STEREOTYPES OF HBCU COLLEGIATE CHOIR MEMBERS TOWARDS CONCERT SPIRITUAL ENTHUSIASTS

by

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To Jennepher, Drake, Brooke, Mom, Dad, Mother, DaMarrus, DaShaughn, Uncle George, Dr. Fleming, Dr. Elliott, Dr. Lynch, Dr. and Mrs. Grant Harrison, Sidney Sessoms, T. Moore-Mitchell, Dr. Callahan, Dr. Alston, Mrs. Wilcox, Antonio Roberts, and Pastor and Mrs. Ezra Mendinghall. Also, memorable dedication to Mrs. Betty Jennings, David Marshall Jackson and Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer all of whom have made immeasurable deposits of time and support in me, yet have passed away before they could celebrate this accomplishment with me.

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D.L.M.

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INTRODUCTION

Another concert has come and gone, with empty seats absorbing the melodious sound – if only these plush chairs could applaud. The vibrations of gloriously sung concert spirituals, SATB choral arrangements of religious slave songs (Evans, 1972), ricochet off the stone auditorium walls without warm bodies to inculcate the sound. On Historically Black College and University campuses (HBCU) across the nation, there remains a challenge to maintain the relevance of the concert spiritual (Mallory, 2006; Miller, 2010; Simmonds, 2005; Small, 2009). With roots deeply entrenched in the HBCU tradition, and its origin on Black campuses, many spiritual connoisseurs are alarmed by the lackluster support on and off the HBCU campus. Many questions still exist surrounding the validity of the concert spirituals on Black college and university campuses. In a qualitative study with six HBCU choral conductors spanning across North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, Simmonds (2005) probed into the minds of conductors concerning the preservation of this traditional African American sacred genre. HBCU choral conductors discuss the enormous weight they feel to preserve this tradition.

> HBCUs have a duty to present this [concert spiritual] musical heritage to college students, many of which have little or no knowledge of this part of our history (Simmonds, 2005, p. 48).

The spiritual is an important part of in the history of African Americans. With increasing rates of African American HBCU students entering their freshmen year with

little to none historical exposure culture, choir directors feel the necessity to teach the rich history of the spirituals with students.

> The Spiritual is vital in their [student] education. College is a time where you're really starting to bloom, you're becoming aware of who you are, your identity, what you want to do, and where you're going to go (Simmonds, 2005, p. 67).

HBCU conductors consider themselves as curators, or caretakers of the Spiritual (Reed-Walker, 2008; Simmonds, 2005). Across the array of the African American musical spectrum, HBCU music programs and departments are viewed by the Black community as the most vivid examples of how African-American music should be performed. Both international and national choirs look to choruses on HBCU campuses to justify what they do stylistically. Today, the majority of HBCU concert/university choirs consider the concert spiritual as a standard part of their repertoire (Mallory, 2006). Consequently, HBCU choirs carry the task of showcasing the spiritual, while preserving its tradition. If choral conductors fail to preserve the genre, by performing it regularly, it will become extinct. "It is our heritage. If we [HBCU conductors] get away from them [negro spirituals] our kids will never know them… we must perform them" (Simmonds, 2005, p. 47).

However, the issue still persists - students seem disinterested in the spiritual (Miller, 2010). Many researchers document why this is so - its tie to a racialist history (Burleigh, 1917), recurring poor performance practice (Burleigh, 1917; Mallory, 2006; Miller, 2010), its fall from popularity within the church (Epstein, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Reed-Walker, 2008), the rise of gospel music and its marketability (Boyer, 1995; Reed-Walker, 2008; Wise, 2002), social identity formation (Rentfrow,

McDonald, & Oldmeadow, 2009; Tajfel, 1978), the creation of musical communities (Elliott, 1995) and racial identity formulation/personal reference group orientation as presented in Cross's works (1978, 1987). All of these fractions converge and effect the attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes of students concerning the relevance of the concert spiritual -- and ultimately, sculpt student appreciation.

In today's society, the concert spiritual is sometimes conflated with gospel music. With the prevalence of gospel music in today's society many people have difficulty distinguishing between the two (Mallory, 2006; Miller, 2010; Miller, 2003). To eliminate any confusion a clear delineation between the concert spiritual and gospel music is in order. Both genres are cut from the same cloth (i.e., the African American experience), yet they each have distinct historical context and usage (Boyer, 1995; Evans, 1972; Walker, 1979).

Concert spirituals, the predecessor of gospel music, are SATB choral arrangements of religious slave songs (Evans, 1972). These spirituals are typically arranged for several voice parts, notwithstanding all male and female choruses. This distinct sound was birthed out of the Negro spiritual, but uniquely infuses Western tonal choral pedagogy. Johnson Reagon states (1993), "The concert or arranged spirituals are a blend of African musical forms and European choral harmonic and performance practices… In the concert tradition, the sound of the group or soloist is smooth and blended, creating a polished effect" (as cited in Simmonds, 2005, p. 9). The performance practice of the concert spiritual is typically a cappella and or accompanied by piano. Many contemporary composers are stretching the performance practice to include a wider array of instrumental forces (i.e., organ, drums, and instrumental ensembles).

Simplistically defined, concert spirituals are multi-voiced choral arrangements for concert performance.

Gospel music is not as easily defined (Wise, 2002). Gospel music is difficult to accurately define because its history has not been completely compiled within one source with a single agreed upon definition, that considers the changing stylistic characteristics gospel music has experienced from its inception to its current state. The term "gospel" references the "good news of salvation" as presented in Christianity (Heilbut, 1985). However, the lyrical message is not wedded to a particular musical style. Gospel music today cannot be completely confined, nor defined by one particular musical sound (e.g., Traditional Gospel, Blue Grass Gospel, Urban Contemporary Gospel, Gospel Jazz, Southern Gospel, Gospel Hip-Hop, Gospel Rap, etc).

Similarities do exist between both concert spirituals and traditional gospel music. Historically, as with many African American music genres, both the concert spiritual and gospel music provide insight into the collective minds of the Black community. Walker (1979) discusses the mirroring of issues in the Black community with the music it produces. To determine the central issues and focus of the Black community – just look as far as the music it births. In addition the concert spiritual and gospel music share: strong African influences, rhythmic complexity, the usage of call and response, the use of repetition, personalization (Courlander, 1992), the tradition of memorization, use of biblical stories, shared church culture and genres sung with power and conviction - notwithstanding both birth out of the Negro spiritual (Boyer, 1995; Roach, 1992; Southern, 1997).

Problem Statement

The Negro spirituals as sung and popularized by the Fisk Jubilee Singers (1871-1878), composed of eight HBCU students, attending Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee was the beginning of the concert spiritual genre (Anderson, 1997; Evans, 1972; Graham, 2001; Simmonds, 2005). Since that time the concert spiritual has become a standard part of HBCU concert choir repertoire. Through the years choral conductors at HBCUs have created a reputation of performing high-level choral literature taken from both Western tonal music repertoire and choral arrangements by Black composers (Mallory, 2006; Simmonds, 2005). By continuing to perform the concert spiritual, Black college choirs help preserve the performance practice of the concert spiritual and help maintain its relevance as a traditional African American art form (Reed-Walker, 2008; Simmonds, 2005).

However, in today's society the prominence and performance practice of the concert spiritual is declining (Chenu, 2003; Courlander, 1992; Reed-Walker, 2008). There are many attempts to unmask the reasons as to why this performance practice has decreased (Burleigh, 1917; Reed-Walker, 2008). One unaddressed issue yet to be explored are the musical preferences and attitudes of students who participate in HBCU concert choirs. It may be that students maintain stereotypes towards the concert spiritual and its fans, which indirectly affects the prominence of the genre. Stereotypes refers to the state by which individuals are perceived by others according to either self-categorization or perceived categorization; which leads to predetermined social actions

and interactions (Rentfrow, McDonald, & Oldmeadow, 2009; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 2011).

Freeman (2002) asserts that students attend HBCUs for three reasons: (a) because of cultural affinity (i.e., knows someone who attended an HBCU), (b) seeking roots, and (c) lack of cultural awareness. This is not a new occurrence; these three reasons have remained consistent for decades (Astin, 1982). After deeply probing student motivation of HBCU students, Freeman's (2002) research notes a correlation between African American students who are isolated from their cultural heritage in middle and secondary school, and their longing for cultural exposure which results in higher motivation to attend HBCUs.

Herein lies the enigma, with increasing rates of culturally deprived students choosing to attend HBCUs, it is less likely that these students will be familiar with the concert spiritual tradition; and may conflate prior exposure to contemporary gospel music performance practices with the concert spiritual performance practice and its tradition (Mallory, 2006; D. Miller, 2010). Extensive exposure to gospel music and its saturation within the African American church and society (Boyer, 1995) may cause increased preference for the genre, thus influencing musical preference and identity formation. This may be the greatest contributor to the decline of the concert spiritual. According to Frith (1981), musical preference is used as a badge, which communicates information about personal opinions, values and lifestyle (Hargreaves & North, 1999; North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). People use music preference to differentiate themselves from others, as well as proclaim, consciously or not, membership to a particular social group. It may be that students who participate in the

choral ensembles on HBCU campuses are gospel music fans; and bring with them preconceived stereotypes about concert spiritual fans. If stereotypes associated with the concert spiritual are not congruent with personal self-image and self-identity - students may not prefer the genre. Furthermore, without socio-cultural context in which to place the concert spiritual, students may become disinterested in concert spiritual performance and genre preservation (Miller, 2010); and would much rather perform music which is more familiar to them – gospel music. Consequently, stereotypical opinions held by gospel music fans towards concert spiritual fans could further perpetuate the decline of the concert spiritual performance practice, while exacerbating preservation attempts by HBCU choral conductors.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the stereotypes that gospel music fans may hold towards concert spiritual fans, which are projected upon their personalities, personal qualities and values (Survey 1). A related, but less primary purpose is to determine whether concert spiritual fans actually fit the stereotype held by others (Survey 2). Expected results from this study will assist HBCU choral conductors in their continued preservation efforts of the concert spiritual by expanding their understanding of the internal perceptions of gospel music fans that may be in their ensembles. These results may help focus genre preservation efforts towards dispelling the negative stereotypes associated with concert spiritual fans, as held by some HBCU

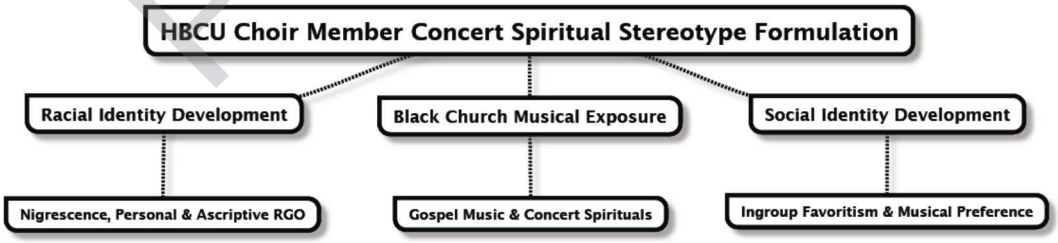
choir members. Quantitative research on stereotypes associated with the concert spiritual is limited.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is the "road map" which guides this study. This visual schematic helps explain the relationship between the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts and variables (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Robson, 2002) and their connection with each other. In an attempt to reveal the presumed relations and interrelationships of various concepts comprising HBCU choir member's stereotype formulation, the following conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Model



Various elements comprise the formulation of stereotypes in the minds of HBCU choir members towards the concert spiritual and its fans. The convergence of racial identity development, social identity development, along with the influence of the

musical culture in the Black church, all contribute to the formulation of stereotypes towards concert spiritual fans. The conceptual framework offers a model as to the possible connections amongst these three entities.

African American students enter HBCUs at various stages in their personal progress through "nigrescence." Nigrescence refers to the process by which African Americans begin to recognize, identify and internalize their "Blackness" (Cross, 1978; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). The four-staged process (Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, & Internalization) of becoming "Black" (Cross, et al., 1998; Helms, 1990, 1995; Parham & Helms, 1981, 1985) represents pivotal areas in which African American's racial consciousness is awakened. Contingent upon the process of a student through their nigrescence, a connection can be made to their willingness to identify with racial issues, historical plight of African Americans and or racially sensitive music (i.e., blues, spirituals, field hollers, calls and cries, etc.). Life-experiences of students, having impact upon their racial consciousness, can drastically affect their attitudes and perceptions of the spiritual, thus formulating stereotypes about concert spiritual fans.

The assortment of individual student experiences, both racial and non-racial, can contour their Reference Group Orientation (RGO) (Cross, 1987; Porter, 1971). As a student progresses through their nigrescence they discover group differences in worldviews, values, perspectives and group identity as related to lifestyle. Consciously or not, students will determine to what extent they will identify with racial issues. As they progress through their nigrescence, many may wrestle with how they feel about specific values, preferences or societal symbols and their explicit indicative actions.

RGOs are further delineated into two categories, personal and ascriptive RGOs (Cross, 1987). Personal RGO is defined as an individual's self defined reference group orientation, while ascriptive RGO is an imposed reference group orientation, ascribed by another. Although society has ascribed ethnicity as a significant RGO, race may not be a salient quality in a Black person's personal RGO. As students make choices as to the extent they will identify with racial issues, the choices they make will directly affect their preference for spirituals, thus resulting in internal stereotypes towards the genre and its fans.

Black church culture wields great influence upon the musical preferences of its parishioners (Walker, 1979). In fact, musical preference has become a focal point within Black church growth and development. Many pastors, evangelist and ministers recognize the influence music selection has upon the types of parishioners attracted to the church. Matching church music selection with the kinds of people each church is attempting to reach has become a regular practice for many churches today (Warren, 1995). There remains a rejection towards the idea that musical styles can be judged as being either "good" or "bad."

> Churches also need to admit that no particular *style* of music is "sacred." What makes a song sacred is its *message*. Music is nothing more than an arrangement of notes and rhythms; it's the words that make a song spiritual (Warren, 1995, p. 281).

Underpinning this idea is that musical preference is determined by individual background and culture. Therefore, music heard in each church should match the cultural and musical tastes of its parishioners. The choosing of appropriate church music suited

to meet the needs and preferences of its parishioners represents one ideological and theological side of what is now being called "worship wars."

Music appropriateness is a weighty subject for those who support a more traditional style of music for church worship. The selection of church music has eternal consequences (Best, 1993). To some, church music does not exist for its own sake; nor is it, a tool to be used to "become all things to all people." Best (1993) states, "something for everybody" does not make for good church life, even though it might make for good advertising… It manipulates them [parishioners] into creating needs out of wants and assuming that wanting and needing are really the same thing" (p. 189).

The proposed conceptual model highlights the connection between popular musical styles of the church and preference for those styles by its parishioners. Although there are other genres of music performed in the Black church that are not represented in the conceptual model (i.e., hymns, metered hymns, praise & worship, etc.) the dominant genre style today is gospel music.

In 1970, a gospel music selection by Walter Hawkins entitled, "Oh Happy Day" became an international hit reaching US #4 and UK #2 on the pop charts (Boyer, 1995; Heilbut, 1985; Southern, 1997). This landmark accomplishment increased the popularity of the gospel music – not only in society, but in the Black church as well. The popularity of gospel music swept across the Black church. This resulted in the creation of many new gospel music styles, which satisfied the varied musical taste of its laity. Due to its multi-styled sound, gospel music has crossed cultural, ethnic and denominational barriers (e.g., country gospel, blue-grass gospel, southern gospel, urban contemporary gospel, gospel jazz, gospel hip-hop, gospel rap, etc.).

While gospel music became increasingly more popular in the Black church, the absence of the spirituals resulted (Reed-Walker, 2008). The message of the spiritual was over shadowed by the joyous, syncopated and energetic sounds of the "good news" (Heilbut, 1995). Today, students who attend Black churches are primarily exposed to gospel music and all of its variations. Because of its array of genre forms, gospel music is better suited for the varied preferences of students of this generation. The conceptual framework shows the influence of the Black church – and the music it embraces, upon the preferences of its youth for gospel music. The unconscious endorsement of gospel music by the Black church may have an effect upon development of unconscious stereotypes that are projected upon concert spiritual fans.

In addition, Gospel choirs are emerging on many college and university campuses across the country. Often, these choirs satisfy spiritual and social needs of students seeking familiar surroundings, while others may be trying something new. Typically, these choirs do not receive academic credit towards traditional music degree. This may be a point of contention.

The issue of "credit vs. non-credit" may come to bear upon the perceived stereotypes projected upon concert spiritual fans by HBCU gospel music fans. Typically, HBCU College/University choirs are actual courses where students who participate in these ensembles receive some form of academic credit. Conversely, HBCU gospel choirs are often deemed as "extra curricular activities." It may be that students who participate in gospel choirs have a drastically different perception of concert choir members simply because of the acceptance of one genre and rejection of another.

Whether conscious or not, people communicate information about their opinions, values and lifestyles via their musical preferences (Hargreaves & North, 1999; North, et al., 2000; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). By sharing ones musical preference, students convey information about their personal attitudes, values and beliefs that are congruent with other members who prefer the same musical preference (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). In Rentfrow and Gosling's (2007) study, content and validity of stereotypes about fans of 14 distinct genres (Blues, Classical, Folk, Jazz, Alternative, Heavy Metal, Rock, Country, Pop, Religious, Sound tracks, Electronic, Rap and Soul) were examined. In this study, personality was assessed using the Five-Item Personality Inventory (FIPI) instrument (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) consisting of five items each corresponding to the Big Five personality dimensions (e.g., extroverted, enthusiastic). Personal qualities were assessed using four items (artistic, athletic, intelligent, and physically attractive) taken from the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ) (Pelham & Swann, 1989). While values were assessed using Rokeach's Values Survey (RVS), a reduced 18 itemed survey which participants ranked values in relations to its projected importance. Rentfrow and Gosling (2007) report that stereotypes surrounding various genres do exist. In fact, these stereotypes not only exist, but also are projected upon the personalities, personal qualities and values of specific genre fans.

When students express their musical preference, it symbolizes membership to a particular societal group (Lonsdale & North, 2009). Inadvertently, when HBCU choir members express their preference for gospel music, they are declaring membership to a particular societal group and its norms. In many instances, this societal group and its norms is Black church culture. According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), people