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Essence of Joy: Empathy in an Afrocentric Collegiate Choral Ensemble at a Predominately White Institution

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Abstract

Researchers (e.g., Watts & Piña, 2023) have demonstrated that World Music Pedagogy might promote students' empathy towards members of other cultures. In choral ensembles, however, researchers have yet to study whether or how transcultural musicking, or engaging with music and/or musicians from cultures other than one's own (Sánchez-Gatt et al., 2025, pp. 56–57), promotes experiences of empathy. The purpose of this phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) was to explore the oft-repeated claim in World Music Pedagogy that transcultural musicking supports students' experiences of empathy by examining the experiences of participants in *Essence of Joy*, an Afrocentric choir at The Pennsylvania State University, a Predominately White Institution (i.e., a post-secondary institution in the U.S. with a majority of white students). Additional goals of this research were to examine how participants' experiences of empathy were mediated by whether they belonged to the cultural or racial group whose music was performed by the ensemble and to examine in what ways experiences of empathy were supported by the choir's repertoire, the conductor's pedagogical choices, or both. Data included eight semi-structured interviews, field notes, and participant-observation. I identified three textural themes, "connections to others," "connections to self," and "multifaceted definitions of empathy." I also developed a structural analysis represented in a graphic model of the participants' experiences and synthesized the textural themes and structural analysis into a phenomenological essence statement. The essence of participants' experiences of empathy in *Essence of Joy* was transformational connections to others and to themselves. For Black participants, singing in *Essence of Joy* also provided an opportunity to explore their ethnic identity. Based on the findings, I suggest implications for practice and future research.

Keywords: World music pedagogy, transcultural musicking, African American music, Black music, empathy

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Introduction

The evening sun filters through stained glass windows, painting long strokes of pastel colors on the white wooden walls of a tiny Hawaiian church. Audience members, eager to hear an Afrocentric choir from the northeastern United States, crowd the pews and even stand in the doorway and outside. For just over an hour, *Essence of Joy* shares choral music from the sacred and secular African American traditions with the audience in Kapa'au on the Big Island. The singers' harmonies reverberate off the wooden church frame, filling the small sanctuary like thick incense. The emotion of the music is inescapable. As audience members and singers alike begin to cry, they feel as if they are on the same wavelength (Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023), experiencing the same sounds and emotions as they share this singular musical experience.

In this vignette, a multiracial choir from The Pennsylvania State University and a multiracial audience in Hawai'i shared an emotional experience mediated through African American choral music. Although sacred and secular African American choral music are central to the mission of *Essence of Joy*, Black singers and audience members constituted a minority of its singers and its audience at this concert. Thus, a majority of the singers in *Essence of Joy* were engaged in *transcultural musicking*. The term *transcultural musicking* combines two concepts that are present in above vignette. First, *transculturalism* describes "the exchange of practices, beliefs, and ideas between different cultures and the results of those exchanges when they come together," (Sánchez-Gatt et al., 2025, p. 56). Second, *musicking*, a concept proposed by Small (1998), suggests that "to music" may be understood to be a verb defined as "tak[ing] part in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing, or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing," (p. 9). Thus, transcultural musicking may be understood to include the acts of creating, performing, rehearsing, listening to, or dancing to music from a culture other than one's own. Transcultural musicking may occur individually, within an ensemble that shares a single cultural origin, or it may occur in collaboration with musicians who are members of cultures other than one's own in ways that involve exchanges of musical ideas, practices, or concepts across cultures. In the example that opens this article, the performers and audience were engaged in transcultural musicking as the concert constituted a collaboration between performers and audience members who did and did not share a cultural origin with the music being sung.

Music education scholars have suggested that students may gain empathy for others by learning music from cultures other than their own (Bennett, 2022; Campbell, 1991, 2018; Hess, 2019; Pascale, 2011). The American Choral Directors Association's (ACDA) stated purposes include "to foster and promote choral singing in the pursuit of peace and justice that enhances social and emotional well-being," and "to engage, listen to, and learn from marginalized and historically underrepresented groups in order to create a more inclusive community" (ACDA, 2023, p. 1). Given these purposes, choral conductors and ACDA members may consider how or whether transcultural musicking in choral ensembles can

create empathetic connections amongst choral singers that promote social and emotional well-being while creating inclusion for historically marginalized groups. An exploration of transcultural musicking in a choral ensemble may provide choral directors further insight into whether or how choral musicians experience empathy through performing the music of cultures other than their own.

Additionally, the assumption that transcultural musicking promotes students' empathy ignores students who are members of the underrepresented cultures that choral conductors choose to celebrate in their repertoire. For example, a Black American singer may not need to learn Black American choral music in order to have empathy for other Black people. Bishop (1990) encouraged educators to consider how the literature they select might provide students with mirrors that reflect their own experiences and windows that provide students opportunities to learn about the experiences and perspectives of others. A book that is a mirror for one student may be a window for another. Similarly, choral conductors may wish to consider how the repertoire that they program provides opportunities for choral singers to experience musical windows and mirrors (Bernard & Talbot, 2023). Choral educators may also seek to understand the impact of World Music Pedagogy for singers who experience non-European repertoire as a mirror in addition to its impact for students who experience it as a window.

Review of Literature

Choral singing can be important to the social identity development of young people (Parker, 2014). Through a high school choral experience, singers can experience a desire to work as a team which can lead to a sense of accomplishment, pride, and a desire to give back to the choir (Parker, 2014). Additionally, high school students may experience increased comfort engaging in social situations and increased confidence in their sense of self (Parker, 2014).

Within the African American church, gospel choirs may also contribute to young people's social development while supporting their spiritual or faith journeys as well (Parker, 2017). Gospel choirs in African American churches may support young people by creating a sense of family and allowing young people to take on additional roles within the choir as they age (Parker, 2017). Participants may also experience an increase in development of their sense of self by connecting emotionally and spiritually to the music they sing. This process can lead to a desire to give back to the choir and community (Parker, 2017). Although researchers have explored the experiences of adolescent choral singers and the experiences of Black singers in Afrocentric choral ensembles (e.g., Parker, 2014, 2017; Pinto, 2022; Strayhorn, 2011), few researchers have explored the experiences of choral singers who engage in transcultural musicking.

World Music Pedagogy (WMP), often associated with the work of music educator, researcher, and ethnomusicologist Patricia Shehan Campbell, is one approach that music educators and choral conductors have utilized to engage in transcultural musicking. Ac-

according to Campbell:

WMP concerns itself with the role of music within its culture of origin, how it functions, for whom, and for what reasons. It presses on the manner in which music is taught/transmitted and received/learned within cultures, and how best the processes that are included in significant ways within these cultures can be preserved or at least partially retained in classrooms and rehearsal halls. (2016, p. 95)

Although WMP practitioners seek to honor and preserve the cultural practices of the musics they teach in their classrooms and perform in their ensembles, some music education scholars have argued that music educators who program world music without concern for reciprocity and collaboration between cultures may in fact perpetuate harm. Sánchez-Gatt et al. (2025) suggested that music educators may engage in extractive or colonial transculturalism when they engage with World Music Pedagogy while ignoring power differentials inherent between members of different cultures—as well as power differentials between student and teacher or conductor and singer (p. 62).

World Music pedagogues have suggested that transcultural musicking may lead to experiences of empathy for individuals from cultures other than one's own (e.g., Bennett, 2022; Campbell, 1991, 2018; Pascale, 2011). Maibom (2020) summarized various types of empathy, including affective empathy and sympathy. Affective empathy occurs when person A experiences an emotion as the result of person B's emotional experience. The emotion is usually similar to person B's experienced emotion or is a direct cause of it. In affective empathy, the emotion "is experienced partly for the other person and partly for the self" (Maibom, 2020, p. 15). Sympathy, according to Maibom (2020), "is an emotion experienced by a person A for the wellbeing and plight of another person B. This emotion is rarely like the emotion(s) experienced by B, since sympathy is almost uniquely other-directed" (p. 16).

Thus far, scholars have examined music's capacity to foster empathy through philosophical inquiry (Winter, 2013), practical applications (Laird, 2015; Pascale, 2011; Watts & Piña, 2023) and through qualitative study of music educators and activist musicians (Hess, 2019). Winter (2013) argued that participatory music-making might encourage empathy by requiring musicians to focus on the subjectivities of their fellow musicians (p. 111). Similarly, Laird (2015) suggested that general music teachers might support empathetic development through group activities. Pascale (2011) and Watts and Piña (2023) found that World Music Pedagogy may promote general music students' empathy for people from other cultures. Researchers have also addressed how to prepare music educators to be empathetic to English Language Learners (Zhang, 2017) and whether empathetic musical experiences may influence choral singers' views of social justice (de Quadros & Abrahams, 2022). However, little research directly explores how or whether students may experience empathy through transcultural musicking in choral ensembles.

Background and Research Questions

The goal of this phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) was to explore the oft-repeated claim in World Music Pedagogy that transcultural musicking supports students' experiences of empathy. To explore this claim, I examined the experiences of Black and non-Black participants in *Essence of Joy*, an Afrocentric choral ensemble in The Pennsylvania State University (PSU) School of Music, a large public Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the mid-Atlantic United States. (PWIs are post-secondary institutions in the United States whose student enrollment is majority white.) Following Sánchez-Gatt et al.'s (2025) suggestion that music educators engaged in transcultural musicking should be concerned with reciprocity, collaboration, and disrupting the colonial power dynamics involved in musicking across cultures (p. 64), an additional goal of this research was to understand what benefits Black participants might gain from their experiences of empathy in *Essence of Joy*. Of interest to this research, the majority of students enrolled in *Essence of Joy* at the time of this study were white, and thus were engaged in transcultural musicking. During the semester that data was collected, there were approximately 35 singers in the ensemble.

Dr. Antony T. Leach founded *Essence of Joy* as a temporary ensemble to perform at the PSU Forum on Black Affairs' Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Banquet in 1991. At the time, Leach was a Ph.D. student in music education at PSU. Interest in the ensemble grew beyond its initial performance, and Leach continued to lead the choir as an extracurricular ensemble. After serving as a sabbatical replacement conductor for other ensembles in The Pennsylvania State School of Music, Dr. Leach accepted a full-time position with the stipulation that *Essence of Joy* become a credit-bearing ensemble. Since its founding, *Essence of Joy* has performed sacred and secular choral music from African American and African traditions. Although some have referred to *Essence of Joy* as "Penn State's gospel choir," Dr. Leach did not embrace this label for two reasons. First, *United Soul Ensemble*, a student-led group, was already recognized as a gospel ensemble on PSU's campus. Second, *Essence of Joy*'s repertoire included not only gospel music, but also spirituals, original idiomatic and non-idiomatic compositions by Black composers, and other styles, genres, and works from African and African American choral traditions. Dr. Leach later became the first Black tenured professor in the Pennsylvania State School of Music. Under his direction, *Essence of Joy* has performed throughout the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America.

I chose to study participants' experiences of empathy in *Essence of Joy* because of its reputation at the university and in the local community for fostering a family-like atmosphere amongst its members and for giving emotional performances. Based on the success of the student ensemble and on the strong community that it created both among its members and its audience, residents of the local community asked Dr. Leach to found a community choir, *Essence of Joy 2, Ltd.*, and alumni of the choir also encouraged him to found an alumni choir, *Essence of Joy Alumni Singers*. Furthermore, Dr. Leach's reputation as a choral pedagogue (e.g., Sieck, 2019, pp. 57–66) made it possible to explore whether partic-

ipants experienced empathy based on the ensemble's repertoire, the conductor's pedagogical choices, or a combination of both. Thus, the strong record of community building in *Essence of Joy*, its dedication to the performance African and African American choral music, its multiracial membership, and Dr. Leach's unique pedagogy made it an ideal setting to study the relationship between empathy and transcultural musicking. Additionally, Dr. Leach's pedagogy may be understood to overlap with the tenets of World Music Pedagogy; during rehearsals, Dr. Leach taught music using the appropriate practices (including both reading and rote learning), vocal timbres, and musical styles from the music's cultures of origin (including gospel, spirituals, and classical works by Black composers, among others).

My exploration of participants' experiences of empathy in *Essence of Joy* was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, do participants in *Essence of Joy* experience and engage with empathy?
2. In what ways do Black and non-Black participants have similar or different experiences of empathy based on their experiences in *Essence of Joy*?
3. In what ways, if any, were participants' experiences of empathy mediated by transcultural musicking in *Essence of Joy*?

Methodology

I used a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) because it focuses on elucidating the meanings that participants create from human experiences. In order to faithfully report participants' experiences, the phenomenological researcher must first lay aside their own preconceptions and judgements, a process called *epoché* (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The researcher then uses phenomenological reduction to describe the meaning of each piece of the data. Through *horizontalizing* the researcher regards each piece of data as equally weighted to uncover possible meanings (p. 97). During imaginative variation and synthesis, the researcher combines data and themes that are important to the phenomenon being studied to create a description of the experiences of the participants (p. 97–101). In a phenomenological study, findings are presented in textural and structural analyses, followed by an essence statement (Moustakas, 1994, p. 144).

In order to set aside my own presuppositions as a researcher, I chose not to define empathy during the initial stages of data collection and analysis. Instead, based on the data, I searched for psychological literature that addressed the experiences of the participants. Additionally, I discussed my methodology, findings, and analysis with a mentor researcher at my institution who did not participate in the choir, a researcher at my institution who had previously participated in the choir, and a researcher/conductor at a different institution who has experience both conducting and singing in Afrocentric ensembles and researching

the experiences of African American music educators. I chose to discuss initial findings with mentors of varying experiences so that they could each evaluate whether my own experience had affected my findings. Based on these discussions, I edited my interview protocols, revised the model in Figure 1, and chose limit demographic descriptions of participants to help maintain their anonymity.

Participants were four undergraduate students enrolled in Essence of Joy as well as Dr. Antony T. Leach, the conductor. I invited all members of the ensemble to participate in the study. Based on potential participant responses, I used purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96) to select four member participants. As one purpose of this study was to understand how musicking in an Afrocentric ensemble may contribute to the development of empathy for singers who are or are not members of the African diaspora, I chose two participants who were Black or African American (Participants 1 and 4) and two participants who were white (Participants 2 and 3). Due to Essence of Joy's high profile at The Pennsylvania State University and beyond, it was Dr. Leach's desire that I not use a pseudonym for the choir or for him. Given that Essence of Joy was majority white, the risk of losing anonymity was greater for Black participants. Thus, after discussing this issue with a mentor researcher, I chose not to disclose specific demographic information about the undergraduate participants or demographic percentages of the ensemble in order to protect their anonymity.

Data collection included eight semi-structured interviews, field notes, and over 200 hours of participant-observation. During rehearsals, I took field notes as I was able while Dr. Leach worked with other sections. I added to these preliminary field notes after rehearsals and performances. Interview protocols were adapted from those developed by Pinto (2022). Each interview lasted 25–70 minutes. I interviewed each participant one to two times. Thus, each participant's total interview time was 60–120 minutes. After I transcribed interviews, I gave participants the opportunity to read transcripts to ensure their accuracy. No participants had corrections for the transcriptions.

I conducted two rounds of coding. In the first round of coding, I used descriptive and in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2021) to label and equally weight data through phenomenological reduction and *horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1994). In the second round of coding, I combined codes to create relevant themes and parent codes through imaginative variation and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). For examples of codes and parent codes see Table 1 on the next page. I used field notes to write the opening vignette and to triangulate data from participant interviews. Based on my findings, I developed a phenomenological essence statement and a model to illustrate it (see Figure 1 on page 92).

After my initial analysis, I presented findings to participants as well as to the entire ensemble. Singers asked questions and discussed the findings in relation to their own experiences. To maintain anonymity, ensemble members did not know who the student participants were. Many singers and Dr. Leach expressed that the findings faithfully reflected their experiences in the ensemble. No singers offered corrections. After Dr. Leach read an early draft

Table 1.
Sample Codes

Text	Code	Parent Code
It's easier to experience it. I mean, fundamentally it is a choir. We sing music from African and African American cultures [...] but we're not just a choir. We're a choir that actually cares about each other. I guess that's as far as I can go, but again, like it's easier to just like actually physically be there and see it as opposed to just putting it in words.	A choir that cares about each other	Connection with others
I feel like I've made lasting relationships that I would—they're really special to me.	Lasting relationships	
I would say it's more free. Like you could just be yourself and people don't judge, I guess, like people will just accept you for who you are. And I feel like there's a lot of love and a lot of care that goes into the group as well. A lot of support. It's a family, to be cliché.	A family	

of this article, he wrote to me, “You have captured the ‘essence’ of the EOJ experience and this cuts across all editions of the choir from the early 90’s to the present. Framing the story within the context of qualitative research truly brings out trends and areas of interest that otherwise would be buried beneath the stuff of life” (Dr. Leach, personal communication, October 12, 2023). I also discussed findings with another researcher who is an Essence of Joy alum who helped me to revise the model I developed to illustrate the essence statement (see Figure 1). I chose to speak with an alum of the choir because he could provide insight as to whether my interpretation of the data accurately reflected his experience.

Positionality

As a queer, white, middle class, male-presenting former graduate teaching assistant for Essence of Joy, my relationship to the participants, four of whom were undergraduate students warranted reflection. By reflecting on the unequal power dynamic inherent in my relationship with the participants, my goal was to create an environment where participants felt safe to share their experiences. Additionally, as a white person living in a white supremacist society, my presence within an Afrocentric choral ensemble will always be that of a guest in someone else’s house. When I was a high school choir director, I worked for five years in a school where the majority of my students were Black (both African and African American). I often sought to provide musical windows and mirrors for my own students through my repertoire selection. This included programming and teaching folk music from the global African diaspora as well as original pieces by Black composers. However, Essence

of Joy was the first choir that I worked with whose mission was specifically to perform African American music.

As I was a graduate student and a singer in the ensemble during data collection, I was required to be both musically engaged while singing in my section and engaged as a researcher in the field. To accomplish this, I approached rehearsals as if I were a new member of the choir. As Dr. Leach rehearsed the choir, I asked myself how a new member or a non-member might interpret his pedagogical decisions. Similarly, when observing other singers participating in rehearsals and interacting with one another, I sought to observe them how a new member might.

After I submitted a manuscript of this article for review, Dr. Leach sadly passed away in early 2025. Following his passing, I was tasked with conducting Essence of Joy as an interim graduate conductor while the university began a search for a new director of the ensemble. Although I was the interim conductor while the article was under review, data collection, analysis, and submission of the initial manuscript occurred while I was a student member of the ensemble. Although I was still a member of Essence of Joy at the time of this study, the musical traditions it celebrates are not my own. Thus, my participation in Essence of Joy also constitutes transcultural musicking. I address the steps I took to mitigate potential biases from my own experienced in the methodology. Throughout interviews, I discussed issues of ethics and power with participants, and allowed them to ask me questions. Additionally, I discussed ethical concerns with a mentor and peer researchers.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that it utilized fewer interviews with fewer participants than are often collected during phenomenological research. As a graduate student, my duties within the school of music as a teaching assistant prevented me from conducting further interviews when I returned to an active role as a teaching assistant within the ensemble. Future researchers who seek to study empathy as it relates to transcultural musicking may wish to interview a greater number of participants.

Findings

I identified three textural themes from the data: multifaceted definitions of empathy, connection to others, and connection to self. The first textural theme, “connection with others,” arose through rehearsal, performance, and casual time spent with other singers. Connections with other singers, Dr. Leach, the audience, and with the music led participants to experience the second textural theme, “connection to self.” The third textural theme, “multifaceted definitions of empathy,” describes how participants in Essence of Joy had differing yet related definitions of empathy influenced by the connections they experienced with others and themselves. In the following sections, I describe the participants’ experiences of empathy in Essence of Joy as they relate to each textural theme. Then, I

provide a structural description and model (Figure 1) that summarize the participants' experiences followed by an essence statement that synthesizes the textural themes and structural description.

Connections with Others

To join Essence of Joy, students sang for a general audition where they were considered for all choral ensembles at Penn State. During the audition, students identified the ensembles for which they wish to be considered. Students interested in joining Essence of Joy often did so based off the reputation of the ensemble, their connections to teachers, family members, or friends who were alumni of the ensemble, or their interest in African and African American choral music (Dr. Leach, personal communication, March 2, 2023; Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023). Students who passed the general audition were invited to participate in one of two call back auditions, one for sopranos and altos, and one for tenors and basses. During the call backs, new and returning students sang choral repertoire together and sang vocalises individually so that Dr. Leach could listen for vocal timbre and range.

While singing in front of half of the ensemble as a new member may have been intimidating, the participants described Essence of Joy as a place where they quickly received empathetic support from other ensemble members. This support between singers lead to the first textural theme, "connection to others." All student participants agreed that members of Essence of Joy often offered one another emotional support to a greater degree than other ensembles, which contributed to the family-like community (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023; Participant 2, Interview 1, February 24, 2023; Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023; Participant 4, Interview 2, March 29, 2023). Participant 1 stated that the support amongst members in Essence of Joy allowed singers to feel more at ease and encouraged them to work hard on their music because they felt ownership of the group.

When I asked Participant 1 to describe Essence of Joy to someone who had never been to a performance or rehearsal, they stated:

I would say it's more free. Like you could be yourself and people don't judge. People will just accept you for who you are. And I feel like there's a lot of love and a lot of care that goes into the group as well. A lot of support. It's a family, to be cliché. Yeah, I mean, it's not stress inducing at all. I mean, if you don't take care of your business, yeah, you could experience stress, but as long as everyone does their part, you're good. But if you don't, I mean, no one's gonna punish you or anything for it. You just want to do well for the group because that's your group, you know. (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023)

Participant 1 further explained that the grace that members showed one other while making mistakes during rehearsal could be understood as an act of empathy:

It's in the learning process, like if one makes a mistake then the other's like, 'LOL. That's so funny.' You know? I can't really explain, but I think there's a lot of grace that goes into Essence of Joy, and I guess that has something to do with empathy. (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023)

Thus, for Participant 1, connection to others occurred when other ensemble members gave them grace to make mistakes and allowed them to be themselves during rehearsal.

Other participants often experienced connection to others during Essence of Joy's "debriefs." Debriefs were a weekly or biweekly part of the rehearsal schedule where students were invited to share about their personal experiences in or outside of the choir. Dr. Leach began the debriefs as a way to make students feel important, create "a safe place for people to grow up," and to make sure that no one felt marginalized within Essence of Joy (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023). Describing the history of the debriefs and providing an example of a particularly poignant debrief, Dr. Leach stated:

As far as our people moments are concerned, this debrief, this weekly debrief that we do on Thursdays after the evening rehearsal, it's not new. We called it in earlier years, our formative years, 'pass the mic,' whether we were passing an actual mic or not, because everybody—whether we were on a bus, in a hotel, in the church basement or whatever, or in room 110—was invited to share their truth, and sometimes that truth was harsh. Sometimes that truth was on the edge, emotionally. I remember one end of the year dinner here at the house, and as the choir was in the great room, as that final sharing session emerged, one of my tenors just wept, and wept, and wept. Now there were other issues there, but just the fact that he could release his emotion with his peers and be comforted by them—because he didn't say a word, couldn't speak a word—was one of the best—and that's been in recent years—but one of the best indications of the sense of community that this choir has nurtured and still celebrates, especially within our alumni as we move forward. And of course, that all begins in the School of Music. (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023)

In Dr. Leach's observation, then, the ensemble members' ability to provide their peers with emotional support was based in the "sense of community" that the ensemble developed, in part through repeated debriefs.

The student participants also viewed debriefs as a place to have their voices heard and receive support from other students and from Dr. Leach (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023; Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023; Participant 4, Interview 2, March 29, 2023). Participant 3 stated that debriefs and the connections to others that they promoted were part of what made Essence of Joy different from other ensembles:

When you're sitting with a group of people that you really love and they all love you

back, it's just different. You can't—no offense, but you can't get that in a big choir. I like [a different choral ensemble at the university], but it's not the same because it's not that connection that you have in *Essence of Joy*. I feel like we're all much more vulnerable in *Essence of Joy*. And we're more straight, open with each other. He makes us do those debriefs, you know? We got those debriefs there. (Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023)

When I asked Participant 3 to explain what occurred during debriefs, they added:

Participant 3: The debriefs, we just kind of get more open with each other and share things. And sometimes he'll [Dr. Leach] ask a question like, 'Oh, what did you do this week?' But he'll also just be like, 'What was your week like?' Sometimes he asks questions. Sometimes he doesn't. We just have to debrief everybody and tell them what's going on. You don't have to, but it's an opportunity to share and get support from everybody else in the group or support other people.

Author: What kind of support?

Participant 3: Any support you need, I think just like a person being there, being aware of what's going on in your life, and you're able to rely on them if you need to talk to them because we're all there to do that. I think every single person in this choir would do that. . . . Honestly, Dr. Leach does a lot of it. Sometimes if he hears you say something in the debrief, he'll maybe like e-mail you later, like, 'are you doing okay?' Or he'll give you his wise words and be like, 'keep going,' but like, in a much more elaborate way. (Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023)

In Participant 3 and Dr. Leach's descriptions of debriefs, ensemble members and Dr. Leach used the information learned about others during debriefs to offer support during and outside of rehearsal, which may have contributed to the feelings of love and vulnerability that Participant 3 described.

The participants' experiences of connection to others were not limited to connections with other members of the ensemble. During performances, participants experienced connection to others by connecting with the audience. Dr. Leach encouraged students to memorize their music so that they could look the audience "in the eye" in order to "establish connection" (Dr. Leach, Interview 2, April 11, 2023). Additionally, Dr. Leach experienced a connection to the audience vicariously through the ensemble. As he faced the ensemble during performances, he was able to judge the audience's reaction to the performance based on students' reactions to the audience (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023). By connecting visually with audience members and noticing how the music affected them, student participants felt as if the audience was singing with them:

... singing to these people, not to them, but with them, even though they're not even moving their voices. If you just make eye contact with someone, there's this mutual interaction that you both are on the same wavelength. And that's going to go with you forever. You're never going to forget that person that you looked at in that way. (Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023)

The experience of connecting with the audience was one that student participants felt would stay with them "forever." Indeed, one participant described the singers' and audience's shared emotional response to the music as one way to experience empathy (Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023).

Each participant agreed that "high caliber music making" was central to the Essence of Joy experience (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023); however, each participant, including Dr. Leach, listed connection with others as something that made Essence of Joy unique. Participants who had experience in instrumental ensembles noted that singing in the choir allowed them more opportunities to connect with and support ensemble members than did playing in bands or orchestras (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023; Participant 2, Interview 1, February 24, 2023). One participant who had extensive experience in other choirs noted that Essence of Joy provided more frequent and meaningful opportunities to connect with others than did other choirs.

Connection to Self

Connections to others and connections with Essence of Joy's repertoire supported participants' experience of the second textural theme, "connection to self." All four student participants described experiencing connections to themselves that involved reflecting on their mental and physical health as well as reflecting on their social interactions. Participant 3 mentioned that Essence of Joy helped her through an episode of major depression because she looked forward to the connections she had with others and with the music. The same participant said that Essence of Joy, "keeps me alive. It keeps me going even when I'm not feeling like that. It's still everything I look forward to" (Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023). One participant mentioned that Essence of Joy helped them to be kinder to themselves when their perfectionism led to declines in mental and physical health (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023). Another participant credited their experiences in Essence with helping them to identify when their own social anxiety caused them to withdraw from others (Participant 4, Interview 2, March 29, 2023).

While all participants experienced connections to themselves in Essence of Joy, this textural theme took on further meaning for student participants who were Black. Participants 1 and 4 additionally experienced a connection to self through exploration of their identities as Black Americans as they learned more about Black choral music in Essence of Joy. Participant 4 highlighted how African American Spirituals had helped her find where she belongs as a Black woman in a white society before and during her participation in Essence

of Joy. Speaking about her high school choir experience, Participant 4 stated:

We worked a lot with like African American spirituals. I can't remember if that was [the director's] expertise, but that was the music she wanted us to be exposed to, and I loved it. I loved it so much. One of my favorite songs was *Ain't No Grave* . . . that song influenced my love of African American spirituals. And around that time, you know, high school, I was trying to come to terms with my identity as not really feeling like a Black girl . . . not really connecting to, like, Black culture, white culture . . . and trying to find out where I belong. And so, listening to African American [spirituals], I was like, this makes me feel good. This feels good in my soul. So, when I did look into Essence of Joy, I was specifically like, I want something gospel-esque or spiritual-esque. (Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023)

During her time in Essence of Joy, Participant 4 expressed that the ensemble's repertoire furthered her exploration of her ethnic identity:

Whenever I'm singing a spiritual, whatever we're singing, like *Anchored in de Lord* [arr. M. Roger Holland II], or singing, *Bring Me All Your Dreams* [lyrics by Langston Hughes, music by Christopher H. Harris], all I can think about is Black culture and Black Power on an individual and a systematic and institutional level. (Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023)

Thus, Essence of Joy's visibility as a choir that is dedicated to African and African American choral repertoire encouraged Participant 4's decision to join the ensemble and provided her continued opportunities to experience choral repertoire that explored her identity as a Black woman.

The experience of identity exploration was not entirely positive, however. Participant 1 described feeling ashamed that she did not have a deeper knowledge of Black composers and poets before her participation in Essence of Joy:

Learning about James Weldon Johnson—I've never—it's so, I feel so shameful to say it, but I'd never heard of the Black national anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, prior to coming [to Essence of Joy], and hearing that exposed me to so much of the history of Black people in this country, especially learning about—even like Langston Hughes. I mean, I was familiar with Langston Hughes, but not so much with the depths of his poems. I did not understand it as much as I did before coming, you know. (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023)

Yet, despite the initial negative experience of feeling shame at not knowing more about Black choral music before participating in Essence of Joy, Participant 1 described feeling deeply connected to the repertoire and enjoying the ensemble more than previous ensem-

bles they had participated in (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023).

Additionally, Dr. Leach's praise and compliments allowed one Black participant to feel as if they had a place on campus for their hard work to be validated, appreciated, and celebrated:

A lot of us really love Dr. Leach. We admire his opinion. We admire his validation. We admire his love, and he has a lot of that for us.... In a lot of places no matter how much effort I make, it will never be validated nor will it ever be appreciated. In EOJ, I feel like that he's given me a place where I feel like a valid and appreciated human being.... When he had given me those props . . . I never heard him say that. And then when he said it, I couldn't keep my tears away like that. It made me feel like years of effort have not gone to waste and made me feel celebrated. Like that's what EOJ can be. It can be a celebration. It can be a mourning. It can be a thank you, a goodbye, a 'how are you?' It is the most simplest emotions for the simplest of kind gestures, the most impactful of patting, the sweetest of hugs. (Participant 4, Interview 2, March 29, 2023)

Although Essence of Joy and Dr. Leach gave Black participants a place to celebrate their achievements, feel seen, and explore their identities, Black singers at The Pennsylvania State University still felt the need for Black-only spaces. Some of the participants, along with other Black singers in the choir, used what Dr. Leach had taught them to form a Black student-led music ensemble. When describing how they ran rehearsals for the ensemble, one participant said, "I'm just like, 'What would Dr. Leach do?' And I would just follow that and copy that" (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023).

Multifaceted Definitions of Empathy

In following the phenomenological practice of *epoché*, I set aside my own beliefs about empathy and did not seek out other scholars' definitions of empathy until I concluded data collection. During the interviews, I asked each participant how they defined empathy and to describe how or if the ensemble had affected their experience of empathy (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions). Based on their experiences in Essence of Joy, each participant defined empathy differently, leading to the third textural theme of "multifaceted definitions of empathy." Although participants defined empathy in diverse ways, these definitions were ultimately related to one another as some participants variously conceived of empathy as an emotion, as an action, or as a combination of the two. I refer to these concepts as "the emotion of empathy" and the "action of empathy." Student participants defined empathy in two ways. Two student participants defined empathy only in terms of emotions experienced. One participant stated that empathy was "a shared emotional experience between two or more people" (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023). Another participant stated that empathy was "truly understanding what another person has

gone through or goes through” (Participant 2, Interview 1, February 24, 2023). For these participants, empathy was experiencing or understanding the emotions of others, but did not necessarily include taking action based on this shared experience.

In contrast, Dr. Leach defined empathy mostly as an action, rather than as an emotion. Dr. Leach’s definition of empathy focused on the actions one person takes for another person, and only briefly hinted at the emotional elements of empathy. According to Dr. Leach, “Empathy implies a need to know, first. And then a willingness to respond to what you know, but especially what you need to know about others, about a context, about aspects of history” (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023). For Dr. Leach, the emotion of empathy was located within the “need to know” about another person. Empathy as a whole, however, was much more concerned with one’s willingness to take action for others based upon the information that has been learned.

Participant 3’s and Participant 4’s definitions of empathy shared elements of both the other student participants’ and Dr. Leach’s definition. These participants defined empathy primarily as understanding or even sharing another person’s emotions but added that empathy includes an element of support for others through their emotions. One such participant defined empathy as:

Being happy for people when they’re happy and being sad for people when they’re not. Just kind of just supporting them, no matter what, even if you don’t like them. It’s just remembering that they’re also humans. And people also have feelings and not just you. (Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023)

Similarly, an additional student participant stated that empathy was when:

You understand a person and their emotions. It’s not just you support them through it . . . you understand them. You can directly correlate their emotions to a situation, scenario or feeling that you have had before and that you start to relate to them on a deeper level. (Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023)

For these two student participants, empathy centered on either sharing someone’s emotions or understanding their emotions in relation to one’s own experience. Both participants, however, acknowledged that empathy included supporting or deeply relating to a person, implying further action on the part of the empathizer.

Structural Description and Model

Dr. Leach described an essential aspect of the Essence of Joy experience as including singers who “allow themselves to undergo aspects of transformation” (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023). Dr. Leach defined this “transformation” as when singers in Essence of Joy “carry that experience and that level of encounter with them far into life” (Dr. Leach,

Interview 1, March 28, 2023). Participant 4 additionally described a transformational aspect of Essence of Joy through an emotional connection to the music:

I was able to work through those emotions through that music, and so I became more aware of how certain situations affected my emotions, became more intuitive to how I affected others, and in that sense, I thought more and more about how each of these different experiences and these different emotional experiences change the way in which I learn, and I grow, and I become a different human being. But that's honestly because I think too much about the music. But I think anyone who's been in Essence of Joy and who starts to practice will start to think as we sing it and hear about it, will start to think about the music in that same way. It really does soak in. It starts to soak into who you are, and then you start to become more emotionally aware. (Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023)

Through participation in Essence of Joy, Participant 4 shared that she felt she had “become a different human being” because of being “more emotionally aware.” Thus, Participant 4 carried her transformational experience to other aspects of her life as Dr. Leach had suggested. For other student participants, transformation allowed them to become more extroverted or to recognize when they were excluding themselves from engaging in social connections (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023; Participant 4, Interview 2, March 29, 2023). For Black participants in particular, the transformation they experienced through Essence of Joy's dedication to choral music from African American traditions offered them deeper connections to themselves through exploration of their ethnic identities (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023; Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023).

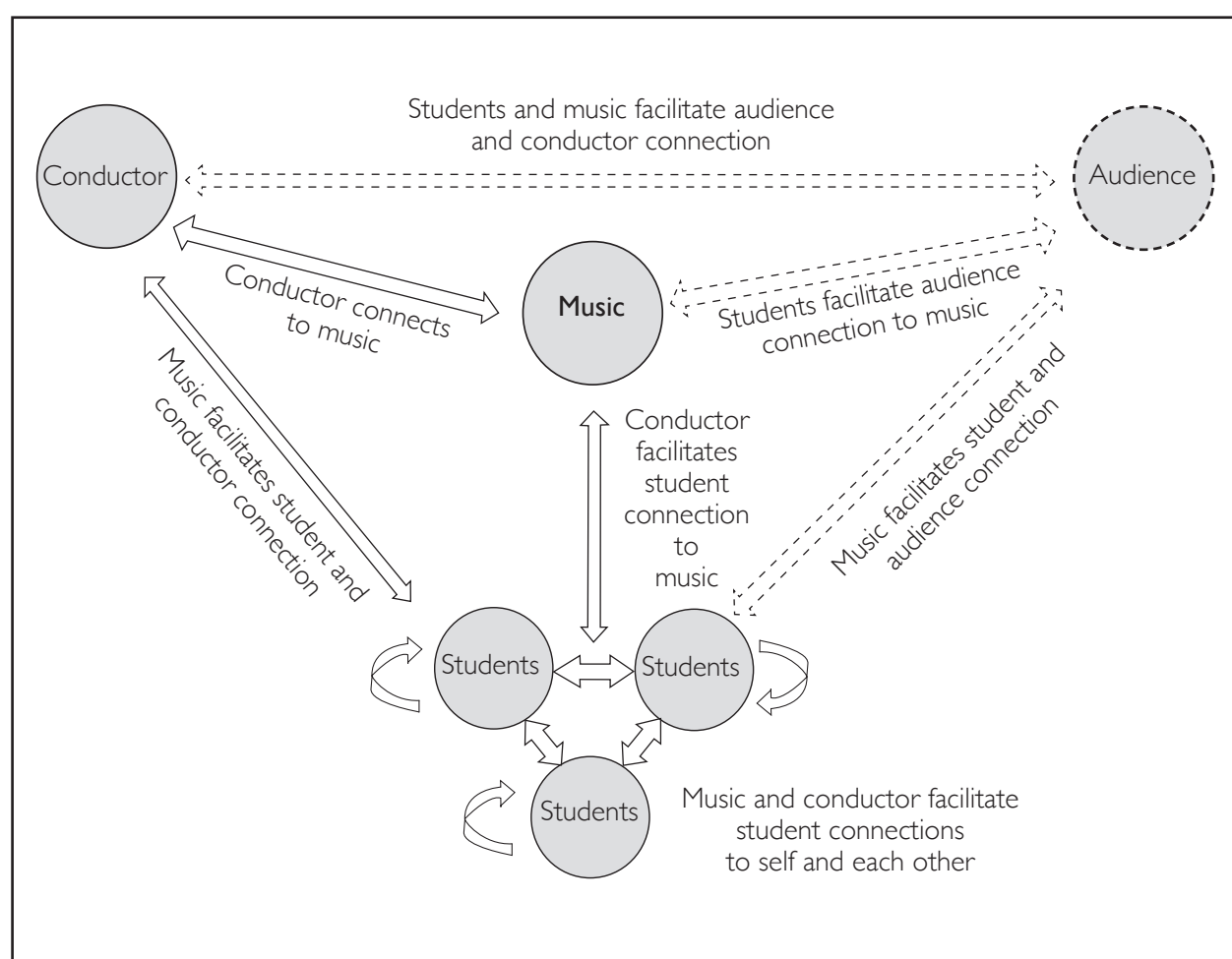
The experiences in Essence of Joy that promoted participants' transformation were mediated through the ensemble's repertoire, connections to others and connections to themselves. Figure 1 displays a model of the participants' experiences of empathy and connections in Essence of Joy. Arrows between circles represent connections. Dotted arrows represent connections that are present only in performance (i.e., connections with the audience). At the center of the model, music represents Essence of Joy's repertoire, African and African American choral music. Connections between the conductor, participants, and the students were facilitated by each group or individual experiencing a connection to the music. Each individual or group also facilitated connections between other groups (i.e., the conductor facilitated connections between audience and students while students facilitated connections between the conductor and the audience). Connections to the music, the audience, the conductor, and one another also facilitated students' connections to themselves, represented by the curved arrows.

Essence Statement

The essence of empathy and connection in Essence of Joy is a shared emotional experience where participants learn about each other, are transformed, and are encouraged by the director and one another to carry this transformation into other areas of their life. These experiences of empathy and connection are mediated through sacred and secular African American choral music, through structured sharing times, and through public performances. For Black participants, Essence of Joy's music provided opportunities to explore their ethnic identity.

Figure 1.

Empathy and Connection in Essence of Joy



Discussion

Although the performance of African American and African choral music in a multicultural ensemble was central to both student participants' and Dr. Leach's experiences in Essence of Joy, transcultural musicking alone did not lead to empathy and connection but were supported by Dr. Leach's pedagogical choices. In the following section, I discuss the findings as related to each of my research questions and to the research literature.

Research Question 1

The first research question was: *In what ways, if any, do participants in Essence of Joy experience and engage with empathy?* Although the participants' definitions of and engagements with empathy were multifaceted and differed from one another, each participants' definitions of empathy aligned with definitions found in psychological literature. Maibom's concept of affective empathy, or experiencing an emotion because of another's emotion that is often similar to the other's emotion (2020, p. 15), is most closely aligned with Participant 1's definition of empathy as "a shared emotional experience between two or more people" (Participant 1, Interview 1, February 23, 2023). Participant 2 drew upon Maibom's perspective taking, or imagining oneself in another's situation (2020, p. 16), when they defined empathy as understand someone else's experience (Participant 2, Interview 1, February 24, 2023). Participants 3 and 4 combined elements of both affective empathy and perspective taking by acknowledging that empathy required them to share in others' emotional experiences, but also relate other people's situations and experiences back to their own (Participant 3, Interview 1, March 13, 2023; Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023).

Maibom's definition of sympathy, or "an emotion experienced by a person A for the well-being and plight of another person B," (2020, p. 16) is similar to Golemon's concept of empathic concern, except that empathic concern goes further than sympathy by requiring person A to not only experience emotional concern for person B, but to take action to support person B based upon that concern (Emotional Intelligence Clips, 2022). Dr. Leach and Participant 4 both described elements of empathic concern. For Dr. Leach this was the "willingness to respond" to what you learned about others, which Participant 4 described as "supporting" others through their experiences (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023; Participant 4, Interview 1, March 14, 2023).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: *In what ways do Black and non-Black participants have similar or different experiences of empathy based on their experiences in Essence of Joy?* While race did not appear to be a contributing factor to participants' experiences of empathy, one way that Black and non-Black participants' experiences diverged was through their experience of the third textural theme, "connection to self." Participants 1 and 4, who were Black, and thus experienced musical mirrors rather than windows with Essence of Joy's repertoire, both described experiencing self-connection by gaining awareness of themselves (Klussman et al., 2022, p. 121) through exploration of their ethnic identities as Black Americans during their participation in Essence of Joy. Ethnic identity is "the identity that develops as a function of one's ethnic group membership" (Umaña-Taylor, 2011, p. 792). The development of one's ethnic identity is related to culture—including choral music—because one's ethnic group is defined as one's culture of origin (Umaña-Taylor, 2011, p. 791). The formation of ethnic identity is a complex phenomenon, but researchers have identified exploration as one of the many processes that contribute to ethnic identity forma-

tion (p. 793). Exploration of one's ethnic identity "involves increasing one's understanding and exposure to one's group by doing things such as reading about one's ethnic background, talking to others about one's ethnic group, or searching the Internet for information about one's ethnic group" (p. 793). Thus, ethnic identity formation can be understood to consist of exploring one's own cultural heritage, including the music of one's own culture.

Research Question 3

Research question three was: *In what ways, if any, were participants' experiences of empathy mediated by transcultural musicking?* Stated another way, this research question addressed whether transcultural musicking alone contributed to participants' experiences of empathy or if the conductor's pedagogical choices also influenced participants' experiences of empathy. All student participants mentioned ways in which the repertoire allowed them to experience empathetic connections to themselves or others, either through performance (Participant 1 and 3) or through exploration of ethnic identity (Participant 2 and 4). Yet, student participants also recognized other aspects of their experience in *Essence of Joy* that promoted empathetic experiences, such as debriefs.

As I described earlier, Dr. Leach intentionally used debriefs to promote students' empathetic connections with one another. However, for Dr. Leach, connection began with purposefully selecting repertoire that would speak to him and to students. Then, throughout the rehearsal and performance process, Dr. Leach sought to create "repeated encounters" for students to connect with the music, each other, and the audience (Dr. Leach, Interview 2, April 11, 2023). When asked to describe *Essence of Joy* to someone who had never attended a rehearsal or a performance, Dr. Leach responded:

You're going to experience high caliber music making, choral music, with singers who allow themselves to undergo aspects of transformation every time they gather to experience the music, to connect with each other, and then ultimately to share their musical offering with audiences wherever we're invited to perform. That's the goal here. (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023)

Thus, opportunities to make meaningful connections to others did not occur by happenstance; promoting student connections to each other and to the music was central to Dr. Leach's pedagogical design.

Implications

In the context of *Essence of Joy*, transcultural musicking and World Music Pedagogy were not the sole factors that contributed to participants' experiences of empathy. Based on the data collected during the present study, the empathetic connections participants made in *Essence of Joy* were the result of intentional planning from Dr. Leach in addition to being mediated by the music he selected for performance. Dr. Leach created opportunities

for “repeated encounters” with others both during and outside of music making. Choral conductors may consider that for the participants in this study, the development of empathy was a long-term goal that Dr. Leach repeatedly and intentionally incorporated into his rehearsals that included pedagogical choices beyond the selection of African and African American choral repertoire. Additionally, conductors who wish to provide students opportunities to experience empathy may consider how they balance their musical product, the rehearsal process, and the relational needs of their students (Bennett, 2022). This balance may include incorporating a version of debriefs with singers, conductors analyzing their own connections to repertoire before teaching it, singing from memory in order to connect with audiences, or otherwise providing structured space and time for singers to connect with one another and with audience members. Thus, conductors who wish to support the development of empathy amongst their singers may find that it is not a skill that can be taught in one lesson or even in one performance season.

Additionally, when choral conductors program music outside the Western canon, they may consider what impact the rehearsal and performance of so-called world music repertoire may have for singers for whom the repertoire is a mirror, rather than a window. For Participants 1 and 4 in the present study, the performance of African and African American choral music led to both positive connections to self, and a negative feeling of shame. Both participants experienced a sense of pride and an opportunity to explore their ethnic identities, yet Participant 1 also experienced shame at their prior ignorance of certain aspects of Black choral music. To mitigate such negative experiences, choral conductors who work with singers with cultural backgrounds different from their own may seek to collaborate with singers before programming musical mirrors for such singers (Bernard & Talbot, 2023; Sánchez-Gatt et al., 2025).

As schools of music seek to offer musicking experiences outside of the Western classical tradition for preservice choral music educators, they may consider how they have historically engaged in musical gatekeeping. Although Dr. Leach held a Ph.D. in music education from The Pennsylvania State University, at the time he founded *Essence of Joy*, he was only a graduate student. When Dr. Leach was hired as a faculty member, one of his stipulations for accepting the appointment was that *Essence of Joy* would become a credit-bearing ensemble. If Dr. Leach had not accepted the appointment or if his request had been denied, *Essence of Joy* may not have continued to exist (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023). Since university schools of music in the United States focus nearly exclusively on Western art music, it can be difficult for musicians with expertise in other musical traditions to earn terminal degrees (D.M.A. or Ph.D.) at those institutions. Universities often strive to only hire individuals with doctoral-level degrees, especially for tenure-track positions. Dr. Leach already had the musical experience and knowledge needed to found *Essence of Joy* before he completed his doctorate. His life-long experiences as a pianist, organist, and conductor in Black churches and Black choral ensembles made him uniquely qualified to lead such an ensemble, regardless of academic titles. If schools of music truly wish to expand their

ensemble offerings to include traditions outside of Western Europe and promote the voices of underrepresented groups, as affirmed by ACDA's purpose statements (ACDA, 2023, p. 1), they may wish to consider candidates whose background and credentials lie outside of traditional Western classical music.

The findings presented in this study provide multiple implications for future research. For example, future researchers may seek to analyze how gender might affect participants' experiences of empathy in the context of transcultural musicking. In future studies, scholars may also seek to understand whether or how repertoire, structured sharing, and performance contribute to empathy and if any of these three experiences contribute to empathy more or less than others. If employing a longitudinal design, future researchers may explore whether or how participants' experiences of empathy develop or change over time as they engage in transcultural musicking. Importantly, future scholars may seek to understand if or how singers experience empathy through musicking alone, or when performing music from their own culture(s).

Conclusion

In the context of *Essence of Joy*, the oft-repeated claim that students gain empathy and understanding through World Music Pedagogy and transcultural musicking (Bennett, 2022; Campbell, 1991, 2018; Hess, 2019; Pascale, 2011) requires two corollaries. First, when choral educators include and even center the musics of underrepresented cultures, they may choose to consider how their presentation of the repertoire might impact students who are and are not members of the underrepresented culture. Second, transcultural musicking may contribute to experiences of empathy when music educators thoughtfully and intentionally create both musical and extra-musical opportunities to meaningfully develop interpersonal connections. Choral directors who seek to provide empathetic experiences may consider that by centering African and African American choral music through pedagogy intentionally designed to promote empathy and connection, *Essence of Joy* is both a "high caliber musical experience" and "the sweetest of hugs" (Dr. Leach, Interview 1, March 28, 2023; Participant 4, Interview 2, March 29, 2023).

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Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Interview protocol for student participants, adapted from Pinto (2022):

1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from? What's your major? How long have you been at Penn State? How do you describe your race or ethnicity? What are your pronouns?
2. Could you tell me about some musical experiences you've had as a singer or musician before college?
3. Are you currently part of any other performing ensemble?
4. How long have you been in EOJ?
5. What made you join the group?

6. What do you enjoy about it?
7. How has participation in the ensemble affected you?
8. How would you describe EOJ to somebody who has never been to a rehearsal or concert?
9. How does EOJ compare to other choirs you have participated in?
10. What is the purpose of the group?
11. I am interested in learning about how people might gain empathy and understanding through singing in an Afrocentric choir. How do you define empathy? Can you describe any ways that EOJ has helped you gain empathy or understanding for others? For Black culture or Black people?
12. How do you relate to other singers in the choir?
13. What's your favorite part about EOJ?
14. Are there any challenges?
15. Is there anything about your experience in this choir that I didn't ask but you would like to talk about?

Interview protocol for Dr. Leach:

1. Can you tell me about your musical journey before you founded EOJ?
2. What made you found the group? What made you keep the group going?
3. How has conducting EOJ affected you?
4. What do you enjoy about it?
5. Are there any challenges?
6. How would you describe EOJ to somebody who has never been to a rehearsal or concert?

7. How does EOJ compare to other choirs you have conducted?
 8. What is the purpose of EOJ?
 9. What is the Mission of the EOJ?
 10. What does EOJ mean to the community?
 11. I am interested in learning about how people might gain empathy and understanding through singing in an Afrocentric choir. How do you define empathy? Can you describe any ways that EOJ has helped you gain empathy or understanding for others? Have you observed students gaining empathy or understanding?
 12. Do you think that Black and non-Black students' experiences of EOJ differ in any ways? How so?
 13. What do you want students to gain or develop from their experience in EOJ? Are these goals the same or different for Black and non-Black singers?
 14. How do you select repertoire?
 15. How do you teach students about the history and culture of the repertoire?
 16. What role does travel play in building the community of EOJ?
 17. How do you relate to the singers in the choir?
 18. What's your favorite part about EOJ?
 19. What can other ensembles learn from EOJ?
 20. Is there anything about your experience in this choir that I didn't ask but you would like to talk about?
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