010) and Ransaw et al., (2019) provide accounts of Black students’ schooling experiences. In a study utilizing one on one interviews and focus groups with 52 high school teachers and administrators at a low-performing school in a Black school district, Lynn et al. (2010) found that teachers attributed the inadequate performance of Black students to Black students themselves. For example, a teacher said, “A lot of students I’ve noticed come into my classroom and they just don’t wanna work! They don’t” (p. 309). This comment is reflective of general sentiments expressed by many educators at the school. Further, the researchers claim that teachers took no responsibility in the low performance of their Black students.

Further, Lynn et al. (2010) utilizes theoretical literature to support the empirical findings of their study. More specifically, they discuss the reciprocal impact of student and teacher self-efficacy. In the study, teachers perceived Black students to be unmotivated, uncaring or oppositional to the institution. Because of this perception, teachers expressed a concern in their ability to teach and positively impact Black students' academic success. This low teacher self-efficacy manifested itself in the form of low expectations of students. Students, sensing and recognizing these low expectations from teachers, did not rise to meet the expectations of course curriculum. Students not meeting expectations negatively impacted their subsequent self-efficacy. Student's low self-efficacy then negatively impacted teachers' self-efficacy with regards to their ability to provide instruction. This cycle may negatively impact Black students' identity development and result in the disidentification with school. This particular case is also reflective of Patrick and Ryan's (2007) and Walker and Greene's (2009) research and is also substantiated by Polite (1994) and Thomas (2011).

In a 3-year longitudinal qualitative study of 115 Black men, Polite (1994) sought to understand the schooling experiences of the Black men in a Black school district. In regards to cultural sensitivity, the researcher noted Black men's perceived lack of care by educators and administrators. For example, the researcher notes that the men had complete control of their academic course schedule. The young men were able to select the classes they wanted to take without regard to graduation expectations. Further, when deviating from course and curriculum maps, there was no documented intervention from school educators or administrators. Second, the researcher also explained that peer pressure was experienced by some Black men; this peer pressure was specific to resisting school. Polite's (1994) research is reflective of 1) Fordham (1988) and Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) research regarding the impact of kinship on identity

development and subsequent schooling success, and 2) Patrick and Ryan's (2007) findings regarding how perceived teacher care influences a student's identity development and success in school.

**Pedagogical and Instructional Practices.** In addition to experiences related to perceived belonging and teacher care, researchers (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Howard, 2010; Husband, 2012; Ransaw et al., 2019) discuss pedagogical and instructional practices as well. Husband (2012) discusses how the curriculum taught in classrooms does not provide necessary supports that contribute to Black men's success. Specifically, with regards to reading, the researcher explains that Black boys typically enjoy reading "Texts based on action, nonfiction, scary fairy tales, super heroes, video games, and humor" (p. 24). Husband continues to explain that many states have adopted and implemented a standardized curriculum that does not account for this difference. Additionally, Black boys learn best by engaging with literature for analytical and informational purposes. Much of the school literature provided in early years is from an artistic and aesthetic perspective. Researchers also briefly discuss the feminization of the teaching profession; "...boys are hurt by the tacit cultural beliefs and socialization practices that characterize schoolwork as a feminine endeavor" (Ransaw et al., 2018, p. 172). They suggest that the absence of Black men as educators also negatively impacts Black men's identity development (Mehta, 2013).

The researcher also comments on the cultural relevance of the curriculum being taught. When Black boys are unable to connect to what is being taught, they may disengage, which will impact academic success. Hollie's (2001) research supports Husband's stance on the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy. Hollie's Language Affirmation Program validates and teaches through the culture of the students in the classroom. This affirmation of language and culture

begins with an understanding that students *enter* the classroom with valuable knowledge and experiences (Hollie, 2001; Howard, 2010; Husband, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Yosso, 2005). The researchers' addition to the literature discusses how inseparable race and gender are with regard to Black men. They also support Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) research and provides an additional explanation as to how disidentification from the domain of schooling may occur.

To again reference Irving and Hudley's (2008) concept of cultural mistrust, cultural mistrust develops due to a lack of perceived care, instrumentality and culturally relevant practices. Overtime, this mistrust can impact the identity development of Black men, negatively shift their academic self-concept, and ultimately grow into domain-disidentification. This disidentification has been shown to directly and negatively impact academic success.

In summary, there are three overarching elements that contribute to the identity development process of Black men in school: the kinship and diaspora, teacher care and pedagogical/ instructional practices. These three elements are shown to negatively impact the academic development of Black men.

## **Summary**

The above section discussed the process through which Black men develop a firm identity within the context of the school. This identity development undertaking is impacted, influenced and/or mediated by concepts such as stereotype threat, fictive kinship, belonging, teacher care, and instruction. More specifically, these elements are enacted and carried out by peers, educators and the men themselves. The factors discussed are shown to negatively impact the academic development of Black men. To present additional elements that have been shown to positively impact the academic success of students, I will discuss extracurricular involvement and the performing arts and their connection to schooling success.

## **Extracurricular Involvement**

To consider additional support structures that positively impact the schooling success of students, the literature on Black men and academic performance is rich in regards to extracurricular involvement. Additionally, seeing that this study hopes to examine the perceived factors associated with the high school choral music ensemble, exploring related literature will create a basis upon which I build my argument. When examining the extracurricular involvement literature, it is quickly evident that much research is directed toward athletics. I will first briefly discuss athletics and its relationship to academic success.

Utilizing data from NELS:88, a nationally representative, longitudinal study sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Broh (2002) found a significant and consistent relationship between 8th, 10th and 12th graders' grades and participation in athletics. More specifically, there was a direct impact on math and reading standardized test scores. Montgomery (2010), in his quantitative study of 85 Black student athletes from two high schools, supports this finding and shows that those who participated in athletics earned a higher average score on standardized tests than non-student athletes.

Many researchers (Bucknavage & Worrell, 2005; Marsh, 1992; Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004) discuss the impact of extracurricular involvement on the academic success of students, but are unable to declare a casual state of this phenomenon. Broh (2002) considers this fact and controls for background factors. The researcher defines background factors as race, family income, and parents' educational attainment. After controlling for all background factors, a significant, positive relationship still persists between extracurricular involvement and academic success. While this still does not show causation, the argument regarding extracurricular involvement and its impact on academic achievement is strengthened.

Broh (2002) also found that students indicated that athletics also provided social benefits. More specifically, analysis show that students participating in athletics indicated a higher level of self-esteem and that self-esteem increased between 10th and 12th grade. As discussed earlier in this chapter, seeing that self-esteem and self-efficacy have been linked to subsequent academic achievement (Freeman, 2017; Randsaw et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2006), it is clear that the social benefit of involvement in athletics would be a significant factor. Additionally, Broh (2002) also found that involvement in athletics increases relationships between and among several different groups: students and parents, students and the school, parents and the school, and parents and parents. Considering research (Bowen et al., 1995; Gantt and Grief, 2009; McKay et al., 2003; Mistry et al., 2008; Nichols-Casebolt, 1988; Weininger & Lareau, 2009) regarding the negative impact of poor parent/child relationships and lack of parental involvement in students' schooling experience, this finding also strengthens the idea that social benefits are an important aspect of involvement in athletics and their impact on academic achievement.

The researcher takes one final step to determine the impact of social benefits on schooling success. Considering both standardized test scores and responses to social capital questions on the NELS:88, when controlling for social capital, academic achievement suffered significantly; "...Measures of social capital reduce the size of the effect of [athletics] on math grades to insignificance..." (Broh, 2002, p. 81). The researcher was able to empirically show that aside from GPA and test scores, the social impact of involvement in athletics is also important for academic achievement. Montgomery (2010) supports this notion and explains that the student-athletes surveyed indicated an immense respect for academics and ascribed their academic success to participation in athletics. Further, Flennaugh (2016), in his in-depth qualitative study of two academically successful Black men, adds an additional perspective. In

response to Broh (2002) and Montgomery (2010) he explains that, at times, students' identity can be inextricably intertwined into who they are inside the extracurricular activity; this socialization contributes heavily to their success as a student.

Regarding extracurricular socialization, Rolland (2011) affirms the importance of and positive impact on academic success. In her study of 12 academically successful, high school Black men, all men interviewed were enrolled in athletic activities and expressed that they perceived the activity to positively impact their academic progress and experience in school. For example, a young man stated, "Extracurricular things really helped out. The activity helps kids to stay off the streets so they can do something like school, stay on the positive mind" (p. 72). Seeing that this was a qualitative study, no statistical effects were found; however, a clear trend was identified in all interviews and surveys administered. The research discusses and supports the notion that social capital gained from participation in extracurricular activities positively impacts success in school.

Referencing Rolland (2011), she found that some students expressed that extracurricular activities kept them from engaging in street activities. The researcher adds an additional layer to how extracurricular involvement can indirectly impact schooling success. A student present at school and in a safe, caring environment provides a space for greater focus and commitment to academic growth. Marsh (1992) supports the notion that involvement in extracurricular activities produces social gains as well. Utilizing data from the *High School and Beyond (HSB)* survey conducted by NCES, the researcher found that the largest effect of involvement in athletics was on social self-concept and very closely favored academic self-concept.

Students' growth in self-esteem, self-concept and relationship with peers and parents provide a larger capacity for focus and academic growth. Considering extracurricular

involvement and post-secondary outcomes, the literature is beginning to show a positive trend. In a 2013 Pathways to Post-secondary Success report, Solórzano et al. (2013) discusses the impact of mentoring on the college completion of low-income students. Conducting at-home and phone interviews, researchers found that 75% of students mentored by a coach or athletic director enrolled in post-secondary education and earned at least an associates degree. More specifically, 55% of students mentored by a coach or athletic director completed a bachelor's degree or higher. This was 10 percentage points higher than all other types of mentors. The researchers hypothesize that that impact of a high school teacher, guidance counselor and/or religious leader tends to dissipate with time; the coach has a lingering effect.

Ashtiani and Feliciano (2012) supports this finding and explains that, “Having a coach/athletic director or employer as a mentor affects the likelihood of earning a bachelor’s degree for adolescents from low-income backgrounds... (p. 3). Marsh (1992) tertiarily supports Ashtiani and Feliciano (2012) and Solórzano et al. (2013). The researcher found athletics to be the most beneficial extracurricular activity; considering all data analysis, there were 13 statistically significant effect sizes in regards to athletics involvement and all were positive. More specifically, he also explains that the data shows a positive trend in regards to educational aspirations and attainment for students. Clark (2015) also substantiates this claim and supports Ashtiani and Feliciano (2012) and Solórzano et al. (2013) stating that “caring coaches coupled by the discipline required to actively participate in athletics help children understand the importance of hard work ethic and determination” (p. 23).

As referenced in the theoretical framework, Black students experience, however implicitly, microaggressions and racial stress on a daily basis (Condrón, 2009; Lynn et al., 2010;



Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Positive social development is a significant contributor to the schooling success of students.

### **The Performing Arts**

Involvement in general extracurricular activities have found to positively impact standardized test scores, self-concept and post-secondary aspirations. Additionally, current research generally shows mixed results with regard to student involvement in the performing arts. This will be discussed next.

Utilizing quantitative data from *The Panel Study of Income Dynamics*, a longitudinal study containing 5,000 families, Foster and Jenkins (2017) found that children enrolled in performing arts show higher performance in five key performance outcomes: applied problems scores, broad reading, global self-concept, letter word, and positive behavior. The researchers explain further that the effect sizes are not significant, but scores do show a positive trend. One major finding in this particular study is that, while not statistically significant, the researchers found that those who participated in the performing arts were 10% more likely to graduate high school than those that did not participate in the performing arts.

In a qualitative study somewhat similar, Barry et al. (1990) explored the performing arts' role in high school dropout prevention. The researchers surveyed and observed 40 at-risk students and found that of the 40, 52% (21) admitted considering dropping out of high school. Of those 21 students, all explained that their decision not to drop out was influenced by their involvement in the arts. When observing these at risk students, the researchers noticed that the students were "on task" eleven percent more often in their arts classes than in their non-arts classes. Further, when asked why they continued to be committed to the arts, there were a variety of answers, but 23% (9) expressed that the arts could provide a path for future employment. As

stated above, extracurricular activities can inspire post-secondary aspirations. This finding within the performing arts specifically, supports this notion. The researchers explained that educators, administrators and at-risk students themselves perceived the arts to motivate the students in moving through school with more ease. Motivation was a large outcome of Barry et al.'s (1990) study.

In a large, multi-site case study, utilizing surveys and interviews, Harland et al. (2000) identified five primary outcomes regarding the participation in the performing arts: enjoyment, arts knowledge and skills, knowledge of the social and cultural domains, creativity and thinking skills, and communication and expressive skills. Regarding enjoyment, students expressed simple enjoyment in the activity. For example, a student explained that they, "...Go to see a lot of plays with drama, so I just find it enjoyable" (p. 39). Within enjoyment, students expressed that involvement in the arts was also cathartic and therapeutic; an escape within the regular school day. A student said, "In drama you kind of forget yourself. Even if you have got troubles or something like that, you can just be somebody else" (p. 45). This natural enjoyment and escape encourages effort and commitment to the art form resulting in increased knowledge and competency within that particular discipline.

The researchers spend a considerable amount of time discussing *knowledge of the social and cultural domains*. They purport that involvement in the performing arts creates a larger capacity to understand and appreciate differing cultures and walks of life. For example, a dance student stated that they have "...Been learning about different cultures and what they do...like with Red Indians...we found out about their beliefs, and if they were having trouble. They would do special dances...that's important 'cos you know not to hurt their feelings" (p. 100). Further,

these arts programs provided opportunities to explore drugs, bullying, racism and many social issues that may not be readily discussed in other subject areas.

In regards to critical and higher-order thinking, many students point to instances where the performing arts have assisted in improving these particular skills. A high school junior states, “[With] playing the piano, have to train the brain to be able to think...[gives example of different rhythms in each hand]...split your mind so you're not quite thinking of either but both of them at the same time (p. 110). Educators also perceived the performing arts to positively impact critical thinking skills. Several educators discuss the intentional development of autonomy and self-regulation. When contributing to a team, being able to adjust and recognize how one can contribute seems to be a desired skill.

Lastly, Harland et al. (2000) discuss communication and expressive skills. Students discussed that the arts improved their ability to speak confidently, speak publicly and has increased their vocabulary; they were able to use more advanced words in normal, day to day speech. Further, students indicated an ability to listen more critically and exercise this skill daily. For example, a student stated, “I think music comes into your career quite a lot, being able to listen to people, and it trains your ears as well. Altogether, I think it makes you more alert” (p. 124). This quote is representative of many comments from students and educators; there was a very clear connection to core subject areas and other aspects of life. Regarding expressive skills, students also discussed that performing arts participation provided an increased self-awareness and multiple strategies that may provide an outlet for how they may be feeling on any particular day. Students gravitated toward certain disciplines because it provided an outlet that did not involve *writing*, or an outlet that did not require *speaking*, etc. It allowed them to express themselves in a manner that was comfortable for them. Thus, an interesting finding surfaced

from Harland et al.'s (2000) study. It was found that each art form provides specific learnings and transferable skills. Students should be exposed to many different forms to receive a well-rounded arts education.

**Visual Art Education.** Researchers (Moga et al., 2000; Dejanette, 1997; Harland et al., 2000; Tishman et al., 1999; Wilhelm, 1995) have discovered that visual art can be used to develop the language and reading skills of students. Specifically, in a qualitative case study of two boys with a learning disability, Wilhelm (1995) employed nine-week drawing and illustration program that increased the boys' level of engagement in their reading and were able to effectively interpret and articulate learnings from their readings. The researchers purport that the visual arts provide a "metacognitive marking point" where students are able to *see* what they do and do not understand (p. 45). Similarly, Burger and Winner (2000), in a metaanalysis of 14 studies examining visual arts' impact on reading, they found that the utilization of visual art within reading instruction has a moderate, significant impact on students' reading readiness. The researchers continue on to explain that further research is needed to determine visual art's impact of reading standardized scores.

In a study of visual art's impact on students' thinking, Tishman et al. (1999) deploy a Visual Thinking Curriculum (VTC) to explore this connection. VTC utilizes art to engage students in conversation and the observation of art. In a quasi-experimental study with 336 4th and 5th grade students, utilizing surveys and interviews, half were engaged in the VTC and half were not. After eight sessions, the researchers found that 20% more students in the experimental group used evidential reasoning to answer researchers' questions. Sixty-nine percent of students in the control group used circular reasoning; "...Repeating their interpretation and citing it as a reason" (p. 27).

Further, the researchers found that through VTC, students were able to independently make transfers to other disciplines. For example, a student said, “There are other times where I have to look at something and figure out what is going on and figure the answer for example when the teacher is doing a math problem” (p. 65). The researchers demonstrates another example of how visual arts can positively impact students in school; VTC is a strategy to increase students’ ability to think critically and use evidence to support their claims. Evidential reasoning is an aspect of cognitive development, which dance education has also been shown to improve. This will be discussed next.

**Dance Education.** Researchers (Bonbright et al. 2013; Harland et al., 2000; Keinanen et al., 2000; Kim, 1998; Minton, 2003) have documented a dance education's impact on schooling. Keinänen et al. (2000) completed a large metaanalysis of dance education literature and found a connection to cognitive and social development. In this metaanalysis, the researchers reviewed seven studies and found mixed results. In their first analysis, the results’ effect sizes varied and when subjected to a t-test analysis, statistical significance did not emerge. Simply, while visual art has been shown to positively impact students’ reading readiness, this metaanalysis does not connect dance education to reading. In the researchers’ second metaanalysis, they sought to determine dance education’s connection to non-verbal reasoning and problem solving. When examining the second analysis, data looks promising. Effect sizes are statistically significant and show a direct connection to problem solving skills. Considering both analyses, the authors are comfortable declaring that dance education is not easily linked to students’ reading ability, but can be linked to spatial awareness and problem solving skills. Further, as mentioned above, the authors caution the reader when generalizing, as “...The two [studies] demonstrating a positive relationship were not designed to rule out alternative explanations” (304).

To further discuss dance education's connection to critical thinking, in a mixed methods, quasi-experimental study utilizing 78 seventh grade girls, Kim (1998) found a difference between traditional dance and creative dance courses. Students were randomly assigned to either the creative or traditional (control) dance course and received training for 8-weeks, completing 15 sessions. After the pre-test, intervention, post-test segments, researchers collected qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitatively, the researcher found that students enrolled in the creative dance course made statistically significant gains in creative thinking and critical thinking, when compared to the control group. Excitingly, both groups did make gains in critical thinking from pre-test to post-test. Qualitatively, the researcher found that students in the creative dance space experienced social benefits as well. Specifically, students expressed that they were frequently embarrassed during the intervention. During the post-test, they expressed an increase in confidence, being less embarrassed with body movement, expanded their way of thinking and become more creative. These attributes are valuable and necessary in other subject areas as well as in post-secondary life. Kim (1998) found that while creative dance, when compared to traditional dance, appears to be a stronger intervention to targeting thinking strategies and general confidence in students, dance education, in general, is shown to be impactful to students' success in school.

Dance education research has mixed results showing no effect, non-significant effects and significant effects, but does have an ability to impact students cognitively, developmentally and socially. Another aspect of the performing arts is drama education, and will be discussed next.

**Drama Education.** Regarding the Literature on drama education, researchers (DuPont, 1992; Fink, 1976; Harland et al., 2000; Kassab, 1984; Pellegrini, 1984; Podlozny, 2000;

Smilansky, 1968) have connected drama education to strong communication skills, critical thinking and empathy. In Fink's qualitative study of 36 students randomly assigned to one of three groups (12 students each), the researcher provided directed imaginative play training to one group, non-directed free play to a second group and changed nothing for the control group.

After a pre-test, intervention and post-test period, the researcher found a statistically significant impact of directed imaginative play on students' cognitive development. Specifically, there was an increase in social role conservation and a decrease in intellectual egocentrism. More plainly, through this directed imaginative play, students learned more about themselves, how they fit into the world and how that may relate to others. Improvement in these areas creates larger capacity for empathy and understanding. The researcher ends by noting that while there was an increase and decrease in cognitive development for both the non-directed free play and control groups, the only group that displayed consistent growth over time was the group that received directed imaginative play training.

In a qualitative study linked to Fink's (1976) study, Pellegrini (1984) sought to determine what method of storytelling would positively impact a student's critical thinking and ability to retell a story. Using 108 students, he randomly assigned them to three groups: discussion, drawing and dramatic play. After two opportunities to practice (before data was collected), the researcher found that students assigned to the dramatic play group were more likely to use clear language and utilize more details when retelling the assigned story. The author explains that, "Children in the drawing condition did not interact with others, verbally or socially, about the books they were read, so it is not surprising that their retellings were less endophoric than the retellings of other children" (p. 66). Further, findings demonstrate that drama education has the power to teach self-expression and clear communication, which are valuable traits and skills in a

plethora of environments. Generally, similar to visual art and dance education, research shows that drama education also has a positive impact on students' success in school.

### **Summary**

This section outlined performing arts research and its connection to students' success in school. We have seen that involvement in extracurricular activities have been found to positively impact standardized test scores, self-concept and post-secondary aspirations. Additionally, current research generally shows a positive trend with regards to involvement in the performing arts. While results are mixed and not directly tied to GPA or standardized test scores, performing arts show a clear connection to social and cognitive development, that in turn positively impact success in school.

### **Music and Schooling Success**

I now focus on music and its documented impact on the schooling experience of students. To again reference Broh (2002), while not the cornerstone of his research, Broh (2002) found a significant impact of music on the math and reading grades, and math standardized test scores of students. In fact, other than athletics, involvement in music was the only other extracurricular activity that presented consistent academic benefits. In this study, consistent academic benefits refer to increased talk with parents, increased talk with teachers, an improved relationship between the parent and the school, and growth in talk between students' parents and the parents of their friends.

In a quantitative study of 766 8th grade students that were classified as minority and poor, Lisella and Serwatka (1996) found that women enrolled in music activities reported a higher GPA than women not enrolled in music. In fact, the researchers evaluated the effect of extracurricular activities on academic success and music was one of the only four activities that



demonstrated a significant impact on academic performance. In the same study, the researchers found contradicting evidence. While music showed a significant impact for the women surveyed, there was not a significant impact for the men in the study. The men actually reported lower GPAs than men that did not participate in music activities. The researcher noted specifically that scores were lowest in science and social studies.

Contrary to the above findings, Demorest and Morrison (2000), utilizing national College Board data, demonstrate that the math and verbal SAT scores of students enrolled in the arts, on average, well exceed student scores who are not enrolled in these school programs. To disaggregate the data, the researchers compare the scores of music students with regard to how long they have been enrolled in school music. Looking at data, average SAT scores are fifty points higher for students enrolled in school music for four years, compared to those enrolled for only one year. It is important to note that the average scores for music students were higher than the arts as a whole, and substantially higher than those not enrolled in arts programs.

To move from music's impact on GPA and standardized testing, research also discusses music's impact on social aspects of schooling success. In a quantitative study of 5,269 students enrolled in two high schools, Hinds (2017) found a statistically significant relationship between students' enrollment in specialized music programs and increased sense of membership in school. More plainly, a student enrolled in a specialized high school music program is more likely to identify with schooling. Second, the researcher also found a statistically significant impact on enrollment in specialized music programs and students' self-efficacy. The researcher hypothesizes, references literature and references short interviews to propose that this increased sense of membership and self-efficacy is due to the persistence and confidence needed to learn

and play an instrument. Drawing upon research presented by Steele (1977) and Fordham (1988), these specialized programs can possibly prevent domain-disidentification.

Morrison (2001) supports Hinds's (2017) findings and discusses the unique culture of the music ensemble. The researcher introduces several advantages of the music ensemble: identity, transmission, social dimension, practical and personal boundaries, organizational hierarchy, traditional song, traditional performance practices, and the diaspora. The two aspects that relate most to the current literature are identity and diaspora. Morrison explains that students don't *take* music or *pass* the class, they join the music ensemble and it becomes a part of their identity. "Over time, this identity grows and strengthens until, by high school, a particular group of individuals is identified as being the band and not just being in the band" (p. 25). Regarding the diaspora, music ensembles often become woven into the fabric of one's identity so strongly that involvement in this particular activity lingers well beyond high school graduation. Upon exiting high school, students will often join a worldwide community of musicians and artists that are connected by their school music ensemble experience (Adderley et al., 2003; Hinds, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Morrison, 2001; Parker, 2014; Pineda, 2017). Considering the research of Fordham (1988) and Stewart (2008), the music ensemble is reflective of the fictive kinship system presented earlier in this chapter.

**Music, Schooling Success and Black Students.** Turning to research regarding the impact of music on Black students specifically, while research is limited, themes remain analogous to prior research. Additionally, identity, belonging and community persist as strong trends. In Hamann and Walker's (1993) quantitative study of 811 Black high school music students, 36% of students reported that they considered a music teacher to be a role model. More specifically, 508 (62%) of the students surveyed indicated that they were interested in enrolling

in post-secondary coursework. We see here that enrollment in school music has a strong connection to positive self-concept and increased aspirations in educational attainment.

In a 3-year, longitudinal quantitative study of 188 students at a Black high school, Phillips (1969) found an increase in the self-concept for girls, and a significant impact on the self-concepts of Black men. The researcher also notes that, for boys, there was a clear numerical increase in self-concept each year of the study. Reflecting on the theoretical framework, the Reciprocal-effects model claims that academic self-concept has been shown to positively impact subsequent academic achievement. Theoretically, Phillips's findings suggest that we can expect to also see an increase in academic performance. Interestingly, in contrast to prior research presented, the researcher found that while participation in athletics had an initial positive impact on Black men, over the three year period, a 50% decrease in self-concept was documented. Similar to academic self-concept, Marsh (1992) also found that participation in music instruction directly correlates to high educational aspirations and post-secondary enrollment of Black students. To support, Solórzano et al. (2013) found that school music directors positively impacted students' trajectory toward higher education. This is also reflective of Walton's (2015) research.

In his qualitative case study, Walton (2015) interviewed five Black men who participated in high school music. The researcher found that students felt safe at school and that the teachers presented opportunities for collaborative learning. One student explained that, "It was really interesting to see what people came up with, and to collaborate and to write your own music, or to choreograph your own dances, come with your own story..." (p. 123). Walton introduces the second theme of academic success and explains that academic success is possible due to the

safety and care cultivated at the school. Voelkl (2012) affirms Walton's claims expressing that a supportive climate encourages student engagement.

The Black men explained that enrollment in music greatly impacted their academic achievement, their motivation and school attendance. Specifically, an interviewee expressed that he loved to compose music and choreograph dance with his colleagues. His ability to craft a coherent and meaningful piece of music provided the structure necessary to write a strong paper in English class. This statement is reflective of much of the interview data; the Black men were able to make connections from music (and other areas of the arts) to their coursework within the core curriculum. Lastly, the fact that four out of five of the men in the study continued on to higher education supports Hamann and Walker's (1993) notions regarding music's connection to post-secondary aspirations.

A second quantitative study determining the impact of music on the academic success of Black men sampled achievement data from 112 Black men. Thomas (2011) analyzed the differences between Black men enrolled in music versus those not enrolled in music. Further, the researchers hoped to capture any intra-group differences between band, choral and orchestral participation. When comparing Black men enrolled in music to Black men not enrolled in music, there was a statistically significant difference on English and math standardized test scores. Thomas (2011) expressed that while students enrolled in instrumental music ensembles (band and orchestra) had higher English and math test scores, the differences were not statistically significant.

Aside from standardized test scores and self-concept, one study also discusses music's impact on behavioral outcomes. In a 2-phase, quantitative study of 28 elementary school Black boys with behavioral challenges, Michael and Dorothea (1973) found that general music

instruction improved students' on-task time commitment by 10 percent post-intervention. The researchers express that this rate of increase in on-task time is surprising seeing that the second phase of the study only lasted for one week. When capturing survey data from the Black boys' teachers, the teachers' perceptions of the young men had also positively shifted. In comparison, there was no shift in the control group's on-task commitment or teacher perception.

Music's impact on Black students is similar to the extant literature and is highly reflective of prior themes surfaced. Music has shown to positively impact social factors such as academic self-concept, motivation, engagement, classroom behavior, and on-taskness. Additionally, literature has also demonstrated a direct and statistically significant impact on GPA and standardized test scores.

### **Choral Music and Schooling Success**

While many studies have determined the impact of the performing arts on academic success and schooling experiences, and several have shown the positive influences of music on school success, only a few have focused specifically on the choral music ensemble. Considering once again the finding of Hamann and Walker (1993), of the 292 music teachers included in the study, 45% of the teachers who were identified as role models were choral directors.

Other researchers (Kennedy, 2002; Parker, 2004; Redding, 2011; Sweet, 2010) specifically describe the impact of the choral music ensemble. In a multi-site qualitative case study, Parker (2004) interviewed 49 choral music students in a three-wave interview process. Also interviewing three choral directors and completing 16 observations, the researcher identified the theme of "family." While in the general music literature, the terms *team* and *collaboration* were present (Adderley, Kennedy and Berz, 2003; Morrison, 2001), the choral literature shows that students develop families upon entering the choral classroom. One

interviewee stated, “Choir is a place to belong...” (p. 26). This family develops pride in the choral singers and encourages continued hard work. Similar to Morrison (2001), the researcher discusses the delicate identity development process that choral singers move through while a member of the ensemble.

Kennedy (2002) and Sweet (2010) both conduct qualitative studies to explore the experiences of men in choral music. Through the use of interviews and focus groups, they find that the choral music ensemble also provides social benefits as well. More specifically, Sweet (2010) explains that men interviewed were especially excited about Choralier Men: An ensemble that consists of only men. One member stated, “Others get to see how we’re challenged with these hard pieces as how we all work as a group.” Both researchers discuss that, through performance, they are able to connect, build relationships and give back to their audiences. This family built in choral music, in conjunction with performance opportunities provides confidence and boosts self-esteem. Similarly, as referenced previously, Phillips’s (1969) study found that music positively impacted the self-concept of students. Of the students surveyed, 45% of those students were choral students.

**Choral Music, Schooling Success and Black Men.** Within the current literature that explores choral music and schooling experiences, only one study is available that specifically examines Black men in choral music. In Johnson’s (2016) qualitative study, he interviewed 12 young Black men and found that the men perceived an impact on their academic success. First, the young men described that they were simply more aware of their academic progress. Additionally, the researcher notes that while there were not statistical tests involved, the young men’s GPAs did increase while enrolled in the choral music ensemble. Second, the young men mentioned that through participation in choral music, they were able to persevere through

hardship. A young man stated, “My educational journey has been tough at some points, but I’ve been pushing through and getting the grades” (p. 66). Lastly, the young men described that they were able to cultivate meaningful relationships. These skills gained in the choral music ensemble positively impacted their success through school.

Considering participation rates, in a quantitative study of students’ participation in extracurricular activities, Bucknavage and Worrell (2005) found that Black men participated more frequently in athletics related activities than they did in music activities. In fact, Black men participated in music activities 24.9% less than athletic activities. When considering choral music, they participated 62.5% less often than athletic activities. Lisella and Serwatka (1996) also substantiate this claim expressing the in their study, Black men participated the least in choral music activities.

### **Summary**

This literature review discussed the impacts on the identity development and school success of students, and Black men specifically. The research regarding music and choral music’s impact on school success was also presented. While the research on extracurricular involvement and its impact on school is focused heavily on athletics, it is accessible. Second, while research on the performing arts is mixed, it indicates a potentially positive impact. However, literature surveyed does not capture the experience of Black students, and Black men in particular. Third, within the performing arts, while findings show moderately positive trends, few studies address the choral music ensemble’s impact on students’ schooling experience. Further, research regarding young Black men, the choral music ensemble and positive identity development has not been explored. This study will add to the literature by discussing the factors that Black men perceive to positively impact their success in school.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study sought to contribute to the emerging literature on Black men and the relationship between perceptions of identity development and schooling success. The goal was to highlight and discuss the success of Black men in schools, through the lens of participation in the high school choral music ensemble. Specifically, this study sought to understand the perceptions and connections, if any, that Black men make between experiencing and participating in choral music and success in school. For this study, qualitative methods were utilized to uncover for 13 young Black men enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble how, if at all, they perceived that choral music influenced their success in school.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative method approach was most appropriate for this study. Qualitative methods are often used to gather detailed reflective and/or descriptive insights about an issue or topic. I made use of qualitative interviews to discuss with young Black men their connection to the choral environment, if any. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, qualitative research exposes the interpretations of experiences and discusses how one constructs their word to make meaning. Because my research questions discussed perceived impact, qualitative methods allowed for this meaning making to take place.

### **Site Rationale**

As research has shown, while the underachievement of Black men is a problem that exists on the national and state level, it persists on a local level as well. In some counties, like Los Angeles County, outcomes are below national and state averages (California Department of Education, 2015; California Department of Education, 2017b; California Department of



Education, 2017c). Additionally, available music education research, including a 2019 national, longitudinal study documents the low enrollment of Black men in choral music across this country (Bucknavage & Worrell, 2005; Demorest, 2000; Elpus & Abril, 2010; Lisella & Serwatka, 1996; Posner & Vandell, 1999; Sweet, 2010). Seeing the large enrollment of Black students in Los Angeles County Schools, the disparate outcomes of this population, and the sparse, low enrollment of Black men in choral music, Los Angeles County, as a whole, served as the site for this study. The major criterion that determined school eligibility was the school choral program. Schools with formal choral programs (scheduled within the school day), supported the goals for this study. For the purposes of this dissertation, all participants were enrolled in ensembles that were considered to be a curricular course.

### **Participant Selection and Recruitment**

I interviewed 13 young Black men who were enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble for *at least* one (1) academic year. The type of choral ensemble (Traditional choral, Gospel, World Music, Men's Choir, etc.) was not a stipulation for participation in this study. Additionally, to affirm all schooling experiences of young Black men, the current academic performance of the young men in this study was not a determining factor of participation. In short, a young man, who identified as Black, within a Los Angeles County high school, enrolled in a formal choral program was eligible.

To recruit the participants for this study, I crafted a participant recruitment letter (Appendix A) and utilized email communication and social media platforms to contact high school choral music educators. As a member of the following Facebook pages: the American Choral Directors Association, the California Choral Directors Association, the National Association for Music Education, and the California All-State Music Education Conference, I

reached out to my network and provided choral music educators with the participant recruitment letter. The choral music educators then provided their students with the recruitment letter. Young Black men and/or their parents/guardians who were interested in the study then contacted the researcher to schedule an interview. Demographically, all participants were young Black men enrolled in a Los Angeles County high school, but differed in four areas: their age, grade level, number of years enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble, and the type of ensemble in which they were enrolled (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*The Participants*

<b>Student Names (Pseudonyms)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number of Years Enrolled in Ensemble</b>	<b>Type of Choral Ensemble</b>
Adam	17	Junior	3	Mixed
Barker	18	Senior	1	Mixed
Bennett	17	Senior	1	Mixed
Dustin	16	Sophomore	2	Men's
Erick	17	Junior	2	Mixed
Haikeem	15	Sophomore	2	Mixed
Heartford	17	Junior	3	Mixed
Izzy	17	Senior	1	Mixed
Jason	16	Sophomore	2	Men's
Justin	15	Freshman	1	Men's
Leslie	16	Sophomore	2	Men's
Yasmir	18	Senior	4	Mixed
Zeke	18	Senior	1	Mixed

*Note.* “Mixed” means that there were young men and young women in the ensemble. “Men’s” means that there were only young men in the ensemble.

<sup>a</sup>All pseudonyms are names of living Black men choral directors.

**My Challenge Recruiting Thirteen Young Black Men.** As discussed above, researchers (Bucknavage & Worrell, 2005; Demorest, 2000; Elpus & Abril, 2010; Lisella & Serwatka, 1996; Posner & Vandell, 1999; Sweet, 2010) document the low enrollment of young Black men in choral music across this country. This is reflective of the enrollment of Black men in choral music in Los Angeles County. As I persisted through my recruitment efforts, that lasted five months, I secured the 13 participants from multiple schools within Los Angeles County. This small fact heightens the need to study this particular population within this particular environment.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection method utilized in this study was interviews (Appendix D). I intentionally asked the young Black men themselves, to uncover their own perceptions of success. Thirteen semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 45 minutes, were conducted in person or using video conferencing. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic,<sup>6</sup> the latter half of the interviews were held over video conferencing platforms. All participants were informed that they could ask to stop the recording at any time and/or could refuse to answer any interview questions. While the researcher made this clear, no participant asked to stop the recording nor did they refuse to answer a question.

In these interviews, questions were asked that sought to understand Black men's perceptions of schooling success and cultural experience in choir versus other academic coursework and other spaces in school. Specifically, I discussed concepts such as the young men's sense of belonging and self-concept. Additionally, kinship was discussed, how it is built

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<sup>6</sup> COVID19 was a global pandemic that entered the United States in February, 2020. Please see (<https://covid19.ca.gov>) for more information.

and kinship's impact on schooling success. Last, instructional strategies and the genre/style of music performed in the choir was discussed.

### **Data Analysis**

After each interview, smartphone and zoom audio recordings were uploaded to Rev.com, an online transcription service, to be transcribed. Written transcripts were then reviewed by the researcher to confirm accuracy in transcription. All interviewer comments that were captured *in the moment* during the interviews, were transferred to transcripts to ensure a holistic transcript was prepared for data analysis.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explains that "...As you collect your data it is important to code it according to whatever scheme is relevant to your study, and according to the theoretical framework that informs the study" (p. 200). Thus, once all interviews were completed, each transcript was analyzed individually. The researcher coded each transcript based on three predetermined categories, closely tied to the study's research questions. Those categories were *contributing factors related to choral music*, *challenges to success* and *overcoming challenges related to choral music*. Specifically, interviews were coded based on: 1) how young Black men perceived choral music to contribute to their success in school; 2) the challenges to success in school; and 3) how the young Black men perceived choral music to assist in overcoming those challenges to success in school.

Once all interviews were reviewed and coded for the above predetermined categories, each category was then analyzed independently for any critical themes within the category. Specifically, the researcher looked for mentions of self-concept/stereotype threat (self-esteem, self-awareness, motivation, effort-optimism, engagement, etc.), kinship/belonging (community, team, family, home, inter- and intra-group relations, etc.), teacher behaviors (mentorship,

discipline/accountability, encouragement, etc.), culture/identity affirmation (genre/style of music, composers and artists discussed, language/vernacular utilized, Black friends, etc.). Targeting the above themes and categories support in answering the study's research questions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceived factors that contribute to young Black men's schooling success. Specifically, this study sought to uncover the perceptions and connections, if any, that young Black men make between their participation in high school choral music and their success in school. These findings utilize the voices of 13 young Black men in Los Angeles County to convey their perceptions of the impact of the choral environment and its impact on schooling success.

This study revealed several factors that the young Black men shared had contributed to their schooling success. Five major findings surfaced based on the themes that emerged from interviews with the young men. These findings were strong community ties, the cultivation of aspirations for the future and positive teacher behaviors. Overwhelmingly, the young men revealed that choral music significantly fostered the development of prosocial behaviors. Additionally, the young men revealed challenges experienced in school, such as mental health challenges and encountering stereotypes and assumptions, and explained how the choral music environment supported them in overcoming those challenges.

### **Contributing Factors to Schooling Success**

#### **Community**

The participants reported that the community cultivated in the choral music classroom provides a safe haven for them. When analyzing the responses of the participants, each participant discussed the impact of community in the choral classroom on their schooling success (see Table 2). Specifically, they discussed connection with peers and the expression of authenticity.

**Table 2**

*Indications of Community*

<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Connection with Peers</b>	<b>Authenticity</b>
Adam	x	x
Barker	x	x
Bennett	x	
Dustin	x	
Erick	x	x
Haikeem	x	
Heartford	x	
Izzy	x	
Jason	x	
Justin	x	x
Leslie	x	
Yasmir	x	
Zeke	x	x

**Connection.** All thirteen young men discussed connecting with peers and how they perceived the experiences of communicating with one another and building relationships in choir to be important to their schooling success. Specifically, the ability to socialize, experiences with student leadership and teamwork were mentioned. Justin explained how he looked forward to peer-peer communication in choir and contrasted it with another class: “Choir is different because you’re able to talk in choir; you’re not in trouble if you’re singing and talking. Other subjects, you don’t really look forward to during the day...” Jason also discussed how he values the freedom to learn and grow through peer communication and collaboration:

In my choir class, I don’t know if this is true with other choir classes, but I feel if the students get more freedom to teach each other because at the start we have this thing where we go through our skills and it’s not teacher led but it’s student led and the

students go through their skills and they are like Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Do and then switch to Dorian or Lydian scale and something like that.

Heartford joined the conversation by providing an example of how this talk-time was created in a productive manner:

So in choir I feel like you have...I want to say you're a little bit more free because she'll [choral music educator] give us time to work in sections. Kind of like group work, but most of my teachers don't really do group work.

Similar to Justin and Jason, Heartford discussed how he perceived peer-to-peer collaboration to be a positive experience.

The ability for students to lead in the classroom, the ability to engage in conversation and multiple opportunities for collaboration increased the connection between young Black men and their peers. Yasmir, a senior, was able to reflect on his multi-year experience in choir and articulate the power of the group. He said:

A lot of classes, your grade is dependent on you or...the success of your class is dependent on yourselves. But with choral music, success comes from a group effort. If one person's off, not there, totally different sound, changes the context of everything, it's just...you won't complete it, and then you can do the same essay, or you could do the same homework assignment over and over again, and there might be some changes, but most likely the same. With choral music, the song, the meaning that it has, sometimes, most times just changes every single time.

**Bond.** This articulation of co-dependency was also reflected in the sentiments of many other young Black men. The word "bond" began to emerge. Haikem, who had only begun his



second year in choir, was already feeling a connection to the other members of the choir. He said:

Well, it's the same because sometimes I see the same people. It's like, I don't know, in our classes we just, like...VAPA [Visual and Performing Arts] is a very friendly school. So when you go to choir you build that family, that's the choir that you like go to senior year with...you build that wonderful bond.

Adam, expressed similar thoughts and explained that although he had gone to school with the same peers since elementary school, the choir experience was unique. Like Haikeem, he utilized the word bond as well:

We had the first year of having the chamber choir together. The kids that were in my choir I'd been going to school with since elementary school. But, because they always shifted us to the new school, because there was always a new school, it really made us feel, really bond and connect, because everybody was there for the same reason. Everybody would love the singing, and it really made it really easy for me to connect with everybody. It really made me feel really good.

The word *bond* was also used by Erick and Barker, and supports their ability to be successful outside of the music classroom. Erick explained how the cultivation of student leadership also permeates other non-music areas:

“Well our president Dina, she helped form study groups in classes if you need help. So for me it was math. So we would get in a group, we would do homework together. Sometimes we would ditch class, go to the choir room to work on work before we go back to class. Because it would be due that day.”

In this quote, Erick really shows the power of building relationships and collaboration in the choral classroom and how it drives toward success in school. Barker, also expressing thoughts on strong bonds and relationships in the choral classroom, explained how those bonds were able to shift his mindset and perspective:

It's helped me push through school because not only the teacher, but the people that were in the previous years and like my friends because I always used to, I don't know why, but I always used to hang out with upperclassmen...so I feel like they've helped me a lot and they've helped me see the world as it's not a playground. It's where you live, it's home.

Barker not only made connections with friends, they were able to help him see his environment a little differently which supported his ability to persist in school. These gentlemen provide a strong representation of what the young men said in regards to building connections and bonds in the choral classroom and how that supported their success in school.

The opportunities for socialization, collaboration and connection in the choral music classroom contributes to the strong community that is developed in this particular space. The students perceived that a strong community shifts mindsets, permeates the walls of the choral classroom and supports young Black men's ability to persist in school. One element that surfaced in conjunction with connection was authenticity.

**Authenticity.** Six of the young Black men discussed how the connection in the choral environment and their ability to "be themselves" supported their success in school. I asked Justin how connecting with others had contributed to his success and he first expressed experiencing a sense of freedom in choir. He said, "You can just express yourself freely. I also picked choir because I'm able to express myself through music...It's just fun. You can just be yourself." I

probed a little further and Justin continued by explaining he was able to escape judgement from peers:

I see the world differently, I'd say...it opened up the range of music that I like. It changed me as a person. You feel like you can just be yourself. It takes away from all of the judgment. It makes you just be yourself no matter what other people think.

Heartford supported Justin's perspective and explained that he perceived choir to be a safe space. He also used the word *myself*:

I'm always myself and choir is a safe space. We don't judge people inside of it. Even if you're singing a solo and your voice cracks, we won't laugh. We'll cheer you on, stuff like that. But I'm always myself inside of choir.

In his response, Heartford provided an example of how the connection cultivated in the choral space allows for mistakes to be made without judgement.

Barker, utilizing the phrase, *be myself*, as well, described how he shifted his behavior when entering the choral music classroom. He says, "Okay. So in chorus I will be myself a hundred percent, like very energetic and outgoing because I know that's a place I can do that..." Barker expressed that the connection is so powerful and unique that he perceives the choral space to be safe enough to display authenticity. Haikem, Zeke and Bennett also utilized similar language and expressed sentiments akin to the other participants.

The young Black men discussed how the connection developed in the choral music ensemble, specifically, created a community that allowed them to truly express their authentic selves. This freedom of expression, while not directly linked to schooling success by the young men, is important because it allows for the cultivation and development of prosocial behaviors.

The choral environment is shown to develop these prosocial behaviors in young Black men, which in turn, support their schooling success. This will be discussed next.

### Prosocial Behaviors

The participants reported that the choral music environment contributed to their schooling success through the development of prosocial behaviors. Specifically, 92% of them discussed confidence, motivation and positive emotional outlet. The type of prosocial behaviors shared are displayed in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

#### *Types of Prosocial Behaviors*

Student Names	Confidence	Motivation/ Persistence	Positive Emotional Outlet
Adam	x	x	x
Barker	x	x	x
Bennett	x		
Dustin	x		x
Erick	x	x	x
Haikem	x		x
Heartford	x	x	x
Izzy			x
Jason	x	x	
Justin	x		
Leslie		x	x
Yasmir		x	x
Zeke			

**Confidence.** Nine of the 13 young Black men pointed to how they developed confidence while enrolled in the choral music ensemble. Dustin explained how he has changed since joining the high school choir. Specifically, he talked about his interpersonal interactions: “I’m kind of

more extroverted than before...it's easier to talk to friends in choir." Dustin's perceived extroversion provides a nice foundation for the other young men's thoughts. Jason echoed Dustin's experience and explained that choir "...Helped me with all my singing and everything and got me to be better. And it broke me out of my shell and made me so I was able to sing out. That was a really nice moment." After expressing this idea of increased confidence, Jason went on to discuss how it has helped him succeed in school:

Choir has helped me to not be as nervous when it comes to doing things like presentations and all that stuff. I'm able to just go up there and say what I'm able to do. Especially from when I auditioned for that solo and Allstate, that taught me how to just not be so nervous in life. Just do what I'm doing and stick to the program. Also, it made me able to talk to people easier. When I started choir, I didn't know anybody.

Jason's self-confidence allowed him to step outside of his comfort zone and take additional risks that support his success in other school environments that he may not have taken without experiencing the choral music ensemble.

Adam agreed with Jason and discussed how his confidence was increased by participation in the choral music ensemble. He gave an example grounded in a performance opportunity:

I will say, definitely, I have always been a very shy person. But I feel way more comfortable singing in front of people than playing piano for people, because I was taught not to be afraid. I remember, I did...we had a cabaret night and I sang *Fly Me to the Moon*...and not to toot my own horn, but I was amazing and everybody loved it. It really, really did help me with my confidence and stage presence. It was crucial to my success. I would not be able to go on stage at all if I did not join choir..."

Adam revealed that this growth in confidence played a crucial role in his success in school.

Haikeem also discussed an increase in self-confidence. He first discussed how the choral music ensemble influenced him to be more expressive, and continued on to explain how it has helped him successfully navigate the schooling environment. He said, “When I wasn’t singing I would sit down and just be quiet and not talk to anyone or anything like that. When I came to VAPA and started singing in the choir I became more open and more expressive...” He continued:

At school I’m known for the happy person because whenever someone sees me they’re always like, that’s Haikeem. He’s always so happy and he’s always so cheerful and joyful about everything, which is true. People are always like, Oh that’s Haikeem, he’s so nice. People I don’t know come up to me and give me a random compliment and it just makes me feel good about myself. They’re always like you’re so confident. How do you be so confident? I’m like, ‘I’m just living this life.’

Haikeem attributed his growth in confidence to the choral environment and further showed how this confidence continues outside the choral classroom supporting his ability to build relationships and successfully navigate social interactions with ease.

Similar to Haikeem, Heartford discussed self-confidence and the building of relationships. The relationships differed slightly from Haikeem. He said:

Chorus honestly helped a lot. Chorus helped me come out of my shell a lot. I’ll go volunteer in school. I don’t think I’ve ever volunteered before until I was in choir in ninth grade year. It was my first time volunteering for the Abbot Kinney festival and now I do it like every year.

Heartford shows how participation in choir developed self-confidence, encouraging him to get involved in his schooling experience, which snowballed into participation in out of school

activities.

Erick, also indicating a growth in confidence due to participation in choir, provided a unique perspective and explained how this confidence is built. He said, “Performing in front of people, it gives you new confidence because most people would be scared in front of crowds. And to just be able to go out there and sing in front of people, that’s really cool.” His excitement in his ability to “...just go out there...” matches Jason’s thoughts from above. Erick, continued on and explained that this increased confidence supports his schooling success because,

I think it made me more mature and independent. And it made me more professional too.

Because [I’m] not just representing [myself,] [I’m] representing the Los Angeles County High School Choir (pseudonym). So it brings professionalism to everything I do.

Erick perceived that his increased confidence led to a maturity, independence and professionalism that contributed to his success in chorus and in school. Specifically, how he approaches multiple facets of his life.

Lastly, Barker, a senior who had just completed his first year in choir reflected on this new experience with much joy and expressed an increase in confidence as well. He said, “Choir makes my day. Like, I’ve been quiet for all four years [of high school] and its [choir] changed my life like phenomenally and I don’t know, I talk more now.” I probed a little further to better understand how this contributes to his success in school. While Barker had a little difficulty clearly articulating the connection, he expressed a clear increase in self-confidence through his ability to talk more often to friends and peers. And like Erick, Barker also expressed that his confidence was coupled with an increase in maturity.

The young men above explained that the choral music ensemble supported their ability to successfully navigate their schooling experience. Specifically, this confidence provides positive

interpersonal connections, risk taking, professionalism, and maturity. An additional prosocial behavior that is shown to be developed in the choral classroom is motivation and persistence.

**Motivation and Persistence.** Seven of the 13 young Black men attributed an increase in motivation and their ability to display persistence to their participation in the choral music ensemble. Adam, for several minutes, discussed his love of choir and the positive experiences he had as a member of the ensemble. He expressed that choir is a major source of motivation for his academic success and how it has supported him in managing his schedule, balancing his time and succeeding in multiple elements of school.

It also helped me with balancing my schedule. I'm not a sports person, but when I did do sports, it really helped me balance my schedule. I would have to prep for a sports, a wrestling match, and also prep for the choir performance, and also prep for the musical performance and the rehearsals. And all those things tied together really made me organize myself and be like, 'Okay. I've got to spend this much amount of time practicing my solfege. This much amount of time at practice. This much amount of time going over my lines.' It really helped me divvy up all the time that I had in the day.

Adam demonstrated that his participation in the choral music ensemble encouraged and motivated him to clearly organize his time and tasks so that he could succeed in multiple curricular and extracurricular areas.

Barker first discussed his success in the choral ensemble. He described how difficult it was to learn how to read music, but explained that he pushed through to gain that skill. He said, "So say I was reading sheet music. I didn't know how to read sheet music. So it's a very difficult thing. Like I learned music, I learned how to play piano." After discussing music specific success, he continued on and provided examples as to how the ability to persist in choir has



translated to other elements of his high school experience to make him successful in school. He ended by saying, “I can say I did all those things just from choir.” Yasmir added a unique point of view to the young men’s thoughts. He discussed how choir has supported him in learning and understanding the importance of persistence in school. He said:

For me (and I think mostly others as well) choir is the first time you get to be a part of something greater than yourself. Being in rehearsal for hours at a time and learning our individual parts to come together and create something beautiful taught me how to continuously work towards a goal that may not be in the near future. This also helped me learn and put into practice that I must do what I have to do now in order to do what I want to do later.

Yasmir showed how the persistence required of him in choir has instilled in him the necessary motivation to apply this concept to other elements to ensure his success in school.

Heartford also discussed the persistence required in choir and contributed a distinct viewpoint. He discussed this expectation by comparing his experience in choir to other subjects.

Choir is different from my subject class because I have to put in way work into choir than I do for math or something because it’s weird, I’ll probably struggle with math for maybe five minutes and then I’ll understand it. But if I get a new song and it’s in a different language, it’ll take me awhile to get it. Although when I say like a while, I’ll be like a week until I have it like halfway down or something.

After discussing how persistence is required of him in choir, he reflected further and said, “Honestly, chorus made me a harder worker because I used to be laid back and chill about school. But now I’m more like upfront.” In this context, when Heartford says *upfront*, he means that he’s more engaged in his schooling process. He explained that the persistence required of

him in choir increased his level of motivation in school. Leslie also compared and contrasted math and choir and discussed how he's developed persistence while enrolled in choir.

While many of the young men above have discussed multiple ways that they demonstrate motivation and/or persistence, sometimes this motivation is cultivated in simpler fashion. Erick expressed that choir, itself, has served as a motivator to attend and persist through school:

I was saying I don't think I would be as motivated to go to school if I didn't have choir.

Because if I didn't have choir I probably would've went right back to sports, and try it with any sport I could, so I'd get a scholarship for something.

While Erick could have found a way to be successful in school, he documented that choir is the foundation for his motivation. Erick's sentiments serve as a strong representative of many of the other young men's perceptions that choir played a significant motivating factor to attend and persist through and school. Aside from confidence and motivation and persistence, participants reported that the choral music ensemble contributed to the development of yet another prosocial behavior: the productive processing of emotions.

**Positive Emotional Outlet.** Nine of the 13 young Black men reported that the opportunity to positively process and express their emotions in the choral music ensemble supported their ability to succeed in school. Specifically, two young men discussed their challenges with anger. I asked what had changed since they began participating in choir. Barker said:

My attitude would be very different. My thought of life would be different. Everything would change for me. Like when I did football, I would be a more aggressive person now I am a passive person. So I feel like choir kind of mellows me down into where I can just be a normal state person.

Barker continued on to explain that choir is a release for him:

Oh, choir from the other classes, choir you can just have so much fun with it. Like you're singing, you can dance, there's nothing stopping you. It's basically, getting like, let's say your release...so it's just all that energy built up in you. You can just sing it out. It helps me get through the day.

Barker explained how the emotional outlet allows him to successfully complete the school day.

Izzy also discussed his anger and said that choir supported him,

...Because I have kind of an anger...I don't have really anger issues, but I have a temper from time to time, like I get irritated fast. And when I go into that class, I just leave happy and smiling and I'll be in a good mood so I'm not getting like irritated.

Izzy also explained that choir provides an opportunity to pause and process his emotions and allowed him to successfully navigate the remainder of the day.

Yasmir had a small epiphany during the interview and described his experience with emotions in the choral ensemble. He said: "I've just realized that the only time I was actually like filled with so much joy, just happiness, was when I was watching good choral musical, or when I was performing myself." I asked him how this supports his success in school and he continued by saying: "Oh, I think it opens you up to emotions...for me, it just makes me really happy. And, just really makes you feel more than you would in any other course...it makes my day better."

Yasmir confirmed Barker and Izzy's sentiments and explained that choir, an opportunity for *release*, provides the headspace that allows the young men to continue forward in their day.

Adam called choir his "third therapy" and described its impact on him. He said:

I mean, one thing I will say is that I feel like it's very necessary. Getting into choir is very necessary. It's just like therapy. I think everybody needs to have it. Because just like

therapy, there's always something that you can learn. Always something that you can improve yourself on. Choir's just like it. It was honestly my third therapy. It really helped me think about things and feel things and get over things.

Adam continued by providing several additional examples as to how his ability to express his emotions in choir supported his ability to continue the school day. He ended by saying, "If I was having a bad day and I just had choir, it would make it so much better. In all honesty."

Lastly, Leslie also discussed how the choral environment made the day better, but explained how it became a space to pause and *forget* about upcoming activities. He said:

It takes my mind off of all the stuff I have to do. So it's relaxing and it's more calming when I'm singing. So it's just helped me. If I have a lot of tests coming up and I'm in choir, I would usually forget. Or not forget that I have tests. I would just calm down about being stressed. I wouldn't be stressed about the tests that are coming up.

Leslie explained how choir serves a space to de-stress and allows him to calmly move on to future classes and tackle upcoming academic expectations.

These gentlemen provided a holistic summary of what is expressed by the nine young Black men. The positive emotional outlet provided by the choral music ensemble supported them to be successful in the school environment. They are able to connect to their emotions, soothe their anger/ irritation and receive strength to continue through the school day.

### **Summary**

The young Black men expressed that through their participation in the choral music ensemble, they developed three main prosocial behaviors. The development of self-confidence, the improvement of motivation and persistence and the positive expression of emotion surfaced as clear themes. Specifically, the prosocial behaviors that the young men surfaced were: positive

interpersonal connections, risk taking, increased professionalism, growth in maturity, persisting through coursework (music and non-music), improvement in time management, increased engagement in their learning process, the ability to connect to their emotions, and soothe anger and irritation. The young men explained that these specific skills and prosocial behaviors supported them academically and socially. An additional contributing factor of choral music ensemble, surfaced by the young men, is post-secondary aspirations. This will be discussed next.

**Future Aspirations**

Six of the 13 young Black men discussed how participating in choral music encouraged them to contemplate and create post-secondary plans (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Future Aspirations*

<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Future Aspirations</b>
Adam	
Barker	x
Bennett	
Dustin	x
Erick	x
Haikem	x
Heartford	
Izzy	
Jason	x
Justin	
Leslie	
Yasmir	x
Zeke	

When asked about the benefit of choir, Dustin listed a few specific benefits that he perceived contributed to his success in school. Among them was the idea of college. He explained that “She [the choral music educator] always says that colleges look at stuff like this, so if they’re looking for some diversity in a person, then choir is a good way to apply.” Through a conversation with his teacher, Dustin was able to rearticulate how choir could be a pathway to college. Barker first talked about how his perceptions of choir have changed over time. He said:

Before, when I wasn’t in high school, I was kind of iffy about music...It changed my life because it showed me the path that I would like to go to instead of going a different path. I want to study music and I want to be a music major.

While Barker discussed plans for college, he also expressed thoughts for a career connected to his anticipated college major. He said, “What I’d benefit in is getting a masters in music so I can possibly become a choir teacher or something maybe even better, who knows. It’s life.”

Similarly to Barker, Jason also expressed that choir provided an opportunity to see a career for the future and explained that he’s not sure what his future would have looked like without his participation in choir.

Haikeem provided an interesting perspective to the young men’s sentiments. While he was already considering some sort of career in music, he explained that choir helped him solidify those future goals. He said:

I have always wanted to be an artist, singing and writing music and performing it, maybe winning a Grammy, who knows. The choir has just pushed me one step further. I plan to keep singing in the future and pushing myself to that goal...

Additionally, Yasmir also added a different perspective regarding future aspirations. He discussed his past performance in school and explained the choir’s influence on his future

aspirations. He first discussed how his participation in choir sparked a change in him regarding his academic performance. He said:

Because my grades were pretty bad...all throughout. But after, I guess, my junior year, like I really decided like, Okay, I really want to go to college. And so, I really decided to...when I decided to go to college, my grades are going back up of course. And then of course I wanted to major in music. So it was like, 'Okay I really want to get my grades up, because I really want to get into this.' And I started to really just change, because I found something that really made a drive.

I probed further and asked Yasmir about the significance of choir in this particular instance.

Yasmir continued:

I probably wouldn't even be...I don't even know. Well for one, definitely wouldn't be majoring in music...and then, I probably would have gone to the military, maybe even, because I didn't really have a plan after college, at one point. Would have had even worse grades. And so yeah, I think that definitely would have changed.

Yasmir attributes his participation in choral music to the realization that academic performance is important for post-secondary readiness. Further, he then expressed that choir also encouraged him to consider his career plans for college and beyond. Erick also discussed a journey similar to that of Yasmir, and explained that he's changed because of choir. He said, "I think I've changed. I found something I'm really passionate about, which is music...I found something that I wanted to do..."

The young Black men expressed that their participation in the choral music ensemble encouraged them toward the development of college and career plans. More specifically, a few of the young men discussed how this realization resulted in a positive shift in their academic

performance as well. There is one stakeholder that the young men expressed significantly contributed to their development in the choral music ensemble: the choral music educator. The community and connection cultivated in this environment, the prosocial behaviors developed and the future aspirations clarified are all mediated by specific choral music educator behaviors.

**Choral Music Educator Behaviors**

All participants expressed that their CME played a role in their success. Specifically, the young men discussed that the CME’s engagement in the learning process and the positive relationship built between the student and their CME contributed to their success in school (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Choral Music Educator Behaviors*

<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Engagement in Learning Process</b>	<b>Positive Student-CME Relationship</b>
Adam	x	x
Barker		x
Bennett		x
Dustin		x
Erick	x	x
Haikeem		x
Heartford	x	
Izzy		x
Jason	x	
Justin	x	x
Leslie	x	
Yasmir		x
Zeke		x



**Engagement in Learning Process.** Six of the 13 young Black men shared that the CME's engagement in their learning processes supported their success in school. Justin compared his experience with his CME to other educators and described her classroom engagement.

Our [CMEs] are always super fun and bubbly and just really outgoing, rather than other teachers that are just kind of like, 'Do your work. Do this.' Choir teachers are always a little more flexible, fun and easy to learn with.

Justin described how he perceived the CME's flexibility supported the learning process. Adam, utilizing the word *engaged*, provided an example of his CME's engagement.

Our choir teacher was always very engaged and stuff. Like at Halloween concerts, the whole VAPA program would all dress up, and they would have their outfits and they would all dress up, and they [CMEs] would always keep the students involved and things.

Adam continued by explaining how this engagement is conducive to his success. He said that CMEs "would always ask for our points of view, not just what they wanted to do. It was just a lot more...you know, you felt very included and stuff like that." He continued:

He had his whole concert reflections. How do we think we improved in this concert versus our previous concert and so far in the year? When really, in choir, I actually answered them I felt full heartedly. Because I was like, 'Huh. This is what I actually improved on. And this is what I need to improve on.' And then I would strive to do so because I liked what I was doing.

Overall, Adam described how the CME's involvement of students in the learning process and facilitation of continuous reflection on learning and growth contributed to the success of his schooling experience.

Heartford also began by comparing the experience of choir to other classes. He explained

how the educators approach instruction differently. He said: “Inside of math class it’s more of let’s just get this job done. That way we can move on to the next thing.” He continued and explained how choir can be different.

I would also say that honestly our choir teacher listens to the students more than the regular teachers. Say if we don’t like a song dynamic, she’ll try to compromise with us. Whereas, say if the teaching style isn’t working for one of my teachers, they just won’t switch it. They won’t compromise, they’ll just keep teaching it the way that they’re teaching it.

Here, Heartford demonstrated how differentiating the instruction and being flexible to the needs of students, as Justin explained above, supports his ability to be successful.

Erick, expressed similar thoughts as the gentlemen above. He also began by comparing his CME and other educators. He said:

And then for the choir teacher, Mr. Smith [pseudonym], he’s more involved. He’s like, ‘Well this is what I want. I want to make this sound. This is why I want to make this sound.’ And he explains the meaning of the poems, give us meaning to make it more special.

I asked Erick why this mattered. He explained and transferred this skill to another subject area. He explained that this supports in “English class too...from what the songs actually mean. Like, how do I explain it? Songs are like poems. They have certain meanings.” Justin substantiates Heartford’s explanation above. Both young men express that CME’s ability to shift their instruction to the needs of the students contributed to their success. Additionally, Erick also provided a clear example as to how the CME’s instruction supported his ability to understand and succeed in school.

Leslie spoke most extensively regarding the CME's engagement in the learning process. He first talked about the collaborative instructional approach discussed by many of the young Black men. He said that, "Every morning, we get to play our own music, like the music we want to warm up. That part's fun. So all the different music that our teacher let us choose." Leslie then described his CME's mannerisms, which are reflective of the gentlemen's thoughts above. He said that his "...Choir teacher is the more loud and screams, yells more, but not mad. She's always encouraging us to do all this stuff. English teachers, they teach us what we need to learn and they stand up less." Leslie provided a few more examples of how his CME's style differs from other educators and ended by discussing her ability to break down concepts differently for different students. He said:

Yeah, she teaches like she'll...when you learn a song, she'll usually play the song before for people who they learn by listening. She'll fix our posture and always remind us to do this or this so that we're not slouching over while we sing or we're standing straight up. She connects it to math and biology and sports. For me, if I don't get something, she would explain it in a sports, basketball way, or like a baseball way

Leslie explained a variety of ways that the CME's engagement in the instructional process supported his ability to be successful in not only in the choral classroom, but also in school.

The young men explained that the CME's ability to differentiate instruction, support in transferring knowledge/skills to and from the choral classroom, the collaborative approach employed, and the independence entrusted in the choral singers improves the schooling success of young Black men. This specific instructional approach seems to build positive relationships between students and CMEs, further bolstering the success of young Black men in school. How these positive relationships are built will be discussed next.

**Positive Student-Choral Music Educator Relationship.** Ten of the 13 young Black men discussed the positive relationships developed between them and their CME and how it supported their success in school. Izzy explained that a large reason why he had a strong relationship with his CME is due to the respect that he received.

He [the CME] treated people with respect because some teachers, they don't like to give students respect. They feel like they should be the only one respected. The way they talk to people is different. Mr. Smith [pseudonym] talks to you like he gives you respect and then you give him respect and it's a two way street and you form a good relationship with him.

I asked Izzy how the relationship has supported him in school. He explained that at first he was hanging out with the wrong crowd, but his CME supported and encouraged him. He said:

I started hanging out with the wrong crowd, but I just realized, like I started thinking about actions before I did it, because at first I wasn't just thinking about the consequences of my actions, but then I started thinking like, what would happen if I did this? And what would happen if I did that? And he [his CME] kept me out of some situations from time [to time]...but then I pulled myself together and I was just like, 'All right, I'm going to just do this school thing and focus on that for right now.'

Izzy explained that the mutual respect between him and his CME strengthened their relationship. This strong relationship provided an opportunity for the CME to encourage Izzy to consider who he associates with and to focus more on his success in school.

Bennet gives a slightly different perspective regarding how he perceives his CME. He explained that "Mr. Smith is different from other teachers...He's more understanding for one. He could talk to you on a more personal level than other teachers can and he's a cool dude. He's a

cool dude all around.” Like Izzy, I asked Bennett if this relationship has supported him in school. He affirmed and provided an example of encouragement, similar to that of Izzy’s example.

Bennett said:

Yes, because Mr. Smith told me, ‘Even if you don’t like it...this is the only one time you have to do this.’ I think me not giving up when it was hard and I didn’t want to do work...he made me be able to push this far and be able to graduate.

Bennett explained that the understanding and motivation displayed by the CME encouraged him to not give up and pursue success in school.

Yasmir expressed great appreciation for his CME and gave tangible examples of how a positive relationship was developed. He said:

From my experience, I think they care more about the student itself. I know in my upper classes, teachers, they kind of cared, but at the same time, it’s like ‘I have my degree, this is my job. I don’t know, I don’t have to be here.’ But my choral teacher, I’ve just never seen someone do so much for a kid who wasn’t even their own, or they had just met.

They like help them with school, take the time to help them with subjects that are not even their own. Maybe give them rides. Help them with money or food or get jobs or talk with their families to support them. Just haven’t seen that support from any of the teachers besides my music teachers.

Yasmir points to several ways, socially and academically, that the positive relationship between him and his CME supported his schooling success. While how the choral music ensemble, generally, contributes to Yasmir’s post-secondary goals and future aspirations are discussed above, he speaks specifically about how the student-CME relationship supported him in succeeding in school. He said:

I feel like my choral teacher, Mr. Smith, because when I told my family I was going to do music, they're on board now and they loved it, but like at first it was like, 'Oh no you're not, if you do that, we're not going to help you.' It was just no support anywhere, except my choral teacher, from high school. So he catapulted me.

Yasmir shows that this positive relationship pushed him to succeed in school and to pursue his future goals. Erick discussed similar thoughts as Yasmir and gave examples of how the CME supported him in school. He said:

[Mr.] Smith, he asked about your grades. Like, 'How are you doing?' Like, 'How are you doing in this class? Do you need help in this class?' 'If you need help, you could use the choir room to study after school.' He'll pick you up before school, stuff like that to help you get better.

Erick explained that his CME helps with arriving on time to school and performing well academically in courses outside of the music classroom. Adam attested to the CME being supportive with academics and the management of his school schedule. He said, "He helped me with my time management. He made sure I was on top of my studies, despite just being my choir teacher..."

While the ten young Black men all spoke highly of their CME and perceived them to be a meaningful contributing force to their schooling success, a few young men struggled to make a clear connection. Justin provided non-judgement as a positive element of their relationship:

It's easier to talk about stuff, I guess. Yeah. I feel like she's less judgmental than any of the other teachers. Yeah. If she said that you can really talk to her about something, you can talk to her about something. There's no need to worry about what she thinks.

I asked Justin if this has supported his success in school and he said, "She was really patient with

me and talked me through things, and just pushed me to be a better person and just matured me, I guess.” Similarly, Barker discussed that he could trust his CME more than other educators.

“[Mr.] Smith is something unique, something I’ve never seen before. Like I trust [Mr.] Smith a hundred percent more than the rest of my teachers because he will stick up for you and be there for you.” I asked about the influence on his schooling success. He attributed the CME relationship to his success in school, but had difficulty connecting. “Oh, it impacted me a lot. Anything that [Mr.] Smith needs me to do, I will do for him. It’s just like a favor thing, it’s like, if he needs something, I will do it.”

Lastly, Zeke began by expressing great gratitude for his CME. He said:

Oh yeah, for sure. For sure, yeah. For sure. Mr. Smith for sure has a spot in my heart, it’s just different. It’s just different than having any other teacher, for sure. My chorus teacher is way more chiller and just way more fun and way more active way with me than all my other teachers. And wants to get to know me more and wants to talk to me more than all of my other teachers, that’s just how my chorus teacher was.

Zeke explained that the CME demonstrated an active pursuit in building a relationship with students. I further asked how the relationship influenced his success in school and he said, “Oh, I really haven’t thought through that like that. I don’t know how to explain it like that.” While Zeke could articulate strong, positive feelings and a devotion to his CME, he was unable to connect the direct impact to his schooling success.

### **Overcoming Challenges To Success**

When asking young Black men what challenges they encountered in school and how they managed to overcome those challenges, two areas of focus surfaced: mental health and judgements/assumptions. The salience of the intersection of young Black men’s race and gender

became especially prominent when discussing challenges in school, which contributed negatively to their ability to succeed in school. One participant discussed mental health and 10 participants disclosed challenges with judgements/assumptions. The participants that indicated each type of challenge are shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6**

*Overcoming Challenges to Success*

<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Mental Health</b>	<b>Judgements/ Assumptions</b>
Adam		<i>x</i>
Barker		x
Bennett		x
Dustin		
Erick		x
Haikeem		<i>x</i>
Heartford		
Izzy		x
Jason		x
Justin		<i>x</i>
Leslie	<i>x</i>	
Yasmir		<i>x</i>
Zeke		x

*Note.* An italicized “x” denotes that choral music was attributed to overcoming that challenge.

**Mental Health**

A challenge that surfaced when speaking to one particular young man was mental health. The participant spoke of mental health and how their participation in the choral music ensemble helped them overcome mental health challenges. First, Leslie described a mental health challenge that he has experienced: “It helped my anxiety and depression...I get very anxious and it makes me feel very uncomfortable. And I’ll just disengage.” When asked if choir supports with this challenge, he provides an example of how choir helped, and says that:



Choir really helped me with that, because being in a space of a bunch of kids, you kind of have to talk to them. Especially if you're having sectionals in a small practice room. You have to talk. It really helped me feel comfortable.

Leslie described how the small group work and engagement in the choral classroom serves to reduce his anxiety and increase his level of comfortability in school. While many young men reported experiencing “stress,” Leslie was the only participant to discuss mental health and explained how the choral music ensemble served to support his ability to navigate school more successfully.

### **Judgements/Assumptions**

Second, I will discuss the judgements and assumptions that young Black men encounter in school. I will begin first by discussing those young men that explain the role that the choral music ensemble played in overcoming this particular challenge. Justin began by discussing an encounter with a teacher and an assumption she made about him. He attributed this assumption to his race:

My teacher was...well, she was racist because she did call me...she kicked me out of her class because kids next to me were talking to me, and I truly wasn't talking, I was just sitting there listening to them. We weren't really doing anything, she wasn't really talking about curriculum or anything, we were just all sitting. So she asked our group to be quiet, they lowered their volume a little bit but they continued to talk. For some reason she thought it was me, I was the only black kid in the group, of course, so she kicked me out. She kicked me out, and I just decided to switch out of that period.

After discussing his experience with that particular teacher and clearly perceiving this interaction to be race based, he ended his comment by saying, “But the choir teacher...she is great.”

I asked Justin why he thought the teacher was great and how choir has helped. He drew a clear contrast between the teacher be referenced above and his choir teacher:

She's the best. She's just really all around the best. She loves all types of music and she opens us up to all types of different cultures and languages, and she's really patient with us, for sure. You can tell she wishes she was a kid again. She's just really a great teacher.

Justin discussed that the recognition of multiple cultures and languages in the choral music classroom and the patience displayed by the CME influenced his experience in this environment.

Adam also discussed race as a challenge in school. He said:

In LA City [pseudonym], it's a primarily, I'd say, Asian community. That's where I get my roots from. More so than what's typical around here. So it's very, very different. I find it hard a little bit to fit in. But it's all right. In academic classes, people can judge you based off of your ethnicity. Being [Black], people automatically assume, 'Oh. They're not very smart.'

I asked Adam about his experiences with judgement in choir. He talked about how the skill set required in choir helped to create a judgement free zone.

That's something [judgement] that doesn't necessarily happen in choir. Because if you have the talent, and the talent is present, the talent is there and they can't judge you. And honestly, they won't...as far as I'm concerned, the only thing in terms of vocal generalizations that they can generalize us [Black people] for is runs. Nothing negative. Because everything like soul and spiritual, those are all things that all ethnicities use and listen to and enjoy.

Further, I asked Adam how this judgement free zone is created in the choral classroom. He agreed with Justin and discussed how curriculum utilized created opportunities for exposure to

various cultures and for conversations to take place:

We had a multicultural choir performance, like concert...So we had a performance where it was a lot of people were performing songs from their cultures. There were people singing in Korean, Chinese, Hindi. That whole concert was not in English. It was a very...Being able to show that really made people feel accepted for who they are and what their ancestry was and stuff like that. I feel like that really is something that you can learn. Because being exposed to that diversity at a young age really does influence you later on...So I feel like being in something like this where you're exposed to it at a young age, it really does influence you later on in your life. Just for general lessons, it does teach you to be accepting.

Adam perceived that the ability to sing in multiple languages and exposure to diversity influences his peers positively and encourages them to be more accepting. This creates an environment conducive to navigating his environment successfully.

Haikeem discussed a too familiar narrative regarding race and schooling. He said: "I noticed this the other day that I'm the only Black guy in my choir, the only Black person in the whole class actually. It's just interesting." I asked Haikeem how the choral music ensemble might support in dealing with this realization. He said that "The teachers at VAPA do a really good job of explaining the history behind the music that we do...Specifically, for Black people it's like, I don't know...black people are fun." Haikeem explained that through the exploration of history and the affirmation of his race he is able to feel more comfortable.

While the gentlemen above discussed how race and judgments/assumptions have impacted their success and school and explained how their participation in the choral music ensemble supported in overcoming those challenges, some of the young could not articulate a

deliberate plan of action to overcome this particular challenge.

**Unsure How To Cope.** Yasmir also mentioned experiencing being *the only*, and discussed how it has impacted his experience by comparing choir and other courses. He said:

So for me, like taking honors and AP classes, definitely being the only a Black [man] in there, and then in choir, as well, the acapella group, of course, there were like almost 50 or 60 kids. So, there were more [Black] students, maybe about six or seven, including myself. When you got to the chamber choir, the much smaller group, about 22 singers, 24. I was always most of the times I was the only one...

I asked Yasmir how his participation in choir might have helped with this. He said that he's "...Thankful for when you get to spirituals or songs in that category, there is not really a sense of cultural appropriation, with most choirs. They definitely do stay true to the text and the message." Similarly to the other gentlemen, Yasmir perceived that performing diverse literature is connected to overcoming this race challenge. I asked specifically how *he* is able to overcome this challenge to successfully navigate school and he said:

Kind of just try not to think about it. It's very, I guess familiarity is comfortable. So I was lacking that sense, but besides that, there's nothing really you can do to be more comfortable about it. You just have to just deal with it and just try not to think about how you're the only one there.

We see how Yasmir is able to describe the choral music ensemble as attributing to his ability to navigate instances involving his race, but he did not have a codified strategy to process what he experienced. He just tries not to think about it. Similarly, Erick described instances of being the only, but was not able to navigate through this experience. When asked how he deals with it, he said that "I just get used to it after a while. So it's one of those things."

Many of the other young men also described experiencing stereotypes in school. Jason described an instance of friends requesting his permission to use the “N-word.” He said:

Okay. So for the whole thing, it’s kind of weird because they stereotype me as being a black kid and being the funny one and the crowd pleaser kind of person. But sometimes I just want to have my me time. And it’s calmed down and they are like, ‘Jason, tell a joke or something like that.’ It’s like ‘Jesus Christ.’ It’s like maybe they sometimes stereotype me and that kind of gets annoying...They’re like just like sometimes like say ‘Jason, dude, can I have the N-word pass,’ and I’m like, ‘What? Hold on a second!’

I asked Jason how he was able to deal with these interactions with his friends. He said:

Well my parents say breathing helps and I tried that, but that didn’t really help at all to be honest. So what really helped me, was just learning, I don’t know how I did it, but just learning how to move forward and not think about it as much. Just letting things slide off my shoulder because it’s so minuscule and whole scheme of life, how was one thing going to derail me from doing what I want to do? I can’t let that happen.

Like Yasmir, Jason was unable to articulate how he dealt with this particular challenge. He simply ignored it. Zeke also expressed dealing with stereotypes by just ignoring them. He first explained a scenario that occurred with a teacher. The teacher made an assumption about Zeke based on an experience the teacher had with a past student.

So I feel like teachers should honestly just try to get to know, just get to know us first because I feel like a lot of teachers already stereotype us...They already have that stereotype in their head to already treat you a certain way when they don’t even know you yet. So yeah, I can say that. Because that happened to me before a couple of years ago. A teacher was trying to say that I was like someone in their class that I didn’t even

know. And he was just stereotyping me saying, ‘Oh, you’re just like him. You’re just like him.’ And I didn’t even know him. It was only the first couple of weeks of school. So it was just things like that. I just feel like they should just try to get to know us before trying to stereotype us and trying to think that we’re all the same and we’re really not. We’re obviously all our individual people, and obviously do our own individual things. I just feel like what they should do.

I asked Zeke how he dealt with overcoming that challenge. He asked me to repeat my question and paused for a few seconds. He finally said, “I honestly just, I was trying to brush it off for a minute.” Lastly, Bennett described a similar interaction with a teacher. In order to deal with the interaction, he said he “Just took it.” He “...Just kept moving.”

When young Black men were asked about challenges they experienced in school, one young man discussed mental health and an overwhelming majority mentioned race as a challenge. While approximately half of those that mentioned race could somehow cite the choral music ensemble as space that supported their ability to overcome this challenge, some did not and others weren’t able to articulate any strategy for success.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from interviews with 13 young Black men regarding their experiences in the choral music ensemble. The data presented demonstrate promising implications for the advancement of the success of young Black men in schools. The participants discussed that the distinct experience in and culture of the choral music ensemble supported their success in school. Specifically, they revealed that the community cultivated in the choral classroom, the prosocial behaviors developed and specific choral music educator behaviors contributed to their schooling success. Additionally, the participants reported that the high school

choral music ensemble contributes to their future aspirations. While there were many contributing factors, the young Black men also explained that the choral music ensemble also helped them overcome challenges experienced in school. Specifically, the possibility to support mental health challenges emerged and the ability to deal with issues of race is promising.

To acknowledge contradicting evidence, two of the young men, Zeke and Izzy, would be considered outliers. Overall, they did not perceive the choral music ensemble to contribute to their success. When asked if the choral music ensemble has impacted him in any way, Izzy said: “Not in my every day to day life. I got a little better at singing, but I don’t really sing every day like that, but I got a little better at singing.” I probed a little further to understand how it may have influenced specific areas of his life. He said, “Nah, nothing too serious.”

Notwithstanding, while two of the young men did not speak extensively in regards to the impact of the choral music ensemble on their success in school, a large majority (11) of the young men discussed various elements of the choral music ensemble that they perceived to contribute to their success in school. The next chapter will discuss how the findings connect to existing literature and will provide recommendations based on the findings presented.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that contribute to the success of young Black men in schools. Specifically, this study sought to understand the perceived impact, if any, of young Black men's participation in high school choral music and their success in school. Through in-depth interviews, I gathered qualitative data that led to the development of key knowledge areas that the young men perceived as supporting their schooling success. This study contributes to the limited research on the choral music ensemble's influence on the success of young Black men in schools.

In this chapter, I will situate my research findings inside the theoretical framework introduced in chapter two. Specifically, I will discuss elements such as stereotype threat, kinship, belonging, teacher care, and a few documented aspects of the choral music ensemble. Additionally, I will discuss connections to past research, study limitations, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### **Significance of Key Findings**

The findings from this study support the current literature in numerous respects. When taking a holistic view of the findings, several areas of alignment emerge quite clearly: community, teacher behaviors, motivation and persistence, and future aspirations. Additionally, theoretical implications are also present. I will start by discussing self-concept.

### **Self-Concept**

Phillips (1969) and Shavelson et al. (1976) discuss that the three components that contribute to general self-concept are social, emotional and physical self-concept. The majority of participants in this study report that the choral music ensemble is a place for positive social



and emotional development. While there is not a case for causation, this study's findings support a strong argument that the choral music ensemble, attending to these specific elements of self, can contribute significantly to the development of a strong self-concept. Additionally, past researchers (Beglis & Sheikh, 1974; Kenny & McEachern, 2009) have purported that Black men are more likely to exhibit low self-concept in the schooling domain. Seeing that all Black men in this study articulated the importance of school and seemed to identify with school, findings suggest that researchers should further explore how the self-concept of young Black men is cultivated and developed within choral music

### **Community**

Community and the building of kinship was highly visible in this study's findings. Participants discussed several elements of how the community was created in the choral music classroom. Researchers (Hinds, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Morrison, 2001) discuss how when students leave these music experiences, the community that has been built allows them to join a diaspora; a worldwide family of musicians, who at one point, engaged in similar experiences. Hinds (2017) specifically states that, "The sense of membership in an increasingly wider community was a positive developmental component for high school students" (p. 67).

Additionally, Fordham (1988) and Stewart (2008) discuss the idea of the fictive kinship system that is cultivated by communities of color. This fictive kinship allows for those outside of the nuclear family to be welcomed into their familial unit. The young Black men reported terms and phrases such as family, bond, myself, "be me," etc. Stewart (2008) discussed how families participating in kinships "...Pooled resources to provide care for their members throughout the lifespan" (p. 164). As evidenced by the young men discussing instances of study groups, peer-

peer instruction, receiving/giving rides to school, etc., we see a quasi-kinship operating within the choral music classroom.

Second, participants discussed the positive impact of collaboration and student led activities in the choral music classroom. They reported that these instances supported in creating stronger community. This finding is supported by Walton (2015), who interviewed five Black men who participated in high school music. The researcher found that students enjoyed when teachers presented opportunities for collaborative learning. The researcher said, “Structuring school environments to create a sense of community and belonging among [Black men] is a critical component in strengthening school achievement for students in this population.” This study shows that the choral music ensemble has the ability to build this community and sense of belonging for young Black men.

**Belonging.** Many of the young Black men in this study were aware of their race and were actively exploring it in school. Simultaneously, the young men seemed to exhibit a positive self-concept: expressing confidence, articulating how others perceived them positively and taking positive risks in the choral classroom. A challenge that surfaced for most participants was dealing with judgements/assumptions in school. Several of the participants pointed to the choral music ensemble as a place that supported them in dealing with that particular challenge. Findings suggest that the choral music ensemble could be a place to deal with race and develop positive racial attitudes.

Considering the positive self-concept in choral music exhibited by the young men, this aligns with King & Price’s (1979) findings that show a positive relationship between racial attitudes and high self-concept. It is important to note that approximately 67% of the choral music educators whose students were interviewed in this study were not Black. However, a large

majority of the young Black men still perceived the choral ensemble to be a place of support in regards to dealing with issues of stereotypes, assumptions and race. This finding is reflective of Hamann and Walker (1993). Their research showed that in music ensembles, Black students, without Black choral directors, still perceived their directors to be strong role models and pillars in their journey to success.

**Stereotype Threat.** Stereotype Threat has been explained as the fear that one may confirm and/or reinforce a stereotype about a group in which the individual holds membership (Steele, 1997). Additional researchers (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 2016; Tatum, 2017) have uncovered how this phenomenon has impacted and continues to influence how young Black men navigate through school and their ability to succeed in school. As discussed above, the young men in this study perceived a strong connection to the choral music ensemble and seemed to identify with this particular domain. The idea of authenticity surfaced as a theme when discussing community. A few of the young men pointed to specific behaviors they were able to engage in, while in the choral music ensemble, that they could not engage in in other spaces. The choral music ensemble, specifically, supported these young men in behaving freely, which could reduce the risk of stereotype threat.

While the young men in this study did not utilize this language specifically, an additional layer to discuss is the idea of masculinity. Within this concept of stereotype threat, for Black men specifically, operating within the societal expectations of masculinity is an expectation to maintain clear membership within this group. In the choral music ensemble, the young men discussed the ability to dance and to move more freely, to be energetic and outgoing, they could make mistakes and laugh about those mistakes, and they could be loud. This particular space seemed to support and *welcome* a unique expression of masculinity that may have been

suppressed in other spaces in school. The young men being conscious of this fact so as to intentionally shift their behavior upon entering and when exiting the choral music ensemble speaks to the power of this particular experience to positively impact their success in school.

### **Motivation and Persistence**

This participants in this study discussed how the choral music ensemble contributed to their motivation and persistence in school. The community and connection created in the choral music classroom seemed to create a culture of motivation and persistence. This supports Druery's (2018) findings regarding the factors that drive persistence. In his study investing retention initiatives for young Black men, he explained that "According to the men, persistence was supported through the brotherhood, motivation, accountability, support, development, and exposure to resources encountered..." (p. 145).

From this increased motivation, the young men discussed a shift in mindset, a growth in maturity and an ability to push through challenges in and outside of the choral classroom. This finding is also reflective of current literature. Michael and Dorothea (1973) found that general music instruction improved students' on-task time commitment and Johnson (2016) found that young Black men mentioned that through participation in choral music, they were able to persevere through hardship. This study supports the notion that music has the ability to motivate and encourage students to successfully move through school.

### **Future Aspirations**

The young Black men in this study discussed that the choral music ensemble encouraged them toward future aspirations. Specifically, it built an interest in college and career goals. This supports several past studies. Marsh (1992) found that "Educational aspirations during high school are positively correlated with extracurricular participation" (p. 8). Hamann and Walker

(1993) reported that 62% of students surveyed and enrolled in high school music indicated that they were interested in enrolling in post-secondary coursework. Of those that indicated interest in attending college, seven percent expressed interest in a career in music. This is reflective of the current study. While many of the young men expressed interest in some sort of post-secondary educational or career goal, a few did express interest in majoring in music and/or entering the music business.

Additionally Barry, Taylor and Walls (1990) explored the performing arts' role in high school dropout prevention. Researchers reported that all students decided not to drop out of high school due to their involvement in the arts. Twenty-three percent reported a pathway toward future employment in the arts. Overarchingly, research on extracurricular involvement, the performing arts and music specifically has shown to influence post-secondary aspirations. When looking at Black men in this choral music environment, these findings hold true.

### **Choral Music Educator Behaviors**

As discussed in Chapter Four, a major stakeholder in the choral music classroom is the choral music educator (CME). The young Black men reported strong relationships with their CMEs and particularly enjoyed the CME's involvement in the learning process. This finding aligns with much past research. To first discuss engagement in the instructional process, as documented by the participants in this study, the young men first discussed the teacher's exuberance and energy in the classroom. In Redding's (2011) study examining the perception of teacher effectiveness by level of intensity,<sup>7</sup> he found that "...High school students seemed quite influenced by the delivery of the teacher. The high school students demonstrated high ratings for

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<sup>7</sup> Intensity is defined as "Sustained control of student/teacher interaction evidenced by efficient, accurate presentation and correction of the subject matter with enthusiastic affect and effective pacing" (p. 1).

this teaching segment suggesting that the high delivery was able to influence positive ratings...” (p. 64). More plainly, high teacher energy influenced high school students’ perception of teacher effectiveness. This study’s findings support those of Redding (2011) and affirm that high school students are heavily influenced by the level of teacher intensity and instructional engagement.

Participants in this study also discussed the love and genuine care displayed by their CME. This teacher care was highly reflective of Walton’s (2015) research regarding the performing arts and Black men. The researcher provides several examples of the teacher teaching life lessons and developing relationships beyond the performing arts classroom. Patrick and Ryan (2007) found that if a student perceives the teacher to care, we can strongly predict that they will perform well in school. Several young men explained that their CME would check on their grades in other courses, they would offer them rides to school, they were patient and practiced non-judgement.

This is reflective of Lynn et al. (2010) and Ransaw et al.’s (2019) research. They studied Black students specifically and discussed the reciprocal impact of student and teacher self-efficacy. Plainly, they documented the impact on student achievement when the teacher either believed they could positively impact students or believed that their efforts were null. Pilote (1994) also documents the perceived lack of care from teachers and administrators and its negative impact on students’ success. Considering the care demonstrated by CMEs in this study and their strong relationships with students, we might expect that students would engage and demonstrate success in school.

Lastly, Walker and Greene (2009) also discuss belonging and explained that if a student perceives that they are accepted into the particular environment, they are more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviors. A major finding of this study was that the young Black men perceived the

choral music ensemble to contribute to the development of prosocial behaviors. What is unique about the choral music environment, as documented by this study, is not only do students begin to exhibit prosocial environments, participants expressed a growth in those behaviors.

Additionally, when looking at choral music education literature, there is very little research on the specific types of prosocial behaviors that are developed and displayed in this environment.

This study will add to that literature.

### **Limitations of this Study**

One particular limitation of this study is in regards to participant transparency. As discussed in Chapter three, this qualitative study was conducted during the COVID-19 Pandemic. When social distancing orders were placed in effect, approximately half of the interviews conducted were completed by utilizing a voice or video recording software. The experience of an in-person interview contrasts from that of a video interview and could have impacted the ability to quickly build rapport with participants to obtain candid responses. Similarly, seeing that most participants were minors, for many of them, a parent/guardian was in close proximity during the interview. This may have impacted participant level of transparency.

Second, it is important to note that all young Black men interviewed were concurrently or had been enrolled in other extracurricular activities. While this study sought to understand the choral music ensemble's contribution to their success in school, it's also possible that their participation in other activities contributed, in some form or fashion, to their success in school. However, to ensure strong data, research and interview questions were closely tailored to understand the contributions of the choral music ensemble. And, all participants interviewed were currently enrolled in a high school choral music ensemble and had been for *at least* one (1) academic year.

Third, I, the researcher, am a former high school choral director and, as expressed on page one of this dissertation, have been positively and significantly impacted by my experience participating in the high school choral music ensemble. With that in mind, I am aware that reactivity is a threat to validity in qualitative research. Maxwell (2013) states that “While there are some things you can do to prevent the more undesirable consequences of this...trying to minimize your influence is not a meaningful goal for qualitative research” (p. 125). He encourages the researcher to use it productively. Further, he explains that “Identifying and analyzing discrepant data and negative cases is a key part of the logic of validity testing in qualitative research” (p. 127). Throughout this dissertation, in an effort to balance the reactivity, there are instances of negative test cases and the acknowledgement of nuance.

Last, seeing that I studied 13 young Black men in Los Angeles County, I cannot claim that this is generalizable to all young Black men. Seeing that perceptions of factors that contribute to the success of Black men were captured, these perceptions can vary across young men, schools and districts. Seeing that this was a qualitative study, and Maxwell (2013) explains that qualitative methods are most appropriate to understand process, data served to provide information regarding the particular context in which the data was collected. This will be a great opportunity for future researchers and practitioners to utilize Shadish et al.’s (1991) idea of naturalistic generalization. Rather than I, as a researcher overgeneralizing, readers can take the findings and contextualize them in a way that they feel most appropriately assists their current conditions. This will be a great opportunity for music educators to consider how they might shift their classroom climate, curriculum, instruction, and practices to best support the development of young Black men.



## **Recommendations for Practice**

Participants expressed that they perceived several benefits of participation in choral music and documented its impact on their schooling success. I will provide recommendations for districts, educational leaders and choral music educators.

### **Districts**

When deciding what programs to cut from school year to school year, I would urge district leaders and retain the funding for arts programs, and music specifically. Now, more than ever, as budgets for the 2020-2021 school year are being drafted and COVID-19 considerations are being made, it is important that we not only think about academic success of students. While ensuring students are college and career ready is paramount, let us also consider spaces in schools to promote engagement, connection, positive relationships, and attend to the socioemotional needs of students. In tandem, the academic and socioemotional development of students can be provided resources to grow into well-rounded students able to enter the post-secondary environment of their choice.

### **Educational Leaders**

Generally, the participants in this study have reported that the choral music ensemble has contributed positively to their schooling success. When crafting master schedules, educational leaders should consider how they might make the choral music ensemble more accessible to students and to young Black men specifically. This could potentially be a transformative space contributing positively to educational outcomes for this particular population.

### **Choral Music Educators**

As schools make decisions to reopen for the 2020-2021 school year and educators consider how they might modify their instruction for virtual or blended learning, choral music

educators have a unique feat to overcome: how might they create music as an ensemble in a time of social distancing? What is interesting about the participants in this study is that, only a few young men discussed the act of singing, specifically. Many of the young men discussed how community and bonding with colleagues supported their success, and how the relationship with their CME positively impacted their success in school, etc. While ensembles will not be able to fully sing together for the unforeseeable future, CMEs should consider how they might utilize the choral music ensemble as a tool for schooling success. Consider how choral music may be used less for the act of *singing* itself and more for the development of wholehearted musicians, students and people.

Second, choral music educators should take an active role in the development of identity for choral singers. While the young Black men discuss the transformative power of the choral music ensemble, there were several instances where young men spoke positively of an experience and/or relationship, but struggled to make the connection to their success in school. There is an opportunity to help choral singers see how they are changing and growing in real time, so as to utilize those newly acquired skills and behaviors to further influence their success in school.

Third, Walker and Greene (2009) discuss the concept of instrumentality: a students' ability to connect school learnings to short- and long-term academic and life goals. Helping young singers understand how instrumental the choral music ensemble can be in their development as singers, students and people, could further bolster programmatic retention and identification with the schooling environment (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Steele, 1977).

Fourth, some of the young men discussed how elements of the choral music ensemble supported their ability to navigate assumptions in school. This study also showed that young

Black men are ignoring these instances or “...Letting it fall off [their] shoulder” in order to deal with these challenges. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Tatum (2017) discuss Black students, at times, will take a raceless attitude or further, will *act White*, to deal with the challenges of stereotypes in school. To ensure that young Black do not stop engaging in racial exploration or begin to hide their race from friends, it is crucial that choral music educators actively engage in conversations around race. This can be done by programming repertoire of all kinds, having conversations about the text/poetry that is utilized in a particular octavo and discussing the history surrounding the time of composition.

**Beyond This Study.** As participants have discussed, the choral music ensemble, specifically, is a unique space that matters for the schooling success of young Black men. As we think about creating more spaces that are sensitive to the needs of young Black men, this study provides an opportunity for larger impact beyond the choral music ensemble. The participants in this study have reported that their CMEs developed strong community and created connections with students. Educational leaders should consider utilizing choral music educators to provide professional development opportunities for faculty; community building and positive relationships are elements that young Black men say support their success, socially and academically. Similarly, they should consider utilizing choral music educators to provide professional development for high intensity instruction and engagement in learning processes. As Redding (2011) stated, high intensity is a factor that high school students correlate to teacher effectiveness. These two elements (community and instructional engagement) could create greater engagement and success for young Black men in other spaces in school.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

As mentioned earlier, all participants of this study were concurrently, or at one point, enrolled in an additional extracurricular activity. Studying young Black men who are and have been exclusively enrolled in the high school choral music ensemble could provide a stronger case for the contributions of this particular space to the identity development of young Black men. Additionally, studying only young Black men who have been enrolled in the choral music ensemble for more than one year could provide an additional perspective to the current literature.

Studying adult Black men who participated in the choral music ensemble in high school would contribute to this literature. Retrospective reflections could provide an opportunity to compare how perceptions change over time, if at all. And, studying choral directors of young Black men to gain their perspective on how young Black men develop in this particular space and how the educators engage young Black men would be beneficial. And more specifically, studying Black choral directors of Black young men may add an additional layer to the research.

As highlighted in this chapter, within stereotype threat, the idea of masculinity was an undercurrent through some of the young men's answer. How masculinity is discussed, if at all, in the choral music ensemble and/or how young Black men deal with this element of their identity, in this particular space in school could be a wonderful addition to the research.

Lastly, to build upon this research study, understanding how, if at all, choral music educators support young Black men (and students in general) in making sense of their experience in choral music and how it applies to their success in school would be impactful. Comparing the perceptions of the students to the perceptions of the educators could help create an identity development curriculum or approach to support educators in taking an active role in such a crucial process as this.

## Summary

As Perry et al. (2003) states “...I would argue that there are extra social, emotional, cognitive, and political competencies required of [Black] youth, precisely because they are [Black], if they are able to commit themselves overtime to perform at high levels in school” (p. 4). For this reason, uncovering additional instructional strategies, pedagogical practices, layers of support, spaces of encouragement, etc. to support young Black men in schools is of utmost importance. Educational leaders and district leadership are often looked upon to enact change in schools. Through this study, I would posit that choral music educators have the power of transformative change in their classrooms. Understanding the factors that contribute to the schooling success of young Black men, how those factors are developed in the choral music classroom and how we can support young Black men in overcoming challenges, is how we can begin to create the change we hope to see.

While there are many sub populations that are under-researched and in need of support, I have unapologetically decided to study the advancement of young Black men in schools. It has been an absolute pleasure getting to know that 13 young men that I have presented to you. I am privileged to tell their stories.

...Race and racism have always played a significant role in the way life is experienced in the United States and that over the past several decades important progress has been made in race relations and racial justice. However, race remains relevant (Howard, 2010, p. 93).

**APPENDIX A**  
Participant Recruitment Letter

**I Sing Because I'm Happy: The Perceived Impact of Participation in Choral Music on the Identity Development of Black Men**

My name is Marshaun Hymon, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am conducting a research study about Black men in Choral Music programs. I am hoping to interview young Black men in a high school (grades 9-12) choral music ensemble. This study will provide educators and school leaders with invaluable information regarding how to best support Black men in schools.

As a volunteer in this study, I will ask for one, 45 minute audio recorded interview at your school, church, home, or any convenient location. Participation in this study will take a total of 60 minutes.

There are no potential risks or discomforts to participating in this study. Interviewees may benefit from the study as they will have the opportunity to reflect on their own success and challenges in school. They may also find satisfaction in knowing that sharing their experiences might help other Black men succeed in school.

Any information that I collect during the study that can identify participants will remain confidential. They can choose whether or not they want to be in this study, and they may withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time. Whatever decision they make, there will be no penalty to them, and no loss of benefits. They may refuse to answer any questions that they do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

If you would like to participate, or know anyone that would like to participate in this study, or have any questions/concerns about the research, please contact Marshaun Hymon

**P:** 386-237-8445

**E:** marshaunrhymon@gmail.com

Respectfully,  
Marshaun Hymon

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

#### **University of California, Los Angeles**

#### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

##### *I Sing Because I'm Happy: The Perceived Impact of Participation in Choral Music on the Identity Development of Black Men*

Marshaun Hymon, M.Ed., from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a young Black man in a choral music ensemble. Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary.

##### **Why is this study being done?**

This study will provide educators and leaders with invaluable information regarding how to best support Black men in schools.

##### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to complete one, 45 minute audio recorded interview at any convenient location.

##### **How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of 45 minutes. After the data has been collected, I will contact you individually to ensure I captured your thoughts correctly.

##### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

There are no potential risks or discomforts

##### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

You may benefit from the study as you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own success and challenges in school. You may also find satisfaction in knowing that sharing your experiences might help other Black men succeed in school.

##### **Will I be paid for participating?**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

##### **Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms (ex: student #1) and keeping data on a password protected laptop.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Study participants will be able to review, edit, and erase the tapes/recordings of their research participation if they wish to do so.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

The research team: If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact:

- Marshaun Hymon at 386-237-8445 or [marshaunrhymon@gmail.com](mailto:marshaunrhymon@gmail.com)
- Megan Franke at (310) 206-3511 or [mfranke@ucla.edu](mailto:mfranke@ucla.edu)
- UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP) if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researcher.

You may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: [participants@research.ucla.edu](mailto:participants@research.ucla.edu) or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant                      Date



**APPENDIX C**  
Parent Permission

**University of California, Los Angeles**

**PARENT PERMISSION FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

*I Sing Because I'm Happy: The Perceived Impact of Participation in Choral Music on the Identity Development of Black Men*

Marshaun Hymon, M.Ed., from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because they are a young Black man in a choral music ensemble. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

**Why is this study being done?**

This study will provide educators and leaders with invaluable information regarding how to best support Black men in schools.

**What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If your child volunteers to participate in this study, the researcher will ask them to complete one, 45 minute audio recorded interview at any convenient location.

**How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of 45 minutes. After the data has been collected, I will contact your child individually to ensure that I captured their thoughts correctly.

**Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

There are no potential risks or discomforts

**Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

They may benefit from the study as they will have the opportunity to reflect on your own success and challenges in school. They may also find satisfaction in knowing that sharing their experiences might help other Black men succeed in school.

**Will I be paid for participating?**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify them will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with their permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms (ex: student #1) and keeping data on a password protected laptop.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

They can choose whether or not they want to be in this study, and may withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time. Whatever decision they make, there will be no penalty to them, and no loss of benefits to which they were otherwise entitled. They may refuse to answer any questions that they do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Study participants will be able to review, edit, and erase the tapes/recordings of their research participation if they wish to do so.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

The research team: If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact:

- Marshaun Hymon at 386-237-8445 or [marshaunrhymon@gmail.com](mailto:marshaunrhymon@gmail.com)
- Megan Franke at (310) 206-3511 or [mfranke@ucla.edu](mailto:mfranke@ucla.edu)
- UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP) if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researcher.

You may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: [participants@research.ucla.edu](mailto:participants@research.ucla.edu) or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

**SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol

Good afternoon! Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview process. As you know, I am a UCLA doctoral candidate and I will be asking a few questions to better understand your experiences as a student in a high school choral music ensemble. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential, so please feel free to speak openly. You can also end the interview at any time. In order for me to accurately capture our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. Is that okay? If there are points during the interview where you would like the recorder off, please feel free to simply let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started? Let's begin.

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. Now I'm going to give you some note cards that say "your school," "your neighborhood," "your community," "your parents," "your family," "your friends." On the cards please write 1 or 2 words that you think of when you read each phrase.
3. Please describe how you define success in school.
4. In terms of school, is there anything or anyone significant that you would credit for getting you where you are today?
5. What were some of the reasons you chose to participate in choir?
6. In what ways is choir class similar to other subject areas?
7. In what ways is choir class different from other subject areas?
  - a. What are the differences in how the teachers teach?
  - b. What is different about the curriculum?
  - c. What is different about your peers?
8. What do you perceive to be the benefits of participating in choir?
9. Tell me about your ability to be *yourself* in school. In choir?
10. How have you changed, if at all, because of your participation in choir?
  - a. How, if at all, does choir help you to be a part of the rest of the school?
11. Would anything in your life be different if you weren't participating in choir?
  - a. Your experience in school?
  - b. At home?
  - c. The future?
12. What types of challenges have you encountered while in school? While in choir?
13. What strategies have you used to overcome challenges in school?
  - a. Where or from whom did you learn these strategies?
  - b. Were some strategies unsuccessful? Why do you think that was?
14. What do you think Black men need to succeed in school?
  - a. What elements of choir support the needs that you just mentioned?
  - b. What elements of choir do not support the needs that you just mentioned?
15. As we wrap up the interview what else would you like to say about your experience in school or choir?

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