EMBODYING THE BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE THROUGH COLLABORATIVE IMPROVISED MUSIC AND DANCE/MOVEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF MUSIC THERAPY

Tatyana Martin, MMT, MT-BC

ABSTRACT

This article is the dissemination of the findings of an arts-based research study exploring the collaborative improvised music and improvised dance/movement on the experience of being embodied as Black. The overall aim was to explore the interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences of one Black/African American musician and one Black/African American dancer engaging in a collaborative creative process focusing on the experience of being embodied as Black. This study grew out of my own experiences when engaging in collaborative improvised music and collaborative dance exploring my racial identity. Participants were chosen through convenience sampling. Data was collected through video recording the collaborative improvised music and dance/movement collaborative experience, written responses to questions about the experience, and through a group discussion. Participants were asked to write down their feelings, thoughts, sensations, imagery, memories, perceptions of cultural aesthetics, interpersonal dynamics, intrapersonal dynamics, and any transpersonal experiences immediately after the experience. Cultural dynamics were explored individually and relationally. Questions posed were centered around connection/disconnection, shifts in power, being in the moment, perceived interpretations of what contributed to the overall collaborative engagement, and perceptions of cultural aesthetics. A poem was created from the themes and sub-themes collected from the data. Member checking was utilized for the accuracy of the representation of the participants' collaborative experience. To authentically represent the essence of the participants' narratives through music and dance, a multimedia arts reflection of their expressions of being Black in the United States was cultivated. Themes of 1) resilience, 2) resistance, 3) Black aesthetics, 4) spirituality 5) connection, 6) trauma, 7) subjugation/oppression, and 8) Black power emerged in the data and are discussed in the context of individual and collaborative Black experiences. Implications for the practice of music therapy will be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

I am Black. I am a pianist. I am a dancer. I find it deeply fulfilling to engage in collaborative improvised music and dance. As a Black woman living in the United States, my life has been filled with beauty *and* challenges. I grew up in a multi-generational household living with both my grandmothers, and several aunts at various times. My maternal grandmother was a first-generation United States citizen; her parents were from Barbados. My paternal grandmother grew up in Butler, Georgia. She was a descendent of enslaved Africans. While there were many similarities within the traditions my parents brought to my life, there were also many differences between both sides of the families. This is congruent with many families throughout the African diaspora.

   Like many Black families, music and dance were an integral part of my upbringing and it was my way of connecting with others in the community. I felt the essence of music deep within me when I played both jazz and European classical music learning from Black teachers. My love for movement has been shaped through my engagement in various styles of African and Latin dance, hip hop, and contemporary dance, as well as through gymnastics. I have had many opportunities to collaborate with others through music and dance. What I have found is that through these creative collaborations I am able to freely express my Blackness. Being Black in the United States comes with societal messages of inferiority, stereotypes, and generational trauma. Finding freedom in music and dance has been liberating for me. Improvised music and dance/movement has always been part of my life. It has presented itself in various ways and provided many opportunities for exploration. One of my earliest memories engaging in improvised music and dance was during a music summer camp in middle school where the exploration of improvisation and precomposed Black music was a significant aspect of our work together. The creative process was steeped in Black culture, collaboration, and community. We learned Jazz and Caribbean songs on piano and steelpans, as well as techniques in improvisation. In these experiences, I felt a real freedom while being musically expressive. During this camp we also created hip hop dances and learned several dances from various African countries. Being surrounded and immersed in this musical process fueled my love for playing the piano and dancing. More importance was placed on *feeling* the music and movement than perfecting technique. This experience was in stark contrast to my classical piano training in which technique and structure were emphasized, and perfection felt necessary. These experiences at the music camp helped me integrate the music as *part* of me, rather than something external. This integration happened in many ways: through motion while the music flowed through my entire body as it touched and wrapped my heart and spirit; through the raw emotions that arose, challenging me to reconcile, let be, let go, or celebrate; through chills, tingling sensations, stomach butterflies or numbness; through experiences of colors, thoughts, memories or stories; and through the experience of space and time expanding or contracting as each body part danced spontaneously with purpose. Playing piano from a young age and engaging in dances rooted in Black culture offered connection with others on a deeply meaningful level, as well as provided a sense of kinship within the greater Black community. For me, creating and participating in collaborative music and dance embodies the spirit of togetherness, honors my heritage, and allows my feelings and thoughts to exist and be seen.

   My experience with collaborative improvised music and dance is multifaceted. When engaging, I can experience freedom. I can share my creativity and experiment with

various ways of being and ways of knowing. I am able to construct a shared space to coexist with another person more fully by allowing myself to feel my imagination, hear my feelings, and see my sensations. The music surrounds and holds me and enters me. There is a comfort in being free, letting go, and honoring self. I have had experiences where I have placed my cold, nervous fingers on the piano and the spirit of music created in the collaboration has reached into me and touched and mended parts of me that felt broken. Other times I have envisioned my body's movement through the warmth of color such as blues, purples, greens, reds, and yellows as I glide on the dance floor, releasing the desolation of hopelessness weighing on my soul within unresolved tension in every step taken.

When embodying the role of a musician and/or dancer, there is truth guiding each step of the collaborative journey. During my undergraduate music therapy internship, I was introduced to the Latin social dance scene. In many ways it reminded me of the feelings I experienced during the summer music camps. The sense of community was incredible, and I was welcomed with open arms, and people wanted to teach me how to dance bachata, salsa, and merengue. The connection with the music was instant and I heard African influences within many of the songs. As I became more immersed in learning dances, I learned that although there is structure embedded in the dances, the improvisatory aspects of the dance remained open for interpretation and creativity, much like dance in Black culture. Additional layers are added when live musicians are playing. Live music brings an opportunity for musical spontaneity as the musicians connect with the dancer and vice versa. As the dancer, I internalize the music, creating kinesthetic expressions. These interactions are transpersonal, beyond words, ineffable. These experiences provide safety for intense emotions to surface. I recall one collaborative music experience where I heard my body cry through the dissonance while I held my breath, curled my fingers and toes. I witnessed my thoughts moving feverishly, like a glass vase shattering on the floor. I felt hot from the adrenaline burst crushing what I thought was true, but with the assurance that a cool calmness was soon to come. My body became one with the music, becoming free and authentic.

Motivation/Rationale for Study

In one of my courses during my graduate studies, we were asked to explore various aspects of our identity through creative arts. Given my love of improvisation and dance, I found myself gravitating to create through these means, collaborating with myself; first creating the music improvisationally at the piano, and then dancing improvisationally to the music I created. I found the experience of exploring my racialized identity particularly powerful. I wondered how other Black people might experience this kind of exploration collaboratively.

As described in the previous section, when I engage in collaborative improvised music and dance with others, I experience intense emotions, sensations, memories, images, spiritual connection, and movement. I feel a sense of personal growth, grounding, and inner strength. The ways in which I view myself, as well as points of connection/disconnection with partners, can shift in various ways as the music and movement shifts during the experience. Given that I feel these things during these experiences, I wondered whether this was also something that others experience when they are engaging in collaborative improvised music and dance/movement. My sense was

that if I feel these things, perhaps others do. If others do, perhaps this is something that would be useful to bring into my work with adults who are in a forensic psychiatric facility. That I have experienced this as a Black person and given that many of the people I work with are also Black, I was particularly interested in what this experience was like for other Black people. As a Black woman, I acknowledge how important music and dance are in Black culture, and I believe that music and dance are uniquely internalized and expressed by Black people, especially in terms of the co-creative nature of collaborative experiences. Furthermore, as a Black person in the United States as well as a professional in music therapy, I have often felt that my personhood is devalued and diminished in public and professional spaces. Yet, when I engage in collaborative improvised music and dance, I experience a fullness of my humanity.

In the music therapy profession in the United States (US), only 2.3% of music therapists are Black (AMTA, 2020), yet a much larger percentage of clients are Black. Black music therapy students and professionals rarely find themselves represented in the curriculum or in the music therapy literature. There is little research in our profession that focuses on the experiences of Black people. Key aspects of Black experiences such as collaboration, improvisation, self-expression, and self-exploration are salient when engaging in music and dance/movement. Music and dance/movement brings out authenticity and expands the opportunities in the creative process. This enriches the experience of the relationship between the client-to-client, or client-to-therapist by allowing both art forms to coexist. Thus, it is essential for clients and therapist to embrace their authentic self, by welcoming culture, self-expression, and creativity into the space, as well as understanding its depth. With all of that in mind, my aim was to focus this research on how the Black/African American experience is embodied through the phenomenon of collaborative improvised music and dance/movement.

Definition of Key Terms

Collaborative music and dance: for the purpose of this research, I am defining collaborative music and dance as a process in which two people, a musician and a dancer, engage in a spontaneous creation that involves the connection of one's physical and emotional being through improvised music and movement.
Improvisation: involves spontaneously creating art, music, and/or dance to express thoughts, feelings, lived experiences, and memories (Bruscia, 1987; Bruscia 1998; Eschen, 2002).
Black: a state of being "...positioned in certain specific ways – of being racialized – by social and cultural forces... that have linked human appearance and ancestry to distinctive social, semiotic and psychocultural locations" (Taylor, 2010). Being Black encompasses a wealth of African Diasporic cultures, beliefs, religious practices, skin tones, physical appearances, and ways of being (Taylor, 2010). Being Black in the United States is broad and complex.
Anti-Black racism: prejudiced attitudes and beliefs, stereotype threat, and discriminatory practices directed towards people of African descent. Upholding the system of white supremacy, anti-Black racism reduces Black people to stereotypes such as dangerous, lazy, hypersexual, physically supernatural, prone to criminality, lacking in intelligence, subhuman, and more (Kendi, 2019).

Black embodiment: the ontological dimensions of lived experiences while living in Black skin. To embody one's Blackness is to embrace Black aesthetics through music, dance, art, writing, linguistics, oral traditions, spirituality, rituals, and more (Hall 2012; Taylor, 2010).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement emerged around 2012 in the United States in response to the acquittal of white neighborhood watchman, George Zimmerman, who was charged with second-degree murder for killing Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old unarmed Black youth. Zimmerman pursued and confronted Martin even after the 911 operator instructed him not to. This act of violence on February 26, 2012, took the life of an unarmed African American teenager who was temporarily staying with his father in a gated community in Sanford, Florida (Chase, 2018). In the year between the killing and the trial, tensions rose as people were divided on whether this was racial violence or self-defense. The verdict determined that Zimmerman was not guilty of the charges. With the dissatisfaction, anger, and frustration felt with the injustice of the case and treatment of Black lives, Alicia Garza wrote posts on Facebook entitled, "A Love Letter to Black People," in which she stated that Black Lives Matter (BLM). Alicia's posts were seen and shared by her friend Patrisse Cullors, who was moved to write her own post expressing her reflections and feelings regarding the verdict with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Patrisse Cullors and Alicia Garza together created a social movement #BlackLivesMatter, making visible Black experiences, providing empowerment and support as a collective community. With the help of Opal Tometi, a social media campaign was created on Facebook and Twitter (Chase, 2018).

Much like the Brown v. Board of Education case started a movement of calls to actions and activism, the State of Florida v. George Michael Zimmerman reignited the current civil and human rights movement towards racial equality, bringing attention to the voices of those in Black communities, and bringing attention to the persistent injustice steeped in the criminal justice systems, as well as other institutional systems. What is clear is that Black lives have never been valued in the United States except in terms of their "enslavement and instrumental use toward the fulfillment of white racist capitalism" (Yancy, 2022). What we are now experiencing, has been experienced across multiple generations dating all the way back to the Middle Passage (The Middle Passage was the inhumane formalized institutional operation which sustained the economy and solidified devaluing of Black bodies. People were enslaved from the continent of Africa by being captured, traded, and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to the North and South Americas to be sold to plantations. Enslaved people were stripped of their identities, freedom, separated from their families, combined with endured violence, illness, and death (Mustakeem, 2016).) The BLM movement shed light on the inequalities that still exist for Black people within the United States. Although progress has been made since the Jim Crow Laws and Civil Rights Act 1964, the evils that are the legacy of slavery "as well as perpetuation of that legacy during subsequent generations by racialized state policies that wove white privilege into the fabric of American culture and institution," have continued

to deny Black people equal treatment educationally, culturally, racially, socially, economically, and politically (Hall, 2005, p. 1261).

With the most recent killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, among so many others, in combination with the COVID-19 pandemic and the polarized political climate, racial inequities affecting Black/African Americans have been brought to greater public awareness. The BLM movement has provided a platform that allowed voices in Black communities to be heard on a national and international stage through social media and active peaceful protest. With the evolution of technology, the BLM movement continues to bring attention to injustices, racism, and inequities Black/African Americans face daily.

From the inception of the transatlantic slave trade, racial hierarchical structures, marginalization, disempowerment, and cultural assimilation have had severe negative impacts on Black Americans (Smith, 1991). Black/African Americans have always engaged in resistance and continue to claim their personhood, resisting oppressive beliefs and actions, reconnecting with Black heritage and culture, addressing feelings of anger and fear, and drawing on personal resources of hope and resilience. These actions require both individual and community effort, and work towards destabilizing oppressive systems, combating racial prejudice, and understanding the Black experience (Cross, 1971). The BLM movement is one of the movements at the forefront moving us towards social justice, connecting people together to stand up for equitable treatment of Black lives.

Trauma and Violence in the Lived Experience of Black People

Black/African Americans experience trauma on a subconscious and conscious level (Bartholomew, Harris & Maglalang, 2018; Degruy-Leary, 2017). Hypervigilance has been learned and passed down as a result of life-threatening experiences and/or historical events/memories that have had a great impact on Black lives. Intergenerational trauma consists of trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation. For Black/African Americans within the context of the United States, such deep trauma has been passed down as a result of the experiences of African ancestors who suffered from being uprooted from their lands, families, communities, languages, cultural and spiritual practices, and treated as chattel (property) when forcibly transported to the United States. Generations of Black people were   brutally enslaved and treated as sub-human. On plantations, Black bodies experienced the physical and psychic trauma of violence in the form of brutal beatings and lashings. After the end of legal enslavement, Black people continued to experience vicious forms of anti-Black violence and trauma. Given the racial terror and denigration that occurred during the reign of formal Jim Crow laws, which included legalized segregation and extra-legal social evils such as the lynching of Black bodies, Black people understood all too well the meaning of *racialized* traumatization. Through the lie of "separate but equal," racialized poverty, continuous public humiliation, and dehumanization, through forms of internalized Black self-hatred, and even medical experimentation, Black people have felt the weight of being racially despised, and deemed "deviant," "inferior," "criminal" and "dangerous." There is a long history of racist practices of policing Black bodies, which Black people still experience in the forms of police surveillance and killing of unarmed and innocent Black people at the hands of those whose job it is to serve and protect. Hence, the trauma continues. The transmission of

generational trauma takes place through negative thoughts, witnessing or experiencing violence, and negative societal messages (Bartholomew, Harris & Maglalang, 2018). In addition, present trauma experienced by people in Black communities as a result of police brutality, racism, genderism, and classism add additional layers of trauma (Barlow, 2018). Trauma is also experienced as a result of Black people being falsely accused of crimes they did not commit. Indeed, as mentioned above, Black people were surveilled and policed in ways not experienced by other groups. Black bodies are surveilled and policed in ways not experienced by other groups. White people continue to profit at the expense of Black lives. This history weighs on the shoulders of Black people at the individual and communal level (Barlow, 2018). While intergenerational trauma is a reality, we need to be wary about conflating the meaning of Blackness with trauma. As Barlow (2018) states, "Blackness becomes conflated with trauma, where the Black experience in the US is stereotypically viewed as pathological and socially accepted as a monolithic, normalized Black experience" (Barlow, 2018, 903).

Steele (2010) addresses how Blackness defined by American society has reduced Black people's worth, resulting in differences in opportunities and incomprehensible stress which is not experienced by others in dominant groups. An example of this comes in the form of stereotype threats. Societal expectations create more pressure on Black people to conform, or risk being identified as the stereotype. The strain creates underlying rejection and feelings of not being good enough. Stereotype threats contribute to this stress, where Black people worry about their actions confirming negative stereotypes. This results in hypervigilance and extra emotional labor in a multitude of areas such as academic settings, social settings, when looking for housing, when applying for loans, etc.

The way historical events are represented shapes the narrative that the collective believes. Historically, voices of Black/African Americans have been left out of the dominant culture's narratives in the United States. This has established inaccurate and inequitable representation, while promoting devaluation and hatred towards Black/African Americans on a global scale. The system of white supremacy is traumatic in the lived experience of Black people and has been upheld throughout the United States' history. Silencing collective memories or narratives of Black/African Americans puts a burden on the community where creative practices such as music, art, and poetry are outlets to release, preserve, and process these burdens (Eyerman, 2001).

Resistance and Resilience of Black Americans

Resistance

Resistance and resilience are many times paired together when discussing enslavement and the history of Black Americans. Dominant beliefs have created a negative connotation, with the word resistance being associated with disobedience and criminality. Black resistance has redefined dominant white values and pushed against problematic systems, such as the institution of slavery (Zamalin, 2017). Resistance is the act of saying no. This should not be limited to the context of social movements, rather it embraces a multitude of ways resisting is perceived versus being politicalized through a polarized lens. Zamalin (2017) makes the distinction that resisting does not equal protest, but protests are one way to resist. By understanding resistance in this context, it sheds greater light on the breadth of resistance that Black Americans engage in. For example, Black

women have resisted physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional abuse on their bodies from enslaver and gendered dominance. Black women continue to experience domination within the context of what might be referred to as racist patriarchal domination. They have also resisted through creating a communication system known as gossip, where womanhood was voiced and information regarding treatment and working conditions were shared (Worthy, 2019). In addition, oral traditions such as folklores, songs, and dances were just as important as other forms of resistance such as running away, breaking tools, engaging in rebellions, and participating in abolition networks. It is important to acknowledge that acts of resistance happen daily, individually, and collectively (Araujo, 2013).

The notion that Blackness is not beautiful has been reinforced by European standards of beauty, and the later white supremacist ideologies linking the physical characteristics of Black bodies such as skin color, body shape, and facial features to "character, aptitude and destiny" (Camp, 2015, p. 682). This has not only demonized African people and people of African descent, but also created an ideology of Black people being deemed less than human. These false conceptions continue to be contested by Black/African Americans, particularly in terms of conceptions of Black beauty. Blackness as beauty expressed in the 1960s and 1970s rejected European ideas of beauty and embraced natural beauty celebrating uniqueness. However, it did not dismantle the ingrained racialized perspectives of beauty (Camp, 2015). These forms of resistance encapsulate resistance as an agent for change.

Black people are reclaiming our history and are retelling it authentically by centering Blackness in creative ways musically, through Black embodiment, and personhood (Leonard, 2020; Lu & Steele, 2019). Although whiteness[1] has been centered in all spheres of our society, in education, media, politics and historical accounts, the significance of Black genres of music and dance has always been present. From work songs, spirituals, blues, jazz, R & B to hip hop, Black Americans have demonstrated resistance and resilience through shared experiences that include racial pride, racial unity, agency, self-empowerment, and self-expression (Chaney, 2018; Hadley & Yancy 2012; Viega 2018). For Black people, resistance is performed within all parts of hip hop music, from the creation of it to performing it, and listening to it. The creative process holds and provides a landscape to express lived experiences such as facing adversity, poverty, imprisonment, witnessing or experiencing brutal interactions with law enforcement, and other Black experiences living in the inner city (Chaney, 2018; Payatak & Muccitelli, 2011). Artists, such as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, Public Enemy, and A Tribe Called Quest, have been pushing back on the commodification of hip hop radio music and the proper acknowledgment that should be given to those musicians who amplify voices and expose unjust systems (Payatak & Muccitelli, 2011).

In the age of social media, Black joy as resistance has been demonstrated across Twitter and Vine via hashtags and multimedia content highlighting the Black experience by amplifying the continuation of oral cultural traditions (Lu & Steele, 2019). Vine came

---

[1] Whiteness has been theorized by critical race theorists and critical race studies scholars as a hegemonic structural system that has led to forms of "othering" and global domination. For further reading on the concept of whiteness, see Bailey (2021), Lipsitz (2006), Roediger (1999), Sullivan (2006), and Yancy (2004).

out before Tik Tok and was a social media platform used "...to showcase how the Black dancers in the original recording are using music and dance to communicate the emotion of the song" (Lu & Steele, 2019, p. 832). The hashtags such as #freeblackchild challenged dominant narratives of Black people and supports the range of expressions and comprehensiveness of humanity which is unrecognized in the white gaze (Yancy, 2017). Simultaneously alongside ongoing police brutality and the deaths of innocent Black lives, Black joy is experienced through the celebration of life through daily posts that embody culture, knowledge, and humor through communal engagement.

Resilience

Along with forms of resistance, resilience has been a significant theme for Black Americans. Family and community are integral parts of the healing and strength for Black Americans, an important aspect of resilience (French, Lewis & Neville, 2013; Chaney, 2018). Reed and Brooks (2017) noted that within Black communities, pride, family, and communication have been essential aspects of the Black experience dating back to the time of forced enslavement of Africans in North America. They noted that despite centuries of oppression and marginalization, Black people have always taken pride in their heritage. They discussed the vital importance of family and having a sense of community. They explain that family involves not just the immediate family and extended family, but also "fictive kin," those who are close friends who are treated as family. Even the community is considered as family. Each person has a role in the family and is valued within their roles. Reed & Brooks (2017) also noted the vital role communication has played in Black communities for survival. Oral traditions have been maintained and passed down generationally to preserve heritage, stories, songs, and religious beliefs, which was at times a necessity due to oppressive practices that prohibited Black people from learning to read and write. Churches, bars, and street corners have been significant sites for communication.

Resilience has been and continues to be a significant aspect throughout the history of Black Americans. It has been crucial for survival and at the same time engaging in resilience has taken its toll on the health and well-being of Black Americans. Anti-Black racism is traumatizing and causes stress affecting the physical, psychological, and physiological health of those experiencing it throughout their life. In addition, race-related stress has been shown to exist across all developmental stages (Jones et al., 2020). Miller et al. (2016) noted that skin-deep resilience, or "outward indicators of achievement and competence," for upwardly mobile youth "co-occur with worse health" (p.1226). That is, African Americans from disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds who exhibit higher psychosocial functioning, conscientiousness, self-control, lower depression, and high academic achievement, are more vulnerable to infections and illness (Miller et al., 2016), such as metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance (Brody, Yu, Chen & Miller, 2020). From this, it appears probable that the extra energy and exertion that is put into being resilient is taxing on the body.

Scrine (2021) describes how resilience has become an expectation for young people who have been marginalized by systemic oppression and have experienced trauma. In most cases, the responsibility and the burden for surviving are placed on the individual, rather than focusing on the systemic structures that cause the oppressive conditions resulting in trauma. Instead of placing the burden of resilience on the individual, forms

of group resistance have emerged to counter systemic injustices in Black communities. Through social media platforms, Black people have made their voices heard by telling their stories and challenges. The Black Lives Matter movement rose up as a way to resist the persistent anti-Black racism that continues to result in the grossly disproportionate killings of unarmed Black people by police and proxies of the state.

The continuous erasure of Blackness within mainstream society, minimizes the humanity of Black people. Disparities created by oppression and segregation, along with the intersections of gender and economic status, have created even more inequalities and perpetuated further discrediting of Black Americans (French, Lewis & Neville, 2013). However, despite the gaps in pay and recognition, Black women continue to access their agency, and have paved a way within the workforce and education (French, Lewis & Neville, 2013). Black women writers and poets such as Alice Walker, Ida Wells-Barnett, and Maya Angelou have redefined the stereotypical sexualized narratives created by the dominant culture. Their writings as well as those of other Black feminist writers and poets, has challenged racial, gendered, and economic justification of oppression. They have also created visibility through narrating their own identities while refusing to conform to whiteness and embracing their Blackness as the social norm (Zid, 2019). Acts of resilience that support embracing Blackness include mentorship, collective intergroup support, spiritual practices, storytelling, and engaging in the arts (Jones, Gaskin-Wasson, Applewhite, Anderson, Sawyer, & Metzger, 2020).

Examining the Black Experience in Music Therapy

In the music therapy literature, there is little until recent years that describes and focuses on the Black experience; that aims to understand Black narratives of clients and therapists (Cross & Hadley, 2013; Goldberg & Hadley, 2013; Norris, 2019; Thomas, 2019/2020; Webb, 2019; Leonard, 2020). The uniqueness of the Black experience has meaning and purpose which needs to be valued and understood by those working within the profession. Focusing on Black experience, Thomas (2020) describes ways in which movement and music are culturally experienced. Black American adolescent clients engaging in music therapy are more receptive to experiences when there is cultural connectivity. Thomas provides suggestions of engaging in movement through popular dance moves from "Black cultural dance icons" who are popular musicians but are also known for their dance moves. Music and movement are connected within many cultures that are part of the African Diaspora. Clients may move their bodies as they actively participate by playing an instrument or by using their entire body as the instrument. Thus, creating music and movement is authentic to the process of musicking and should be welcomed into the session to prevent suppression of the client's wholeness. Different ways movement can be experienced include partner dances, social dancing such as line dances, and individual and group dances choreographed for audiences. Thomas (2020) stresses the importance of differentiating how music therapists and dance/movement therapists engage with movement, where in music therapy the movement is based in the context of the music, and in dance/movement therapy, movement is interpreted in relation to the person (Thomas, 2020). In both cases, both movement and music are cultural expressions that draw on the client's wholeness in the Black experience.

Also focusing on the Black experience in music therapy, Frances Smith Goldberg and Allison Cross shared their experiences as African American music therapists.

Goldberg described her strong sense of pride in her Blackness, her positive experiences being in segregated schools from elementary to high school, as well as her experience being in an integrated college. She detailed accounts of discrimination, being made an exception to her race by white peers and processing racial differences with clients. She also described her feelings of connection with Black spirituality in terms of the Black Goddess traditions when traveling to music with cultural ties to Africa. This was in contrast to her experiences when engaging in Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) with the conventional programs, which draw on music mainly from composers of European descent (Goldberg & Hadley, 2013). Allison Cross, in her narrative, illustrated her challenges negotiating how to be true to self, family, and community in professional settings. She found that in her work as a music therapist, African American families were more welcoming to her and inclusive of her into their spaces. She was able to feel more authentic, personally, and musically, when working with Black clients, connecting on a deeper human level, feeling more genuine, resulting in a more immediate and stronger rapport (Cross & Hadley, 2013).

More recently, Webb (2019), Thomas, (2019), and Norris (2019), have all conducted research that explores various aspects of music therapy and the Black experience. In Webb's doctoral research, she examined the academic and professional experiences of Black music therapists. Through a narrative and arts-based inquiry, she found that the experience of her participants was that they did not feel a sense of belongingness in the profession, and that within music therapy, diversity, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity were inconsistently addressed. Some of the themes arising from her interviews with participants were that things and people are not as they seem; that participants often experienced being the only one/one of a few; that participants felt they had a lot of value to add to the field; that they did not want to be defined by others; that they were tired of dealing with the status quo; that they felt that there needed to be greater cultural awareness and equality in the profession; and, that they indicated that support within the community was important.

In Thomas's doctoral research, she explores how the social identities of Black/African American youth from limited resource communities were demonstrated through ways they engaged in musicking (Thomas, 2019). An interesting aspect of this study was that not only the youth, but also the therapist and researcher were Black/African American. Thomas found that the youth described themselves and their social identity community with pride, while talking down about other groups. Their music making choices were reflective of these descriptions particularly in terms of the ways they worked in collaboration with—or isolation from—their peers. Thomas noted that the cultural proximity of the participants with the music therapist and with the researcher strongly impacted the research experience for all involved. Such research is important when considering the ways in which cultural factors contribute to authentic and meaningful connections in therapeutic relationships.

In Norris' doctoral research, she explores the experiences of Black clients who were members of a vocal music therapy group for chronic pain (Norris, 2019). Norris draws from theoretical frameworks of critical race theories and Africana womanism. Through a critical discourse analysis, she explored the aesthetic experiences of this particular group of Black clients and the role that Black lifeworlds (musical representations and cultural representations) played in these experiences. Norris' research depicts ways in which Black aesthetics as enacted through verbal, gestural, and musical utterances provide ways for

clients to perform their alterity (or otherness), individually and collectively respond to racial microaggressions, engage in spiritual coping, and engage in culturally centered healing practices.

The Present Work

Given the recent resurgence of protests demanding racial justice, as well as the pressing need to shed greater light on Black experiences in music therapy, the purpose of this study is to understand the phenomenon of being embodied as Black in the US through an experience of collaborative improvised music and improvised dance/movement. The overall aim is to explore the interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences of one Black/African American musician and one Black/African American dancer engaging in a collaborative creative process. The primary research question is, what is the experience of being embodied as Black in the US as expressed through a collaborative improvised music and dance/movement experience?

METHOD

Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology

This research is situated within a transformative paradigm. The transformative paradigm positions unheard voices and their experiences at the forefront of the research; exposes how social and political structures are oppressive; and exposes how oppressed groups challenge these practices (Mertens, 2015; Rolvsjord & Hadley, 2016). The axiology in the transformative paradigm encompasses respect, critiquing cultural norms that have disenfranchised communities, and upholds an ethical culturally competent practice. Within this paradigm, there is an ontological assumption that what we know is based on social location and positioning, and an epistemological assumption that "knowledge is socially and historically situated" (Mertens, 2015, p. 11). In this study, the participants and researcher are situated within Black communities which informs their perspectives culturally, historically, and phenomenologically (Mertens, 2015; Rolvsjord & Hadley, 2016).

Methodology

While I initially conceived this research as a narrative inquiry, as it progressed, my advisor and I felt that it would be more appropriate to utilize an arts-based methodology. "Arts based research (ABR) is an umbrella term that includes the use of arts as a research method–where the art forms are primary in the research process–and as an overall methodology…" (Viega & Forinash, 2016, n.p.). The research process is guided by the art forms that are utilized to generate data and shed insight into the results. Viega and Forinash (2016) define ABR as expanding discourse, having intentionality for understanding, recognizing multiple worldviews, and sharing and constructing knowledge with all people involved.

The research question grew out of an arts-based exploration of my racial identity during a graduate course addressing social and cultural foundations within music

therapy. Developed by Norris (Norris & Hadley, 2019), this process of artistic racial self-reflexivity was one in which I explored my racial identity through improvised piano playing, after which I continued to explore by improvising movement/dance in collaboration with my improvised music. Given my experiences, it seemed like a powerful way to engage the participants in this research. Thus, by asking the participants to explore their experience of being Black in the US through collaborative improvised music and dance/movement, the data was also arts-based. This framework allowed for the participants' experiences to be realized and affirmed through the arts. Music and dance were part of the participants' and researcher's lived experience of processing Blackness, thus offering a more holistic perspective. In the data analysis phase, when the thematic material emerged, it seemed fitting to share and disseminate the resulting themes through a multimodal art piece involving poetry, music, and dance. Thus, the findings were also disseminated through the arts.

Research Participants

Participants were chosen through convenience sampling resulting in one Black/African American cisgender man musician and one Black/African American cisgender woman dancer from the greater Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area. The research received IRB approval and participants provided informed consent prior to the research being conducted.

Participant Collaborative Improvisation

Participants were asked to collaboratively improvise on the theme of "being Black in the US." One participant was asked to collaboratively improvise using the keyboard, playing piano, while the other participant was asked to collaboratively improvise by dancing. The improvisation lasted twenty-five minutes and the participants only met one time. They began the improvisation together and brought their experiences of the prompt in the music and dance as the researcher witnessed their process naturally unfold within the creative process. To comply with social distancing requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no in-person contact between the participants and the researcher. All three were in separate spaces and the interaction occurred on the virtual platform Zoom. An interface, instrument cable, and GarageBand (music software program) were utilized to allow the dancer to hear the music created by the musician. The dancer utilized external computer speakers to hear the music while dancing. At the conclusion of the collaborative improvisation, the participants wrote responses to prompts about the experience. The prompts addressed: emotions, thoughts, sensations, images, memories, perceptions of cultural aesthetics, interpersonal dynamics, intrapersonal dynamics, and transpersonal experiences. Finally, a discussion/conversation with the prompt, "share how you experienced your Blackness in this experience" was facilitated by the researcher. This allowed the participants to reflect together on their collaborative experience and share their written reflections when appropriate. The entire collaborative experience including the improvisation, reflections, and discussion lasted one hour and twenty minutes.

Data Collection

The improvised music and dance/movement collaboration experience and the post-improvisation discussion were recorded through Zoom as well as a back-up audio/video recording. Written responses to prompts about the experience were scanned and emailed to the researcher. The written responses and the video recorded group discussion were transcribed to identify themes within the participant's experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The transcripts were coded and analyzed through thematic analysis. Themes emerging from the data were reviewed along with the video recorded collaborative improvisation. A narrative of "being Black in the US" was constructed and co-constructed throughout the collaboration (Wheeler & Murphy, 2016). As this narrative evolved, it became clear that it would be more authentically expressed through a multimedia arts medium. When analyzing the themes, I created a poem incorporating the main themes which I accompanied by improvised music and dance/movement inspired by the music and movement of the participants as a way to embody the collaborative narrative. Once I completed data analysis and created the poem, I implemented member-checking to ensure that the participants' experience was adequately portrayed. It was important to represent the participants' narratives in an authentic way to achieve the essence of their collaborative music and dance improvisation experience and their reflection on being Black in the U.S., in terms of their expressions individually and collaboratively.

RESULTS

This research explored the question: What is the experience of being embodied as Black in the US. This experience was explored through a collaborative improvised music and dance/movement experience. Eight main themes and forty-eight sub-themes that emerged from the data. The main themes were resilience, resistance, Black aesthetics, spirituality, connection, trauma, subjugation/oppression, and Black power. I then present the results in an Arts-based expression of poetry and improvised music and dance, which capture the sounds, movements, and narratives shared by the participants, written, and performed by the researcher. The themes and sub-themes will be addressed at length within the discussion.

Table 1: Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Resilience	Generativity / Regenerative
	· Rooting / Re-rooting
	· Creating / Recreating
	Making a way out of no way
	Finding new ways to express ourselves
	Creativity (Power in the arts expression)
	Pride
	Black Joy
	Freedom
Resistance	Barriers in the way

	Denied progress Restrained / tethered Expressive
Black Aesthetics	Musical vocabulary Sounds Gestures Allowing shifts Black Pride
Spirituality	Honoring ancestors Sacred Connection with presence Faith / Spiritual connection Healing
Connection	Collaboration Musical support Interconnectedness Disconnection Historical connection Mutuality Community
Trauma	Pain: Painful memories / Recognition of ancestral pain Deep emotions / Heaviness Stolen from / Taking culture but don't appreciate it
Subjugation/Oppression	Reduced to Black Barriers / Being held back Diminished Doubt No recognition Blessing and threat Hard to navigate the world Double consciousness - Mask on and off Code-switching
Black Power	Healing Uncovering roots of racism Exposing racism Commitment Gravity Shared intelligibility

Arts-Based Response

We are the Essence of Our Blackness [Link to Performance:]
Essence of our Blackness.
We are the essence of our Blackness!
We plant seeds regenerating life for generations,
Our roots breathe musical vibrations,
Spreading strides of freedom, pride, and joy.

Being Black is deep,
Revealed through double consciousness.
Rolling on masks,
Veiling your Black body.
Bringing comfort to whiteness, erasing Black wholeness.
We are not a Picardy third ending the piece, a token of hope.
Together we are the dance, bass, melody, harmony,
Together we are the song, movement, hardship, and pain,
We are creativity, commitment, and love.

You want what we have?
No, that is not enough to understand who we are.
We gather our pieces, unapologetically.
Pulling them closer,
Healing jabs from repeated penetration of discrimination.
Cleansing the body in Blackness.
We uncover our Black narratives.
We expose the roots of racism,
We won't accept reductionistic views of Blackness.

Black Lives Matter!

Colonialism uprooted Black bodies, created barriers,
But could never steal culture, spirit, or the motherland connection.
Stretching, molding ourselves in face of whiteness,
Our disguises hide the scars, the battle wounds.
No one can deny the progress in the Black process.
We may ache or be tethered,
Yet we re-root into the African Diaspora.

When he's gone
She keeps keepin' on,
With strength,
We fall, hold pain, grasping for air.
With resilience,
We cry like a motherless child, unbalanced, collapsing to knees.
Heaviness saturates the soul, but opens new doors, revealing skin,
This is power!

This power slowly strips back the masks, one by one.
In peeling the mask,
Pain is not individual, it is expressed collectively.
Peeling off the mask,
Shows beauty in shades of brown, hair styles, gestures, and language.
Peeling off the mask,
Requires a balanced tight rope, moving backward to move forward.

Peeling off the mask,
Means Blackness is a blessing and a threat.
Being authentically Black is electrifying!

Now freedom calls for justice and peace.
Black lives lost are the saints marching in,
Paving a way out of no way.
Getting down to the Milly Rock and the Nae Nae,
We reach out to our teachers, mentors, and ancestors.
We are dancers, musicians, and storytellers.
We flow with pride, interconnectedness, and wholeness.
We are the essence of our Blackness!

DISCUSSION

The present research study examined the interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences of being Black in the United States through an improvisational music and dance collaboration. Questions presented to the participants after the collaborative experience were designed to gain understanding into their experience by addressing emotions, thoughts, sensations, images, memories, perceptions of cultural aesthetics, interpersonal dynamics, intrapersonal dynamics, and transpersonal experiences.

The role that Black musical and cultural experiences or lifeworlds (Norris, 2019) played in the collaboration was significant and an integral part of understanding how the participants described their Blackness (individually and collectively), embraced it, and expressed their pain. When shifting to an arts-based methodology it felt authentic, but it also allowed me to have an intimate connection with the data. As the poem, music, and dance were created it was emotionally, physically, and spiritually taxing to embody the Black participants' experiences knowing they are similar to my own experience. There was a heaviness that saturated my whole body. I worried about the effectiveness of capturing their experience of being Black. Telling narratives from Black people's perspective demonstrates, validates, and communicates Black people's experiences. It provides space for their stories to be told, which can be left out of the dominant narrative within the United States and within the music therapy profession. However, based on the time constraints for the research and the challenges in coordinating schedules, the participants only met one time to engage in the improvised collaboration. I did not want to let them down, or their ancestors, or the spirit of the experiences. At the same time, I felt freedom, pride, and joy flow through the music, movement, and my voice in the process of honoring the retelling of these resilient Black narratives.

The discussion following the written responses further deepened and voiced the participants experiences of their embodied Blackness. There were eight main themes and forty-eight sub-themes that emerged. The main themes consisted of resilience, resistance, Black aesthetics, spirituality, connection, trauma, subjugation/oppression, and Black power.

Resilience

P: *"I'm grieving, I'm celebrating, I'm alive, I'm dying, I'm free, I'm bound."*

These words, expressed by the piano player participant, express a range of emotions, pain, joy, freedom, finitude, and barriers, which demonstrate the complexity of Blackness, and the resilience exhibited in one's personhood. The theme of resilience encompassed seven sub-themes, *1) joy; 2) generativity / regenerative (rooting / re-rooting & creating / re-creating); 3) making a way out of no way; 4) finding new ways to express ourselves; 5) creativity (power in the arts expression); 6) pride; and 7) freedom.*

Throughout the heaviness of the collaboration there were moments of *Black joy* expressed. The appreciation for the complexities of the Black experience described as beautiful, resonated beyond words. Lu & Steele's (2019) illustration of Black joy was consistent with the celebratory experience of the participants. *Black joy* was portrayed in the gospel praise music played by the pianist with the energetic walking bassline, and gospel, and jazz-influenced chordal patterns. In collaboration, the dancer began praise dancing with quick skipping feet, large swinging arm movements reaching out and raised to the heavens, and a celebratory jovial walk from side to side filled with power and strength. This externalization of the participants' joy demonstrated the resistance of stereotypes and misguided projections they have experienced (*finding new ways to express ourselves*). The *creation and re-creation* of one's own path represented *generative* resilience the participants continue to hold in their bodies from the uprooting of their ancestors from their homeland on the African continent. With the historical timeline the dancer created through movement, *roots* have been planted within the United States, and *re-rooting* occurs each time Black people are uprooted from where they are. Also, traditions are *created* and continue to be passed down generationally. Despite the barriers created by colonialism, Black people have repeatedly *made a way out of no way.* The dancer discusses the relationship between the kudzu vine and the resilient deep roots of Black people.

D: *"And so I looked at it and when I was doing some research about kudzu, like I thought about black people… And I said, you know, this is something that you can't kill it. Its roots run deep. Even when you think you kill it at the root, it has already rerouted itself."*

In creating one's own path the participants had pride in honoring their heritage. As described by Reed and Brooks (2017) *pride* is an essential part of the Black experience. Self-discovery and defining their Blackness provided the *freedom* to pull back the protective layers or the masks to process communally the emotional labor brought on by bringing comfort to whiteness, as well as embracing the beauty of their Blackness through the creative process *(finding new ways to express ourselves).* The power of the arts exhibited the integral nature of the collaboration through combining the participants' uniqueness and wholeness *(creativity; power in the arts expression).* It is a very vulnerable process to take off the mask, yet also very freeing *(freedom).* As James Baldwin (1963) stated, "Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within" (pp. 81-82).

Resistance

As Zamalin (2017) suggests resistance was demonstrated by the participants stating "no" and pushing against what has been taken away from them and doing this in a creative and expressive way. The theme of resistance led to four sub-themes that voice why resistance is necessary and continues to be part of Black narratives. The sub-themes include, *1) barriers in the way, 2) denied progress, 3) restrained / tethered, and 4) expressive.* Being *restrained/tethered* or held back are reasons for why Black people have historically resisted and continue to create space for each other when others do not. The pianist expressed that when Blackness is diminished Black people do not feel like or feel they can be themselves.

P: *"...when you're around the wrong people, you doubt yourself and you don't, you know, you don't reflect yourself, you don't reflect your glory, your grandeur, your royalty, your regalness, it doesn't happen."*

This is at the heart of why resistance becomes a necessity, and the acknowledgement of self, as a whole full bodied human being needs to be recognized, which was Camp's (2015) argument. The point is made that the people surrounding you influence perceptions of self and hinders one's ability to fully sit within one's authenticity. The participants brought to the forefront their internalization of barriers and how deep rooted the navigation process is from childhood into adulthood *(barriers in the way).*

Within the improvisation, resisting was energizing and provided power and strength to the participants. Additionally, faith in God grounded the participants' experiences of resisting and provided additional support and strength to plow forward. Looking back at the "moment of Sankofa, which is you reach back in order to move forward" (as stated by the dancer), there is a level of expectation where this must happen to progress. Just as white bodies are privileged to progress, Black bodies are restrained physically and emotionally, creating barriers to progression. These barriers are imposed with the intent to prevent growth and knowledge from Black people and have been pervasive throughout the history of the United States *(denied progress).* Stifling one's Blackness was brought up by the dancer as she explained how societal expectations of what you should not do limits personhood, however, resisting this allows for Blackness to be authentic, normalized, and present.

D: *"You know, 'don't let that baby dance on the street like that.' No! Let the baby dance out in the street. Make sure she doesn't get hit by car but let the baby dance on the street. Why, that is, that to me, that's Blackness. Bamboo earrings, hair three, four different colors all. Look, that's Blackness. That's expression, period. Don't stifle that."*

Progress is denied when Black people are forced to take two steps back. At the same time, the two steps back can provide perspective and opportunities to have another chance to resist and break down barriers. However, there is a fine line between learning from the two steps back and being set back from the emotional labor caused from being *restrained/tethered*, thus making it harder to keep going and expending more energy. Yet, energy is also expended having to resist in the first place because of the weight of whiteness that permeates our spaces. One integral quality about the Black culture creative

arts is that they can hold all aspects of the experience and allow for the time and space needed in order to express our humanity *(expressive)*.

As Hadley and Yancy (2012), and Viega (2018) mentioned, creative arts mediums such as music and dance/movement in Black culture have always been an access point for creativity as well as a point of resistance *(expressive)*. The participants in this study were clear that the act of resistance is where the foundation of freedom begins, and the expressiveness of artistry is nurtured. Relief in expressing oneself through music is at the heart of healing through the process. It is notable that the participants' intersecting identities, such as being an artist and teacher, significantly impacted the process.

Black Aesthetics

Centering Blackness was integral in the creation of the music and dance collaboration. Thus, it is no surprise that aspects of Black aesthetics were central. There were five sub-themes, *1) musical vocabulary, 2) sounds, 3) gestures, 4) allowing shifts, and 5) Black pride*. In many cultures, including in Black communities, music and movement are integral parts of daily life and not separated. In our westernized society which thrives on separation, the arts therapies have been severed into single modalities. For example, we have music therapy, dance therapy, art therapy, drama therapy, etc. Each profession "perfects" one modality and most of the time disregards the others. Movement is a natural response to music. The complexity of the rhythmically driven syncopation within Black music creates the desire to move through our sensorimotor perception (Witek, Clarke, Wallentin, Kringelbach & Vuust, 2014). Movement is not limited to just dance; it also includes how the body moves within the space and how *gestures* communicate non-verbal language. It involves clapping and snapping our fingers, which the dancer engaged in, while the pianist joined in with toe taps and head nodding. We gain so much from non-verbal movement, and it has equivalent relevance to the qualities of music. Music and dance share many of the same characteristics sharing *musical vocabulary* such as form, rhythm, dynamics, communication, and storytelling (Thomas, 2020). These characteristics are manifested within Black aesthetics. It is part of our humanity as Black persons. Limiting how we engage in the arts limits our ability to connect with our clients.

Black aesthetics were saturated within the *musical vocabulary* of the participants. The musicality, familiar melody, syncopated rhythms, and strong beat of "When The Saints Go Marching In" played by the pianist influenced the dancer, as she "began marching like the Jackson State University Sonic Boom of the South," which is a marching band from Mississippi from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). This exudes *Black pride*. Within the group discussions Black pride was also voiced by the pianist.

P: *"We bring music to the world. We are music to the world."*

Likewise, the dancer conveyed *Black pride* by discussing physical appearance and the use of language.

D: *"A lot of you know the way we wear our hair, the way we walk down the street. When you say hey man, what's going on? We're fine you dig. That's completely like the …*

speech patterns, like I said, the linguistics are from the continent, how we use our words."

These words not only described Black pride but also demonstrated the *sounds*, *allowing shifts* within the music and movement collaboration. Going back to "When the Saints Go Marching In," the melody was referenced the first time briefly through the improvisatory jazz movement. Then the melody was played three times where it was played differently with less accompaniment while the inner voices were moving. By the last time, the texture of the music was thin, almost solely melody and bass line. After the melody was completed, silence followed, where the dancer shifted into removing several masks. The dancer expressed being able to finish a "movement thought" and then the pianist followed her movement supporting her musically. At times there were seamless shifts between the music and silence, and other times it was abrupt and jarring. Each shift was authentic to the participants' process in negotiating the space together and allowing for various ways of being Black to be present (Norris, 2019).

Spirituality

The participants demonstrated a strong spiritual connection throughout the music and dance experience, as well as during the discussion. Five sub-themes became apparent, *1) honoring ancestors, 2) sacred, 3) connection with presence, 4) faith/spiritual connection,* and *5) healing.* The participants collectively engaged in *honoring ancestors* as a form of spiritual healing. This is congruent with the findings of Norris (2019) where the Black participants drew upon their ancestors, and their faith for strength as well as took ownership of what spirituality means to them in the context of spiritual coping. This demonstrated how *healing* can occur through shared Black narratives that address intergenerational trauma residing within the participants' lineage. In the literature, Bartholomew, Harris & Maglalang (2018) discussed intergenerational trauma affecting Black people long after the trauma has occurred. While this is certainly true, the resilience of Black people is also passed down through *faith/spiritual connection,* which was displayed by the participants. They deemed their experience as spiritual. Within the core of their experience, they described it as *sacred,* and honored their ancestors, mentors, and family members.

The sacredness allowed for exploration of Black spirituality, a deep *connection with presence,* and connection to spirit displayed by the gospel and jazz influenced music, which was felt physically in the body, bringing the dancer to her knees and to tears. The sense of gratitude and connection with Black spirituality was similar to Goldberg's GIM experience (Goldberg & Hadley, 2013). There was a wholeness during the process of centering Black *healing* and Blackness through improvised music and dance, which is one way of engaging in culturally centered healing practices as Norris (2019) has described. The creative process provided the space for a worship experience connecting spiritual and earthly spaces together.

> P: *This is, this is what spirituality looks like. This is what worship is, this what worship should look like. This is what a human should look like, this is what blackness is and should always look like. This is what life should look like. We should dance in the middle of the day, dance in the rain, you know, dance in the*

sun, sleet, and snow. Create, you know, create in those in whatever the season of our lives is, take that power to create the answers and the response that we need, to remain healthy and whole. But this is, for me, is the epitome of what a worship experience is.

Connection

The collaborative music and dance process fostered connection between the participants. There already was a personal connection between the participants because they worked together before. However, the participants created various connections within the collaboration that resulted in seven sub-themes, *1) collaboration; 2) musical support; 3) interconnectedness; 4) disconnection; 5) historical connection; 6) mutuality; and 7) community*.

Interconnectedness was felt by the participants from the beginning of the improvisation. The pianist expressed feeling connected to the dancer throughout the process. Connections with their past, such as their personal history and their ancestral story, was also discussed especially in relation to moving toward the future. The dancer explained, "I felt this was my movement of 'Sankofa' reaching back to go forward." It was powerful to witness the representation of history within the *collaboration* between the pianist and dancer. They cultivated a space that depicted *historical connection* honoring the rich Black history which lives within them and within their Black communities. The dancer represented West African dancing, movements honoring enslaved ancestors, and she energetically drew from Alvin American Dance Theater, and represented popular Black hip hop dances, such as the Milly Rock and Nae Nae. Movements found in contemporary dance with European influences were also represented as they also have connections to the dancer's narrative.

The pianist's prior connection to gospel music was evident, as the improvisations were based in gospel and jazz styles of Black music, providing *musical support*. There was a historical evolution within the music from traditional spirituals such as "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," praise and worship music, to contemporary improvisations. In the discussion, he alluded to the music always coming back home, which in this case was the church setting. In addition to the *historical connections*, the pianist imagined people from the African Diaspora dancing in a village.

Throughout the *collaboration,* gender dynamics were prevalent. The cisgender woman was in the role of the dancer and the cisgender man was in the role of the pianist. During the *collaboration*, the dancer explained her movement drew her within, reflecting on self, which created *disconnection* with the pianist. The pianist had the "final say" musically when ending phrases or musical ideas. However, the dancer continued expressing her ideas and emotions through movement regardless of when the pianist stopped playing or looked disconnected with very little emotional expression. This seemed to mirror the experience of some African American/Black women who have continued to keep things going regardless of the circumstance, whether or not she has been left on her own. Her strength was prevalent.

As the participants reflected on the killings of Black people and the Black Lives Matter movement, there was a heaviness that filled the space. There was *mutuality* in their experiences given that the data collection was at the height of the marches for racial equality after the murder of George Floyd and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The

historical and present context of *interconnectedness* and feeling a sense of *community* had a unique, but important significance as the participants were living through a profound historical moment. There was a point where a sense of embodied Blackness was profoundly present in the single tones on the piano that were played. This was an intense moment of *musical support* where deep reflection of interconnection showed vulnerabilities, effects of racism, and how transitions can serve as pivotal points to move forward.

Trauma

Generational pain and the recent tragedies of so many Black lives were brought to the forefront of the participants' experience. The depth of the painful memories and the invasiveness of the denial of the struggles that Black Americans face due to anti-Black racism resonated within the space. At the time of the collaboration, marches for Black lives were happening on a daily basis across the country and the participants carried the burden of repeatedly reliving loss of Black life through police brutality. The theme of trauma presented itself within the collaboration in multiple ways and resulted in three sub-themes, *1) pain: painful memories / recognition of ancestral pain; 2) deep emotions / heaviness;* and *3) stolen from / taking culture but don't appreciate it.*

There were *deep emotions/heaviness* within the participants' narratives, a tremendous amount of *pain* that was witnessed in the collaboration. Hyperawareness was evidenced in the body of the dancer when folding inward holding her stomach, walking a tightrope, and very carefully making each step with hesitation when placing each foot on the ground. Right after this there was a moment where she put her hands up also in a movement of protecting herself from something. This resembled reactions to deadly historical events and more recent viral videos where Black people were badly beaten or killed (*painful memories / recognition of ancestral pain*). This kind of reaction is noted by Bartholomew, Harris & Maglalang (2018). The representation of the violence on Black bodies was so strong in the dancer that there was a pull to the ground. The music deepened the emotional experience through heart-wrenching repeated drones on the low notes of the piano, giving feelings of uncertainty. The pianist also switched sounds on the keyboard multiple times, amplifying the uncertainty as the dancer proceeded to pull herself up off the ground.

The deep-seated *pain* depicted in the collaboration is the result of devaluation and constant reminders of the loss of Black lives. The participants discussed the frustration at the appropriation of Black culture within mainstream American culture. As they navigate the world in Black bodies, they described being stereotyped (Steele, 2010) and their Blackness being *stolen*. Whiteness takes elements of Black culture out of context and co-opts them, erasing Blackness in many ways. There is a lack of respect or appreciation for Black existence and history *(taking culture but don't appreciate it)*. In addition, the participants found it essential to have *recognition of their ancestors* and family members who have passed away. They noted that Black/African American history books predominately start with enslavement, and they wanted to honor their history more fully. The dancer described the ancestors to have a "…grand, rich, deep, complex history…" She noted that as a Black person her history goes beyond being reduced to the trauma caused by the oppressive actions of the process of uprooting.

When truly acknowledging and understanding people for who they are and not just witnessing experiences through a limited lens, it demonstrates the importance of having compassion for intergenerational *pain*. Trauma lives in the body and so much is unsaid; however, it is felt when activated within creativity in communal spaces, as Thomas (2019/2020) indicates. Within Thomas's (2019) work the children were able to explore various aspects of their identity, particularly racial identity. As the participants in Thomas' study expressed their Blackness in relation to each other, they were understood by facilitators which was invaluable to the therapeutic process and addressing internalized beliefs the participants expressed towards each other. More recently, Thomas (2020) encourages the exploration of internalized beliefs physically held in the body, for example allowing music and movement to occur during the music experience versus limiting movement.

Subjugation/Oppression

The emergent theme of subjugation and oppression resulted in nine sub-themes which depict how the participants experience themselves in the world, as well as challenges that are faced due to obstacles created by society's lack of respect for Black humanity. The sub-themes are as follows, *1) reduced to Black; 2) barriers / being held back; 3) diminished; 4) doubt; 5) no recognition; 6) blessing and threat; 7) hard to navigate the world; 8) code-switching; and 9) double consciousness – mask on and off.*

The agony of being *reduced to Black* through stereotypes, assumed guilty or incompetent *(doubt)*, and facing *barriers/being held back* solely based on one's Blackness was painfully expressed in the improvised collaboration. The creative arts provided a space that allowed for the release of pain and suffering, and preservation of their lived truths in a way similar to what Eyerman describes (2001). As described by the participants, the sacred collaboration provided a container where they were able to integrate aspects of their Blackness without shame, without being considered a threat, and where they could feel safe enough to peel off masks, to reveal their true selves. The dancer put on and peeled off many masks during the collaboration. W.E.B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk* (2007, 1903), discusses the concept of the Veil as representing the psychological manifestation of the color line *(double consciousness – mask on and off)*. The Veil impacts the psychology of both white and Black people. For white people, the Veil functions to reinforce racist understandings about who should have access to opportunities and how policing should work. At the same time the Veil functions as a barrier that prevents white people from accepting Black people as fully human. The Veil also impacts Black people because it prevents them from perceiving themselves as they really are, because of all the negative narratives they have been taught about Blackness within an anti-Black world. The internalization of these narratives is a function of the Veil. Along with the concept of the Veil, DuBois discusses the concept of double consciousness. He says of Black/African Americans that they were:

> . . . *born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a*

world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1997 [1903], p. 38)

Double consciousness is knowing yourself both from the perspective of whiteness and from one's perspective as Black. It is the ability to see on both sides of the Veil. In 1920, in *The souls of white folk*, Du Bois talks about the ability to see in and to see through the souls of white folk. He states that he can "see the workings of their entrails" (Du Bois, 2004, p. 21). He says he knows their thoughts and they know that he knows. He understands this as a form of clairvoyance, that because he lives amongst white folk, he has an ability to see things that go beyond the senses. From what Du Bois writes about, there are ways in which Black people are able to perceive themselves both in the ways white people perceive them and as they really are (double consciousness) and also able to perceive white people: both how white people perceive themselves and as they really are (a kind of clairvoyance) because of having to live oppressed in a white supremacist anti-Black world.

In the collaborative improvisation, the dancer seems to portray the Veil in the ways that she was putting on and removing the mask or the Veil. This putting on of the mask also could be a kind of *code-switching*. In this way, the mask acts as a way of covering oneself to make white people comfortable. Paul Laurence Dunbar in his 1896 poem "We Wear the Mask" understands wearing of masks as both a problem and a form of survival. He writes:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
  We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise;
  We wear the mask!

(Dunbar, 1896, p.167)

Similar to Dunbar, the dancer depicted this process of putting on masks as being at the detriment of her own progress, resulting in moving backward. The dancer's movement described being on a tightrope and negotiating the balance and the quest to

move forward *(barriers/being held back)*. At this moment, the pianist supported this process by playing steady and tonal music, which in line with how she wanted to be by moving forward by integrating aspects of self. In the dancer's words:

D: *"I remember a moment where I was thinking about removing the mask and his music   matched everything, it was timed and what seemed to be finite, deafening."*

Various forms of invalidation of Blackness, such as lack of *recognition*, and unequal expectations, make it *harder* for Black Americans to *navigate the world*. Living with stigmatization of being a threat as a Black man, the pianist stated:

P: *"My Blackness is both my blessing and my threat."*

Centering Black lives and celebrating their wholeness can work against the negative impact of stereotype threats (Steele, 2010) and break down barriers put up to keep Blackness out through systems of oppression, the ism's as described by Barlow (2018), and white supremacy as described *(diminished)* by Bartholomew, Harris & Maglalang (2018). The music and dancing expressed a deep sense of tiredness and resistance as the *barriers* and the duality of the *double consciousness* were enacted. The deep complex layers were outwardly expressed through the complex chordal harmony as well as the exposed tension from the simplicity. The embodiment of Blackness began to unpack the ways Black bodies are reduced and was evident through the participants creativity.

When creating the multimedia arts-based expression of the results, I found that embodying the participants' dualities was exhausting to convey. It also took a physical and emotional toll on my body as the sadness and frustration they carried in the collaboration seeped into my body. Each piece of the multi-media process held a multitude of layers in capturing the complexity of the participants' narratives.

Black Power

Black power upholds the humanity of Blackness. In this research, the emergent theme of Black power had six sub-themes, *1) healing, 2) uncovering roots of racism, 3) exposing racism, 4) commitment, 5) gravity, and 6) shared intelligibility*. *Healing* was integral throughout the entire process. Creating Black art allowed the participants to shift on their own terms providing autonomy within the collaboration. Significant shifts were connected to the transformative moments within the experiences they expressed. How they represented these moments conveyed vulnerability by *uncovering the roots of racism*, as well as *exposing racism*. The acknowledgement and understanding of where racism started combined with exposing racism not only within oneself, but bringing it to the attention of others, are transformative agents for change. This is necessary in being able to address the harm the participants experienced as well as within Black American communities as described by Norris (2019).

The participants demonstrated the *gravity* of this process. It is weighty, challenging, and unpleasant, but there is so much strength within their Black experiences as they embodied and continue to have *commitment* to their Blackness. The *commitment* exemplifies wholeness, love, being seen, and the power of Blackness when creating in

their respected art forms coupled with owning Blackness as a spiritual experience. The *shared intelligibility* starting from the moment of entering the space, engaging in the music and dance, to the discussion, meant there was a sense of community and an understanding of Black culture. Although social distancing created physical distance, their collaborative process illustrated an unwaveringly powerful display of their authenticity and their connection. As the researcher, although this was a passive role from westernized standards, the *shared intelligibility* accounted for the active involvement of being present to witness the collaboration. This is similar to Thomas's (2019) work where she discusses how cultural factors have an impact on the participants and the researcher.

CONCLUSION

Limitations

Due to the pandemic requiring the research to be conducted virtually for the safety of the participants, the original plan was changed. Initially the research was to have the participants engage in the collaborative improvised music and dance in-person. Virtual spaces do not always allow for the same level of nonverbal communication through body language, which is important in the collaboration. During the collaboration, each participant chose their environment. With the varying environments, this could have impacted the results regarding the comfort of the space and other unexpected distractions.

Being that the Greater Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Black arts community is a small, tight-knit group of people, the participants knew each other prior to the research, unbeknownst to the researcher. That the participants had prior connections could have impacted how they engaged in the collaboration.

Gender may have also played a role in what was expressed. At one point the cisman piano player stopped, as if he wanted the collaboration to end, and the ciswoman dancer continued alone. Had the gender of either participant been different, perhaps the dynamics in the collaboration would also have been different. The gender of the researcher facilitating the collaboration may also have impacted the level of engagement and self-disclosure of the participants, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Given that there were only two participants, the findings in the study only reflect these participants' experience of being Black in the US. It cannot be generalized to all Black/African American people in the US. That is, the results in this study do not necessarily capture or express the multitude of experiences of being embodied as Black/African American. Although the themes of the participants' experiences of being Black in the United States are validated and supported by experiences of many other Black people in the US, as found in the literature, this research should not be understood as a definitive description. Finally, my own biases in terms of my own experiences of being Black in the US could have influenced the interpretation of the improvised collaboration recording, written responses, and the discussion transcript. I tried to stay true to their conveyed experiences, but there is still the chance that as I analyzed the data, and as I created the arts-based response, that my biases crept in. As a way to guard against that, I was in constant communication with my research cohort, especially one who is a Black

cis man, and my research advisor. The questions they asked helped me reflect on ways I may be overlaying my own experiences and also ways that my experiences helped me understand the subtleties of what was being expressed.

Future Research

Future research could explore how music therapists, students, and their clients view and engage in music and dance/movement within their clinical settings and as part of their own cultural practice. Having more awareness of this could provide more insight into how music and dance/movement could be incorporated in treatment. It would be interesting to analyze improvisations as narratives to gain a deeper understanding about the salient aspects of lived experiences within the context of one's culture and how that is reflected in their body movements as they are engaging in the music. Within the context of forensic psychology, more research is needed to explore the meaningfulness of creating and being supported by one's own music and dance/movement in order to process complex trauma, and for clients to re-narrate themselves from a thin description as criminal to a more complex understanding of their creative possibilities. Furthermore, there is a need for more research on the interconnectedness of music and dance in music therapy.

Implications for Music Therapy Practice

Music and dance/movement influences how a person shows up in the world; it allows for self-expression and self-exploration. It is crucial that music therapy students and music therapists have a critical lens through which to understand the physical impact of racialized trauma held within a person's body, voice, and music. Black narratives and Black personhood have barely been attended to within the music therapy profession, which is rooted in anti-Black violence and systems of oppression (Norris, 2020a). The ignoring and even erasing of these narratives harm clients, students, and therapists who are part of minoritized communities, thus limiting the freedom to be authentic (Norris, 2020a; Norris, 2020b).

The use of collaborative music and dance/movement within sessions may provide opportunities for rich meaningful experiences of expressing one's embodied Blackness. Intentionally creating the space for both art forms to coincide, broadens the possibilities for creativity and growth. As Thomas (2020) suggests, as music therapists we are not trained to interpret movement in the ways that dance therapists do. However, music and movement are often inseparable in some cultures, and so for some music therapists the connection between the two are very meaningful and thus shape our relationship to music and movement. As such, we have experiences engaging with dance/movement personally as well as communally. This research also showed that connecting and collaborating in music and dance/movement is not limited to in-person shared spaces but can be navigated across virtual spaces. This was an unexpected finding in the research, due to the circumstance of having to move to an online platform due to the pandemic. This has implications for how to build community and connections through virtual collaborations.

Final Reflection

In closing, this research was realized from personal experiences of being Black and participating within collaborative cultural practices within music and dance/movement. Engaging in music and dance/movement provides opportunities that go beyond words, allows freedom to express pain and trauma, and creates a shared space to witness lived experiences, which were explored in the discussion. The creative process with Black people is unique and expresses the value Black experiences brings to therapeutic spaces. There is a need within the music therapy literature to authentically understand Black experiences from Black people, their communities, as well as welcoming collaborative creative processes within music therapy practice. It is imperative to continue to honor and embrace Black lives through embodying collaborative improvised music and dance/movement.

REFERENCES

American Music Therapy Association (2020). 2020 *Workforce analysis: Statistical profile of the 2020 AMTA membership and music therapy community*. American Music Therapy Association, Inc. https://www.musictherapy.org/assets/1/7/2020Workforceanalysis.pdf

Araujo, A. L. (2013). Introduction to Atlantic approaches on resistance against slavery in the Americas. *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology & Heritage, 2*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1179/2161944113Z.0000000001

Baldwin, J. (1963). *The fire next time*. Penguin Books.

Barlow, J. N. (2018). Restoring optimal Black mental health and reversing intergenerational trauma in an era of Black lives matter. *Biographical Research Center, 41*(4), 895-908. https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2018.0084

Bartholomew, M. W., Harris, A. N., Maglalang, D. D. (2018). A call to healing: Black lives matter movement as a framework for addressing the health and wellness of Black women. *Community Psychology in Global Perspectives, 4*(2), 85–100. dio:10.1285/i24212113v4i2p85

Bailey, A. (2021). *The weight of whiteness: A feminist engagement with privilege, race, and ignorance*. Lexington Books.

Brody, G. H., Yu, T., Chen, E., & Miller, G. E. (2020). Persistence of skin-deep resilience in African American adults. *Health Psychology, 39*(10), 921–926. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hea0000945

Bruscia, K. E. (1987). *Improvisational models of music therapy*. Charles C. Thomas Publisher.

Bruscia, K. E. (1998). *The dynamics of music psychotherapy*. Barcelona Publishers.

Camp, S. M. H. (2015). Black is beautiful: An American history. *Journal of Southern History, 81*(3), 675–690.

Chaney, C. (2018). 'You can never kill me': Racism and resilience in hip hop. *Journal of Popular Music Education, 2*(1-2), 81–100. https://doi.org/10.1386/jpme.2.1-2.81_1

Chase, G. (2018). The early history of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the implications thereof. *Nevada Law Journal, 18*, 1091–1112.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design qualitative, quantitative, and mixed Methods*. (5th ed.) SAGE Publications, Inc.

Cross, A., & Hadley, S. (2013). Narrative seventeen: Lessons learned through growing and learning. *Experiencing race as a music therapist: Personal narratives* (pp. 201–207). Barcelona Publishers.

Cross, W. E. Jr. (1971). The negro-to-black conversion experience. *Black World, 20*(9), 13–27.

Degruy-Leary, J. (2017). *Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury*. Portland, OR: Joy DeGruy Publications Inc.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (2007, 1903). *The souls of Black folk*. (B. H. Edwards, Ed.). Oxford University Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (2004). *Darkwater: The Givens collection*. Simon and Schuster.

Dunbar, P. L. (1896). We wear the mask. *Lyrics of lowly life*, 167. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAC5659.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext

Eschen, J. T. (2002). *Analytical music therapy*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Eyerman, R. (2001). *Cultural trauma slavery and the formation of African American identity*. Cambridge University Press.

French, B. H., Lewis, J. A., & Neville, H. A. (2013). Naming and reclaiming: An interdisciplinary analysis of Black girls' and women's resistance strategies. *Journal of African American Studies, 17,* 1–6. https://doi.org//10.1007/s12111-012-9215-4

Goldberg F. S., & Hadley, S. (2013). Narrative ten: Creating a path in the middle. In S. Hadley. (Ed.), *Experiencing race as a music therapist: Personal narratives* (pp. 123–135). Barcelona Publishers.

Hall, J. D. (2005). The long civil rights movement and the political use of the past. *The Journal of American History, 91*(4), 1233–1263. https://doi.org/10.2307/3660172

Hall, J. M. (2012). Revalorized Black embodiment: Dance with Fanon. *Journal of Black Studies, 43*(3), 274–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934711419363

Jones, S. C. T., Anderson, R. E., Gaskin-Wasson, A. L., Sawyer, B. A., Applewhite, K., & Metzger, I. W. (2020). From "crib to coffin": Navigating coping from racism-related stress throughout the lifespan of Black Americans. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry. 90*(2), 267–282. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000430

Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an anti-racist*. Penguin Random House LLC.

Leonard, H. (2020). A problematic conflation of justice and equality: The case for equity in music therapy. *Music Therapy Perspectives, 38*(2), 102–111. https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miaa012

Lipsitz, G. (2006). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Temple University Press.

Lu, J. H., & Steele, C. K. (2019). 'Joy is resistance': Cross-platform resilience and (re)invention of Black oral culture online. *Information, Communication & Society, 22*(6), 823–837. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1575449

Mertens, D.M. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Miller, G. E., Cohen, S., Janicki-Deverts, D., Brody, G. H., & Chen, E. (2016). Viral challenge reveals further evidence of skin-deep resilience in African Americans

from disadvantaged backgrounds. *Health Psychology, 35*(11), 1225–1234. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hea0000398

Mustakeem, S. M. (2016). *Slavery at sea: Terror, sex, and sickness in the middle passage*. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Norris, M. S. (2019*). Between Lines: A critical multimodal discourse analysis of Black aesthetics in a vocal music therapy group for chronic pain*. [Doctoral dissertation, Drexel University]. ProQuest.

Norris, M. S. (2020a, November 1). A call for radical imagining: Exploring anti-blackness in the music therapy profession. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy, 20*(3), 1–7. https://doi. org/10.15845/voices.v20i3.3167

Norris, M. S. (2020b, November 1). Freedom dreams: What must die in music therapy to preserve human dignity? *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy, 20*(3), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v20i3.3172

Norris, M. and Hadley, S. (2019). Engaging race in music therapy supervision. In M. Forinash (Ed). *Music therapy supervision*. (2nd ed, pp. 101–126). Barcelona Publishers.

Payatak, E., & Muccitelli, L. (2011). Rap music as resistive occupation: Constructions of Black American identity and culture for performers and their audiences. *Journal of Occupational Science, 18*(1), 48–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2011.554154

Reed, K. J., & Brooks, D. (2017). African American perspectives. In A. Whitehead-Pleaux & X. Tan (Eds.), Cultural intersections in music therapy: Music, health, and the person (pp.105–123). Barcelona Publishers.

Roediger, D. R. (1999). *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class*. Verso.

Rolvsjord, R. & Hadley, S. (2016). Critical inquiries: Feminist perspective and transformative research. In B. Wheeler & K. Murphy (Eds.), *Music therapy research* (3nd ed.). Barcelona Publishers.

Scrine, E. (2021). The limits of resilience and the need for resistance: Articulating the role of music therapy with young people within a shifting trauma paradigm. *Frontiers in Psychology. 12*(600245), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.600245

Smith, D. L. (1991). The Black Arts Movement and its critics. *American Literary History, 3*(1), 93–110.

Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do*. W.W. Norton & Company. Inc.

Sullivan, S. (2006). *Revealing whiteness: The unconscious habits of racial privilege*. Indiana University Press.

Taylor, P. (2010). Black aesthetics. *Philosophy Compass 5*(1), 1–15. doi:10.1111/j.1747-9991.2009.00263.x

Thomas, N. A. (2019*). Social identity and the music making choices of Black/African youth from limited resource communicates*. [Doctoral dissertation, Lesley University]. DigitalCommons@Lesley. https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_dissertations/85

Thomas, N. (2020) "Dance and Movement Across Cultures" in Belgrave, M., Kim, S. (Eds), *Music Therapy in a Multicultural Context*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Viega, M. & Forinash, M. (2016). Arts-based research. In B. Wheeler & K. Murphy (Eds.), *Music therapy research* (3rd ed., pp. 2729–2808). Barcelona Publishers.

Webb, A.W. (2019). *The full has never been told: An arts-based narrative inquiry into the academic and professional experiences Black people in American music therapy.* (Publication No. 13862525) [Doctoral dissertation, Temple University]. ProQuest.

Witek, M. A. G., Clarke, E. F., Wallentin, M., Kringelbach, M. L., & Vuust, P. (2014). Syncopation, body-movement and pleasure in groove music. *Plos One, 9*(4), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094446

Wheeler, B. L., & Murphy, K. (Ed.). (2016). *Music therapy research.* Barcelona Publishers.

Worthy, J. II. (2019). American Studies in Review. Southern resistance and Northern defiance: African American women's quest for freedom and political agency. *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue Canadienne D'études Américaines, 49*(2), 226–235. https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.2018.11

Yancy, G. (2022). Innocent white people are also complicit in the anti-Black murders in Buffalo. Truthout, May 17, 2022. https://truthout.org/articles/innocent-white-people-are-also-complicit-in-the-anti-black-murders-in-buffalo/

Yancy, G. (2017). *Black bodies, white gazes: The continuing significance of race in America* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Yancy, G. (Ed.). (2004). *What white looks like: African-American philosophers on the whiteness question.* Routledge.

Zamalin, A. (2017). *Struggle on their minds: The political thought of African American resistance.* Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/zama18110

Zid (2019). Unearthing new dimensions of Black "womanism": Poetic resistance and the journey from absence to self-representation. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 10*(6), 12–19. http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.10n.6p.12