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EXPLORING THE WAYS BLACK CHORAL CONDUCTORS NEGOTIATE RACISM AND NONCULTURALLY RELEVANT LEADERSHIP IN CHORAL MUSIC SPACES IN THE UNITED STATES

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EXPLORING THE WAYS BLACK CHORAL CONDUCTORS NEGOTIATE

RACISM AND NONCULTURALLY RELEVANT LEADERSHIP IN CHORAL

MUSIC SPACES IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Cordara Xavier Harper

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Cognate: Choral Conducting

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Susan; aunts Annabel, Pearl, Grace, and Ethel; my students; and the many mentors that have paved the way for myself and others. I also dedicate this dissertation to the music professor that always called me "doctor" during my undergraduate music program at North Carolina Central University, the late Prof. Arnold George.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to understand the ways Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. I sought to address the following research questions: (a) How do Black choral conductors experience racism in choral settings?; (b) How do Black choral conductors describe an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting?; and (c) How have their experiences influenced or informed their decisions as choral conductors today? Using critical race theory (CRT) and culturally relevant leadership learning model (CRLL) as the macro-level theoretical lenses and narrative inquiry as the methodology, I sought counternarratives to amplify the stories of Black choral conductors by engaging in conversations centered around racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings. I employed purposeful sampling to select three participants who identified as Black choral conductors working in K-12 and higher education settings. The three participants engaged in two ninety-minute, semi-structured interviews. Using thematic analysis techniques, I identified themes that illustrated patterns in the data. Findings reflect the following themes as they pertain to the research questions: (1) navigating racism through developed resilience and resistance, (2) navigating racism through familiarity with Eurocentric music-making practices, (3) culturally relevant–led choral music settings go beyond the surface level of knowing the people led, and (4) Black life experiences influence the use of voice and desire to liberate others. Findings suggest the importance of incorporating the culturally relevant leadership learning model in choral

conducting pedagogy. Results may help choral conductors, music educators, and music training environments to rethink, reimagine, and reconceptualize choral music leadership.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In May 2023, *Choral Journal*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Choral Directors Association, released an issue titled "Discounting Our Colleagues: Gender Inequity in the Choral Conducting Profession." The article was comprised of interviews with 12 leading female choral and orchestral conductors from the United States. It sought to create an awareness of the lack of progress within the choral conducting profession as it relates to nurturing equity, fair hiring practices, equal pay, and supportive work environment for women. I experienced many emotions as I read the article and reflected on my own professional experiences, particularly my observations of how the choral conducting profession has been at a standstill concerning equity over the last few decades. The idea of not feeling seen, heard, and valued resonated with me as a historically minoritized choral conductor. I often hear the importance of representation, and I even ask myself what my career would be like if I had the opportunity to study with someone who looks like me, a Black choral conductor. Unfortunately, I have not had the chance to do so in an academic setting. It was disappointing to learn about the experiences of Black female choral conductors who were qualified and competent for lead choral conducting jobs, yet their White male colleagues referred to them as "diversity hires" when speaking about their successes.

The experiences highlighted in the article show there is so much work to do in terms of implicit bias in the choral conducting profession. The article revealed a need for national organizations to create opportunities to discuss disparities and the need for

implicit bias training. These recommendations made in the *Choral Journal* article support the need for a study that establishes a space for Black choral conductors to feel seen, heard, and valued, initiating conversations about socially unjust experiences in choral settings. As a researcher, I aimed to provide a space where Black choral conductors could be heard and share stories to initiate social change in the choral music profession.

Over the past several years as a choral conductor, I often heard my colleagues, particularly Black choral conductors, share stories of their professional experiences in music. They spoke about the wonderful opportunities afforded them and issues that are still present for Black choral conductors. I would be remiss if I did not share that I too encountered wonderful and not-so-wonderful experiences in my professional experience as a choral conductor. Upon completing my undergraduate studies at two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), I sought to complete graduate studies at two Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). During some of these educational experiences, I was able to observe how choral conductors who lacked cultural competence had an adverse impact on choral student attrition and morale, particularly with students of color.

As an undergraduate music student at a HBCU, I had my first experiences with culturally relevant leadership in an ensemble setting. My voice teacher and choir director charged all of us to preserve the Negro Spiritual and to perform all music with intense focus, honor, and respect. Preserving the Negro Spiritual entails acknowledging the original name and not reducing the name to just a "spiritual." Additionally, preservation of the Negro Spiritual includes ensuring it is performed in a way that honors the life, legacy, and stories of Black resistance. My voice teacher also encouraged me to "give myself permission" to be both Black and excellent when all I previously heard was that

being Black equated to being bad. In the context of my one-on-one conversations with my choir director, to give oneself permission means to get out of one's own way to achieve success. Her words inspired me to want to become an agent of change and sparked an interest in engaging in conversations centered around the first-hand experiences of Black choral conductors. While continuing my education as a choral musician, I realized the power that choral conductors have on those under their care. I began my career as a choral conductor and music educator nearly eight years ago, and I now understand that choral conductors are responsible for providing immediate feedback, empathy, and establishing the culture they desire. Additionally, choral conductors have the power to choose repertoire. In most choral ensemble settings, I have experienced in way or another the sustaining of a centralized focus on Western music tradition.

As a middle-class Black choral conductor, music educator, and first-generation college student, I seek to understand and celebrate the wealth of diversities that others bring. I have championed diversity through my work as a restaurant general manager, elementary, middle, and high school music teacher, and collegiate instructor of music appreciation, music history, and choral music. For instance, I have ensured my students feel seen, heard, and valued through repertoire selection, classroom visual representation, and referencing things that are important to them that I obtained from conversations and surveys. I have had the responsibility to mentor and lead students, teachers, and colleagues in a variety of settings. In being self-reflexive, I understand the responsibility as Black scholar that I must represent my communities in a positive way. I conducted this research through the lens of critical race theory and the culturally relevant leadership learning model, using narrative inquiry as my methodology, to illuminate personal

experiences of individuals who identify as Black choral conductors in choral music spaces in the United States. Choral music spaces include K-12 classrooms, collegiate rehearsal halls, churches, and community settings. I applied the culturally relevant leadership learning model as a remedy to the unjust practices Black choral conductors experience in these settings.

Personal Context

I grew up in rural eastern North Carolina with my mother and eldest brother. I watched my mother work multiple jobs, and with the help of her four sisters, she successfully raised my brother and me. I have found myself in leadership situations since childhood. I recall assisting in chartering and serving as the president of the 4-H chapter at the public library in my hometown during my early teenage years. As a result, I visited a university, North Carolina State University, for the first time and met peers with whom I am still connected today. Additionally, during high school I worked two jobs, one as a shift manager at a pizza restaurant and another at a clothing store. I also served as editor-in-chief of the yearbook staff and in many other high school leadership positions. My classmates selected me as "most involved" my senior year. As a teenager, I developed into a self–taught musician and served as the pianist and vocalist at the church my family and I attended. Although I was very musical, the culture and climate of the choral program at my high school was predominantly White in demographics and repertoire, which did not feel welcoming or inclusive to me. As a result, I did not feel invited or encouraged to partake in music at the high school level. Years later, I returned to the high school I attended and served as a choral director for three years.

Starting as a McDonald's cashier, progressing to general manager there, and later working as a music educator and pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Memphis has been a realization of my dreams. As a first-generation college student, I had very little assistance to help me decide what I wanted to major in or what I wanted to do as a career. I began my educational journey in music at my local community college and believed at the time I had no choice but to switch educational paths away from music due to family and work obligations. During my time at McDonald's, a district manager shared with me that he decided not to become a teacher because of teacher pay. I knew I wanted to teach music, and at that moment, my thoughts shifted, and I realized I was not doing what I was called to do, which is giving back to society. I had to take the initiative to prioritize my dream and aspirations for myself and the lives I would impact in the future. Things appeared impossible because I already had a successful career and I would have to leave a decent paying job to start over. I obtained a Bachelor of Science in psychology and Master of Science in human resources training and development, and I planned to become a human resource consultant for McDonald's. I also had financial obligations. A change of career path became inevitable and necessary, so I sought counseling, contacted universities, and consulted with my friends and family. After five years, I left McDonald's and returned to school to complete my music studies. As a result, I learned the importance of perseverance, grit, and not accepting excuses or shortcuts.

During my undergraduate experience at an HBCU, I immediately felt the superiority of the music of the Western canon over all other genres, including music of the Black diaspora. Before my audition for the music program, two voice professors, one jazz-trained and one classical-trained, spent the summer providing me with vocal

coaching. I entered the music program with the ability to sing gospel and R&B music and the skills to play piano by ear. I took music classes years prior at the local community college; however, I needed more music-reading ability and had no idea what sight-singing was. I remember auditioning with "Non Lo Diró Col Labbro," an Italian aria by George Frideric Handel I learned at the community college, and the jazz standard "My Funny Valentine" by Richard Rodgers. The audition committee asked me to play something on the piano and read rhythms. The audition felt inviting, and I remember thinking I found a place where I could bring all of myself and my musicality, and both would be valued. Although I initially applied to the university intending to be a music educator, I was accepted into the music program as a jazz studies major with a concentration in voice and secondary emphasis in piano.

It was very evident as a student that there was an intense divide between the jazz voice area and the classical voice area. Some faculty and students noted that the jazz studies musicians did not have good diction or vowels and did not perform music of the Western canon correctly. The jazz students performed more freely over rhythms because of the role of improvisation in jazz. The jazz music performed felt more relevant to the entire student body. After a year of learning jazz, I reverted to my original plan and finished my degree in music education with experiences in jazz and Western art music. The faculty demanded excellence and wanted us to be competitive with individuals training at PWI. My experience observing the Black excellence exhibited by the music faculty at the HBCU helped me to be both musically and culturally competent.

Upon completing my bachelor's degree in music education, I taught for a few years and later pursued a master's degree in music education at the state's flagship PWI.

When I first entered the campus, I immediately noticed the beautiful buildings. Our music building resembled a large conservatory of music, and our libraries had the latest technology. I now had first-hand experience seeing how HBCUs needed more resources and were severely underfunded compared to PWIs. Nevertheless, I was grateful for my HBCU experience because it taught me how to work with little to no resources; and now that I had more resources, I felt I could be more successful during my graduate studies. I sat in classes with White colleagues who bragged about how easy they found the music teaching licensure exam. As a competitive individual, it inspired me to study; I took the exam and earned my public-school teaching license. At the time, there was only one Black professor on the faculty at the PWI I attended. Although my research interests aligned with her work, I did not have the opportunity to take a class with her. Later in my program, she met with me over coffee to get to know me and my interests. This experience was pivotal in my decision to pursue further music studies.

During my program, I had the opportunity to experience graduate-level voice, vocal pedagogy, and courses that helped me to grow as an overall musician. There was one professor in my program with whom my advisor told me not to take a class with. This woman was White, brilliant, very political, and was not afraid to stand up for social justice. As a curious scholar, I took her course, and she became the best thing to happen to me during my program. She taught me how to conduct musicological research and prepared me to present at national conferences. Closer to the end of my master's program, I was discouraged from pursuing doctoral studies despite my grade point average at 3.8. I was told that there were no jobs and that doctoral studies were highly competitive, but I could not help thinking that I was discouraged by my White advisor because I was an

educated Black man. I still did not feel seen, valued, or heard as a student. Furthermore, there had been many rumors that Black students experienced racism on campus from faculty, and my experiences confirmed those rumors.

After several years of teaching K-12 music in public schools and completing my licensure program in school administration, I realized I wanted to continue studying music in higher education. I finished my final year as a high school choral director, a position in which I helped lead a beginning teachers mentor program, wrote grants, and evaluated and deemed distinguished educator. I interviewed and was accepted for Ph.D. studies. I relocated out of state to pursue my goal of a doctorate in music. I was sad to leave the students I had the opportunity to inspire; however, I was relieved to leave my post because of the racial tensions within and surrounding the school. Moving to a new state and becoming a graduate assistant was one of the most challenging times of my life, but I thought it would be a breath of fresh air away from negative experiences. Little did I know I would quickly feel the challenges of losing my full-time wages, health insurance, and immediate family support, and I still encountered racism.

Additionally, I battled with severe allergies that often made it difficult to get out of bed. Sometimes I was critiqued in front of an ensemble and made to feel incompetent as a choral conductor. I was called "resistant" for the first time in my life. When I consider the word "resistant," I immediately connect it with the Black resistance that resulted in the abolishment of slavery and the civil rights movement. It is important to note that not all my encounters during my educational studies were bad; however, I highlight these negative occurrences to show that my personal experiences helped to

shape my interest in the experiences of Black choral conductors in the predominantly White-dominated field of music.

Today, I have a charge to keep. I currently serve as an Assistant Professor of Music Education at Grambling State University, where I conduct the University Choir and teach music education methods, applied voice, conducting, and music history. Even as a professor at an HBCU, at times I must begin conversations around culturally relevant teaching and encourage a people-first mindset as it relates to stakeholders. As a professor, I have once experienced pushback related to culturally relevant teaching and have even been accused of making racist comments. In all my experiences, I have noticed that people become very uncomfortable with conversations concerning race, racism, and inequitable practices. The silencing of historically-marginalized communities must end, and I am ready to begin telling our stories, even if the conversations cause some discomfort.

This specific research matters to me because it provides me, a researcher, with the opportunity to give voice to Black choral conductors. At times, when Black individuals speak about race-related barriers, White individuals often invalidate the role of race in the first-hand experiences of Black people (Benbow et al., 2022). Recently, I was inspired to continue this work while watching a television series titled *Bel-Air*. I heard the fictional character Aunt Vivian say, "If one does not disrupt the system, the system does not change." I have observed how issues of racism towards Black musicians go unaddressed daily. Conductors are positioned to teach from a culturally-sensitive and inclusive ideology; however, they are rarely prepared to do it well. In this study, I co-narrated and illuminated the experiences and understandings of Black choral musicians. I focused on

their involvement within traditional choral spaces and the presence or absence of nonculturally-relevant leadership in those spaces.

Racism

Historically, racism has been a critical American frame and has played a significant role in how White people perceive and act toward Black people (Coates, 2011). Racism has been described as the twin of ethnocentrism (Fredrickson, 2002). Racism is defined as a view that features a belief that one race is culturally or biologically lower to another and uses these beliefs to rationalize how the dominant race should perceive and treat the perceived inferior rank race in society (Coates, 2011). Racism is a system that occurs when racial groups' prejudice is supported by institutional and governmental authorities and control (DiAngelo, 2018). It is important to highlight that racism can be both intentional and unintentional, with the idea that to be "a racist" is intended; however, to be "racist" is unintentional (Cole, 2016). Before the mid-1400s, Europeans had little direct contact with sub-Saharan Africans. However, artistic and literary representations depicted images with dark skin or African features (Fredrickson, 2002). The birth of mass enslavement of Africans in the United States began in 1607 as the English colonized Jamestown Island in Virginia (Cole, 2016). West Africans did not identify as Black or Africans before the slave trade. Africans became readily available to purchase and were non-Christians, which quickly justified Europeans' enslavement of Black people. The symbolic associations of Blackness with evil and Whiteness with goodness and purity continued throughout history (Fredrickson, 2002). Enduring inhuman treatment, the Black enslaved people observed the ending of slavery during the American Civil War, beginning in 1861 under the leadership of President Abraham

Lincoln. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment banned slavery everywhere in the United States (Cole, 2016).

Racism is intertwined in social, political, and institutional systems in American society (McConnell, 2022). First, racism was described as negative dispositions regarding African Americans, later encompassing discrimination and prejudice concerning Black–White relations in the United States (Fredrickson, 2002). The Civil Rights Act of 1866 provided equal rights to all Americans born in the United States, and in 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution gave everyone the right to vote regardless of race (Cole, 2016). In the 1960s, the term "racism" became favored over "race prejudice" (Fredrickson, 2002). Segregation between Black and White people in the United States became endemic, with laws passed to enforce segregation in all public venues spanning from 1876 to 1965. Violence related to racism, such as burnings, whippings, lynchings, and threats, happened regularly throughout the South (Cole, 2016).

The term "racism" is often used to describe discrimination and violence directed towards a group for any reason (Fredrickson, 2002). Racial microaggressions produce destructive outcomes that include individuals experiencing feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and seclusion (Solorazon et al., 2000). Racism is expressed in social practices and institutional patterns, negatively impacting historically-minoritized communities (Fredrickson, 2002). Microaggressions and macroaggressions have a severe negative effect on the personal experiences of Black individuals (Solorzano et al., 2000). Numerous individuals that experience microaggressions and racism grieve alone or fault themselves for their lived experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Prolonged exposure to race-related stress because of exclusion and discrimination can impact psychological,

behavioral, and physiological health outcomes that can be debilitating to those on the receiving end (McConnell, 2022).

At times, victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence and often blame themselves for their experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theory provides conceptual tools for interrogating how race and racism have been embedded and maintained in the United States and amplifies counter-stories by Black and people of color (Sleeter, 2017). Covert racism varies by situation and is described as racism that is secret, disguised, or concealed (Coates, 2011). Black people are often framed negatively and must negotiate with adversaries by being better than their non-Black peers, particularly in academic work (Happel-Parkins & Esposito, 2022). In the United States, many more definite forms of racist ideology, such as those asserting the biogenic inferiority of Black people, have declined. However, many of these ideologies are embedded in institutional norms and practices, often excluding Black people at some level (Coates, 2011).

Theoretical Context

Serving as the macro theories and overall lens of the study, I employed critical race theory (CRT) and the culturally relevant leadership learning model (CRLL) to make meaning of the lived experiences among participants. In exploring research that focuses on the personal experiences of individuals who identify as Black choral conductors, it was vital to select a theoretical framework that deliberately amplified the voices and experiences of historically-marginalized communities. CRT challenges scholars to discover ways to identify the strengths and assets within Black students to combat negative racial biases (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Traditionally, critical race theorists

have explored lived experiences, viewpoints, beliefs, and the power of narratives to better understand how people see race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This research study follows the work of Ladson-Billings because of her focus on racism within educational settings.

Ladson-Billings asserts that the use of voice in stories, counterstories, art, and histories shows the false requisite and irony of much of today's civil rights policy (Ladson-Billings, 1999). CRT's debut in education in 1994 has now evolved into a critique and analysis of educational practice and research (Ladson-Billings, 2005). As previously mentioned, this study examines the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings's critical race theory in education, specifically on the tenets of racism as endemic and deeply ingrained in American life; and challenges the claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Neutrality is the idea of not supporting any side or objectivity, colorblindness refers to the idea of not seeing racial differences, and meritocracy deals with political power. CRT is an intellectual tool that can breakdown unjust structures and help to rebuild a more equitable and socially-just structure as it relates to power (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Storytelling offers the essential background for accepting, recognizing, and portraying lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Scholars engaging in what Ladson-Billings refers to as "voice" or "naming one's reality" utilize storytelling and counterstorytelling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In this research, I used counternarrative and counterstorytelling interchangeably to describe stories that challenge the dominant and societal norm narrative. Storytelling is an important component in critical race theory as stories emphasize key points in such as counterstorytelling which

contradicts dominant narratives (Ladson Billings, 1998). This study focused on CRT tenets, counterstorytelling, and racism as endemic or normal, specifically building on the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings. A key tenet of CRT is the counterstory and it intensifies the essential contextual outline (Ladson-Billings, 2003).

CRT originates with the idea that racism is typical and intertwined in all facets of American civilization (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT originates with the idea that racism is typical and intertwined in all facets of American civilization (Ladson-Billings, 1998). To utilize critical race theory in education means using a bold approach to expose racism and propose profound solutions for addressing it (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Researchers utilizing critical race theory seek to illuminate the many ways structural racism creates racial inequalities within political, social, and educational systems (Conway, 2022). CRT emerged in the 1970s and has been used to examines issues with racism that include systemic biases and color blindness, to name a few (Degand, 2022). CRT began as a legal studies concept; however, it has expanded to other fields and disciplines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For instance, CRT grew and broadened a literature base in sociology, law, ethnic studies, women's studies, and history (Solorazono et al., 2000). The framework is described in detail in Chapter 2.

The commitment that the culturally relevant leadership learning model has on the fight against various forms of oppression lends it well with the critical race theory in my research. CRLL requires an intentional departure from traditional training of leadership education to promote socially just leadership (Owen et al., 2022). CRLL requires an intentional deviation from traditional training of leadership education (Owen et al., 2022). Derived from Gloria Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy, CRLL seeks to

transform leadership programs to examine the benefits and drawbacks diversity produces and oblige said programs to contest old traditions of leadership and learning (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016). CRLL is a framework for challenging leadership preparation to scrutinize the advantages and pitfalls differences create (Jones et al., 2016). Given the fact that issues of racism are often ignored and not taken into consideration, I examined participants' experiences through the lens of CRT and CRLL.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Given the background of the problem, context, and theoretical orientation, the purpose of this narrative inquiry was to understand how Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. I examined the following research questions:

1. How do Black choral conductors experience racism in choral settings?

2. How do Black choral conductors describe an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting?

3. How have their experiences influenced or informed the decisions they make as choral conductors today?

In this study, I employed critical race theory (CRT) and the culturally relevant leadership learning model (CRLL) as *a priori* lenses to view participants' lived experiences related to negotiating racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings. Because of the nature of the research questions and inquiring into the ways Black choral conductors negotiate, these theoretical frameworks align with the study.

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Methodology

Methodology consists of the theoretical rationale and issues related to a given body of methods and the principles related to the research study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Narrative research does not lead to conclusions and certainty; uncertainty and tension guide the work (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Since theoretical perspectives directly impact methodology and CRT and CRLL focus on stories, personal experiences, and social justice, narrative inquiry served as the means of data collection in this study. Narrative inquiry is a tool to study human first-hand experiences and honor these experiences as a means of understanding (Clandinin, 2013). The method utilized in this study included semi-structured, open-ended interviews. I relied upon participants' narratives and personal experiences because of CRT's tenet counterstorytelling and the aim of CRLL to challenge norms of racism, sexism, religious oppression, and disadvantages to individual lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

Site Selection

The selected site for this study was the United States of America. The historical context of the United States and nature of the research questions worked well for the narrative inquiry design. Purposeful sampling was utilized to recruit Black choral conductor participants across the United States. I created and shared a recruitment flyer (See Appendix A) within a Facebook group called Black Choral Conductors Network to locate and select participants that met the selection criteria. discussing the research questions, participant criteria, and details about the narrative inquiry.

Significance of This Study

Choral conductor leadership directly impacts rehearsal design, repertoire, climate, and culture. It may be a factor in why many preservice music professionals major in or do not major in music (Freer, 2007). At times, choral ensemble members describe their memorable experiences with conductors, ranging from aspects of the choral rehearsal to how the choral conductor exhibits their leadership with the music and ensemble (Welch et al., 2020). Allen and Apfelstadt (1990) conducted research on choral conducting leadership through the lens of situational leadership theory (SLT), grounded in the idea that leaders should be able to apply the most effective style of leadership for all situations that arise. The researchers suggested that choral conductors should model the way, encourage the heart, enable others to act, inspire a shared vision, and challenge the process. Armstrong and Armstrong (1996) argued that conductors and music educators should have a transformational impact on the students they serve. Apfelstad (1997) argued that leadership issues such as power dynamics and influence must be addressed in the professional development of conductors. Jansson (2020) discussed four main themes in the mastery level of skills and competencies in choral conducting: control, empowerment, mentorship, and rehearsal management.

Research centering leadership and music education does exist; however, studies specifically examining these issues in the choral conducting profession are limited. Scholars have viewed the choral music educator role, competencies, education, and potential of leadership (Allen & Apfelstadt, 1990; Wis, 2007; Ludwa, 2012; Jansson & Balsnes, 2022). Allen & Apfelstadt (1990) argued that leadership was not a new concept in the field of choral conducting. They offered situational leadership theory as a practical

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model that allows choral conductors to apply their perceived most effective leadership style for any situation. Jasson & Balsnes (2022) conducted a phenomenological study that sought to unpack what conducting gestures were acknowledged and ignored by choral singers. The researchers found that most choral singers in the study believed that the conductor was the soul of the choir which relates more with being instead of doing. The findings suggested for choral conductors to increase their use of self-reflexivity as a means for continuous professional development. Additionally, they found that a perceived beautiful gesture requires all qualities of conductors such as passion and devotion to the ensemble.

Many choral professionals serve in higher education institutions which are often considered challenging places to thrive and work (Edwards, 2022). In this study, I sought to examine choral professionals of all levels of K-12 teaching. Therefore, a better understanding of the experiences of Black choral music students in university settings will assist reform efforts in higher education institutions, relating to choral music teacher preparation. Issues concerning race in Black music research have been discussed since the turn of the 20th century (Maultsby & Burnim, 2017). This study is vital to the body of literature because it can provide voice and create a space for stories centered around how Black choral conductors negotiate racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral music settings.

Additionally, this study could help secondary and postsecondary administrators hire, recruit, and train choral music leaders with culturally relevant leadership competencies. Also, it could serve as a tool to help evaluate effective choral music education leadership. This research may aid development of a better understanding of the

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experiences and need for culturally relevant leadership training. Additionally, it may reveal historical issues, provide an in-depth understanding of individuals' lives, and provide further insights into choral conductor preparation training and Western canonic thought. Finally, the CRLL model could help prepare conductors in choral conducting methods, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level.

Delimitations

Three self-identifying Black choral conductors participated in this narrative inquiry study. As part of the selection criteria, all the participants experienced what they have identified as racism in choral music settings in the United States. In this study I focused solely on the experiences of racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings. The sampling strategy employed sought into the lives of members within the Black choral conductor Facebook group. Therefore, although the findings are essential to understand, they are not representative of the experiences of all Black choral conductors in the United States. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method for data collection.

Definitions of Terms

I have incorporated various theoretical terminologies related to critical race theory (CRT) and culturally relevant leadership learning model CRLL). The purpose of this section is to provide brief definitions of terms utilized throughout this dissertation.

Color-blind racism: the idea that if one pretends not to see race, there will be no racism (DiAngelo, 2018).

Covert: hidden or not openly displayed (Coates, 2011).

CRT: abbreviation for critical race theory (Liu, 2022).

CRLL: abbreviation for culturally relevant leadership learning model (Guthrie et al., 2021).

Counterstory/Counternarrative: a story that opposes the dominant narrative (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019).

Endemic: a phenomenon that happens regularly or normally (Tichavakunda, 2019).

Ethnocentrism: the unconscious mindset that one's own cultural background is normal, and individuals from different cultures are in a lesser or other category (Fredrickson, 2002).

Legal storytelling: a technique by which individuals of different cultures can introduce their understandings into the discussions about how society should be governed (Bell, 1999).

Narrative: a story where an individual tells someone else about something that took place, a lived experience (Ross, 1989).

Racism: an ideology that features the belief that one race is culturally or biologically inferior to another and uses these beliefs to rationalize how the dominant race should perceive and treat the inferior race in society (Yosso, 2005).

Chapter Summary

In Chapter One, I provided an overview of the purpose of the study, personal context, underlining theories, research questions, and a brief outline of the research design. Additionally, I identified key terms, the rationale for both macro and micro theories, and delimitations. The remainder of the dissertation provides an in-depth exploration of the phenomena outlined in the introductory chapter. Chapter Two discusses the theory and literature that informed the study. Chapter Three details the

narrative inquiry methodology utilized in the study and methods for data analysis.

Additionally, it outlines trustworthiness, researcher subjectivity, positionality, and ethical

considerations in this research. Chapter Four presents the findings of the narrative

inquiry. Finally, Chapter Five details the conclusion, implications, and recommendations

for future studies.

CHAPTER II: THEORY AND LITERATURE

Introduction

In Chapter One, I contextualized this narrative inquiry study by highlighting the purpose, research questions, design, theories, and the context of racism, critical race theory, and the culturally relevant leadership learning model. The aim of this study to understand how Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. I begin this chapter by highlighting this study's macro- and mid-level theories. Both critical race theory (CRT) and culturally relevant leadership learning (CRLL) served as the overall lenses utilized in the study. Additionally, in this chapter I will describe the mid-level relevant to the study, culturally relevant teaching. Finally, I review literature related to the experiences of Black choral conductors. The relevant literature supports the study's rationale and illustrates the related depth of scholarship. The chapter is organized to begin with more extensive theories and transition to more specific concepts within the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a gap in the literature section and summary.

Macro-level Theory

Excellent qualitative research combines the practice of utilizing both practical applications and theory (Keegan, 2009). Researchers need to utilize theories that relate to the research questions or scope of the study to inform the research methods and methodologies (Balmer & Richards, 2022). Researchers who do not utilize a theoretical foundation sometimes become confused or lost in direction (Keegan, 2009). Macro-level theories explain phenomena or social institutions at a more substantial societal, social, cultural, or structural level. Mid-level theories inform researchers about how the

individual participant experiences things within a smaller or more minor context (Balmer & Richards, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within the context of this study, to amplify the voices of Black choral conductors, I utilized both critical race theory and culturally relevant leadership learning models in tandem to analyze and highlight concepts. Because the macro-level theory informs the overall research design, this section starts with a brief overview of critical race theory and its origins, key players, tenets related to this study, and what critical race theory looks like in music education. Next, I discuss the second macro-level theory, culturally relevant leadership learning. I briefly discuss its origins, key players, and themes related to the study and how culturally relevant leadership connects with music.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The media has devoted much attention to critical race theory (CRT). Individuals opposing CRT have questioned if it race further divides America or if it helps Americans examine the continuous racial inequalities that historically-minoritized individuals have experienced over time in the country (Liu, 2022). This debate could stem from systemic racism or from misunderstandings about what, specifically, CRT is. CRT is a tool that scholars can use to highlight and combat the ways race and racism impact social practices, structures, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Alan Freeman, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Cheryl Harris, and others contributed to developing CRT as a means of finding answers to questions such as why discrimination, subordination, and inequality exist. These scholars created an awareness that helped expose and clarify the structure and nature of racism in the United States (Farmer, 2020). The late Derrick Bell, a law professor at New York University, is

considered the intellectual father, founder, and originator of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Douglas, 2012). Bell's scholarship sometimes troubled colleagues and students as he would shift away from conventional legal thoughts with his students and towards topics centered like race and social justice (Minow, 2012). Critical race theory seeks to center the focus from the dominant culture to cultures of communities of color (Yosso, 2005).

Critical Race Theory Origin

Since its inception, scholars have applied critical race theory to other disciplines and CRT continues to evolve and address the realities and needs of those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed (Leung & López-McKnight, 2021). Critical race theory arose from the failure of the legal system to confront White supremacy in the construction of the law in the United States (Schmidt, 2018). Legal storytellers such as Derrick Bell and Patricia Williams drew upon long histories that included enslaved narratives to illuminate the conditions created by White plantation society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). *Legal storytelling* is a technique by which individuals of different cultures can introduce their understandings into the discussions about how society should be governed (Bell, 1999). CRT recognizes that altering a culture starts with the fundamental assessment of the culture (Bell, 1995). In addition, the past two years have resulted in state laws restricting how race may be discussed and taught in public schools, causing teachers to be uncertain about how to approach race in education (Salzman, 2022). The resulting attacks in the media on critical race theory are an intense attack on intellectualism and progress (Conway, 2022).

Critical race theory was birthed from civil rights protest and researchers insists that it can illuminate the many ways race and racism are endemic or normal to society (Tichavakunda, 2019). The civil rights movement propelled the birth of critical race theory. CRT deals with understanding how White supremacy has historically and presently oppressed Black people and people of color in the United States (Leung & López-McKnight, 2021). The civil rights movement yielded laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination in employment; the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, and Title IX of Education Amendment Acts of 1972; however, despite the hope that these laws would create a new equality in the United States, it was not the case (Farmer, 2020). CRT emerged as a selection of a variety of components and projects emphasizing specific engagements centering on race in tolerant and radical spaces (Crenshaw, 2011). Researchers utilize critical theory because of its longstanding ability to challenge and disrupt the status quo (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002).

The CRT movement is a collection of scholars and activists seeking to study and transform the relationships between power, racism, and race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The movement is a result of activist engagement with measurable products of liberal change and the development of a philosophical critique of dominant ideals relating to racial power (Crenshaw, 2011). CRT is interdisciplinary and scholars engaging in it use it in hope to work towards the elimination of racial oppression and ultimately ending all forms of oppression (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Additionally, CRT is an academic concept that scholars use to argue against the slow legal progress made in the 1960s civil rights movement, and acknowledges that race intersects with other identities, such as

class and ability (Liu, 2022). The model relies on intersectionality, a critique of liberalism, denial of neutrality in scholarship, storytelling, and counternarratives to speak against dominant discourse that will be further explained later in the chapter (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018). Researchers engaging in critical writing use counterstories to contest dominant narratives and viewpoints (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Additionally, critical race theory allows researchers to see how individuals understand frames such as privilege and oppression; and recognize that research is never neutral (Happel-Parkins & Esposito, 2022).

Tenets of CRT

CRT concurrently aims to challenge dominant cultural ideology, tradition, methods, tests, and inequitable practices that exclude communities of people of color (Solorazono et al., 2000). Delgado & Stefanic (2001) identified the following tenets of critical race theory:

1. Racism is ordinary or endemic;

2. The unique voice of color deals with storytelling and how people of color bring competence to discuss race and racism;

3. Interest convergence entails that because White elites and working-class people benefit from racism, there is little incentive to eliminate it;

4. Social construction believes that race and races are products of social ideas.

CRT Counterstories

A narrative is a story where an individual tells someone else about something that took place, a lived experience (Ross, 1989). Scholars engaging in CRT counterstories understand the importance of recognizing the experiential knowledge and voice of Black

people and people of color (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This tenet highlights the essence of viewing community members of color as a source of knowledge and acknowledges the power of stories to counter the narrative of the dominant group (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Storytelling offers insights into the particulars of lives lived at the border of society (Bell, 1999). Many storytellers assert that storytelling has a proper destructive function to the dominant group's narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Counterstories are a medium to expose and critique normalized dispositions that sustain racial stereotypes (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Storytelling and counterstories offer a space to amplify the voices of those otherwise absent and validate their experiential wisdom (Bhattacharya, 2017). CRT narratives and historical documents have illuminated minority student exclusion and ways many have had to compromise their racial identity to survive at predominantly White colleges and universities (Parker, 1998).

Narratives can aid in understanding individuals' experiences and exploration of the ways institutional policies, practices, and structures advance racial and ethnic inequalities. Counterstories expose systems as oppressive, enabling, marginalizing, and can create a better experience for historically-minoritized communities and others (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019). Decentering describes removing the dominant narrative from its position of power (Schmidt, 2018). Storytelling gives voice to the voiceless and reveals that others may have similar experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Counterstories can make the invisible visible and disrupt the beliefs of dominant ideologies (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019). Storytelling and narratives are potent for challenging mindsets (Delgado, 1989).

Scholars engaging in CRT can use counterstories to challenge the dominant understanding and seek opportunities to build consensus and community (Delgado, 1989). Utilizing counterstories is about understanding the potential of thick, rich data of daily lived experiences to add value to the academic insights offered by scholarly writing (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019). Storytelling in critical race theory seeks to recognize that peoples' construction of reality differs, and space is necessary to acknowledge the differences instead of the dominant group narrating truths concerning the marginalized group (Bhattacharya, 2017). Founding critical race theory scholar Derrick Bell expressed that one deprives their enemies of ammunition when the truth is revealed (Tyson, 2016). Storytelling and narratives through CRT allow racially marginalized students to have voice on predominantly White campuses (Parker, 1998). Interviews of storytellers from historically marginalized communities can provide a different perspective that can contribute to understanding phenomena that might not have been considered valuable at the time (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019).

CRT Racism as Ordinary

Two essential tenets of CRT are that racism is part and parcel of everyday lives, not an aberration, and that people of color have unique experiences that can speak to the reality that White people cannot (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Parker, 1998; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Discrimination occurs due to prejudice and encompasses exclusion, threats, and at times, violence (DiAngelo, 2018). Today, racial disparity between White people and people of color exists in all facets of life across the United States (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017)

Racism is interwoven into all aspects of society and is led by individuals with social power and privilege (DiAngelo, 2018). Racism happens intentionally and unintentionally. Racism happens when individuals and institutional practices are based on the assumption that one ethnic group is superior to all others (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Racism is an example of oppression where one racial group dominates over another (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Finally, institutional discrimination happens when systems are in place to exclude or deprive some from opportunities due to the institution operating normally (Nieto & Bode, 2012). For instance, Black people are likelier to be poor, receive poor treatment from stores, and pay more for goods than their White counterparts (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). The historical impact of institutionalized racism is long-standing and has visibly impacted Black people for centuries (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Racism and many other forms of discrimination have historically been found in education and are still not a thing of the past (Nieto & Bode, 2012). To be prejudiced is to hold a preconceived disposition about a person based solely on the social group that person is a member of (DiAngelo, 2018). Color-blind racism has become a far–reaching racial ideology and has historically kept Black people and other racial minorities at the bottom of many aspects of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). *Color-blind racism* is the idea that if one pretends not to see race, there will be no racism (DiAngelo, 2018). Well-meaning individuals unintentionally become discriminatory when silent, color-blind, and color-mute regarding race and racism (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Because racism is an institutional practice, one individual alone cannot be enough to counteract the negative biases resulting from racism in society (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

CRT in Music

Historically, Black legal and feminist scholars have challenged the general Western canon from within by amplifying the subjective experiences of historically marginalized people (Schmidt, 2018). In music, critical race theory as a framework aids music educators in seeing the Whiteness and Eurocentricity that lives and is often masked at all levels and aspects of school music education programs (Clauhs, 2021). Music education researchers has examined issues of power and representation in rendering research (Hess, 2018; Hanson & Roberts, 2023; Howard, 2022). Hanson and Roberts (2023) conducted a phenomenological study on the perspectives of Black students in music education. Findings suggested a need for better representation through diversity–orienting hiring practices in music education. Additionally, the study shed light on the need for more research on diversity and race issues in music education.

Within the field of choral conducting, VanWeelden (2004) sought to examine racially-stereotyped music and conductor race on perceptions of conductor and ensemble performances. Her results supported the idea that conductor race, regardless of evaluator gender or major, impacted conductor and ensemble performance ratings. Additionally, Wahl (2018) discussed her own narrative, highlighting how being Black has been one of the defining factors of her career as a choral conductor in Canada. She utilized CRT and film criticism as the lenses to examine her personal experiences. She sought to show how dominant and primarily White power structures in the choral community impacted her.

White privilege in music education often excludes historically-minoritized students through genres, repertoire, auditions, evaluations, and interviews (Clauhs, 2021). In music education, Hess (2019) article drew upon critical race theory with a strong emphasis on counterstorytelling. Hess challenges the frequency of resilience education

and encourages a pedagogy of oppression to allow young people to create counterstories through songwriting. Most Black music traditions originated in vernacular and religious traditions (Maultsby & Burnim , 2017). To teach music in a culturally-responsive manner, music educators should develop a mutual disposition that values all music, including music outside their expertise (Hamilton, 2021). Music often allows students to examine diverse cultures, and teachers should aim to sustain cultures through research. For instance, it is important that teachers provide accurate historical accounts, using counternarratives instead of reinforcing stereotypes and false narratives of the cultures represented in the classroom (Liu, 2022).

Howard (2022) conducted a phenomenological study to examine choral directors' experiences navigating Whiteness through their philosophies and practices related to repertoire. Additionally, Howard examined the ways the choral directors' lived experiences may or may not impacted the students they served. The findings included three themes: (1) the presence of dysconsious racism or racism that accepts White norms and privileges with episodes of White fragility; (2) the presence and absence of ethical caring; and (3) the development of critical consciousness along a spectrum based on the experiences. In article Holmes (2023) discussed experiences of growing up with gospel, hip-hop, and R&B music. He described how he began studying Western classical tradition in middle school. He highlighted how at times he is often questioned by White stakeholders about maintain "classical" programming in his post as a Black choral conductor in a predominantly White space (Saplan & Holmes, 2023). I highlight this article because the authors sought to create an awareness of the power of sharing their stories. The findings suggest that because intersectionality or interconnectedness of

identities occurs frequently in the lives of choral conductors, choral musicians should empathize with others.

Many believe that music transcends cultural boundaries; however, critical race theorists in music are concerned with how Western classical music came to dominate conservatories and university music programs around the world (Liu, 2022). The Western canon has historically been deemed superior to the aural and indigenous musical traditions of many cultural groups, including Black students (Hamilton, 2021). Recently, Ellis, Johnson, and Grillo (2023) sought to examine belongingness through a transcendental phenomenological study among African American male students participating in a predominantly African American choral programs. The aim of the study was to support African American males in social and academic settings. The findings in the study supported that choir participation could positively impact successful academic achievement.

Many higher learning institutions have silenced Western art music's histories and their participation in sustaining racial segregation in the 19th and 20th centuries (Thurman, 2021). Recently, music educators have become aware of issues of social justice and historical music education practices such as problematic music and practices that have historically excluded students. Researchers have cited music literacy and history exams as a means of excluding students (Vaugeois, 2007). Today, many teacher education programs disclose a direction toward social justice and prepare preservice educators to be culturally relevant (Sleeter, 2017).

Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning Model

In environments such as music ensemble settings, individuals engage in collaborative ways, providing opportunities to engage affectively and cognitively with leadership (McCarron et al., 2022). The culturally relevant leadership learning model is grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy and campus climate, accepting that leadership is a social construct and means something different to everyone (Jones et al., 2016). For individuals to engage in leadership, they must consider their identity, capacity, and efficacy as leaders (Guthrie et al., 2021). CRLL is a framework for challenging leadership preparation to scrutinize the benefits and pitfalls differences create (Jones et al., 2016). Kathy Guthrie, Tamara Bertrand Jones, and Cameron Beatty are leading scholars in CRLL. Cultural competence requires a deeper understanding and commitment to those around us (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021). CRLL aims to create an awareness among leaders to challenge archaic or old leadership and learning, consider new ways to educate learners, and develop leaders capable of challenging inequity to create social change (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

The CRLL model centers on the diverse perspectives of what leadership students bring, whether related to race, ethnicity, social class, ability, social position, or combinations of factors such as religion, employment, or preferred learning modality (Guthrie et al., 2021). Scholars engaging in CRLL confront leadership education norms and assume critical self-reflexive teaching and learning within the sociopolitical contexts of the learning environment (Mahoney, 2017). Scholars operate CRLL through reflexivity and implementing conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Prior studies have used the model as means of reflecting on individual identity, centering student leaders'

identity, social class in higher education, and how individuals develop leadership learning (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

Grounded in Ladson-Billings' work on culturally relevant pedagogy, Scholars engaging in CRLL seek to transform leadership programs; and to examine the benefits, the drawbacks diversity produces, and encourage said programs to challenge old traditions of leadership and learning (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016). Leadership learning began in the United States at the start of the 20th century due to the United States funding research to gain an advantage during World War II (Guthrie et al., 2021).

The CRLL model is centered around identity, capacity, and efficacy, fused with the institution's culture and climate (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021; Guthrie et al., 2017). The model shows the power of language and institutional climate to influence students' capacity, identity, and efficacy in producing social change (Jones et al., 2016). Identity is how individuals negotiate with society; capacity is the incorporation of leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which provide the ability to engage in the leadership process; and efficacy is how one can produce a desired result (Beatty & Guthrie. 2021). Additionally, CRLL examines previous leadership ideas to engage students in developing knowledge, skills, and values to create socially-just situations (Guthrie et al., 2017). Researchers engaging in culturally relevant leadership intentionally study and tell stories (Mahoney, 2017). As a result of an intentional culturally relevant learning environment, more individuals feel welcome and seen and thus will engage in the environment (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

Culturally relevant leadership competence requires individuals to look within themselves and be socially-just to make situations better for all (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

Leadership is learned through training, observation, engagement, and metacognition (Guthrie et al., 2021). Leadership, like power and race, is a social construct, meaning it can change over time (Guthrie et al., 2021). The CRLL model requires an intentional deviation from traditional training in leadership education (Owen et al., 2022). Additionally, the CRLL model recognizes the dynamics of oppression and power related to leadership and how they impact the willingness to create social change (Guthrie et al., 2021).

As it relates to institutions, CRLL considers five critical dimensions, which include the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, compositional diversity, psychological climate, behavioral climate, and organizational and structural components (Guthrie et al., 2021). Scholars utilizing CRLL examine the history of the institutions' environmental climate by researching practices of inclusion and exclusion and exploring the historical compositional diversity, like racial and socioeconomic diversities. Through CRLL's critical dimension of the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, leaders intentionally examine closely the narratives and systems that have silenced and excluded diverse voices from leadership to change these systems (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021). Leaders aware of their power to influence others can (un)model undesirable behaviors and adopt a way to amplify marginalized voices (Maia, 2022). In relation to leadership settings, a follower is an individual who engages in activities with and under the direction of the leaders and attempts to aid in meeting objectives along with the leader (Guthrie et al., 2021).

Mid-level Theory

As mentioned previously, a macro-level theory is a crucial lens used to explain phenomena or social institutions at a more considerable level. Mid-level theories provide understanding within a smaller context (Balmer & Richards, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given the context of this study and my desire to amplify Black choral conductors' voices, culturally relevant teaching seemed most appropriate for illuminating the relationships between music, culture, and people within the scope of the choral music profession. Before discussing what culturally–relevant pedagogy or teaching looks like in a music context, I discuss its definition, origins, key players, and how choral music educators are now engaging with culturally–relevant teaching.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

The awareness of cultural diversity, culturally relevant curricula, classroom environments conducive to learning, and effective cross-cultural communication are foundational for leading individuals to employ culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). Drs. Gloria Ladson-Billings, Connie McKoy, Julia Shaw, and Geneva Gay are some leading scholars in culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining teaching. Ladson-Billings shared how teachers must instruct students in a way that students can see how what they are learning applies to the everyday challenges they face; and discusssed culturally relevant teaching has three components: student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Culturally relevant teaching can improve a sense of identity, engagement, attendance, and academic achievement in students of color (Will, 2022). Culturally relevant teaching is the pedagogy of opposition, meaning that teachers hold a disposition that students can succeed, encourage higher-order thinking that may oppose

dominant narratives, and see students' culture as an asset and utilize their unique differences as a means for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

To utilize culturally relevant teaching means to hold a disposition that students are diverse in how they learn. Culturally relevant teaching involves the ability to uphold diverse cultural characteristics, ideas, and lived experiences of all stakeholders, connecting them with learning opportunities and critical thinking (McKoy & Lind, 2023). Culture is ingrained in any teaching and learning situation; consequently, diverse instructional strategies are necessary (Gay, 2002). Culturally relevant teaching includes consciousness and critical analysis of how diverse persons and groups are seen in popular culture and society (Gay, 2002). For instance, scholars engaging in culturally relevant teaching are aware of the ways different cultures are depicted in the media and they seek opportunities to sustain and represent the diversity of cultures in a positive way.

Culturally relevant teaching utilizes students' culture to transcend the dominant culture's harmful effects and racial stereotypes (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In choral music education, Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified six characteristics of culturally- relevant and competent teachers: having a sociocultural consciousness, affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing change, understanding how learners construct knowledge, knowledge about the lives of students, and designing instruction based on knowledge of students (Shaw, 2020). Valuing what students already know and seeking opportunities to build upon that prior knowledge are hallmarks of culturally relevant teaching (Lind & McKoy, 2016). In choral music education, engaging in culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining choral techniques acknowledges students' unique cultural differences, allows them to see

themselves in the choral curriculum, and amplifies their unique cultural identity to sustain and represent their culture in a positive way (Shaw, 2020).

Literature Review

In the 12th century, the choir director was considered the most prestigious appointment any musician could have (Hanning, 2019). Music has always served as an integral part of society, and ancient practices in music influenced music education in the United States (Mark, 2008). Scholars believe that singing has been a natural means of emotional expression since the beginning of human inception (Hanning, 2019). Choral singing has been a vital part of music education in the United States since formal music education found its home in America through Lowell Mason (Holt & Jordan, 2020). Between 1837 and 1838, Lowell Mason petitioned the Boston School Committee to include music education in the school curriculum as a subject (Holt & Jordan, 2020). Scholars state that the first well-rounded view of musical culture derives from Ancient Greece, and much of the modern system of music theory comes from Greek musical thought. (Hanning, 2019). Medieval music was dominated by vocal music, and boys received music education in schools connected with the church. Women were not allowed to sing in church; however, they made music in convents (Kamien, 2015). The choirs of the Roman Catholic Church were filled with men and boys with unchanged voices, creating a tone with minimal or no vibrato sound (Dehning, 2003).

Eurocentric Choral Music in the United States

Much of the music–making practices found in choral music in the United States originated from the history of choral music in Europe. Choral music dominated the Medieval and the Renaissance eras with musical inspiration derived from Roman

medieval church music and melodies influenced by Ancient Greek thought (Hanning, 2019). Historically, the Western choral sound emulated by many choral conductors in the United States derives from the musical ideas of the Roman church (Dehning, 2003). In Ancient Greek music culture, vocal music was emphasized over instrumental music because words in vocal music allowed for a distinctive character (Hanning, 2019). The Renaissance era (1450-1600) saw a shift with the increasing popularity of secular vocal music, such as the madrigal (Kamien, 2015). During the 15th and 16th centuries, composers were trained as choir boys, hired as singers, and studied at choir schools that taught singing, music theory, grammar, mathematics, and other subjects (Hanning, 2019).

Early American music education began when European Pilgrims and Puritans created the English colonies of New England (Mark, 2008). In North America a reform took place after 1700 by Puritan and Congregational members to improve the quality of psalm singing in church. The ministers argued that music literacy should be taught in local singing schools (Tick & Beaudoin, 2008). The earliest singing book, *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tones (1721-1744),* compiled by a minister John Tufts, provided a new way of music note reading using the letter FSLM (fa, sol, la, mi) on the staff (Holt & Jordan, 2020). Around 1837, Lowell Mason and his colleagues convinced the Boston School committee to incorporate vocal music education into the public-school curriculum. As a result, Mason and his colleagues made a proposal for vocal music education in schools that ultimately started publicly-funded music education in the United States (Tick & Beaudoin, 2008). However, in music education, many conductors only turn to Western Civilizations for examples of quality music and sometimes neglecting the music of other cultures (Webb et al., 1993).

Black Experience in Choral Music

Many Black musicians in the United States considered that classical music could be the way to challenge White American racist constructions of Blackness tied to minstrelsy (Thurman, 2021). Historically, African Americans have united to share victories over injustice, discrimination, and poverty (Warren, 1997). In Taylor's book, Taylor asked jazz singer, Thomas, "Do you think the Black man would ever have the same rights as the White man in America?" Thomas responded, "Yes! Oh Yes!" Thomas shared, "Nature has a way of always straightening things out whenever things are too unbalanced" (Taylor, 1993, p. 102). Music still sustains African Americans today as it did our ancestors (Warren, 1997). Black musicians are known for their resilience, hard work, talent, and perseverance in American music history. However, they had to negotiate obstacles such as racism (Taylor, 2005). The civil rights movement of the late fifties and sixties birthed beautiful songs of freedom, contemporary gospel, and songs of praise (Warren, 1997).

Decades after the United States Civil War, African Americans sought to study, perform, and teach music (Thurman, 2021). The civil rights movement initiated the return of old songs, particularly Negro Spirituals (Warren, 1997). The Negro Spiritual was created by enslaved Black people in the United States to retain their African cultural memory (Floyd, 1997). African American music first became widely accessible through published collections of Negro Spirituals in 1867. Later, scores of minstrel songs, ragtime, and blues became accessible in in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Maultsby & Burnim, 2017). Racially-mixed institutions like Oberlin College set out to educate as many Black students as possible, and the rise of Black institutions of higher

learning began to shape the role of Black students in academic spaces (Thurman, 2021).

During racial segregation in the United States, the music of the Western canon was

upheld by Historically Black Colleges and Universities to uphold the values of racial

uplift to create a liberally educated Black middle class (Thurman, 2021).

Course offerings at HBCUs did not offer instruction in Black popular music;

instead, students learned about Johann Sebastian Bach, Franz Schubert, and the choral

music of Felix Mendelssohn (Thurman, 2021). The guiding assumption for Black

musicians was that excellence in art would change the nation's perception of Black

people, leading to justice and equality (Floyd, 1997). Many institutions and music

teachers across the United States insisted that if Black students were going to advance in

society, they would do so by performing and listening to the right kind of music, also

known as classical music (Thurman, 2021).

Sims–Warren (1997) wrote, "We African Americans have been richly endowed

with the gift of music" (Warren, 1997, p. 3). However, Black musicians sometimes must

negotiate their Blackness in Western canonic art music (Maultsby & Burnim, 2017).

Black students worked with music teachers outside of music conservatories because

many established music institutions were hostile to Black students (Thurman, 2021). In a

manner like medieval craft guilds, conducting is taught hands-on via the guidance of a

mentor conductor-teacher (Mauceri, 2018). The musical styles of Europe became

desirable for Black musicians as they were considered serious and had a sense of

purpose. At times Black musicians would reject the music of Black Americans such as

blues and jazz (Thurman, 2021).

The Profession of Choral Conducting in the United States

Most conductors have narratives that link their skills and abilities to their sources of inspiration (Mauceri, 2018). Traditionally, individuals who led orchestras were known as conductors, and individuals who led choirs were called directors. The distinction between conductors and directors resulted from instrumentalists considering singers lesser musicians (Neuen, 2002). The role of the conductor became linked to the development of Western music, with the music notation that began with the Roman Catholic Church and its desire to standardize chants (Mauceri, 2018). Some college curricula require one to three semesters of conducting (Neuen, 2002). In the past, some conductors were known to be egotistical, and they abused performers through verbal intimidation; remaining the case today (Hunsberger & Ernst, 1992). In choral music education preparation programs, many students have spent less time learning choral techniques, spending more time on their major instruments, music history, and theory (Neuen, 2002).

In this section I will continue to highlight the choral conducting profession because there is little to no mention of choral conducting and leadership in the literature. Choral music educators and conductors teach through words, gestures, passion, and pedagogy (Wis, 2007). Choral conductors tend to teach how they were taught, emulating the techniques, pacing, words, and phrases learned from their lived choral ensemble experiences with their former conductors (Peterson, 2021). Today, times have changed, and now choral directors see themselves as professional choral conductors (Neuen, 2002). To achieve excellence as a choral conductor, individuals must first become a consummate musician and possess a thorough understanding of music. Additionally, the

choral conducting profession requires a lifetime study of choral literature and familiarity with the French, German, and Italian languages (Webb et al., 1993). American choral conductor pedagogue Rosenbaum (2018) asserts,

> The creative and ambitious college choir conductor will take every opportunity to collaborate with the school orchestra or with small instrumental ensembles, to focus primarily on classical repertoire, to explore music from different eras and in different languages, and to provide solo work for their finest students (Rosenbaum, 2018, p. 5).

> Dehning (2003) asserts that interpretation, conducting, and rehearsing are the essential things conductors do, but interpretation is the most vital of these. Rosenbaum argues,

> "choral conducting is more a calling than a profession. There is a deep yearning, a craving, an obligation to bring musical treasures such as Masses, Passions, Requiem, Vespers, and Cantatas to life, and to do it with the choral conductor's voice, stamp, and interpretation" (Rosenbaum, 2018, p. 7).

One of the many concerns that choral conductors must come to understand is that choral music has as much to do with human and social concerns than it does music (Webb et al., 1993).I highlight the assertions of Dehning and Rosenbaum to emphasize the need for scholarship in choral conducting and leadership.

Every conductor is a teacher, transmitting knowledge and experiences to ensemble members (Webb et al., 1993). Many choral conducting pedagogues cite how ensemble members will benefit from a conductor trained in traditional choral conducting techniques because they will feel at home in an all-state group or under the guidance of

any other great choral conductor (Roe, 1983). American choral conductors are often most concerned with technique, seeking a sound with uniformity of vowels, clear diction, precise intonation, and equal balance (Dehning, 2003). Distinguished conducting technique will benefit sight-reading contests and help when the ensemble stumbles at a performance (Roe, 1983). Outstanding choral conducting techniques possess no wasted motion, such as body movements and unnecessary hand or enlarged beat patterns (Rosenbaum, 2018). Wis (2007) asserts that in an ideal choral rehearsal setting, one could find a strong, charismatic, autocratic leader with great skill and knowledge (the conductor) who organizes a plan (rehearsal of repertoire to be performed) for the organization (the ensemble), and then executes the plan to achieve a common goal (Wis, 2007).

Choral conductors must combine their ability to understand people with their musical abilities to create an environment that produces productive ensemble members (Webb et al., 1993). The role of a choral conductor is a privilege; however, it comes with substantial responsibilities to the ensemble members, composers, and audience (Hunsberger & Ernst, 1992). Many choral conducting pedagogues feel the Western canonic music tradition is necessary for training choral musicians but cannot be the only experiences for practical choral training and leadership (Webb et al., 1993). Most choral conductors hold auditions centered in Eurocentric tradition, where a level of proficiency is sought and demonstrated by prospective choir members (Rosenbaum, 2018).

Leadership in Choral Music

The necessity of empathic understanding in choral ensembles between conductors and ensemble members is not new; however, it has grown to become a more essential

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part of a conductors' overall approach than it was three decades ago (Webb et al., 1993). Leadership in choral conducting encompasses the ability to inspire and control the ensemble through a conductor's personality (Roe, 1983). Like good leadership in organizations, choral conductors must be fair, consistent, knowledgeable in the field of music, and willing to accept suggestions and adapt (McElheran, 1989). One of the essential commitments choral conductors have is to people, as choral music is a people enterprise (Webb et al., 1993). Choral conductors are known to demonstrate power in choral spaces by commanding a choir to make a memorable experience (Roe, 1983). Additionally, choral conductors are responsible for leading and inspiring others through their ability to teach in a supportive way instead of being negative and intimidating (Hunsberger & Ernst, 1992).

Choral conductors must understand that their first responsibility is to ensure that ensemble members feel seen, valued, and at home in a world where music-making is a privilege and expression of humanity (Webb et al., 1993). The success of a choral conductor is determined mainly by their ability to plan and set intentional goals (Gordon, 1989). Everyone plays an essential role in sustaining a choir culture; however, the choral conductor assumes the role of the director of the culture within the ensemble setting (Burch et al., 2022). The choral conductor–ensemble relationship is faced with an imbalance of power, with the conductor having control of the student's future (Paul, 2020). Therefore, conductors should have a people-centered mindset that supersedes the historical tradition of a product mindset (Burch et al., 2022).

Leadership is a social construct, and culturally relevant choral leadership is intentional. Leadership has three requisites: a passion for one's work and the professional

skills to match, genuine concern for people, and a desire to become a leader (Wis, 2007). Choral conductors lead ensembles, and because of this, music conductors are in the people business. Leaders can create more culturally relevant environments for ensemble members and learners. Culture is the silent force of experience that sustains every choral ensemble (Burch et al., 2022). Leadership is how an individual accomplishes goals (Wis, 2007). Culture in an ensemble is created, sustained, and clearly stated in practices related to all choir members, music products, and benefits (Burch et al., 2022).

More than ability, knowledge, technique, and personality, leadership is critical to the success of the ensemble and conducting (Wis, 2007). An essential requirement for a conductor is the competence to inspire the singers to want to do their best (McElheran, 1989). A key aspect of choral leadership is to instill in performers the desire to be part of a quality musical experience under the choral conductor's leadership (Webb et al., 1993). Language is a form of power because it allows people to represent specific events (Thomas, 1993).

Individuals seeking to learn more about organizational leadership have historically cited conductors and music ensembles as a model of successful organizations (Wis, 2007). For instance, successful organizations begin with a leader, and then the leader engages in the process of management. The process of management includes the systems that are put into place that make the climate and culture of the rehearsal or class. Most conductors are taught to take charge and establish authority from the beginning; however, Wis (2007) argues that conductors should understand the importance of developing trust relationships. One of the immense challenges choral conductor-teachers face is consistently maintaining a rehearsal environment conducive to teaching and

learning (Paul, 2020). Conductors who validate the feelings of each choral singer have the potential to impact the return and addition of new ensemble members (Burch et al., 2022).

Gap In Literature

Today, scholars, researchers, and students are still looking for ways to examine and combat the result of race and racism in the United States (Yosso, 2005). Many scholars state that the repertoire choral conductors select influences how ensemble members understand different cultures and eras of music (Gumm, 2006). Ideally, individuals engaging in leadership examine their own identity by asking themselves questions about power and privilege issues that impact all in the teaching and learning environment (Maia, 2022). Today, very few studies examine the interconnection between leadership learning and culturally relevant leadership learning in choral music settings (Owen et al., 2022). Leaders inspire others, and leader (ensemble directors in music) identity is a crucial component of social justice leadership processes and culturally relevant leadership learning (Maia, 2022). Many scholars highlight that most young conductors begin teaching with the understandings gained from their choral experience and through collegiate music education training (Ames et al., 2019).

Summary

The macro-level theories, mid-level theory, and literature review provide further insight into the issues of racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings. The theories and literature also provide context and illustrate my direction in this study. Critical race theory and culturally–relevant leadership learning combined to serve as the macro lenses utilized to examine racism and the lack of culturally–relevant leadership

practices. The CRT tenet of racism being usual and counterstorytelling and CRLL's aim to amplify historically minoritized voices made both theories appropriate for this study. Additionally, culturally relevant teaching served as a mid-level lens to examine the literature around research questions. Finally, I reviewed relevant literature that highlighted Eurocentric music, Black choral music experiences, and the choral conducting profession to support the concepts related to this research study. In the next chapter, I outline the methodology utilized in this study to explore how Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I discussed the macro-level theories, mid-level theory, and related literature to provide further insight into the issues of racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings. In this study, I aim to explore how Black choral conductors negotiated nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology and methods employed in this research study. In this chapter, I highlight the selected research method, the process of participant recruitment, approaches to data collection, site selection, and analysis. Additionally, I detail the study timetable, data representation, and procedures employed to ensure ethics and trustworthiness.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how Black choral conductors negotiated nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. I sought to address the following questions related to the experience of being a Black choral musician in choral music spaces in the United States:

1. How do Black Choral conductors experience racism in choral settings?

2. How do Black Choral conductors describe an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting?

3. How have their experiences influenced or informed the decisions they make as choral conductors today?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research enables researchers to examine how people understand their lives and make meaning of their experiences (Clandinin, 2013). Qualitative researchers explore the personal experiences of research participants through qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and focus groups. Philosophical stances guide the actions of researchers, influence findings, and inform the research perspectives, approaches, and methods (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). A qualitative design allows researchers to bring their unique lived experiences to the study and examine understandings through many lenses (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Description, understanding, interpretation, and communication are vital objectives of qualitative research, and the researcher is the crucial instrument for data collection and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Therefore, qualitative researchers must select philosophical and methodological approaches that align with their researcher identity (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Researchers should move towards understanding the salient details of stories and narratives and how the stories inform reality (Bruner, 1986). Similarly, qualitative researchers must choose ways to write up and present their findings that reflect their individuality, personality, attitude, and character (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Stories and Narratives

Stories serve many functions, offer insight into people's lives, and can be essential to begin discussions that can result in reform (Bell, 1999). Bruner (1986) asserted that stories are valid and can stand independently without needing testability. Anthropologists and researchers have observed the importance of stories in countless cultures (Vitz,

1990). Despite how familiar narratives are in society, the ability for everyone to tell their own stories and have them validated and honored on their own moral values are unequal (Saulnier, 2020). Because of the need for narratives and stories in the human experience, scholars must take advantage of the power of the human reaction to narrative thought (Vitz, 1990).

Narrative research focuses on how individuals find meaning in their experiences through the stories they tell, and no two narratives can look exactly alike (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Narratives are natural to human experiences, as people spend hours listening, watching, and reading narratives daily (Vitz, 1990). Narrative researchers work with each participant to inquire into the experience of a storied phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). However, narrative research does not lead to conclusions and certainty; uncertainty and tension guide the work (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Clandinin & Connelly (1989) discussed how humans story their lives and experiences and showed how narrative inquiry, as a research approach, allows researchers to elicit stories and narratives and to engage in relational co-constructed research with participants. At times, narratives are utilized as data and representational forms for results or findings in various qualitative methodologies (Clandindin, 2013).

Narrative Inquiry

In this research study I followed the narrative inquiry work of Clandinin and Connelly (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, the participant begins sharing their story with the researcher in a conversational manner (Clandinin, 2013). Cultural, social, and institutional lived experiences work simultaneously as both participants and inquirers engage in storytelling (Clandinin, 2006). Researchers engaging

in narrative inquiry intentionally come into relation with research participants. Inquirers think narratively about their own experiences, the participants' experiences, and the experiences that become clear while co-constructing narratives alongside, telling their own stories, hearing stories, and moving in and activating the places everyone's lives meet (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry can help facilitate and advance a social change agenda, and telling the stories of marginalized people can help create a public space requiring others to hear what they might not want to acknowledge or hear (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Additionally, narrative inquiry is a tool for understanding experience in collaboration with both researcher and participants over time, in a place or places, and through social interactions (Clandinin, 2013).

Narrative inquiry is both a phenomenon and method and it acknowledges that stories provide meaning to lives and are valued as data (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019). In a narrative inquiry, the researcher brings their own epistemological and ontological views to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Clandinin (2013) explains that narrative inquirers must begin with their reasons in the context of their own experiences to conduct the research. The research from a narrative inquirer develops from their own experiences and outlines the comprehensive narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Additionally, narrative inquiry is a fluid inquiry deeply rooted in relational ethics, which calls for social responsibility, and allows the researcher to negotiate and organize stories (Clandinin, 2013).

The study of narratives means the study of people's lived experiences through the language they use to describe their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). According to Clandinin and Connelly, narrative inquirers share in-progress research with the

expectation that readers will read and respond in ways to come to different conclusions and meanings that lead to further study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A researcher engaged in narrative inquiry is immersed in many layers and complexities of stories individuals experience daily (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Narrative inquirers seek to understand and interpret experiences by asking questions, collecting notes, and writing research about social and personal conflicts from all angles (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The data received from participants are retold or restoried by the scholar engaging in narrative inquiry and placed into a narrative chronology to provide meaning of the experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight that narrative inquirers focus on understanding experiences. Stories are powerful in providing individuals a voice and show that undesirable experiences with racism are both an individual and structural phenomenon (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As a result of the storytelling method, narrative inquiry allows the participants' voice to be the dominant authority. Narrative inquiry lends well to the research topic, highlighting how researchers and participants compose the stories together (Clandinin, 2013). Additionally, I selected narrative inquiry because of its flexibility and connection with the macro-level theories, research questions, and my desire as a storyteller to provide a space to amplify historically minoritized voices.

Narrative inquiry allows researchers to explore participants' thoughts about a phenomenon experienced and develop themes representing the participants' experiences. As researchers engaging in narrative inquiry, it is essential to be open and transparent about researcher subjectivity and past experiences with the research topic (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000). Inquirers utilizing narrative inquiry must relate to participants and think narratively about their own stories, the research participants' stories, and experiences identified and co-constructed through telling and hearing (Clandinin, 2013). When researchers tell stories related to their research, they can relate to their participants and co-create stories of empowerment (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). While engaging in research, I invited participants to share their experiences based on the research questions that guided the study and by sharing memories and artifacts that will help me to understand myself and the participant concerning the research. The lived experiences and stories in narrative inquiry support researchers with an in-depth understanding of the research phenomena (Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

In this study, I explored lived narratives related to the institutional context associated with experiences in the choral music profession. I explored the cultural, linguistic, and social narratives of the participants' lived experiences. Inquirers must understand the individuals' experiences and their familial, cultural, linguistic, and institutional stories that mold and are molded by the research participant (Clandinin, 2013). Focusing on social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional contexts helps researchers go deeper into the complexity of how narrative inquirers attend to lives in motion (Clandinin, 2013).

Macro-level Theories and Narrative Inquiry

Critical thought demands a call to change that can span from a modest rethinking of comfortable thoughts to more direct engagement, including social justice (Thomas, 1993). In narrative inquiry, research is negotiated between participant and researcher; however, researchers must answer questions with attention to social and theoretical

importance of each inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). In this study I sought to amplify the voices of Black choral conductors through CRT tenet counternarrative. Similarly, the CRLL model seeks to amplify voices and promote social justice. As mentioned previously, CRLL model recognizes the dynamics of oppression and power related to leadership and how they impact the willingness to create social change (Guthrie et al., 2021).

The narrative inquiry methodology was selected because it aligned with my desire to facilitate storytelling, and I sought to understand how Black choral conductors negotiated nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. In narrative inquiry, research texts are collaboratively created with participants, and participants have the most influence on the final document (Clandinin, 2013). The critical race theory (CRT) framework aligns well with narrative inquiry because it focuses on storytelling and amplifies the voice, knowledge, and experiences of people of color (Rolón-Dow, Bailey, 2002).

Methods

I utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary method utilized for this research study. At times, interviews can create an imbalance of power; however, interviewers who create a positive and participatory relationship with research participants often feel the interview turning into more of a conversation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Three Black choral conductor participants were selected for a series of two interviews. Data were collected primarily through a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide (See Appendix B). In addition, as the researcher, I journaled my individual reflections, experiences, and reviewed relevant artifacts to make meaning of the data during the duration of the study.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative research and allow researchers to be flexible in data collection and interaction. During semi-structured interviews, the direction and development of the discussion are based nearly entirely on the participant and in more of a natural environment (Berent, 1966). In semi-structured interviews, researchers enter the interview with questions; however, the questions serve as a loose guide, and the approach offers flexibility with most intended questions answered (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Semi-structured interviews follow some preset questions but allow for additional questions in response to participants' comments or reactions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Finally, I created the interview guide (See Appendix B) by considering the study's macro-level and mid-level theories and research questions.

I scheduled the logistics such as time, date, and location of the semi-structured interviews with each participant. Before the initial semi-structured interviews with each participant, I conducted a short pilot interview with another scholar who identified as a Black choral conductor to test the interview guide. After testing with the non-participant scholar, I made minor adjustments to the interview guide to ensure that the questions flowed well. Next, I used the interview guide to conduct two 90-minute interviews with each participant. All semi-structured interviews in this study were conducted using the Zoom virtual meeting platform. I utilized two laptops–one to see the research participant, another to see the interview guide–an iPad to record, a phone to record as backup, a research journal, pens, and a bottle of water. The audio of each semi-structured interview

was recorded through the encrypted iPhone application Voice Record Pro, which has multiple layers of encryption and is transcribed.

I greeted each research participant with a smile, began by having casual conversations, and read items from the consent form (See Appendix E). Next, participants signed the consent form. I asked for permission to record, detail the rationale of the study, research questions, their rights, the length of the interview. Prior to the semi-structured interviews, I asked if the participants had any questions, I asked them a few demographic questions, and began with the first question on the interview guide. I took notes of the research participants' body movements, gestures, and facial expressions so the words and gestures could connect during the transcription component of the semi-structured interview process. I used the observational data to assist with data analysis and interpretation. I ensured that the research participants felt comfortable and that things ran smoothly through my preparation and by maintaining a conversational environment with each participant.

After each interview, I asked the participant if there was anything else they wanted to share. I thanked the participants for their participation and immediately wrote my reflection in my reflexive research journal. Then, I uploaded all audio files from each interview into Otter, a web-based transcription tool (www.otter.ai). After completing the interview transcriptions, I emailed each participant a copy of their transcript and asked if they would engage in member checking. Member checking allowed each research participant to verify all data and co-construct the narratives created. I also informed participants that I would oblige if they requested any content be deleted. Finally, I sent

consent forms electronically via email to each participant, and participants received a copy of the signed form.

Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity differs from positionality in that it enables the researcher to locate themselves in the study and focus on their power and influence (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Reflexivity encourages researchers to embody their subjectivity through tools such as reflective logs and discussions to enhance the researcher's understanding (Smith, 2006). When researchers engage in reflexivity, they consider their position and influence while undertaking the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Narrative research requires reflecting through various lenses, including engaging in journaling, critical reflection, and stories (Brown & Grigg, 2017).

In qualitative research, reflexivity is used to assist researchers in identifying their position and effect during the study, showing how the researcher produced meaning in the research process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Narrative inquiry's strengths include offering understanding and meaning; however, reflexivity demands careful attention from the researcher and each participant as stories emerge and evolve over multiple iterations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). When qualitative researchers employ reflexivity, they reveal their reasons for their decisions regarding analysis, allowing researchers to challenge their notions (Grodal et al., 2021).

I maintained a self-reflective journal throughout to document my experiences, memories, and research agenda. In journaling I asked myself questions about what sense I gathered from semi-structured interviews: what emotions were experienced? How did it start? How did it unfold? How did it end? How inquisitive did I become while listening?

How open was I to develop further insights? How much support do I have to continue to engage in the work? Finally, I was very careful to be as objective with all the research participants to ensure that I was able to capture their stories as close as possible through their lens.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness concerns all systematic steps related to research techniques and theoretical approaches employed throughout the research process (Alder, 2022). Trustworthiness is what qualitative researchers consider quality instead of the term "validity, used in quantitative research" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As previously mentioned, critical race theory seeks to center the focus from the dominant culture to cultures of communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). Culturally relevant leadership learning model challenges leadership preparation to scrutinize the benefits and pitfalls differences create (Jones et al., 2016). With both critical race theory and culturally relevant leadership learning as the macro-level theories, it was essential to ensure this study adhered to ethics and maintained the aim to amplify the voices of the research participants.

Qualitative research aims not to produce truths but to develop descriptive, contextual findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). I described the three research participants through rich, thick descriptions to ensure the study was transferable. In qualitative research, scholars use a lens of credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and authenticity to ensure rigor (Billups, 2021). Credibility is when the research participants believe that the researchers' data analysis and descriptions are an actual representation of them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). For instance, credibility is

related to how well the findings are believable and transferability is concerned with the way the study could transfer to other contexts or settings. I explained the process I employed in the research study to allow the possibility of the findings to apply and be useful in other contexts. Dependability is concerned with whether the study could be done twice and obtain similar results, confirmability is how well the findings can be confirmed by others to be accurate, and authenticity deals with transparency of methods.

Trustworthiness is vital to transparency in the research process, and sharing research methods employed in qualitative research adds credibility (Alder, 2022). Additionally, trustworthiness is the term that refers to credibility and is dependent upon factors such as prolonged engagement, member checking, peer debriefing, and persistent observations (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Prolonged engagement refers to extended time spent with the phenomena and peer debriefing are conversations with that participants to ensure findings are accurate in their perspective. Member checking refers to sharing items related to data analysis, such as interview transcripts, with participants and allowing participants to talk back to the researcher's interpretations (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Using rich, thick descriptions, researchers can evaluate how a similar circumstance of people, place, and phenomena could be applied under a similar condition with similar participants (Billups, 2021; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). To ensure accuracy, I constantly reviewed the interview and observational data from participants for accuracies (Thomas, 1993).

I employed systematic research approaches such as member checking, interview data sources, and data comparison in this study (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019). For instance, I utilized reflexive journaling and member checking throughout the research process to

ensure trustworthiness. I had ongoing conversations with research participants, recorded

my writings, and adjusted my constructed truths to ensure that research participants were

represented in a way they agreed upon (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I compared the

interview recordings with transcripts for accuracy and then sent the transcripts to each

participant for member checking. After providing the participants with transcripts to

confirm accuracy, I went back and reviewed the original recordings a few more times. I

listened for vocal inflections, words selected, contradictions, and key points.

Reflexive Journals

Reflection is a vital component of qualitative research and reflective practices

allow researchers to enhance a qualitative study in a rich and meaningful way (Billups,

2021). A research journal is a valuable tool that allows researchers to examine thoughts. I

maintained a reflexive research journal to be transparent and share my experiences,

counterstories, and qualitative research process. Research journals are an excellent way

for scholars to reflect upon questions, critically engage with references from the

literature, and document aspects of their thinking (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). By being

reflexive, researchers can show their choice of direction and decisions and increase rigor

in the analytical process (Grodal et al., 2021).. Figure 1 shows an example of the kind of

research journal entry I wrote immediately after each semi-structured interview. I wrote

this journal entry following one participant's initial interview.

Figure 1

Research Journal Entry

> *Thursday, May 18th, 2023, 9:30 am- 11:00 am*
>
> *Wow, we are wearing the same gray polo! I began the semi-structured interview by*

smiling at the participant. I noticed that William is moving his head, which translates as he is passionate about what he is talking about. As I listened to William share about how Black students struggled with music theory, I gasped and became anxious, as I experienced the same thing during my undergraduate and doctoral music theory courses. After William mentioned how Black choral conductors had to work harder and had a responsibility of preserving the Negro Spirituals, I began to visualize the biblical story of Moses. It seems like there is a pattern that Black choral conductors, even Black people in general, are responsible for liberating the people of a foreign place. Then, William began to speak passionately and shouted, "I am getting fired up."

At that moment, I nodded, took notes, and listened as he showed his passion for young people. Questions began to come to my mind. Questions include: Do Black choral music students know what to do when unsuccessful? I began to connect my thoughts with Ladson-Billing's idea of culturally relevant teaching where students need to experience achievement. William shared how he knows his students and their stories. Then I thought about how privileged some folks are not to have to think about what is best for the students. My initial interview was very successful. I gathered rich data that answered many of the research questions. The research participant was passionate, knowledgeable, and a seeker of knowledge, such as myself. He was indeed a storyteller sharing his counter-narrative and first-hand experiences with me. For that, I am truly honored and thankful. I will take a few moments to breathe as the stories were similar to my research, life experiences, and understanding of being Black and a choral conductor in the United States.

Rich, thick description

I utilized rich, thick descriptions combined with reflections and experiences to map the experience of the research participants (Bhattacharya, 2017). Thick descriptions refer to the interpretation and reflection of symbolic acts and generalizations of people. A researcher engaging in thick description goes beyond basic observations and includes contextual, emotional, and social connections (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Rich, thick descriptions are imperative for ensuring a narrative is convincing, is of value, and goes beyond basic understandings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Qualitative researchers must identify what rich, thick descriptions mean for them and their work (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, thick descriptions are considered one of the essential concepts of qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2006).

Clifford Geertz (1973), an anthropologist, borrowed the term "thick descriptions" from Gilbert Ryle as an approach to describe the focused and interpretive meaning of the experience (Geertz, 1973). The context must be rich and thickly described to establish the credibility of the researcher's understanding and interpretation (Ponterott, 2006). Thick descriptions provide researchers with efficient ways to evaluate the exact circumstances of people, places, and phenomena in a similar setting with similar conditions and research participants (Billups, 2021). For a narrative to be thickly described, it must be accurate and interpret the actions that took place within the context of the environment. Additionally, thick descriptions secure the emotions, motivations, and intentions of the interactions around the phenomena (Ponterotto, 2006).

I define rich, thick descriptions as describing the details of the narrative in a way that profoundly captures emotion, relationships, and details. Rich, thick descriptions

present detail, context, emotion, and social relationships that combine people and evoke emotion and self-feelings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I described the semi-structured interviews in the voice of the conversations between the participants and I in detail to obtain rich, thick data. In addition, I kept a researcher's reflective journal to record my distinct feelings, build on notions, explore biases, and serve as an additional basis for data (Bhattacharya, 2017). In addition to semi-structured interviews, I used reflections as a data collection tool (Billups, 2021). I described each of the participants before the analysis, which provided me with detailed, thick descriptions of who the participants are and the context they come from before (re)presenting their data and narratives.

Member Checking

I utilized member checking to ensure the study's credibility (Billups, 2021). Additionally, member checking can be completed through writing or face-to-face conversations as a form of data verification (Billups, 2021). Member checking is a strategy to engage with participants to verify the interpretation of their own lived experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As mentioned previously, member checking is concerned with credibility and allows research participants to review the preliminary data analysis and findings to ensure they reflect what the participants expressed to the researcher (Billups, 2021).

In addition, researchers must document member checking regarding feedback on their interpretations of the data from the study participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). To establish trustworthiness, I conducted member checking throughout the study to allow participants to see my interpretation of their own valid lived experiences. For instance, I

member-checked by sharing the write-up and description with each participant to ensure they felt it was a good reflection of who they were.

Participant Consent and The Institutional Review Board

Ethical considerations in research are concerned with individuals' right to understand the boundaries of their voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, privacy, confidential treatment of data, and obligations of the researcher to ensure the safeguarding of all components (Billups, 2021). While engaging in narrative inquiry, researchers must imagine ethics as respect, openness, care, negotiation, and mutuality to multiple voices (Clandinin, 2006). Because of the relational ways of narrative inquiry, inquirers can become an intervention that requires researchers to keep a close eye on ethical issues even long after research texts have been completed (Clandinin, 2013). For instance, narrative inquirers could become too concerned about solving problems that arise in the participants' narrative.

All researchers must comply with legal and procedural policies from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is federally mandated and each university has its own. The IRB is comprised of faculty, researchers, and administrators responsible for reviewing research that involves humans (Dutka & Astroth, 2022). To ensure compliance, I followed all procedures and processes to request IRB approval before undertaking this study. The IRB completed a review of the research procedures and plan before the start of data collection (see Appendix C).

Researchers engaging in narrative inquiry must keep ethical concerns at the forefront, as ethical matters shift and move throughout an inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each participant selected a pseudonym before the semi-structured interviews,

which took place at private and neutral places. Participants selected were first required to return signed consent forms (See Appendix E). Next, I used the blind carbon copy (bcc) email function to contact them via email (See Appendix D) to schedule the best time for the interview to occur. During the correspondence, I thanked them for their voluntary participation and interest in amplifying their stories. Finally, in the consent form, I obtained each participants' permission to audio record their responses. I asked again for verbal consent before recording during the initial semi-structured interview.

I made sure I debriefed each participant about protections and confidentiality in this study. I ensured that I maintained the confidentiality of participants as much as possible by using their selected pseudonyms and writing in a way to protect their identity. All semi-structured interviews were conducted in private settings, and all interview transcripts were kept on the researcher's computer. Reports of the research do not name or otherwise identify research participants. Participants selected their pseudonyms, completed informed consent forms, and were made aware of their rights of voluntary participation, privacy, and confidentiality of their safeguarded data. All recordings were safely stored and saved to the internal memory of a password-protected computer and on my University of Memphis OneDrive.

Site Selection

I recruited participants from across the United States in this narrative inquiry study. I selected the United States as my site because of the importance of its history related to the African American experience in choral music. I utilized a Facebook group called Black Choral Conductors Network to begin locating and selecting participants that met the selection criteria. Finally, I posted a flyer (see Appendix A) that discussed the

study and participant criteria in a Facebook group. This study took place over two months of semi-structured interviews, data collection, and member checking the findings.

Purposeful sampling requires access to participants in the field with experiences relevant to the research questions (Suri, 2011). I utilized purposeful sampling to ensure the participants selected for the study met the selection criteria and the narratives and insights each could provide. Purposeful sampling adds to the richness of a qualitative study, where the context of inquiry is vital to interpreting the research findings (Billups, 2021). When researchers carefully and purposefully select both participants and sites, it aids the researcher in better interpreting and understanding the phenomenon and research questions (Billups, 2021). All qualitative research starts with purposeful sampling, where researchers select individuals and settings for their study based on the data and information they can provide (Billups, 2021).

Participants

I created a post on the Facebook platform in a group called Black Choral Conductors Network. The Black Choral Conductors Network is a Facebook social media group with 323 members identifying as Black and choral conductors. In my attempt to recruit research participants, I asked for voluntary participation from individuals who met the criteria and chose participants based on their availability for the study. In addition, the social media post included the flyer found in Appendix A, detailing information about the research and requirements for the study and requesting that interested participants email me privately. Eight participants initially responded, none were turned away, however, only four participants provided the initial consent forms, and three participants made time for the study.

The selection criteria were as follows. Participants must:

1. identify as Black;

2. identify as a choral conductor;

3. be willing to open critical conversations about race/racism in choral music settings;

4. have a degree in choral music education or conducting;

5. be willing to participate in two 90-minute interviews;

6. and have obtained their relevant degree in the last 5-7 years.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of participants' demographic information including pseudonyms, gender, age, ethnicity, participants highest education, region in the United States, and major concentration, and current occupation.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Region In U.S.	Major: Minor & Concentration	Occupation
William	M	25	African American	Masters	Northeastern	choral music education	teacher
Amira	F	40	African American	Doctorate	Southeastern	choral music education/ vocal performance	professor
George	M	30	African American	Masters	Eastern	choral conducting	teacher

Subjectivity Statement

In narrative inquiry, a researcher becomes a co-constructor and collects data centered around interpretation, analysis, and engagement (Gavidia & Adu, 2022). My role was an insider researcher, interacting with each participant as a Black choral music professional and culture bearer. A remarkable experience with narratives happened when I was around six. I would visit and learn from the eldest member of my hometown in rural North Carolina, as she allowed me to view history through her lens. At the time, I was unaware that I was naturally interviewing and taking notes in the field as an insider interacting with a participant. I would sit down, and I would ask her unstructured interview questions relating to the town, my relatives, and life in general. Growing up in a village-like community afforded me experiences with storytelling and how important music is to everyone. The town I grew up in has a population of less than 400 individuals, nearly 42% of whom are Black. Most Black people in my hometown are related, and it was at two separate churches, the Pentecostal Holiness Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where I was introduced to live music. As a preteen, I was a self-taught pianist and eventually became the musician at my home church, the Pentecostal Church. I would sometimes fill in at the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

I am a university-trained music educator, conductor, and vocal musician. Before attending an HBCU I had no experience with a Black, culturally relevant choral leader. Through my HBCU experience, I became aware of my identity and learned how to navigate spaces that have historically excluded Black musicians. Toward the end of my Master of Music degree, I enrolled in a musicology class where the professor allowed me to interview African American composer William Grant Still's daughter and search

through primary and secondary sources to discuss his opera, *Troubled Island*. As I began to develop as a musician and scholar, I became more deeply aware of Western canonic traditions and biases that often exclude people. I experienced situations during my post-secondary education where my unique musical abilities and experiences were considered a disadvantage.

Figures 2 and 3 show front and back images of a racist note I received during my time as a high school choral conductor at a school where my colleagues informed me that the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was alive and well in the community. My experiences have led me to understand that there are many ways Black choral conductors navigate settings that were not designed for them. I critically interrogated my assumptions and biases throughout the research project by writing in a journal and discussing my thoughts and processes with my committee members. I also worked closely with my dissertation chair to ensure I stayed grounded in the data throughout data analysis.

Figure 2

Image of a Racist Note Placed in my Microwave as a High School Choral Conductor
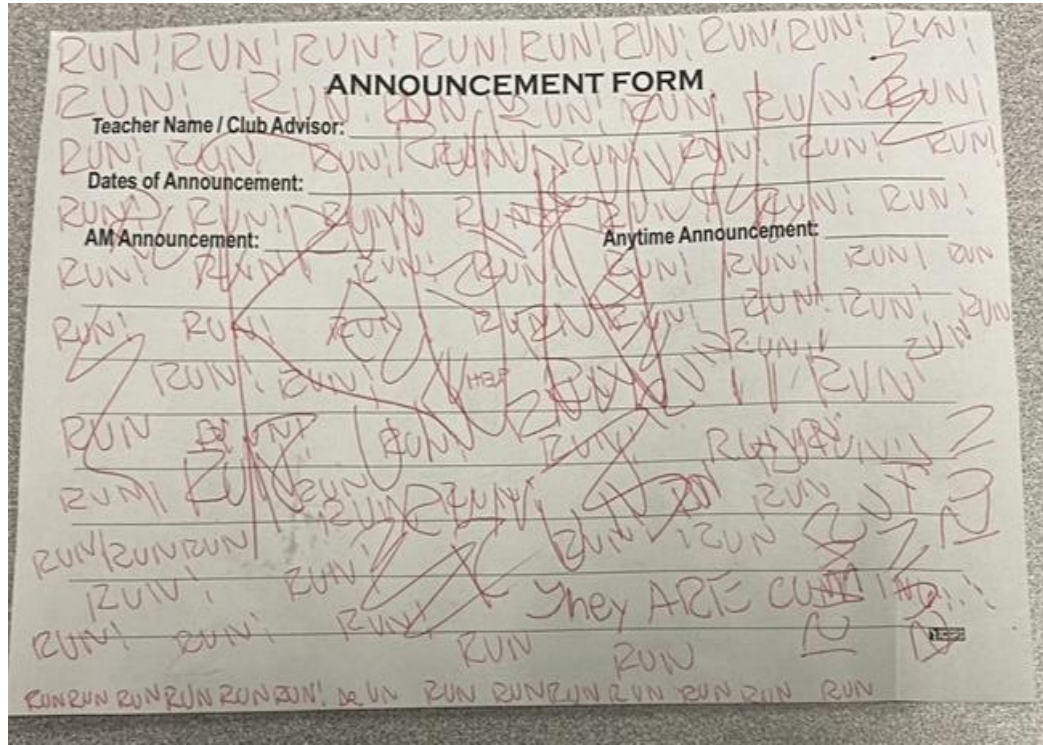
Figure 3

Image of a Racist Note Placed in my Microwave as a HS Choral Conductor
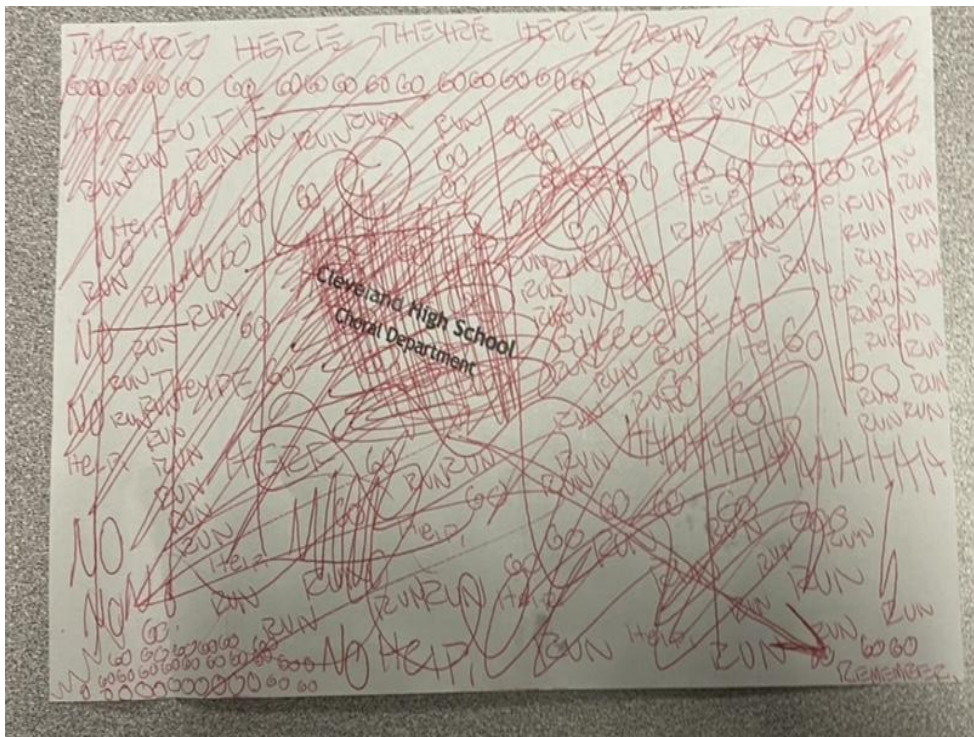
Data Analysis

In this narrative inquiry, I utilized thematic analysis to analyze and interpret data. Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for qualitative researchers to demonstrate how key components connect. Additionally, TA is a way to visualize elements that must come together for the complete analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore, partnering with the participants and navigating how the data are interpreted and represented is vital. Analysis brings order, structure, and meaning to the data and requires the researcher to be patient and reflective in a process that seeks to make sense of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Researchers must take into consideration that appropriate methods of data analysis are based on the research purpose and the essence of data collected, with a careful approach to detailing steps to show a credible and dependable account for data analysis

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In TA, researcher subjectivity is encouraged and considered a tool. I selected thematic analysis because researcher subjectivity is a crucial technique, as the knowledge created from this study is intrinsically subjective. Additionally, researcher bias is not a major concern within reflexive thematic analysis as TA sees subjectivity as a means and resource of understanding during the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

In analyzing participants' personal stories, the focus was to highlight the shared narratives evident across Black choral conductors' personal experiences negotiating noncultrally-relevant choral conductors. Thematic analysis features both analytical techniques and philosophical assumptions with a focus on research questions, data collection, and research techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Narratives are built to have beginnings, middles, and endings and can help humans understand the complicated behavior of humans in society (Sarbin, 1990). In qualitative research, data analysis is the process in which researchers attempt to summarize all the collected data in an organized, dependable, and accurate way (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Thematic analysis is a tool that allows qualitative researchers to conduct a systematic process of data coding to develop themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I began data analysis by characterizing the data and ensuring that the words recorded were transcribed accurately and verbatim. Braun and Clarke (2022) six phases include familiarizing yourself with the data set, coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, naming themes, and writing up the findings. I followed a six-phase thematic analysis to understand the patterns and similarities across datasets. Transcription is an interpretive process to transform spoken word audio recordings into written texts

that are easily read, studied, and analyzed through qualitative methods (Ellingson &

Sotirin, 2020). I reviewed and re-read transcriptions numerous times to develop a strong

understanding of the created knowledge and to immerse myself in the data. I cut the data

into smaller sentences from the full transcript to reduce the information for further

examination and to generate preliminary categories that eventually turned into

overarching themes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Coding

In qualitative research, coding is the systematic method in which researchers label

the data from the participants to understand the research questions or frames (Savin-

Baden & Major, 2013). Codes in qualitative analysis refer to a term or short phrase that

gives salient and essence-capturing data that represents a fragment of interview

transcripts or observational data (Saldaña, 2021). Qualitative researchers should write

about how codes were derived and applied to the data, their definitions, and what

methods were employed to respond to coding reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Researchers employ coding when working with data collection tools, such as interview

transcripts, field notes, journals, and artifacts, to organize data (Saldaña, 2014).

Coding is not an exact science but primarily an interpretive act (Saldaña, 2021).

Coding is the process that qualitative researchers use to label things that stand out in the

data set and analyze and describe them (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Data coded during

the first cycle coding process can produce a single word to a whole page of text (Saldaña,

2021). During the first cycle coding process, I used in vivo and descriptive coding. In

vivo coding is the application of the exact word or phrase taken directly from the data,

whereas descriptive coding can be one word or short phrase but not verbatim.

Additionally, codes are used with interview transcripts as a means for qualitative researchers to situate themselves to the participants' thoughts and actions (Saldaña, 2021). Some qualitative researchers utilize computer programs; however, I printed the transcripts and coded by hand to review the transcripts line by line to conceptualize the data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

I reviewed the data, stopped each time I observed something relevant to addressing the research questions or related to the literature, and gave the relevant part a handwritten code label with highlighting, underlining, and circling (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During the second cycle of the coding process, the codes can be identical units, extended text passages, and revised if necessary (Saldaña, 2021). Additionally, I continued to refine the codes I created through multiple rounds of working my way around the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Finally, I coded the data through a process of categories and themes. Ideally, the first coding cycle took things apart from the larger dataset. Then, I went through the coding process again through a second cycle which allowed me to put things together and examine the data closely. Next, I categorized the data from the codes list to ensure they were responsive to the initial research questions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Additionally, I utilized word clouds generated from each participant's semi-structured interview transcripts. Word clouds aid in analyzing text data, including semi-structured interview transcripts (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014). Additionally, word clouds provide a word count of the entered text, providing a descriptive or first-draft visual look of the text's most salient words and, thus, potential codes, categories, themes, and concepts (Saldaña, 2021). Word clouds serve as a map for additional analysis and are

helpful during the initial coding cycle to hone in on essential concepts identified by research participants (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014).

Themes

After I created the codes and categories, I turned them into themes, the dominant idea in the data and the foundation of the data analysis process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Themes show the patterns and essences of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2022). A theme is an extended-phrase or sentence that illustrates what a component of data means (Saldaña, 2021). To develop themes, I reviewed the created codes from the interview transcripts and journal several times every morning when I woke up and every night prior to bed. I looked for patterns or similarities of meanings, turned them into categories, and created a visual thematic map to organize themes and subthemes by hand (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Also, I created a table (see Table 6) that shows the overarching themes and a description of categories within these themes to provide a general overview of the findings in Chapter Four.

Data Representation

In this narrative inquiry study, tables and maps were presented and used to illustrate the connections between the themes and research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Researchers often examine chunks of data, identifying analytical insights and reflecting on the rich, thick, and contextual details to amplify ideas concerning the phenomena (Bhattacharya, 2017). Thematic descriptions and data extracts were utilized to represent the data. Additionally, data were represented through the stories as excerpts, descriptions developed from semi-structured interviews, and observations of each participant. It is challenging to represent anyone in their most accurate form. However,

researchers can best represent the information shared through collaboration and co-construction of the findings with the participants (Bhattacharya, 2017). Collaboration with research participants is vital to ensure the researcher presents the participants' lived experiences while remaining reflective about the researcher's agendas and political and personal backgrounds (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). I asked all research participants to member check by reviewing interview transcripts, descriptions of them, codes, categories, and overarching themes. Interpreting qualitative data requires the researcher to co-construct narratives centered around meanings with the research participants (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Summary

In this study I sought to explore how Black choral conductors negotiated nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. In this chapter I outlined narrative inquiry as the methodology and semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method employed in this research study. Through narrative inquiry, I sought stories regarding the experiences of Black choral conductors regarding racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral music environments. I highlighted the selected research method, the process of participant recruitment, and methods for data collection, analysis, and site selection. Additionally, I discussed the procedures employed to ensure ethics and trustworthiness in this research and data analysis. The data representation in Chapters Four and Five was developed through thematic analysis and interpretations, as discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings in the United States. I selected three Black choral conductors of various backgrounds and located in different regions. The following section introduces the research participants.

Participants

Table 2 provides a brief description of each participant with information such as their chosen pseudonym, age, gender, college degrees, the type of institutions they attended, and their current occupation. Next, I provide a co-constructed rich, thick description of the participants in the context of their semi-structured interviews and their lives. In the descriptions of each participant, I share information such as their age, schooling, body language, and overall personality. Additionally, I share brief details about my experience with each participant during the interviews. Approximate age is provided to further protect the identities of the participants.

Table 2

Overview of Participants

William	Amira	George
● Approximately 25	● Approximately 40	● Approximately 30
● African American	● African American	● African American
● Male	● Female	● Male
● Graduated with a	● Graduated with a	● Graduated with a

bachelor of choral music education and master in church music with an emphasis in choral conducting. ● Attended an HBCU for one semester but graduated from PWI's. ● Serves as a higher-ed instructor but previously as a general music teacher.	bachelor of choral music education, master in vocal performance, and doctorate in music education. ● Attended both HBCU's and PWIs. ● Serves as a music professor.	bachelor of choral music education and a master in choral conducting. ● Attended all PWIs. ● Serves as a secondary school choral music teacher.

William

William is a male who is approximately 25 years of age, holds a master's degree in church music with a concentration in choral conducting, and serves as a higher ed instructor. William has four sisters and one brother, but he has an approximate 11-year age difference from his siblings because he has a different father. William's mother was married to the father of his siblings, divorced, and then married his father. He is his father's only child and believes his musical abilities come from his dad, who used to sing

in church choir. William's cousin, a musician, also inspired him and told him growing up that he could make a career out of music. As a child, Williams parents told him that music was an option for him; they said he could be successful, receive scholarships, and attend noteworthy universities.

William's parents were very intentional about putting him in piano lessons as a child. His first piano teacher was a Black female, who was approximately 60 years of age. She was stern, and she sometimes used a stick to discipline him during his piano lessons. Music was deeply rooted in this teacher's family, and many of her students– as well as her son– worked with celebrities in the music industry. At times, William disliked the piano. However, he found a passion and love for playing the trombone from 4th to 9th grade. He began singing during middle school, approximately between the ages of 11-13, and his White male choir director became his mentor when William entered the field of music education. Although he grew up and lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood, William attended a predominantly White high school under the leadership of a White high school choral conductor. In his sophomore year in high school, William made the district honor choir and all-state choir. William highlighted his experiences with two White choral clinicians, one male and one female, as his inspiration for pursuing a career in choral music.

During his junior year of high school, William also served as a cantor at his Catholic church, with an opportunity to sing for Christmas Mass. Additionally, his immediate family attended the Catholic church; however, he was always inspired by his relatives, who attended a Baptist church. William attended a HBCU for one semester and left the next semester to pursue his passion for playing tennis at a predominantly White

institution. William currently resides in the Northwest region of the United States, and he describes his higher education students as "kids," which could be a result of his experience teaching elementary-age learners. With lots of sunlight and a lovely and inviting warm environment, I began the interview with William smiling in the Zoom meeting. I connected with William as he talked about how he was inspired by Black history to preserve the Negro Spiritual. Towards the end of the interview, William had both hands in the air, beaming with passion as he discussed the importance of culture in choral ensemble rehearsals.

Amira

Two great minds met each other with smiles, excitement, and a willingness to tell in our well-lit rooms during the Zoom meeting. Amira entered the interview boldly, beautifully, and goddess-like. Amira is a female, mother, and African American who is approximately 40 years of age. She holds a bachelor's degree in music education, a master's degree in performance, and a doctoral degree in music education. She currently directs K-12 choirs, children's choirs, and church choirs, and resides in the Southeastern region of the United States. Amira discovered that her most meaningful expression as a young child was being musical. She is the middle child and has two singing, musical sisters who are approximately one year apart in age. Amira's mother always wanted to take piano lessons as a kid but could not afford them because they cost five cents at the time. Her mom was determined to enroll all her daughters in piano lessons. Amira's dad was a singer, took voice lessons, and sang in the choir. Amira recalled accompanying her father on piano as he practiced his singing.

Amira spoke about how she could sight-read just about anything put in front of her on the piano and came into playing the piano by ear in her early twenties. A self-identified "piano nerd," Amira, aged 11-13, would come home from her magnet middle school and sight-read music for fun after school. During her K-12 experience, Amira participated in elementary general music, middle school choir and band, and high school choir. However, it was during middle school that she picked choir and became the accompanist for her middle school choir director, who was an inspiration to her. In high school, Amira continued studying piano; all her piano teachers were Black, and she spent one year in the school band. She was a member of honor ensembles and church choirs. In addition, she participated in community events, such as performing in a community choir led by Black musicians who believed in performing standard choral literature and spirituals.

Amira remembers watching her older sister play the piano when she was too young to take lessons. She had to wait two years until she turned five to take piano lessons like her oldest sister. Amira's oldest sister was always mean to her and succeeded at getting away with it. In a little sibling friendly rivalry, Amira was determined to get her revenge, and she decided to play out of her sister's piano books, as she knew this would frustrate her sister. However, she did not get in trouble because of the emphasis on practicing the piano in their household. This rivalry led to her sister stopping piano lessons; however, Amira's attempts to frustrate her sister began the journey of a love of piano and choral music. Amira found much success in piano and music throughout her life. She shared how her first piano teacher was mean and made her mad, and at the time, she felt she could get the same caliber of instruction with a teacher with a kinder

demeanor. However, Amira returned to her first piano teacher after a year with a different teacher because the instruction from her new teacher lacked the rigor she desired. Many of Amira's piano teachers were either fluent in reading music, did not play by ear, or even discouraged playing by ear because that was not how they did things. However, a few of her teachers were adept at playing by ear and could also read music.

Amira and her sisters all took piano lessons and attended HBCUs; Amira took piano more seriously, but she believes her youngest sister had the best solo voice. The sisters come together to sing during family functions, and her youngest sister sings in a gospel group with an arranger who arranged "Lift Every Voice and Sing," could not read music, but created one of the most musical and intricate arrangements Amira has heard. Growing up, Amira attended an African American church where she was exposed to gospel music and hymns. Nevertheless, as a child, she noticed a difference in what she was learning in her lessons versus what the musicians in her communities were doing. For instance, Amira observed the musicians in her church community doing more note-reading and performing music of the Western–European tradition.

I left the interview feeling inspired and reminded of the vital work I have embarked upon in the hopes of amplifying the voices of Black choral conductors. Everything felt comfortable. At times, Amira spoke with her hands and moved closer to the screen to emphasize her story's points and demonstrate the passion behind each word. Again, I felt connected to the biblical story of Moses. Although Black musicians trained her in Eurocentric traditions, she is still liberating and uniquely paving the way for others through her mentorship and service to others. Amira shared an excerpt from the book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Woodson, 1933/2023), which I will share during the

opening of Chapter Five. To me, the quote speaks to this Moses idea, relating to the biblical story of Black choral conductors liberating other Black choral conductors and members of other members of historically marginalized communities in choral spaces.

George

George is a young African American male who is high-energy, passionate, hard-working, and religious. He is approximately 30 years of age and holds a bachelor's degree in choral music education and master's degree in choral conducting. Typical with many choral conductors, he talked with his hands and smiled as he began reflecting on his narrative. George serves as a middle school vocal music teacher and choral conductor and is one of the few Black male teachers at his school. George is encouraging and prides himself on being a father figure and advocate for the Black and Brown students he serves daily.

With his mother planting the seed, George began singing in church at the age of three and has been singing ever since. He is a middle child with four siblings, approximately 1 year apart, being the only child of his single parent mother. George comes from a musical family. His mother, father, grandmother, aunt, uncles, and siblings all sang in the church choir or played an instrument. George remembers being inspired by watching his church choir director and worship leader directing the church choir. George took his first piano lessons at age five; however, his most memorable lessons were with his second piano teacher, an African American male in his early 80s, who George considered a grandfather figure. George was inspired by the fact that his second piano teacher was always personally working on something on the piano and would allow George to turn pages while he played.

Although he did not attend a HBCU, George grew up and attended school in a predominantly Black community. During his K-12 experience, George participated in elementary, middle, and high school choirs, with all his K-12 choir teachers identifying as African American. He participated in district festivals and honor choirs and was allowed to sing and conduct. George was trained in the Western canon tradition of sight-singing and received a scholarship at the PWI he attended. George shared that he believes he received the scholarship to study music at the collegiate level because of the sight-singing abilities he developed from singing in middle school and high school choirs. At times, George was the only Black choral ensemble member in his college choir.

The interview with George ran slightly longer than our allotted time. However, his story was valuable, and I was honored that he shared it with me. George spoke about how he loves learning and how he is big on relationships in his classrooms and within his choral ensembles. He discussed how his choir classroom and everywhere he is in the school he works serves as a safe haven where others can be authentic. After completing the interviews with George, it was clear that middle school impacted his career choice of becoming a choral conductor and was the place that honed his Eurocentric music-making skills. George's story speaks to the idea that representation in choral spaces matters to students of all ages, especially during the middle school stage. He shared how this interview was a fantastic opportunity to reflect upon his life, experiences, and practices as a choral conductor.

Findings

Below, I discuss the themes I created and provide examples of how each theme relates to the participants' experiences and addresses the research questions. The research

questions were: (1) How do Black choral conductors experience racism in choral settings?; (2) How do Black choral conductors describe an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting?; and (3) How have their experiences influenced or informed their decisions as choral conductors today? The findings reflect the following themes as they pertain to the research questions: (1) navigating racism through developed resilience and resistance, (2) navigating racism through familiarity with Eurocentric music-making practices, (3) culturally relevant–led choral music settings go beyond the surface-level of knowing the people led, and (4) Black life experiences influence the use of voice and desire to liberate others.

RQ #1: How do Black choral conductors experience racism in choral settings?

Theme #1: Navigating Racism Through Developed Resilience and Resistance

Developing resilience and resistance was necessary for each participant, relating to the problematic adversities of racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in the choral profession. The church and middle school served as institutional influences for the research participants. All participants discussed how high-impact social institutions, such as family, middle school, and church, and high-impact musical experiences, such as opportunities to conduct or accompany the choir, helped them build their resilience and resistance. Social components such as participants family, church, and middle school allowed them to embrace their musicalities and inspired their forced Black resistance. All participants mentioned that middle school was a time when they consciously decided to pursue choral conducting, and all participants mentioned the church as a foundational place for music experiences.

Concerning the first research question, participants described various situations where they experienced racism in the form of micro and macro aggressions in choral settings. William recounted being treated less than others, incompetent, unequal, or that his education was not valued because of the color of his skin. In this study, participants discussed experiences of racism from colleagues, peers, and other students. William described racism as feeling like an immense growing pain or fatigue. It was common among all the participants that racism forced them to become resistant and resilient. Participants discussed negotiating racism through forced resilience. The Black choral conductor participants described the use of developed resilience and resistance to navigate the common occurrence of racism they have experienced in choral music settings.

Participants discussed being nervous about unfair repercussions that could happen to them because of being Black. This section discusses the moments in which each participant discussed experiencing and navigating racism through their resilience and resistance. Participants described experiencing and negotiating racism with words such as "being uncomfortable"; however, they persevered. At times, resilience and resistance appeared as self-affirmations for most research participants. For William, his use of self-affirmations as a form of resistance and resilience helped him navigate issues with racism. He used words such as I am "good enough" and "my skin color and education should not determine my value in the choral music profession."

> I am good enough to be represented at all levels. So, my skin color does not, it
> should not, I would say that it should not hinder me from being able to sit at the
> table with everyone. I am competent enough to work in this setting, this

centeredness that I should not be looked down upon or unequal, because of my

skin color when we get to get into the room, or I'll say this, even because of my

educational background, because that's another thing you'll see and will

experience. (William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Participants discussed various encounters with racism that they experienced as

choral conductors and how racism made them feel. William described negotiating with

racism in choral settings as a growing pain. He discussed how he adapts by being flexible

in his leadership and in how he interacts with co-workers and colleagues:

Like, it's just something that through the, through the growing pains, of you

know, just having to go through that as you grow up, you know, being an

African American, you learn how to be flexible and that's my key word for it! Just

being flexible in leadership and just even…you know, how you handle yourself

among your coworkers and colleagues as well.

(William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Participants agreed that Black choral conductors experience racism in choral

settings through repertoire, low expectations, and low standards, and when choral

conductors or teachers of Black choral students lack a thorough understanding of the

treasure of Black musicality and abilities that Black choral students bring into the choral

space. Most participants in this study highlighted that they had to negotiate a form of

racism through choral repertoire in choral music environments; however, they all

resiliently pressed forward despite the negative narrative and adverse experiences. Amira

shared how many Black choral music students at the PWI she serves tend to have a

similar experience. She tells a story about a young Black choral music student who was

very musical and could teach complex church pieces without the aid of the piano; however, he felt he was ill-prepared, unlike his peers:

> When it comes to students who are here at this institution, my vocal music ed majors who are Black, as I see, well, first of all, they are few and far between, the experiences are very similar. There are, there is a lack of understanding of how to maximize their voices, there is a musicality that they possess that is not very valued, or that does not have a space to grow and be nurtured in our academic spaces. And either they will change a major, change major, or they will graduate feeling that they are not as qualified as their peers.
>
> (Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Amira continued discussing the challenges she has observed in higher education concerning Black choral music majors. The same student who was very musical did graduate, but he mentioned the many ways White faculty members made racist remarks to him. This situation affirms prior literature as racial microaggressions produce destructive outcomes that include individuals experiencing feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and seclusion (Solorazon et al., 2000).

> There is not one other vocal music major before or since him who could do what he did. Yet, when it was time for him to graduate, he passed all of the proficiencies that his peers had, and he had all of that experience teaching and leading and organizing a gospel choir. He had these two strong musicalities right there. And he felt that he wasn't as prepared as his peers, when in actuality, he had way more than they had. So, this lack of self-efficacy is lacking there, and it disturbs me and I believe that this person has left the teaching profession now.

Also, racist remarks being made to them. Um, without people realizing that these

things are inappropriate, and you should not be saying that to somebody. Those

are the main things we will see from vocal music ed majors

(Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Not only were instances of racist remarks discussed by the participants, but they

also experienced being uncomfortable, being treated unfairly, and feeling a lack

of nurturing from their choral conductors and music teachers. While the participants

mentioned experiences of unconscious, covert, or hidden racism within their choral music

experiences, instances of direct racism were also discussed. Amira described how she

brought her choral students to a festival event and how a White male colleague would not

initially acknowledge her as a choral conductor. This colleague refused to allow her into

the building or the back room where her students were after the two had interacted for

months:

I went to walk to the back. Now mind you, one of the people standing at the door

stopping people from going back was a person who…I had been to this man's

house giving him things. I talked to him on the phone about my students, and that

man knew me. I got to the door to go to the back. And I had been there all week.

Two people standing at the door, choral directors in the area, said," I'm sorry,

nobody can come back here. I said, okay. And I knew that I had read my

information right. I knew that choral directors were allowed in the back before

[the performance]." So, I was kind of walking away. And I saw another choral

director walk up, a White lady, she walked up the door and they said "hi, come on

back." (Amira makes a sound) What! We turn right around, "you let her back

90

there. And you did not let me back?" Well, It is only for choral directors. "Have

you not seen me here all week, I am a choral director!" really what school? "I'm at

SUL school. And I have this student, this student, this student and this student

back there that I brought information to your house about!" Oh, okay, okay, you

can go back. Also, I would go to meetings and they would overlook me, they

would talk over me, they would not pass materials to me. They would. It is like

they had their own little club that I was not a part of. And those things happened

really frequently. That happened on a frequent basis. And if it were not for the

students and wanting them to have good experiences, I would have left it alone

(Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

All participants actively negotiated racism through resistance and resilience. I

highlight this finding because adverse experiences may have lasting effects on

individuals beyond imagination. In this portion of the interview, Amira discussed an

example of direct racism that occurs to numerous Black choral conductors. Amira

expressed how exhausting it was to live through this experience of racism; however,

because she was affording her students an opportunity, she resisted the racism and pushed

ahead. It is paramount to acknowledge that this is not the experience of all Black choral

conductors. For instance, Amira discussed how an issue of racism caused her predecessor

to never return to the same choral event she described. She continued to discuss how her

predecessor at the school was offended because of how the White choral clinician

approached the Negro Spiritual genre of music:

The person who was the choir teacher to two or three people before me, still

worked at the school. And she told me she stopped bringing her students there

when she was teaching because there was an invited conductor that came. And

when it got to the spirituals, he spent a lot of time working on the other pieces.

When he got to the spiritual, he said, "Well, we do not really have to practice this.

You just sing it how you feel it." And that was a wrap for her. She never brought

students back there again. So, me being young and thinking, oh, you know, this is

temporary, and nobody is going to be that way. It was definitely that way. Yeah,

so I experienced it as a choral director.

(Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Most participants mentioned that they did not experience direct racism in choral

settings until they became choral conductors themselves. William shared that when he

entered the choral music profession, he first truly experienced the issues related to racism

that African Americans experience in the United States. He discussed that when he was

singing in ensembles during his music training, he did not perceive any issues. William

discussed that, as a choral student throughout his K–collegiate experience, he did not pay

much attention to racism; however, when he became a choral conductor, he observed and

experienced first-hand the issues around racism that his parents had warned him about

while growing up:

> You know, it was not until I got into the working world, where I saw the different
>
> proponents or, you know, like, the issues that African Americans face that maybe
>
> like my parents had talked about, I'm gonna be honest, like singing in those
>
> ensembles. I never really thought about that stuff. Just being honest. I was, you
>
> know, I was just there. Like, it was cool. Like, I am singing! Hey, thumbs up. Yeah,
>
> it was not until I actually got into the profession where I see some of the stuff I see

or experienced some of the stuff that I have experienced

(William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

William explained how, as an African American choral conductor, he has to be vigilant and intentional about everything he does in the choral profession. I emphasize this because most participants discussed how they had to work harder to ensure they were at least acknowledged compared to their non-Black counterparts:

When you are Black, you have to think before you do anything and analyze completely. You know, that is the thing about being African American, you know, because you have never been at the top of the network; you have to think before you do because if you do not, like the repercussions may be a little bit different for you than it would be for some other people.

(William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

George discussed how his teachers and colleagues at the PWI where he studied were very welcoming to him; however, this was not the case for all Black students. During his collegiate music experience, he discussed how many Black choral music majors experienced some things that he did not. George remembered looking up one day in the university choral ensemble and realizing he was the only Black student out of one hundred members. He discussed how Black choral students would leave the top choir at the predominantly White institution he studied due to the elitism and dispositions of the White choral music students. He described how a lot of the racist comments would come from students at the university:

A lot of the times where I would experience any type of racist comment or any type of, how do I say it…for lack of better term, undercover racist comment or

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somebody who is not Black saying something and not realizing what they are

saying, is was from students.

(George, Interview 1, May 23, 2023)

Theme #2: Navigating Racism Through Familiarity with Eurocentric Music-making Practices

Participants in this research study discussed how they navigated racism through their familiarity with Eurocentric-music-making practices. Within this study, the research participants negotiated their Blackness and innate musicality to navigate Eurocentric music training environments. George discussed how his ability to sight-sing or read music, which he began to cultivate during his middle school experience, paid off by exposing him to Eurocentric music-making practices and aiding him in securing a scholarship at a PWI.

And so, but in the music school, the minority were the African Americans.

Although overall, I had a great experience at the university. They gave me a

scholarship to attend school—hallelujah glory to God! Music scholarship, because

I could do what? Sight-read! See how all that is paying off?

(George, Interview 1, May 23, 2023)

Each participant mentioned that, at times, Black choral music students experience racism through a lack of foundation of Eurocentric practices and approaches. Participants discussed how some Black choral music students did not receive the proper nurturing of the Eurocentric form of music-making. However, Black choral students were measured and held accountable in the same manner as their White peers. William discussed that many Black students he encountered during his collegiate music training environment

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struggled in music theory due to lacking familiarity with Eurocentric music-making

practices. He described how thankful he was that his parents encouraged and supported

him in taking piano lessons:

> And so that's another thing too, that may add to why African Americans may
>
> struggle at music theories because they may come from a background where
>
> they're not even getting the full, well-rounded choral experience. Well, thankfully,
>
> for me, that I took piano, and it's kind of sad.
>
> (William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

William stated he was thankful for his piano experiences however; it was sad for

him because many of his peers didn't have the same opportunities and struggled. Most

participants discussed a lack of concern among choral conductors and teachers regarding

how valuing solely Eurocentric music traditions excludes Black and Brown students from

music training programs. Amira spoke about her experiences studying at HBCUs and

teaching at a PWI now. She described how she had seen Eurocentric music-making

practices, primarily how music theory is taught, exclude talented aspiring musicians in

music learning environments:

> Excuse me, and I will never forget this, there was a young man who came in,
>
> admitted to the program and could play anything you put in front of him, we were
>
> in a theory class, and still to this day, just musical beyond belief, but he could not
>
> read notation. And over the years, they ended up weaning him out of the program
>
> through the theory class. And two years ago, that man just won a Grammy. But he
>
> never got his degree because of the way theory was approached at the university.
>
> (Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

RQ #2: How do Black choral conductors describe an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting?

Theme #3: Culturally Relevant–Led Choral Music Settings Go Beyond the Surface Level

Considering the second research question, each participant described a culturally relevant led–choral music setting as a place where the conductor intentionally extends beyond the minimum of knowing and understanding the ensemble members. The participants discussed that the leader would intentionally seek opportunities for high-impactful musical experiences, centering the student, requiring the choral conductor-leader to go beyond the surface level of knowing and understanding the ensemble members. The research participants described an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting as a place where students can authentically be musical, turn pages, conduct, accompany the choir, and ultimately lead. Most of the participants discussed how page turning allowed them to experience music of the Western canon and be near their inspirational teachers. Participants discussed how turning pages served as a tool to motivate students in their classrooms who may not desire be a choral singer. In this context, authentically means that the students are able and encouraged to bring their own unique diversities and musicalities to the choral setting. Participants used words such as "well-rounded, knowing and understanding the people, and high expectations."

All participants in this study discussed how high-impact musical experiences are essential in an ideal culturally relevant–led choral setting. In the context of this research study, high-impact musical experiences can include opportunities for students to be the focal point in the choral music setting, such as accompanying or conducting the

ensemble, being section leaders, or attending district or state festivals and honor choirs. It is understood by the Black choral conductors in this study that many of these musical experiences are commonplace in the choral setting. However, for the experiences to be high-impact, the choral conductor must intentionally go beyond the surface level of knowing the students. The intentionality is critical to highlight because it demonstrates an opportunity that choral leaders can take advantage of to create a more socially-just environment.

Most participants discussed how essential it is for a culturally relevant choral conductor to know the students and be flexible. When describing the conductor, participants used words such as being flexible when working with the students, believing that the students would then, in turn, be flexible with one another. Participants described that culturally relevant conductor would value the different diversities within the choral ensemble; for example, race, neurodiversity, and other backgrounds. Participants described an ideal choral ensemble setting as a place where ensemble members would have a voice and belong. Participants used words like "privileging the voice of ensemble members, honoring the different frames of reference within the choral music experience, and honing the many ways ensemble members are musical:"

> I believe that cultural competence as a Black conductor means that the
> conductor knows that no matter the age group, they know their singers well.
> (George, Interview 1, May 23, 2023)

George continued to describe a culturally-relevant choral music setting as a place where everyone involved can be who they are. Participants used words like "safe haven,"

"everyone accepted," and "celebrated." William discussed how an ideal culturally

relevant choral music setting is where everyone learns from one another:

> We need to understand each other, we need to know that people are going
>
> through things, and when they do, we're gonna lift them up and not put them
>
> down.
>
> (William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Participants described a culturally relevant–led choral music setting as a place

where members feel seen, understood, and represented in natural, tangible ways. The

participants described an ideal choral music setting as a place that feels great and where

the conductor would value the many diversities within the space. Within this theme,

participants discussed how choral conductors must have the ability to be intentional in the

many ways they address people. For instance, choral conductors would think prior to

acting and saying words that could adversely impact ensemble members.

All research participants discussed the importance of tapping into their students'

musicality and the importance for choral conductors to hone the many ways ensemble

members are musical. Like most participants in this study, Amira described her idea of a

culturally relevant–led choral ensemble environment as a place of privileging,

representing all persons involved, and celebrating the wealth of knowledge that all bring

to the environment.

> My ideal ensemble (Amira pauses to think), my ideal ensemble would be one
>
> where all persons, of every background, wherever they are from, whatever they
>
> identify with, feel seen, feel understood, and feel represented in real ways, not just
>
> surface ways, not just throwing something, I sprinkled a little sugar on top of the

cake to make it sweet. But there is none in the cake. Like there. It is interwoven, not just in the music we do. And not just in the way that we do the music, but in the ways that we interact with each other. And the ways that we greet each other when we walk in the room. And the way that we celebrate each other's accomplishments. In the way we communicate with each other, and the people that are leading the ensemble, and the knowledge that those people bring. (Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

In the context of this research, the participants shared that high-impact musical experiences are ideal and belong in culturally relevant–led choral ensemble settings. These experiences and practices include different ways for students to be musical. Additionally, most research participants agreed that it was more than just having opportunities to perform; it was how their choral teachers went beyond the surface level of knowing each of them as individuals. All participants acknowledge that to provide students with a well-rounded and culturally relevant–led choral ensemble, choral conductors must first intentionally go beyond the surface level of understanding and knowing all the students. To me, when one seeks to go beyond the surface level of knowing and understanding the students, they deliberately seek opportunities to learn the people they serve. For instance, an individual could conduct a survey to gather data about things that are important to the ensemble member and their families. To me, the most important aspect of going beyond the surface level would be for one to avoid performative practices that regularly occur.

Most research participants agreed that an ideal culturally relevant–led ensemble was where the choral conductor went beyond the surface level and centered each student.

Each research participant described how their inspirational choral music teachers centered them, first as individuals, then as music students, and how the choral teachers made them feel. According to the participants, choral leaders in this ideal choral setting would be intentional about addressing people. For instance, these choral leaders would be sure to know the ensemble members correct name pronunciations and preferred pronouns. Amira discussed a high-impact musical experience she engaged in as an alto section leader in her collegiate music training environment. She talked about being selected as the alto section leader because of her ability to play the piano and how the veteran choral students in the ensemble had already established a tight community within the choral environment. Amira discussed how the choral students initially wanted to avoid listening to her, a first-year student serving as their section leader. She described the opportunity as uncomfortable at first. However, Amira acknowledged that it helped her learn how to gain the respect of others without resulting in disrespect. Amira shared how this opportunity changed her and now informs how she leads and interacts respectfully with others today.

> For the first few months, they just talked over me and did whatever they wanted to do. And I talked to the choir director, and he had one of the veterans who was sweet, she was just as sweet as she could be. But she did not play the piano. And he only did that because I was the only one that played the piano. But in doing that, there, I learned what I could, and I stayed in that position for four years, I learned how to lead a group without being a dictator. I learned how to gain the respect of people who were close to me in age, how to do it without shouting or being rude, how to not be like, "hey, yall be quiet!" I'd be like, "yeah, that was

funny. All right, yeah, we gotta get back to it." You know, I learned how to do

those things. And I never would have learned that if I had not had that experience

in that way. So I wanted one thing, but I got more than that."

(Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

RQ #3: How have their experiences influenced or informed the decisions they make as choral conductors today?

Theme #4: Black Life Experiences Influence the Use of Voice and Desire to Liberate Others

Relating to the third research question, participants explained that their

experiences influenced the decisions they make as choral conductors through their

resilience, resistance, flexibility, and how they use their voice to liberate others. In this

study, all participants mentioned how their Black life experiences within and outside of

choral music settings had informed their practice, changed them, and influenced how they

now use their voices to liberate others and be social change agents. Within this study, the

research participants described positive things they gained from their inspirational choral

conductor-teachers. Most participants discussed taking the positive things from their

Black and non-Black inspirational teachers and implementing them in their practices.

Within this study, the research participants discussed how they make sure their students

feel seen and valued. The participants did not discuss specifically what it would look like

for students to feel seen and valued. To me, one seeking to ensure ensemble members

feel seen and valued would first listen to them and seek opportunities to engage in

conversations. Additionally, the conductor would find ways to represent the ensemble

members in authentic and accepted ways specific to each individual ensemble member.

The participants also discussed how racism had influenced their daily lives as choral conductors. George discussed a moment where one of his White teacher colleagues at the middle school he serves targeted a young Black male student. He described the young Black student targeted as a choir student he had never seen argue with teachers or administration. This situation allowed George to use his voice to liberate his targeted Black choral music middle school student. George resumed describing another moment when his White teacher colleagues were discussing culturally-relevant teaching yet their actions appeared to be the opposite:

> The student finally comes over to me, where I am standing in the cafeteria, and he said, "Man, why is she following me? Why is she following me like the police?" And I said, "did you not hear what he just told you? You are following him! Like, you are the police. This young man. Black boy lives in an area where the police are always knocking on doors and always arresting people! People! He has seen arrested! But you keep following him when he keeps telling you to stop doing it!" Even goes further to when I stood up in a staff meeting and they were having a whole conversation about cultural relevance, you know, diversity, and all of that. And I basically said, all this is all good and dandy, but we have White teachers here who keep targeting Black students (George, Interview 1, May 23, 2023)

In the first incident, the teacher was following the student around the school. George continued discussing how he must advocate for the Black and Brown students he teaches in his choir because White teachers often target them. He highlighted how he observed how his White colleagues have lied to many of his Black choir students on

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paper and in emails to have them removed from the school. George discussed how he

personally observed White teachers do this to students. He continued to describe how he

finds himself as a liberator of his students, creating a choral setting or environment where

his students feel safe:

> I have seen them lie on paper, lie in emails just to get students out of school. So, I
>
> find myself all the time having to intervene to save our Black kids.
>
> (George, Interview 1, May 23, 2023)

William emphasized how his life experiences have taught him that, as an African

American choral conductor, there are certain things he is not able to do like others. He

discussed that because of his experiences, he knows how he must navigate in the choral

music profession:

> As an African American, there's an experience that you face in the world, that's
>
> a little bit different than maybe those that are of a different race. And because of
>
> that and having to go through that you must learn how to be flexible in what you
>
> do and how you do it.
>
> (William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

William continued highlighting that, due to his Black life experiences, he must be

conscious of how he interacts with others. William continued discussing how his

experience as a Black choral conductor has influenced how he can empathize with others

and reach them differently:

> When you are African American, there are some things you have to face, whether
>
> people are going to accept you, whether they are going to think your education is
>
> good enough. And so, I think by having those diverse, those diverse experiences

and having to adjust to them, it allows you to be flexible within the ensemble, and

culturally understand everybody differently. I find you can reach people

differently.

(William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Each research participant in this study mentioned that their experiences created a

different awareness of how they must be conscious about how they interact with others.

Amira discussed how her life experience with her Black choral music teacher during

middle school had influenced the decisions she makes today. Amira talked about how she

now sets out to ensure that every student she encounters feels seen and valued.

Oh goodness, from my earliest experiences in middle school, I would say that

has influenced me, in how I want to make sure every student is seen, and they feel

what makes them special is showcased.

(Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Discussion

In this study, three Black choral conductors in the United States shared their

narratives in the hopes that they would generate insights to improve the choral profession

and society. I sought to create a space to amplify the voices of Black choral conductors

and create an awareness of how Black choral conductors negotiate racism and

nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral music settings. I sought to address the

following research questions: (1) How do Black choral conductors experience racism in

choral settings?; (2) How do Black choral conductors describe an ideal culturally

relevant–led choral music setting?; (3) How have their experiences influenced or

informed their decisions as choral conductors today?

As a result, the first and second themes, (1) navigating racism through developed resilience and resistance and (2) navigating racism through familiarity with Eurocentric music-making practices, addressed research question one in that the participants discussed the ways they experienced racism in choral music settings. The third theme, (3) culturally relevant–led choral music settings go beyond the surface-level of knowing the people led, addressed research question two in that the participants described their ideal culturally relevant–led choral ensemble setting. The final theme, (4) Black life experiences influence the use of voice and desire to liberate others, addresses research question three as the participants discussed how their experiences influenced their decisions as choral conductors today. In the next section, I provide the reader with participant research summaries, participant-generated in vivo word clouds, and preliminary participant categories used to create themes. I created these summaries to highlight and amplify the narratives and, ultimately, the voices of William, Amira, and George.

Participant Research Summaries

William

William's narrative suggests that racism is normal and happens through the many ways Black individuals experience life. He described how Black choral conductors experience racism in choral settings through the Western canonic approach to teaching the foundations of music. First, it is essential to highlight that William's parents, siblings, and cousin advocated for him to pursue a life of music. His family's support and his piano lesson experiences helped him navigate his undergraduate music training where everyone was measured the same but entered at different levels. Additionally, William's

strong sense of identity, capacity, and efficacy borne from his earliest musical experiences prepared him to navigate the challenges that come with racism that his parents warned him about, and he was able to honor his African American history and occupy an historically-excluded seat at the choral table as a choral conductor. I highlight this because William describes how he intentionally honors his African American history by celebrating the culture and music. Additionally, like most participants, William discussed how challenging occupying the role as a choral conductor was for him.

William discussed a recent experience with a White student in the collegiate ensemble that he conducts:

> I had a girl in the choir who, literally, you know, she gave me three, three rehearsals, and then she told me she was not coming back. And I did not know this until the chair of the department came to me and said, well, she practically said from day one that she "did not like your teaching style, and that she did not feel like it was best suited for her." And so, I was kind of shocked. Because how do you not like someone's teaching style on the first day? And honestly, if you do not really know someone, you cannot really declare that you know someone or you are gonna say, well, I already know I am not gonna like them if you do not give them a chance. And it is generally never singled out. She never, you know, she never had a bad experience with me.
>
> (William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

After seeking support from to the diversity office at the PWI where he worked, William learned that the same student had a history of complaining specifically about

Black instructors at the college. William also spoke about how he learned that the same student spoke negatively about him to his department chair:

> And the chair had to respond to her, like, "well, it is his program, he can do it the way, like, as long as it is not like nothing is getting done." But I had, I actually had no idea until after she left the choir completely, that I found out that all this was being said, and so it is just a very sad thing. But it is very much, like, it is so real, where, you know, unfortunately, like, there are still people out there who see it as, African Americans may not cut it, like White people
>
> (William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

William discussed how an ideal culturally relevant–led choral setting would be an environment with remarkable experiences. This environment would be grounded in high expectations for everyone, success, respect, equity, acceptance, and a well-rounded repertoire. William discussed throughout the importance of music speaking and connecting with life. Additionally, he talked about acceptance, relating, and reasoning with music and people. Finally, William asserted that an ideal culturally relevant–led choral setting would provide all students, regardless of any societal ideal, the experience of a lifetime. William's experiences influenced him to not only understand his students but to impact his students. Additionally, he has empathy, honors, and understands the importance of energy transfers in the choral setting. William aims to hone his students' musical and life skills to ensure they are impacted in a way that will live with them forever. Last, his experiences have informed his flexible practice in the different ways he addresses the music and people he serves as a choral conductor.

Figure 4

Table 3

Preliminary Categories with Codes Derived from William's Interview

Preliminary Category:	Preliminary Category:	Preliminary Category:
Foundational experiences yield success in music.	The middle school experiences and resistance. (The deliberate cultivation of high expectations)	Impact is contingent upon understanding your students.
Codes:		**Codes:**
The impact of family Support on career decisions.	**Codes:** High expectations of choral conductor leaders.	Care is essential in the choral ensemble.
High expectations aiding in inspiration to become a choral conductor.	Attitudes are contagious in the choral environment.	Discipline is desirable in the choral ensemble. Empathy is a tool to reason

Positive self-affirmations to navigate adverse experiences. Foundational music. Lessons (piano). Struggled with Western canon Approach to Theory.	Success helps students to continue the path. Intentionality is vital for choral conductors to be impactful. Respect is key in choral ensembles. Everyone must relate with the music and one another. The Music must speak. Choral students must experience. Everyone needs acceptance. Equity and equality are not the same. Students need a well-rounded choral experience.	with the music and others. It's important to know the students. Everyone must honor the music. Choral conductors must engage in flexibility: The ability to address people from different dynamics. Energy transfers in the choral setting. Choral conductors must hone their students' musical abilities.

Amira

Racism was not noticeable to Amira until she became a choral conductor herself. Middle school was the time where Amira found that music was her greatest expression and that she wanted to be a choral conductor just like her music teacher. She described

her middle school teacher as being the best music teacher and centered in high expectations with a command and respect of her students. After studying at an HBCU just like her inspirational teacher, Amira herself became a high school choral conductor. It was during this time her White colleagues in her region would overlook her, would not pass her materials, and would talk about her. In her words, Amira discussed how choral "elitists idolized the Western canon system, relegating the Spiritual and Black music-making to a secondary status, and continuing to serve racist fruit." Amira described the term "racist fruit" as the undesirable gifts that Black individuals receive such as gifts of prejudice, discrimination, and ideals connected to racism:

> I really experienced prejudice as a choral conductor. When I had my school
>
> ensembles, I experienced it more with that than I did as a member of an ensemble.
>
> (Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023)

Amira emphasized an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting as a place where all can "come on in and take a seat at a table where the understanding of different voices and people are served." Amira imagines a choral setting where the ensemble's members are provided the space to grow, feel seen and understood, and represented in real ways, not just the surface ways choral conductors have been doing it. Additionally, this choral setting would privilege the voices of communities and embrace different frames of references and funds of knowledge. Today, Amira is intentional about nurturing the many ways of being musical. A choral conductor, pianist, and vocalist herself, she has known for some time that music has always been her greatest expression, like many of the students she encounters as a choral conductor. In her childhood, her mother ensured that her and her two sisters had piano lessons, and she understood that

music was her safe haven. Today, Amira continues to care for the students, and she ensures that they feel seen, understood, represented in real ways, and that she embraces their multiple musicalities. Amira understands that it is impossible to know everything, and she values when strengths complement each other in choral music-making spaces.

Figure 5

In Vivo Word Cloud Derived from Amira's Interview

Table 4

Preliminary Categories with Codes Derived from Amira's Interview

Preliminary Category:	**Preliminary Category:**	**Preliminary Category:**
Middle school helped with racism negotiation.	Nurturing the many ways of being musical.	Understanding the people led.
Codes:	**Codes:**	**Codes:**
Middle school experience. I wanted to be choral	Greatest expression musically.	Bringing to the table. My piano teachers were

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conductor.	All three took piano lessons.	Black.
Little bit nerdy.	Still sing.	Own set of challenges.
Continued to pursue music.	Music was everything.	Another Black woman.
I got to accompany.	The church.	Firm and fair.
I really liked it.	Kept practicing.	Had a command.
Best music teacher.	She was brilliant and musical.	Did not have to raise her voice.
The band.	Participating in the choir.	Had our respect.
Graduated from an HBCU.	My one safe haven, the choir room.	Consistent.
Idolization of a system that has served them well.	Playing by ear as an asset in music-making.	Diversity within diversity.
"Racist fruit."	Our strengths complimented.	Different frames of reference.
Roots go far back.	Be musical in every way.	Variety of music's.
Elitism.	Strong piano skills.	Honor the ones.
Western musicality.	Has the ear for the career in music.	Story in a lot of different styles of music.
Secondary status.	Singing it for years.	Incorporate more pieces by ear.
Not centered in Black communities.	Strong musicality's	Privilege the voices.
Overlook me.	I cared for the students.	Community.
Wouldn't pass me materials.	All persons feel seen.	Connected.
Talk over me.		

	Feel understood.	
	Feel represented in real ways, not surface ways.	
	Embracing multiple musicality's.	
	The way they're musical.	

George

George highlighted how uncomfortable it is to respond regularly to racism from non-Black colleagues in various choral music settings. During his collegiate music experience, he discussed how many of the Black choral music majors experienced some things that he did not. George described looking up one day in the university choral ensemble and realizing he was the only Black student out of one hundred choral ensemble members. He discussed how Black choral students would leave the top choir at the PWI he attended due to the elitism and dispositions of the White choral music majors. Still, he did not realize the many adversities experienced by many of his Black peers as much because of his strong ability to sight-sing in the Western musical tradition. As a Black choral conductor, George observes how other teachers sometimes target Black students, devalue his perspectives, and refuse to learn. George highlighted how he had to advocate for his students when a White colleague began passing judgments on his Black

students. George was bothered immensely by the experience and after taking a moment to gather his thoughts, he spoke up about how the experience made him feel:

I guess she was trying to diagnose the problem with the child or something like ADHD, something like that, something, or some another. And so, I had to go to her privately because I did not want to do it on the day. Because I recognized that she was speaking from her White experience and failed to remember that none of my students are coming from your White experience. And not only that, but I am not coming from your White experience, and I had to go to her privately. Private message, I said, "Hey, you are my friend. But I do not appreciate what you said. What you said was out of pocket. It was offensive. Not only was it offensive but you fail to realize that we teach two different sets of people here, two different sets, this is your population."

(George, Interview 1, May 23, 2023)

George emphasized that an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting is one where the conductor centers the musical ensemble member. For instance, conductors centering ensemble members think about them prior to all decisions made and incorporate them in all aspects of the choral music environment. George discussed how choral conductors creating a culturally relevant–led choral music setting are flexible and vulnerable, allowing students to be vulnerable in a brave and safe space. Today, George has expectations to cultivate the many ways his students can be musical and thrive in both choral and educational environments. He understands the importance of being a middle school choral conductor and the impact of his middle school experience. George believes that middle school was where his musical horizons truly broadened. George

teaches similarly to what he learned from his inspirational choral teachers. He discussed that the only thing he does differently than his teachers is the ways he incorporates technology use. Additionally, he advocates for more diverse, equitable, and accessible resources for choral conductors at all levels.

Figure 6

In Vivo Word Cloud Derived from George's Interview

Table 5

Preliminary Category with Codes Derived from George's Interview

Preliminary Category:	Preliminary Category:	Preliminary Category:
Great expectations to cultivate the many ways students can be musical. **Codes:**	Centering the musical child. **Codes:** She afforded me	Being uncomfortable with racism in music settings. **Codes:** And not only did our

We performed a difficult
repertoire.

He had a very, very
profound impact on me that
I kept up with that goal and
dream.

I rarely saw males doing it.

He did not play games.

He always had high
standards for us.

She is still my choir mama
now.

She was very passionate.

She held us to high
standards.

She did not play any
games.

opportunities then to
conduct to be a leader.

I still have this relationship.

Afforded me opportunities
to conduct.

Experience that really
solidified it for me.

Do you think if I put you
into piano lessons, you'd
be able to play for church?

Who in here wants to be a
music educator or choral
conductor one day?

ancestors live it, but we're
still living it.

We have White teachers
here targeting Black
students.

You just totally discounted
and diminished and
devalued my perspective.

Some of them just refuse to
learn.

Got to undo this tradition.

They are afraid to do it.

Because they could not
deal with the elitism that
was going on over there.

Some of them experienced
some other things more
than I did.

They would be
experiencing it from other
students.

I was uncomfortable.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced research findings, described themes, and provided examples of how each theme related to participants' personal experiences. Additionally, I provided a detailed, thick description of each research participant. Finally, I represented the findings in this narrative inquiry study through excerpts from the interview transcripts and research summaries that portrayed real-life scenarios and showed themes and patterns found in the first-hand experiences of each research participant. The research questions were: (1) How do Black choral conductors experience racism in choral settings?; (2) How do Black choral conductors describe an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting?; and (3) How have their experiences influenced or informed their decisions as choral conductors today?

This study's findings reflect the following themes pertaining to the research questions. The first and second themes, (1) navigating racism through developed resilience and resistance, and (2) navigating racism through familiarity with Eurocentric music-making practices, address research question one in that the participants discussed the ways they experienced racism in choral music settings. The third theme, (3) culturally relevant–led choral music settings go beyond the surface-level of knowing the people led, addressed research question two in that the participants described their ideal culturally relevant–led choral ensemble setting. The final theme, (4) Black life experiences

influence the use of voice and desire to liberate others, addresses research question three as the participants discussed how their experiences influence their decisions today as choral conductors.

Table 6

Descriptive Table with Overarching Themes and Descriptions of Categories

Overarching Themes	Description of Categories Within Overarching Themes
Navigating racism through developed resilience and resistance	• Social institutions and the development of resilience. • Social institutions and the development of resistance. • Social institutions and the negotiation of racism.
Navigating racism through familiarity with Eurocentric music-making practices	• Foundational experiences yield success in music-making. • Feelings of discomfort and lack of empathy creates struggle.
Culturally relevant–led choral music settings go beyond the surface-level of knowing the people led	• Impact is contingent upon understanding the students. • Impact is contingent upon knowing the students.

	• Centering the people led.
	• High-impact experiences help cultivate the ways people are musical.
	• High expectations help cultivate the ways people are musical.
Black life experiences influence the use of voice and desire to liberate others	• Social institutions and the development of resilience.
	• Social institutions and the development of resistance.
	• Nurturing the ways people are authentically musical.
	• The Black liberator.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

> When a Negro has finished his education in our schools, then, he has been
> equipped to begin the life of an Americanized or Europeanized White man, but
> before he steps from the threshold of his alma mater he is told by his teachers that
> he must go back to his own people from whom he has been estranged by a vision
> of ideals which in his disillusionment he will realize that he cannot attain. He goes
> forth to play his part in life, but he must be both social and bisocial at the same
> time… For this arduous task of serving a race thus handicapped, however, the
> Negro graduate has had little or no training at all.
> (Woodson, 1933/2023, p.6)

This quote from the book *The Mis-Education of The Negro* (Woodson, 1933/2023), was shared with me by one of the research participants, Amira, after the initial interview. I own two copies of this book and have recommended it to others. I first learned about the book as an undergraduate choral music student at North Carolina Central University. The author, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, was the second Black American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University, and he writes about how Black people must resiliently extend beyond what is taught in American institutions of higher learning. Woodson discusses how Black people are sometimes taught to dislike themselves within the educational system and how education does not eliminate Blackness for Black people (Woodson, 2023). This quote reminds me of the challenging, exhausting, but necessary work I have begun to embark upon with this research.

In the context of this study, the quote connects with the idea that frequently, Black individuals who study in the Eurocentric practice are often unprepared for a reality of being flexible, negotiating between Eurocentric tradition and Blackness, and negotiating within environments that are historically grounded in racism and situated in Eurocentric ideals. In Chapter One, I began this study describing my experience reading *Choral Journal*, as it outlined issues related to gender inequity in the choral conducting profession. I sought to create a space for conversations centered around the lived experiences of Black choral conductors. Situated in narrative inquiry to share the counterstories that show the experiences of Black choral conductors, the study addressed the following questions: 1) How do Black choral conductors experience racism in choral settings?; 2) How do Black choral conductors describe an ideal culturally relevant–led choral music setting?; and 3) How have their experiences influenced or informed their decisions as choral conductors today? In this chapter, I will review the research findings presented in Chapter Four connecting them to prior literature and discussing practical, social, and theoretical implications. The following section will address the motivations for this study through prior literature.

Choral Conducting, Leadership, and the African American Experience

Very few studies have examined the interconnections between choral conducting, leadership learning, and the culturally relevant leadership learning in choral music settings. Scholars looking to understand more about organizational leadership have historically identified conductors and music ensembles as models of organizational effectiveness (Wis, 2007). Past research suggests that the conductor's profession is connected to the development of Western music, with the music notation that began with

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the Roman Catholic Church and its desire to standardize chants (Mauceri, 2018). While researchers like Gumm (2006) argued that the repertoire that choral conductors select influences how ensemble members understand different cultures and eras of music at times, Black people in the choral setting experience adversities, including feeling misunderstood, unseen, unwelcomed, unrepresented. The civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 60s generated songs of freedom, contemporary gospel, and songs of praise (Warren, 1997). Change agents are still searching for ways to understand and combat the instituation of racism in the United States (Yosso, 2005)**.** Prior literature suggests that issues concerning race in Black music research have been discussed since the turn of the twentieth century (Maultsby & Burnim, 2017). The following section will address each research question in the study and provide implications derived from each theme. Themes will be italicized throughout the remainder of this chapter.

RQ # 1: How Do Black Choral Conductors Experience Racism in Choral Settings?

Decades after the United States Civil War, African Americans sought to study, perform, and teach music (Thurman, 2021). Still, choral singing in the United States models Eurocentric practices, and Black musicians often must negotiate their Blackness in Western canonic music-making (Maultsby & Burnim, 2017). Relating to the first research question, the participants in this study experienced racism through direct and indirect micro and macroaggressions in choral settings; however, they *navigated through resistance, resilience, and familiarity with dominant White music-making practices*. In this study, Amira described how her White colleagues would overlook her, not pass her materials, and talk negatively about her. This finding aligns with prior literature, as individuals that experience microaggressions and racism may grieve at times alone or

fault themselves for their lived experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While I did not collect data that suggested participants grieved alone or faulted themselves for their lived experience with racism, I did find that the research participants experienced micro and macroaggressions and racism. This finding affirms prior literature, as all conductors have narratives that link their skills and abilities to their source of inspiration (Mauceri, 2018). I highlight this connection to literature because the experiences of the participants forced resilience, including macroaggressions from conductors could at times be a source of inspiration. The relationship with institutional influences is essential to emphasize because it demonstrates the foundational power and impact of social institutions such as middle or junior high school and, in the context of the research participants in this study, the Black church. Additionally, this finding affirms the literature as the CRLL model shows the power of language and institutional climate to influence students' capacity, identity, and efficacy in producing social change (Jones et al., 2016).

These findings parallel the literature concerning racism in music education and the Black experience in the United States. The source of the Negro Spiritual and civil rights movement are parallel in that they were grounded in Black resistance and resilience due to racism in the United States. The findings affirm the literature as the historical impact of institutionalized racism is deeply rooted and has visibly impacted Black people for centuries (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Decades after the United States Civil War, African Americans endeavored to study, perform, and teach music (Thurman, 2021). Historically, African Americans have united to share victories over injustice, discrimination, and poverty (Warren, 1997). Each research participant described how racism against Black choral conductors forces them to be on edge, anxious, and flexible.

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Participants described often feeling uncomfortable when dealing with issues of racism. George described how uncomfortable it is to respond regularly to racism from non-Black colleagues in various choral music settings. William recounted: "But it is very much like, unfortunately, there are still people out there who believe that African Americans may not cut it, like White people" (William, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023). The participants in this study discussed how students have certain perceptions of African American musicians, their strengths, and the types of music they engage with in choral settings. Similarly, these preconceived notions at times come from other choral conductors as it relates to a particular type of musicianship that they value less while engaging with repertoire. For the participants in this study, occurrences of racism were so frequent and routine that they would often deflect by making the experiences seem less significant than they really were, affirming a central tenet of critical race theory: racism is ordinary or endemic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

This finding affirms previous literature as Black musicians sometimes must negotiate their Blackness in Eurocentric art tradition (Maultsby & Burnim, 2017). Additionally, the finding affirms literature and exemplifies how Black music-training environments have historically sought to prepare Black musicians in the Eurocentric music-making practice. In prior literature, Historically Black Institutions and Black music teachers across the United States insisted that if Black students were going to advance in society, they would do so by performing and listening to the right kind of music, also known as the music of the Western canon (Thurman, 2021).

Considering the prior literature, I anticipated that Black choral conductors experienced racism; however, navigating racism through resilience and resistance speaks

to the intrinsic strength that each participant developed through their many first-hand experiences. These findings were consistent with prior research that found that Black musicians tend to be resilient, hardworking, and talented, and have persevered throughout American music history; yet still, Black musicians negotiate obstacles such as racism (Taylor, 2005). Most participants described how they often must prove themselves to get respect that others may not have to work as hard to obtain. This finding affirms recent research indicating that Black people are often framed negatively and must negotiate with adversaries by being better than their non-Black peers, particularly in academic excellence (Hanson & Roberts, 2023; Happel-Parkins & Esposito, 2022). Prior literature also suggests that prolonged exposure to race-related stress due to exclusion and discrimination can impact psychological, behavioral, and physiological health outcomes and can be debilitating to those on the receiving end (McConnell, 2022).

Participants in this study described knowing their identities as Black choral conductors, and that they do not like to waste their time on individuals who are intentionally committed to discounting and misunderstanding them. This finding relates to the constructs of the culturally relevant leadership learning model, particularly identity, with the understanding that identity is how individuals negotiate with society (Jones et al., 2016). At times, each participant found themselves negotiating their identity in situations where the environment was culturally insensitive. Participants expressed how they worked resiliently to become choral conductors, citing the impact of family, institutions, and other social components that enabled them to embrace their multiple musicalities, prepared them for racism, and built their resilience to overcome adverse experiences. William developed a strong sense of identity, capacity, and efficacy from his

earliest musical, familial, and institutional experiences, connecting to the constructs of the culturally relevant leadership learning framework (Guthrie et al., 2021). William described how these experiences prepared him to negotiate the challenges that arise with being African American and the societal challenges concerning racism that his parents warned him about during his childhood.

An unanticipated finding, the theme of pre-exposure and familiarity with White-dominant music-making practices encapsulated how all the participants negotiated music training environments centered on Eurocentric practice. However, this was not the case for many of the Black choral music majors or the students each participant encountered throughout their experiences. Each participant in this study had some form of piano lessons as early as the age of five that served as an introduction to Eurocentric music-making practices. William discussed some challenges of Black choral majors who lacked a foundation in Western music-making traditions. William spoke of some of the competitive advantages of pre-exposure to these music-making practices in music training environments.

Amira shared how many Black students struggled with music theory in her teaching experience at a PWI. George also discussed that, although he did not struggle with music theory in his collegiate degree program, many of his Black choral colleagues faced challenges. The situation affirms the literature as White privilege in music education often excludes historically-minoritized students through genres, repertoire, individuals, auditions, evaluations, and interviews (Clauhs, 2021). George discussed how the PWI he attended provided him with a scholarship to attend school, because he could

sight-read. Additionally, most research participants had experiences singing the music of the Western canon as early as middle school.

Previous research suggested that many Black musicians in the United States considered that classical music could be the way to challenge White American racist constructions of Blackness tied to minstrelsy (Thurman, 2021). Although I did not collect data to suggest that the participants believed classical music could challenge racist constructions of Blackness tied to minstrelsy, the participants described instances where they were offended by how non-Black choral conductors approached the Negro Spiritual genre. Most participants in this study acknowledged opportunities to attend district and state festivals and honor choirs with White choral music clinicians during their K-12 experience. Overall, all participants in this study found success in the Western canon approach to music theory in their collegiate degree programs; however, they all highlighted how many other Black choral music majors struggled immensely, and that some never received their degrees as a result.

RQ #1: Implications

The findings reveal that the participants had to push resiliently to become choral conductors. What would happen if choral conductors at all levels sought to eliminate racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in the choral setting? What would happen if choral organizations and choral music training environments would intentionally seek ways to acknowledge the forced resilience that Black students face in choral music settings and become catalysts for social change in choral music? When I began this research study, I anticipated that Black choral conductors did experience racism in choral settings; however, the findings demonstrated that Black choral conductors had to develop

resilience and resistance to navigate it. Interestingly, research participant William did not initially mention any Black choral conductors or musicians as his inspiration; however, he mentioned a Black music education professor who inspired him during his undergraduate music training. William not mentioning a Black choral inspiration made me think that it had a lot to do with the fact that Black people are not represented in choral music at large in the United States, and many barriers, such as testing and higher education policies and practices were noted by participant as contributing to the problem. Choral conductors of all levels can create curricula that intentionally make space for all and are centered around this awareness. Concerning the first research question, the findings suggested that Black choral conductors navigated racism in choral settings through familiarity with Eurocentric music-making practices. For participants in this study, familiarity with Eurocentric music-making took the form of piano lessons and sight-singing skills that began to develop in their middle school choral classroom with teachers that inspired them. The findings imply that exposure to Western music-making traditions may help Black choral music students navigate the challenges that some experience. These challenges include learning from teachers that teach the foundations of music, music literacy, music history, or music theory only one way-- via the Eurocentric view. Moving forward, teachers should revise the way they value Eurocentric traditions to include other expressions of music beyond the Western canon. Additionally, choral music programs should consider adopting approaches to music-making that include but decenter the Western canon. Teachers of choral music education, conducting, music history, and music theory could reimagine curricula that decenter Western traditions and

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value other forms of music-making to produce a more robust and well-rounded experience, allowing others to feel seen, included, and understood.

Choral conductors of all levels should consider revising and incorporating well-rounded and differentiated strategies to engage Black choral music students. Participants discussed that familiarity with diverse music-making, including Eurocentric practices. This finding could provide students with early levels of success in the Western tradition. Prior literature suggests that Black musicians sometimes must negotiate their Blackness or Black identity in Western canonic art music (Maultsby & Burnim, 2017). In the context of this study, it was advantageous to the participants, compared to other Black choral students in music training environments, that they were somewhat familiar with Eurocentric music ideals. Many Black choral conductors, including myself, were not trained in Eurocentric music traditions early on. In my experience, I, like many others, can recall having severe anxiety and being extremely uncomfortable due to the lack of empathy that many music theory teachers show for students with different musical backgrounds. Undergraduate and graduate choral music admissions programs should acknowledge that there is more than one form of music-making worldwide most not based solely on Eurocentric practices in music and should therefore reimagine audition requirements and processes.

The findings connect to the research questions and support the idea that Black choral conductors indeed experience racism in choral settings in many ways. The themes illustrate the experience that the Black choral conductors in this study live daily. The findings suggest that the choral conductor role today still, at times, feels uncomfortable and rather "welcome-ish," a colloquial term used in the African American vernacular.

These findings hold implications that, at times, Black choral conductors may experience racism in selection for job opportunities in specific demographic locations, selection of choral music repertoire, selection for honor choir conducting opportunities, and their programs' representation in honor choirs, district and all-county choirs, and state festivals. For the participants in this study, the motivation that drives Black choral conductors to excel is rooted in racism, leaving them, at times, with exhaustion and a lack of fortitude and strength. The participants discussed working harder and often felt the need to overachieve and function in "hyper excellence" to avoid being seen as lazy and indispensable.

RQ # 2: How Do Black Choral Conductors Describe an Ideal Culturally Relevant–Led Choral Music Setting?

In relation to the second research question, the participants described an ideal *culturally relevant–led choral music setting as one where the conductor goes beyond the surface level of knowing and understanding the singers*. This theme connects to prior research in that choral conductors are teachers, and culturally relevant teachers see students' culture as an asset and utilize their unique differences as a means for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Prior research suggests that culture embeds in any teaching and learning situation and that music often allows students to examine diverse cultures. Teachers should aim to sustain cultures through counternarratives instead of reinforcing stereotypes (Liu, 2022; Gay, 2002). William described the ideal choral setting as all about acceptance, relating, and reasoning with music and people. Additionally, this idea parallels with the literature relating to environments such as music settings. For instance,

individuals engage in collaborative ways, providing opportunities to engage affectively and cognitively with leadership (McCarron et al., 2022).

Each research participant mentioned how their Black inspirational music teachers centered them first as individuals, then as musical students. This connects to prior research suggesting that choral conductors tend to teach how they were taught, emulating the techniques, pacing, words, and phrases learned from their lived choral ensemble experiences with their former conductors (Peterson, 2021). Freer (2007) found that choral conductor leadership directly impacts rehearsal design, repertoire, climate, and culture. William discussed throughout the importance of music speaking and connecting with life. The participants all described working hard to make sure that their students felt seen, valued, and represented authentically, connecting to the prior studies on how an intentional culturally-relevant learning environment could result in more individuals feeling welcome and seen (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021). This finding affirms prior research suggesting that choral conductors must understand that their first responsibility is to ensure that ensemble members feel seen, valued, and at home in a world where music-making is the right, privilege, and expression of humanity (Webb et al., 1993). Additionally, it affirms prior research relating to the CRLL model. For instance, leaders seeking to create an intentional culturally relevant learning environment ensure more individuals feel welcome and seen. As a result, more students or ensemble members will engage in the environment (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

Additionally, most participants agreed that it is vital for choral directors to value what each ensemble member brings to the table, prioritizing the voices of ensemble members and honoring the different frames of reference within the choral music

experience. In Chapter Four, I described how Amira discussed that an ideal ensemble would be one where all persons, of every background, wherever they are from, whatever they identify with, feel seen, feel understood, and feel represented in real ways, not just surface ways. This finding aligns with prior literature affirming that CRLL centers on the diverse perspectives of what students bring, whether related to race, ethnicity, social class, ability, social location, or how students learn (Guthrie et al., 2021). For Amira, her ideal culturally relevant–led choral ensemble would be one where all persons would feel seen, understood, and represented. The finding parallels the literature relating to CRLL. When leaders intentionally create a culturally-relevant learning environment, more individuals feel welcome and seen and thus will engage in the environment (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

RQ # 2: Implications

What would happen if choral conductor-teachers employed culturally-relevant leadership in teaching choral music that goes beyond the surface level and values all the diversities that ensemble members bring to the choral environment? These findings hold implications for choral conductors and how they lead, know, and understand choral ensemble members. Could this approach be used in schools to help historically-marginalized communities of students have better learning outcomes in the choral classroom? Choral conductors and those who train them at all levels could benefit from leadership training centered on the culturally-relevant leadership learning model. Related to the second research question, the findings suggest that a culturally relevant–led choral ensemble setting would be characterized by the conductor going beyond the surface level of knowing and understanding the ensemble members. In prior research, Jansson (2020)

argued four main themes in the mastery level of skills and competencies; the choral

conductor must come with control, empowerment, mentorship, and rehearsal

management. The prior research relates to the findings as it illuminates the

responsibilities of choral conductors, supports how they are leaders, and the need for

more research that explores leadership and choral conducting.

How would a choral conducting competency that intentionally seeks to create a

space beyond the surface level of knowing and understanding the ensemble members

impact those historically excluded in choral settings? Acknowledging limited rehearsal

time and challenges of the choral rehearsal, this finding requires intentionality and proper

planning. In addition, what if choral conductors and choral conductor teachers prioritized

cultural competence as an essential component? Choral conductor teachers could utilize

this research and acknowledge or adopt diverse music-making forms, including informal

and formal music performances. Finally, these findings hold implications for choral

music and music education programs regarding how to promote authentic conversations

about the personal experiences of Black individuals and People of Color. These findings

hold implications for researchers to consider designing a tool to evaluate effective choral

music leadership.

RQ # 3: How Have Their Experiences Influenced or Informed Their Decisions as Choral Conductors Today?

Regarding the third research question, the theme *Black life experiences influence

the use of voice and desire to liberate others*, particularly Black students, resonated with

all the participants. They navigated through various narratives across time and described

good and, at times, bad personal experiences that shaped their practice as choral

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conductors today. William described how he did not experience racism in choral spaces until he began his career as a choral conductor. Relating to the first research question, all participants highlighted that they did not experience racism as much until they became choral conductors, or in other words, they sat at an unwelcome table.

The participants in this study described how, through self-affirmations and resilience, they worked harder at becoming emotionally detached and tended to confront racism more, connecting to critical race theory and counternarratives. William shared affirmations like "I am good enough to be represented at all levels." In prior research, Ladson-Billings asserted that using voice in stories, counterstories, art, and histories shows the false requisite and irony of much of today's civil rights policy (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

In prior research, Armstrong and Armstrong (1996) argued that conductors and music educators should have a transformational impact on the students they serve. Most participants mentioned how they learned from their inspirational teachers the importance of being firm, fair, and commanding respect in the choral setting. William's experiences, both good and bad, influenced him to not only understand his students but to impact them. Today, Amira continues to care for her students, and she is intentional to be sure that they feel seen, understood, and represented in tangible ways and that she embraces their multiple musicalities. Amira recounted: "Oh goodness, from my earliest experiences in middle school, I would say that has influenced me in how I want to make sure every student is seen, and they feel what makes them special is showcased" (Amira, Interview 1, May 18th, 2023). This finding suggests Amira understands that it is impossible to

know everything, and that she values when the strengths of the ensemble members complement each other in choral music-making spaces.

The findings of this study suggest that Black choral conductors empathize differently with other cultures because of their first-hand experiences. William described that as an African American there are things that he experiences that others of a different race may not be concerned with. He shared that he must be intentional with the ways he reasons with others and does his best to care for all ensemble members in his charge. As a result of their experiences, participants saw themselves as not only choral conductors, but also culturally competent leaders committed to social justice and liberating others. This bears similarities to prior research related to the culturally relevant leadership model in that participants described competent choral conductors as individuals who look within themselves, show up for themselves, and prioritize social justice to improve situations (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

RQ #3 Implications

What would happen if choral conductors could examine their own biases and understand that the individual experiences of others are valid? The findings suggest that national organizations should create space to discuss current disparities and provide opportunities for implicit bias training. Choral music organizations, music training environments, and choral conductors of all levels should use this awareness to acknowledge and provide intentional support for amplifying the voices and social justice efforts of change agents like the participants in this study. The final theme, *Black life experiences influence the use of voice and desire to liberate others*, connects to the idea of forced resilience and resistance that the Black choral conductor participants in this

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study adopted to negotiate racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral ensembles. Additionally, it relates to the book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Woodson, 1933/2023)*,* and particularly how after receiving training Black people are prepared to begin a life of a Europeanized White person but unprepared to go back to others of similar backgrounds due to lack of representation in the American educational system.

The experiences of Black choral music students in university settings should be an essential agenda item for higher education institutions. Two of the participants currently work in higher education, and all the participants earned degrees and trained in collegiate music training environments. Prior literature suggests that higher education institutions are often considered challenging places to thrive and work (Edwards, 2022). The findings in this study could help postsecondary and secondary administrators hire, recruit, and train choral music leaders with culturally-relevant leadership competencies. What would happen if choral conductors sought to create a choral environment that intentionally makes space for all centered around an awareness of those of historically-marginalized communities? What if choral music programs could provide intentional support for students from different musical backgrounds, and the ways students are measured?

In the context of this study, participants all discussed utilizing their platforms and voices to liberate their students from racism in choral music settings. Choral music educators at the secondary level should take this research and seek opportunities to engage students in choral conducting and allow them to express themselves in musically-diverse ways. All participants recounted that during middle school, they decided upon a career in choral music and resiliently endeavored to become a choral conductor.

These findings should encourage HBCUs and their choral conductors to visit schools, particularly predominantly Black middle and high schools, to engage students with diverse music-making practices. Also, said professors should seek opportunities to mentor K-12 teachers and foster opportunities for healthy discussion with the school administration concerning visibility of HBCUs and ways they can work collaboratively. These findings can serve as inspiration for choral conductors to advocate for environments that are more culturally relevant and socially just. Further, these findings suggest that engaging in culturally relevant leadership learning may uncover historical issues, provide an in-depth understanding of individuals' lives, and provide further insights into choral conductor preparation training and decentering Western canonic thought.

Implications for Culturally Relevant Choral Leadership (CRCL)

Findings of this study can help choral conductors, music educators, and higher education leaders rethink, reimagine, and reconceptualize choral music leadership. Much of the insights found in this study can embed into the daily practice of choral leadership that choral conductors engage in daily. Choral conductors could revise the definition of what it means to be a choral conductor leader to include other ways of expressing the music that decenters Western tradition. With this awareness, choral conductors could be competent in how they model and implement culturally-relevant leadership practices in choral music settings.

Instructors of choral conducting could revise and update their undergraduate and graduate choral conducting syllabi to include culturally-relevant leadership. Leadership is an essential component of the choral conducting profession; however, choral conducting

programs and courses in the United States are likely to prioritize things other than leadership learning (Wis, 2007). A critical area that could emerge from the current findings is culturally-relevant choral leadership learning (CRCL), a term I coined from combining both culturally relevant leadership and the choral conductor profession. The CRCLL would be an approach that should exist in graduate and undergraduate choral conducting programs, choral music education programs, curricula, and professional development opportunities.

Researchers may consider the theoretical implications and develop a leadership learning model that centers choral conductors going beyond the surface level of knowledge and understanding. Prior research suggests that most young choral conductors begin teaching with the understandings gained from their choral experiences and through their collegiate music education training (Ames et al., 2019). What would happen if researchers proactively trained conductors in a more socially-just way, prioritizing the awareness of historically-marginalized communities? Through the many ways leadership is acquired, choral conductors can model and implement culturally relevant leadership in choral ensembles by leading by example, guiding student learners through leadership training, and teaching culturally-relevant leadership in undergraduate and graduate choral conducting courses. Further implications include creating spaces for additional dialogue centering on Black choral conductors' experiences of racism and non-culturally relevant choral leadership.

Through continual dialogue, choral conductor leaders, higher education leaders, and stakeholders might move towards a more socially-just choral music environment and experience for individuals of historically-marginalized communities. Concerning the

findings of this study, could choral conductors use this awareness as an opportunity or catalyst for social change in the approach to the music of the Black Diaspora?

Future Research

In this section, I provide suggestions for future research. The narratives in this study should provide transferable data for future scholars seeking to engage in similar research. This research suggests many options for future directions; however, I will highlight a few key options. This study explored how Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States through a narrative inquiry methodology. Also, this study utilized purposeful sampling in a social media group specifically for Black choral conductors and involved three participants who met the research requirements. For instance, future researchers could utilize the same methodology and narrative inquiry approach to study other historically-marginalized populations and capture their stories of negotiating racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings.

Another future research idea would be to narrow the approach geographically to focus on a specific region. For example, it would be interesting to do the same study focusing on an urban setting in the Northeast or a rural setting in the Midwest. Future research could incorporate the role of the middle school in choral conducting career choice, or how the three participants noted that racism became far reaching when they assumed their role as choral conductors. Scholars should further examine how Black choral conductors interact with students and help them advocate for themselves regarding racism and nonculturally relevant leadership. Future researchers could also explore how

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Black choral conductors who identify as women negotiate racism and nonculturally relevant-choral leadership.

Additionally, future researchers could explore the ways instrumental conductors negotiate racism or the impact middle school experiences have on identity and a career in instrumental music education. Also, future researchers could explore how choral conductors' leadership behaviors mirror their prior choral conductors and first-hand learning experiences. The findings in this study imply a need for future research that connects CRLL and choral conductor leadership. Finally, scholars could investigate how social locations such as gender, race, ability, and language could serve as a factor in the magnitude of the choral conducting or choral music teaching method.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this study should interest all choral conductors, professors, and scholars seeking ways to create a more socially-just choral profession. Research on leadership and music education does exist; however, studies specifically about choral conductors are limited. A first of its kind, this study is vital to the body of literature because it could yield a greater understanding of individual experiences and the need for culturally-relevant leadership training. Additionally, the findings offer implications, historically for understanding of individuals' lives and providing further insights into choral conductor and music education training. The findings parallel much of the information found in prior literature concerning racism, but with a deeper and more nuanced view into the lives of Black choral conductors. In my dissertation prospectus, I shared that my goals for this study were to provide voice and create space for these stories to promote social change in choral music. In transparency, this is a sad reality that

I, a Black choral conductor, music educator, and researcher, have to conduct this type of research about racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership that is happening too often in choral spaces and within other disciplines.

The findings generated understanding of the stories of so many Black choral conductors and how, at times, Black choral conductors face similar pressures and realities. I first sought to understand how Black choral conductors negotiate racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings in the United States. The outcomes in Chapter Four represent and connect to the rationale of this study. I wanted to create a space where Black choral conductors could have a voice and speak about issues they face in choral settings. I have provided an in-depth analysis of the personal experiences of three Black choral conductors in the United States. The findings of this study demonstrate that change is still needed. They also support the importance of platforms and environments where Black choral conductors can have crucial conversations centered around racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings.

With CRT and CRLL serving as the macro-level theories, the findings illustrate the relationship between critical race theory, Black individual experiences, and the need for culturally-relevant leadership training and development. Also, the findings extend beyond the current literature and support the idea of interconnecting CRLL and choral conducting pedagogy. Previous studies have examined the need for leadership training in the conducting profession. The literature profiled in Chapter Two suggested that choral conductors tend to emulate how they learned during their choral music experience in their music training environments. This study is essential to the body of literature because it can provide voice and create space for stories centered around how Black choral

conductors negotiate racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in the choral music setting.

I hope readers will take this work seriously. I desire that university systems, music training environments, faculty mentors, individuals in charge of tenure, and choral conductor teachers find healthy and affirming ways to build and acknowledge the value that Black choral conductors bring. It is vital that dialogue regarding the ways Black choral conductors negotiate racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership continue but also include issues of gender, sexism, financial inequities, promotion and tenure, and any other intersection that breeds systemic inequities. I understand there has been much work in diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging; however, if the work is not allowed to right wrongs, repair relationships, and break barriers, it is a work for naught. I challenge all readers to extend beyond performative ways of creating a more equitable choral setting. I hope this research will illuminate the need to rid the mindset that values shortcuts. The findings in this study demonstrate there is still work to do and it will require everyone to work together.

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Appendix A

Selection Criteria

BLACK CHORAL CO...
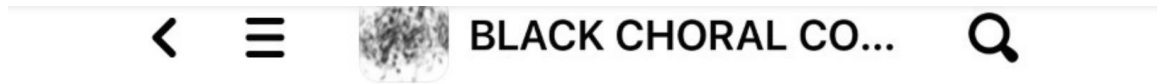
Cordara Harper
Just now ·

Greetings Choral Conductors,

I'm seeking participants that meet the following selection criteria below to participate in a research study. If you're interested please contact me via email for further information.
... See more

Call for Participants for a Study:

EXPLORING THE WAYS BLACK CHORAL CONDUCTORS NEGOTIATE RACISM AND NONCULTURALLY-RELEVANT LEADERSHIP IN CHORAL MUSIC SPACES IN THE UNITED STATES

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to explore how Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. This study aims to amplify the stories of Black choral conductors s by beginning engaging in conversations centered around racism in choral settings in the United States.
Participation is voluntary.

Eligibility

Selection criteria:
- Self-identify as Black
- Currently identify as a choral conductor
- Be willing to open critical conversations about race/racism in choral music settings.
- Have a degree in choral music education or conducting.
- Be willing to meet for regular conversations and participate in two 90-minute interviews.
- Have obtained at least an undergraduate degree in choral music in the last 5-7 years.

Interested?

Appendix A

Selection Criteria (Continued)

Doctoral Candidate at 252-571-9386
or cxharper@memphis.edu

Sent from my iPhone
**This study has been approved by the University
of Memphis Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Protocol # PRO-FY2023-403**

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS.
Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ▷ Send

Appendix B

Interview Guide

EXPLORING THE WAYS BLACK CHORAL CONDUCTORS NEGOTIATE

RACISM AND NON-CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEADERSHIP IN CHORAL

MUSIC SPACES IN THE UNITED STATES

Research Question #1**:** How do Black Choral conductors experience racism in choral

settings?

Research Question #2**:** How do Black Choral conductors describe an ideal culturally-

relevant led choral music setting?

Research Question #3**:** How have their experiences influenced or informed the decisions

they make as choral conductors today?

<u>Semi-Structured Interview Questions:</u>

- Tell me about your earliest musical experiences.

     o (things related to childhood experiences, family dynamics, church, etc.)

- What motivated you to become a choral conductor? I'd like to hear more about

  the factors that influenced your decision.

- Can you describe a typical day in your life as a Black choral conductor (notes on

  pitch, tone, emphasis)

- What does cultural competence mean to you as a Black choral conductor?

- How does choral conductor leadership style help or hinder the cultivation of

  culturally-relevant or socially-just culture within a choral ensemble?

Appendix B

Interview Guide (Continued)

- Can you describe the experiences, both good and bad, that Black choral music majors typically describe? How does that compare to their non-Black colleagues in the music training environments?

- Have you had both Black and non-Black choral conductors?

- How did you negotiate your identity as a Black Choral Conductor under non-Black choral conductors?

- If so, were there any noticeable differences for you in your experiences working with a Black and non-Black Choral conductor? (If yes) What were they? (make sure you probe here!)

- Tell me about a time when you experienced prejudice or racism in a choral ensemble setting? (year, place, situation, context, and participants involved)

- If so, Can you describe what happened in the choral ensemble from when you arrived until you left? (Ask about key players, how issues were addressed, and progressions, describing the climax in full detail) (notes on pitch, tone, and emphasis)

- How would you describe your ideal, culturally-relevant choral ensemble environment?

- What, in your opinion, is keeping more choral conductors from actively creating culturally-relevant choral environments?

- How could conductors work to make their ensemble environments more culturally-relevant and/or inclusive

Appendix B

Interview Guide (Continued)

- How did your experiences as a k-12 choral student, pre-service music educator, and student teacher influence the choices you now make as a Choral conductor?

- What are you doing differently than what you experienced as a student?

- Conclude the interview by asking: Is there anything else you would like to tell me or share with me regarding today's topic?

- Final: Thank the participant and share that I will send a member checking exercise to verify my notes from our session and will follow up with a second interview.

Appendix C

IRB Approval

PRO-FY2023-403 - Initial: Approval - Expedited

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Tue 5/16/2023 8:11 AM
To: Cordara Xavier Harper (cxharper) <cxharper@memphis.edu>;Josef Hanson (jhanson2)
<Josef.Hanson@memphis.edu>

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS.

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
215 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

May 16, 2023

PI Name: Cordara Harper
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Josef Hanson
Submission Type: Initial
Title: EXPLORING THE WAYS BLACK CHORAL CONDUCTORS NEGOTIATE RACISM AND NON-CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEADERSHIP IN CHORAL MUSIC SPACES IN THE UNITED STATES
IRB ID**:** PRO-FY2023-403

Expedited Approval: May 14, 2023

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Appendix C

IRB Approval (Continued)

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.

Appendix D

Solicitation Email

Greetings,

You are invited to participate in a research study to understand how Black choral conductors negotiated racism and nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. Please review the attached consent form, sign and return it to me via email to begin the study. If you agree, participating in this study will involve two semi-structured interviews lasting 90 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and there is no penalty if you decide not to participate. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me at cxharper@memphis.edu or 252-571-9386, or my faculty advisor Dr. Josef Hanson, at josef.hanson@memphis.edu.
I look forward to hearing more about your story.

Sincerely,

Cordara Harper

Appendix E

Consent Form

Consent for Research Participation

Title	Exploring the Ways Black Choral Conductors Negotiate Racism, and Non-Culturally Relevant Leadership in Choral Music Spaces in the United States
Researcher(s)	Cordara Harper, M.M., University of Memphis
Researchers Contact Information	(252) 571-9386, cxharper@memphis.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher(s) any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of about 3 people to do so.

Key Information for You to Consider
Voluntary Consent: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
Purpose: The current study specifically explores how Black choral conductors negotiate nonculturally-relevant choral music leadership in the United States. This study aims to amplify the stories of Black choral conductors by engaging in conversations centered around race and racism in choral settings in the United States. Implications from this study may reveal historical issues in choral music, an in-depth understanding of the lives of Black choral music professionals and provide insights into preparing choral conductors to be competent in culturally relevant leadership.
Duration: It is expected that your participation will include two 90 minutes total.
Procedures and Activities: You will be asked to participate in two 90-minute interviews and answer questions about your negotiation with non-culturally relevant choral music leadership in the United States. I will have ongoing conversations with you, record my own writings, and adjust my findings to ensure you are represented in a way you agree upon.
Risk: The potential risks are minimal, limited to the emotional or psychological risks associated with discussion of sensitive topics. While the interviews are not designed to elicit emotional responses to the questions posed, the nature of semi-structured interviewing does not prohibit the possibility that sensitive topics will arise. In the consent form and in verbal

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Appendix E

Consent Form (Continued)

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instruction participants will be informed that they can stop the interview at any time if they get uncomfortable or too emotional.

Alternatives: Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate.

Who is conducting this research?

Cordara Harper, M.M. of the University of Memphis's School of Music is in charge of the study. Mr. Harper has no financial stake or conflicts of interest related to this research project.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?

If you agree to participate, **I will interview you twice for 90-minutes** via the Zoom platform, in a place and at a time that is convenient for you. During the semi-structured interview, I will ask questions about key stories to describe your experiences related to racism and nonculturally-relevant leadership in choral settings. All interviews will be audiorecorded. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you can discontinue your participation at any point.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

I may publish/present the results or this research. However, I will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. Data will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

I promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best I can. Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include:

- Conducting interviews in a private setting;
- Deidentifying data so that your name and affiliation is not identifiable;

It is important to acknowledge that there are limits to protecting your privacy. This includes your voluntary participation in a focus group interview, where other participants will know your identitiy.

To maintain confidentiality, your personal opinions about your teaching experiences will always be viewed as sensitive data. I will audio-record the interviews and keep the recordings and typed transcripts in password-protected computer files on an encrypted laptop. Any paper versions of interview data will be kept in a locked cabinet. Only I will have access to data. Each participant will be accorded a code number, and no data will be saved in the same location as personal identifiers (i.e., a master list of code numbers and names will be kept in a separate locked location). All data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

It is important to acknowledge that there are limits to protecting confidentiality, including the possibility of data security and storage breaches.

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Appendix E

Consent Form (Continued)

THE UNIVERSITY OF **MEMPHIS**™

Institutional Review Board
315 Administration Bldg.
Memphis, TN 38152-3370
Office: 901.678.2705
Fax: 901.678.2219

Individuals and organizations that monitor this research, including the Institutional Review Board at the University of Memphis, may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also ok to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Memphis.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?
You will not be compensated for taking part in this research.

Who can answer my question about this research?

Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Mr. Cordara Harper, at cxharper@memphis.edu or (252)571-9386. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. I will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

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Appendix E

Consent Form (Continued)

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation

As described above, you will be audiorecorded and/or photographed) while performing the activities described above. Audiorecordings of interviews will be used to create transcripts for analysis. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audiorecordings as described

_____ I agree to the use of audiorecordings.

Name of Adult Participant	**Signature of Adult Participant**	**Date**

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

Name of Research Team Member	**Signature of Research Team Member**	**Date**

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Appendix F

Member-Check Email Correspondence

Harper Dis Follow-up

Cordara Xavier Harper (cxharper) <cxharper@memphis.edu>
Sun 5/21/2023 1:17 PM
To: Cordara Xavier Harper (cxharper) <cxharper@memphis.edu>
Greetings,

    Thank you again for participating in this research study. I would like you to review the transcribed interview and your written description. Please verify that everything is accurate and let me know if you want me to remove or adjust anything. Note that this is an opportunity for you to clarify any important points to emphasize in preparation for our second follow-up interview. I cleaned the transcript by removing names and locations; however, I maintained the true essence of the conversations through semi-structured interviews. Please provide any feedback utilizing the comment function at your earliest convenience. Additionally, please let me know a time next week when we can meet again to complete the second semi-structured interview. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Cordara Harper