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IF YOU FEEL AS THOUGH YOU DON'T FIT IN THIS WORLD, CREATE A NEW ONE:  
STRATEGIES TO MOTIVATE ADOLESCENT MALES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
PERFORMING ARTS

By

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

From the age of three, when I sang my first solo in the church preschool choir, until now, as the theatre arts teacher and director at a public middle school during the school year and a director for a performing arts camp during the summer, the performing arts have been my passion, career, and grounding force in life. I was a bona fide theater kid, eating my lunch in the choir room and rehearsing in the auditorium late into the night with my fellow artists. My dream was to be a professional actor. After earning my Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting at my dream college in New York City, I began to pursue just that.

My first acting gigs after graduation were national tours in educational theatre, using the power of theatre to teach everything from preschoolers how to count, middle schoolers the importance of energy conservation, high schoolers to recognize the signs of addiction and how to get help, and everything in between. These experiences led me to arts leadership and education through directing, choreographing, music directing, and teaching for all kinds of students, ranging from totally unwilling teens whose classrooms I invaded with my interactive drama techniques during the school day to students whose passions mirrored my own in after-school productions.

In all those scenarios, from performing to directing, from childhood to adulthood, from teaching in large public schools to small private conservatories, from rural townships to the largest city in the United States, the same question always arose: *where were the boys?* After all, boys were around, just not in the auditorium. Copious data from my review of the literature regarding adolescent male performing arts participation rates confirmed the anecdotal evidence

my life experience claimed. Males are consistently and historically underrepresented in the performing arts both during and after school; individual studies and meta-reviews both confirm this (Antshel & Anderman, 2000; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2003; McNeal, 1998; Posner & Vandell, 1999; as cited in Feldman & Matajsko, 2005).

The underrepresentation of males in the performing arts inspired the following research topic: *Strategies to motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts*. A lifetime in the theater proved that most boys did not choose the performing arts in the first place or dropped out as they approached adolescence, the chief reason for younger boys being *it's for girls* and for teenage males being *it's gay*. Admittedly, in most groups of performers, some of the guys are, in fact, homosexual. Even so, I never did understand what about the act of singing, dancing, or acting *made* someone gay, and even if it did, why that was considered to be negative. How could an activity do that? Especially one that involved a small number of men being surrounded by and involved in various levels of intimacy with large groups of women?

On a trip to Chicago with some actor friends in college, we saw a sketch at Second City addressing exactly this phenomenon. On one side of the stage, a group of high school football players very physically interacted with each other, punctuating these interactions with cries of “no homo!”, while a group of women fought over a chance to be dance partners with the only guy who auditioned for their high school production of *West Side Story* on the other, dancing more and more provocatively with (and physically *on*) him as the sketch progressed. The sketch concluded with the football players mocking the “gay” male dancer, who winked at the audience as he grabbed and kissed one of the football player’s girlfriends behind his back to hoots and hollers from the audience. My straight male actor friends echoed this sentiment after the show,

one I had been hearing since middle school, which essentially was “go ahead, call me gay - until I steal your girlfriend”.

The cultural assumptions of the male role in the performing arts are a direct result of hegemonic or toxic masculinity, which are so pervasively woven into the fabric of Western culture that they go unquestioned by many, even in our increasingly progressive society (Kupers, 2005). Since the performing arts are perceived as a feminine activity, and feminine is perceived as inferior to masculine, the only males who participate are either actual homosexuals, which is considered to be more feminine and thus less desirable than being a heterosexual man, or heterosexual men who can withstand being perceived as homosexual, with their reward for subjecting themselves to heterosexual male ostracization being access and even entitlement to plenty of women.

Since women and homosexual men currently comprise the majority of performing artists in educational and professional contexts (Rumens & Broomfield, 2014), it is alarming that these two groups are seen as sexual rewards for a few straight men or as second-best to straight men respectively. While many straight men are allies for their female and gay coworkers and wonderful men overall, toxic masculinity is so ingrained in our culture that it cannot help but seep onto the stage and into our lives. The influence of toxic masculinity is arguably stronger offstage, where the majority of men choose to stay. However, all men deserve to be educated about the effects of toxic masculinity on our culture and make decisions from that knowledge base.

A particularly heartbreaking example of toxic masculinity comes to mind. A few years ago, I led a theater workshop for an at-risk elementary school to introduce my after-school

Create-A-Play (CAP) program. After the workshop, students could sign up. I was thrilled to see a second-grade boy thrive and shine. He was bold, funny, and quick while most of the boys were sullen and withdrawn, only participating reluctantly at my behest. As I was helping a handful of girls at my table with registration, I overheard his friends telling him he could not do theater with all the girls, that that would be *gay*, and goaded him to go to the gym with them to sign up for basketball. I saw him freeze, looking back at the stage where he had just performed, caught between his desires and the desires society was telling him he should have. After a moment, his face just crumpled and he left the room with his head hanging to sign up for basketball.

This moment deeply impacted me. If I had not just met him that day, could I have convinced him to follow his passion? Whatever amount of progress we believe we have made as a society is not enough if an eight-year-old boy in 2017 is not empowered to pursue his interests and talents since it will cost him his masculinity. So how do we, as performing arts educators and leaders (directors, music directors, choreographers, etc), shift this paradigm? How can we reframe the performing arts from its current view as an inherently gendered activity to what it truly is, as William Inge tells us: “Theater is, of course, a reflection of life” (BrainyQuote, 2020, p. 1). The need to share stories, express oneself, and reflect life is neither masculine nor feminine. It is simply and fundamentally human.

The performing arts are falsely equated with being not only feminine but frivolous, especially for males who envision their adult role in life as a traditional breadwinner. I had a disheartening conversation with an exceptionally talented and close friend of mine in high school who decided to major in business in college instead of accepting a full-ride scholarship to get a BFA in musical theatre because he thought it was more practical. This, too, was a decision based



on gender. As he told me, “It’s different for you. Guys will marry actresses and help support their careers. But women don’t want to marry a man who’s always looking for a job.”

This idea also stems from false cultural narratives. While it is true that the number of professional actors that make a consistent and comfortable living off acting jobs alone hovers around 2 percent (Williams et al., 2019) the benefits of performing arts participation during school years and beyond are numerous and profound, as the wealth of literature on the topic attests. Data regarding academic achievement, substance use, sexual activity, psychological adjustment, delinquency, and effects on young adulthood listed from the study *The Role of School-Based Extracurricular Activities in Adolescent Development: A Comprehensive Review and Future Directions* by Amy F. Feldman and Jennifer L. Matjasko (2005), provide a foundation for the discussion.

As the benefits of participation affirm, the lessons learned on stage are practically applicable to many areas of life. By using the National Core Arts Standards (Home - National Core Arts Standards, 2014) to ground a performing arts curriculum and make explicit connections to other content areas, students will see how the performing arts will support their college and career aspirations, whatever those happen to be. Additional resources and funding beyond school district allotments for the performing arts are listed, which can sustain performing arts educators with necessary tools to ensure their students achieve success on and offstage for years to come.

Despite the challenges male recruitment present, successful strategies are illuminated in the literature. Making the performing arts something men do (Demorest, 2000), creating a culture of male solidarity under the leadership of a competent, confident, and passionate

performing arts instructor regardless of gender (Ashley, 2009), and actively involving young people and addressing their concerns surrounding the performing arts (Daykin et al., 2008) are among them. These strategies, alongside my own that connect the history of males in the performing arts to current attitudes about male performing artists, have the potential to increase the numbers of males in a performing arts program.

For this capstone, I chose to narrow the focus to adolescent males as this is the age group I currently teach and am most passionate about. Several sources from the literature explained that activities an adolescent participates in and the subsequent social connections made have a profound impact on individual and peer identity formation. This identity shaping process during adolescence is often sustained well into adulthood (Barber et al 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Lagaert et al, 2017). Adolescence is a critical phase of development that has long term effects later in life, so concentrating recruitment strategies on adolescent males seems prudent.

As a performer exploring an issue in the performing arts, I wanted my product to have a performance element: this is who I am and what I do. I envisioned a product that connected people through one of the most powerful mediums throughout human history: live performance. While nothing can replace the impact of a live performance, having a product that can be referred back to at the educator's convenience was necessary. Considering these factors, a TED talk was the best format to deliver my message. I can present the lecture live at conferences, meetings, and hopefully on the TED talk stage and also have a recorded version as an anytime resource for anyone who needs it. Using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework created by Wiggins and McTighe (2011), I outlined strategies that performing arts educators and leaders can use to recruit adolescent males into their performing arts classes and programs, retain these

students in classes and productions throughout their academic careers, and reframe the conversation and culture surrounding gender and the role it plays in performing arts participation.

The combination of the topic at hand and the product chosen to deliver it led to the following research question: *Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* Copious research on effective strategies that other arts educators and leaders have implemented, my own strategies I have found to be successful in practice, and my willingness to dream big and *follow the fear*, as the People's Improv Theater in New York City taught me to do, assured me that the answer to this question is *yes*.

The ultimate goal or dream would be for every student to participate in activities based on their interest and desire, not on false cultural notions that activities are inherently gendered. This would create a more welcoming performing arts community, which would affect the school community, which would then affect the world at large and help dismantle harmful gender stereotypes that are finally starting to be questioned.

### **Summary**

To summarize, I have developed a TED talk on strategies to motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts. Chapter two attempts to answer this complex capstone question in four parts:

1. First, past and current statistics regarding performing arts participation for males (in comparison to females and isolated by gender) are explored, providing quantitative and qualitative evidence of adolescent male underrepresentation in the performing arts.

2. The numerous academic, social, emotional, mental, and physical benefits that performing arts participation provide are then outlined. Contradictions in the literature are considered and broad conclusions are drawn.
3. The juxtaposition of male reticence to participate in the performing arts with the plethora of benefits of participation posits the obvious question of *why*. This is when toxic masculinity and its relationship to the performing arts is examined, providing a framework for the cultural assumptions that dissuade males from pursuing the performing arts.
4. Lastly, successful strategies that have been implemented to increase male participation in the performing arts are shared for performing arts educators and leaders to adjust and utilize to serve the needs of their unique programs and populations.

Chapter three details the particulars of the product, explaining how the implementation of Wiggins and McTighe's UbD framework (2011) organized research from the literature and my professional experience into the *recruit, retain, reframe* model used in the TED talk. National Core Arts Standards are utilized to ground curriculum that can be practically applied to many areas of life to aid recruitment. Resources beyond school and/or district funding available to performing arts educators and leaders are listed to ensure students are retained into sustainable performing arts programs. And finally, to reframe the conversation surrounding gender and the performing arts, ideas that connect the history of men in the performing arts to current theories of gender and identity are explored for teachers and directors to adapt and/or use directly in their schools and communities. A description of my project with a timeline for its execution along with an assessment of its efficacy concludes the chapter.

Chapter four reflects upon the capstone process as a whole- its creation, purpose, and limitations. I expound upon what I learned as a graduate student researcher, performing arts educator and leader, and performing artist. It concludes with implications for both policy and practice as well as considerations for further research and investigation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

According to Dictionary.com, to “motivate” is “to provide with a motive, or a cause or reason to act; incite; impel” (Dictionary.com, 2020). The research question, *Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* required investigation and interpretation of the literature regarding male adolescents, defined as ages 12-18, and their relationship with the performing arts, defined as instrumental and vocal music, theatre/drama, and dance. Stage crew, while an integral component of the performing arts, is not included in this definition as males are working behind the scenes and not strictly performing. Furthermore, males tend to be overrepresented in that area (Henry, 2020). Past statistics must be assessed to strategize improvements for the future: namely, how to recruit and retain male participants by reframing the performing arts as a discipline that is gender inclusive and provides benefits to all.

First, past and current statistics regarding male participation in the performing arts establish the fact that males currently are and consistently have been underrepresented in this field. Possible hypotheses for this phenomenon are explored; perhaps males simply do not consider the performing arts as an option so their lack of participation is a mere act of omission. The differences between and relationship among the low rates of participation during and after school are also considered. For instance, if the literature showed that males participated in the performing arts during school at high rates, their lack of participation after school may not be due to the subject itself but to an external issue such as timing. And if this is the case, the data

would show that males have low rates of participation not just in the performing arts, but in all after school activities. The history of the problem must also be examined. If this is a recent problem, perhaps a turning point can be found in the literature that can help explain the drop. And finally, as an arts educator, the question and concern of adequate offerings of educational performing arts programs necessarily deserve review, as no one, male or female, can participate in a program that does not exist.

Whatever the reasons males have for declining to participate in the performing arts must be seriously reconsidered. As predicted, the literature enumerates a host of academic, social, emotional, mental, and even physical benefits both during adolescence and beyond, with effects on independent variables including academic achievement, substance use, sexual activity, psychological adjustment, truancy and other forms of delinquency well into young adulthood. Even when possible confounding factors that may mitigate these positive results are considered, performing arts participation still proves to have a net positive effect overall.

A critical look at participatory patterns and trends and their effect on the benefits of participation are examined. The impact of intersectional analysis and gender theories on male performing arts participation attempt to rectify this discrepancy. Finally, strategies that have been successful in motivating males to participate in the performing arts are examined and evaluated with the intent for educators to adapt these strategies to serve their unique educational theatre programs.

### **Statistics: Males Are Underrepresented in the Performing Arts**

Sources with statistics regarding adolescent male participation in the performing arts were numerous (around 30 studies and 2 meta-reviews were analyzed, both of which cited over

40 studies) and varied widely in terms of demographics observed (racial composition, socioeconomic status, urban vs rural, type of school observed, etc), sample size used (ranging from single case study to comprehensive empirical reviews), location of study (the U.S., Europe, Australia, New Zealand) and type of study (longitudinal, observational, experimental, etc). Even so, every study on the subject of adolescent male participation in the performing arts showed a few commonalities despite the differences among them: for males, performing arts participation ranks among (if not the absolute) lowest choice compared to other in-and-after school subject choices, and males participate in the performing arts at lower rates than females (Colley & Comber, 2003; Daykin et al., 2008; Denault & Poulin, 2009; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Foster & Jade, 2017).

Since males are categorically underrepresented in the performing arts and the performing arts are often underrepresented among other curricular and extracurricular options, male performing artists are perhaps one of the smallest minority groups in Western schools today (data for Eastern nations was not explicitly sought due to possible confounding cultural differences and implications).

### **Underrepresentation of Males in the Performing Arts: A Matter of Omission?**

The literature seems to indicate the lack of male participation in the performing arts cannot be attributed to simple oversight or as a product of ignorance. It is not a matter of omission. When surveyed, the majority of adolescent males explicitly state that their preferences lie elsewhere. In one such study,, 218 boys and 144 girls ages 11-12 and 300 boys and 269 girls ages 15-16 ranked school subject preferences as a follow-up to data obtained in the 1990s. In both studies, girls ranked drama, English, and music as their top in-school subject choices while



boys ranked PE, science, and math as their top three. PE was found to be preferred very strongly by boys and consistently tops the list as a favorite subject while art and drama were found to be preferred very strongly by girls (Colley & Comber, 2003). Another study focusing on compulsory curricular dance participation and its effects on voluntary extracurricular dance participation found prior research on the subject indicated girls were more motivated to participate in dance in both cases -their current research confirmed these findings (Fairclough, Stratton, & Baldwin 2002, Ntoumanis 2001, as cited in Anderson et al., 2017).

### **Curricular versus Extracurricular Participation: A Matter of Timing?**

Extracurricular preferences tend to be an extension of the aforementioned in-school subject data for males. In a study of 1,259 10th graders with an almost 50/50 gender split, sports dominate the list for males with 66.7% playing school team sports and 25.5% playing in school sports clubs - this rate is more than triple the rates of participation for band, drama, and dance combined. For students involved in extracurricular activities, 79% of males have never participated in any facet of the performing arts compared to 57% of females who have also never participated - less than half of females and less than half of a quarter of males ever participate in any form of extracurricular performing arts programming (Eccles & Barber, 1999). While the prior studies could suggest that for females, the lack of extracurricular arts participation may be due to an outside factor like scheduling conflicts since in-school performing arts participation is high, the rates for participation in-school and after-school for males both remain low.

### **Beyond the Performing Arts: Male Rates of Participation**

As the previous data demonstrates, the lack of male participation in the performing arts is not due to a lack of male participation in extracurricular activities overall. For curricular

activities, a choice must be made, but that choice usually is not in the performing arts for adolescent males. And though males typically participate in extracurricular activities at lower rates than females, their participation rates are hardly negligible. In athletics, male rates are routinely higher than females (Antshel & Anderman, 2000; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2003; McNeal, 1998; Posner & Vandell, 1999 as cited in Feldman & Matajsko, 2005). Extracurricular involvement on the whole is high - roughly 60% of high school sophomores and 70% of high school seniors participated in one or more activities in 1995 (Cooper et al., 1999 as cited in Shulruf, 2010) and 75% of 14-year-olds participated in 2002 (Mahoney et al., 2002 as cited in Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). However, only 28% of high school seniors participated in music, debate, or drama in 2002 (The National Center for Education Statistics 2002 as cited in Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Alarming, extracurricular performing arts involvement seems to be declining in popularity for both genders. While the percentage of students taking music classes during school remained relatively stable between 2008 and 2016, the percentage of students involved in extracurricular music declined from 2008 to 2016 (The Nation's Report Card, The National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

### **A Brief History of Male Participation in the Performing Arts**

Unfortunately, the lack of male participation in the performing arts is hardly a recent phenomenon. Studies regarding rates and effects of ECAs (extracurricular activities) on their participants date back to the 1930s. One such meta-review from 1937 analyzed over 800 junior high and high schools and found that females participated at higher rates than males, that gender had a strong effect on ECA choice, and that males ranged from less than a quarter to less than half of members in dramatics clubs for grades 7-9 (Upshaw, 1937). Evidently, low male rates of

performing arts participation have been a problem since the advent of extracurricular performing arts programs.

### **Curricular Performing Arts Offerings**

A current contributor to the problem lies in the relative lack of breadth of curricular performing arts opportunities (with the exception of music). In 90% of schools surveyed in the 1999-2000 school year and 91% of schools in the 2008-2009 school year, curricular music programs were offered (Nation's Report Card, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The same study revealed less than 50% of schools offered drama/theatre programs and only 14% of schools offered dance in 1999-2000, a rate which dropped to 12% in 2008-2009. It is telling that the National Center for Education Statistics assessment and achievement data for secondary students by grade level in the arts only includes data for music and visual arts. Apparently, there are not enough drama/theatre and dance programs to create nationwide arts achievement assessment tools (Nation's Report Card, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Curricular offerings in the performing arts are essential if recruiting males into extracurricular programs is to be considered. For many males, curricular offerings provide their first and/or only exposure to performing arts, especially dance. (Anderson et al., 2017). This study also found that the second most cited reason students gave for not participating in dance after competency is accessibility (Anderson, Leyland, and Ling 2013; Watson et al., 2015 as cited in Anderson et al., 2017). It is not sufficient for schools, districts, and community-based education programs to offer extracurricular programming only. Many students first need to understand and experience the performing arts in class as part of the school day before they can be expected to make further commitments after school. While curricular offerings pose no

guarantee of participation of any kind, a lack of curricular offerings almost certainly guarantees that participation rates will remain critically low.

To answer the question, *Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?*, adolescent male underrepresentation in performing arts as a constant and long term problem due to their gender, at least in part, must be established. The literature confirms that adolescent males are consistently and historically underrepresented in every facet of the performing arts both during and after school, with research documenting this trend starting in the 1930s (Upshaw, 1937). Gender plays a role in subject matter preference - research shows males tend to prefer PE, science, and math over performing arts in both curricular and extracurricular settings. While females do tend to participate in extracurricular activities at higher rates than males, male rates of participation are significant in areas like athletics (Colley & Comber, 2003; Denault & Poulin, 2009). The literature argues for curricular exposure to the performing arts to provide a pathway to extracurricular performing arts involvement, as many students do not have or choose not to access the performing arts outside of school (Anderson et al., 2017).

### **Benefits: Performing Arts Participation**

Arguably the most thorough data source for statistics on participation in different types of school-based ECAs and their implications on a variety of outcomes for adolescents is *The Role of School-Based Extracurricular Activities in Adolescent Development: A Comprehensive Review and Future Directions* by Amy F. Feldman and Jennifer L. Matjasko (2005). This meta-review includes over 40 studies from American secondary schools and provides the study name, sample size, variables (dependent, independent, and other), and direction of influence

across the following independent variables: academic achievement, substance use, sexual activity, psychological adjustment, delinquency, and young adulthood.

### **Academic Achievement**

The lack of male participation in the performing arts is cause for concern, as the literature espouses a plethora of benefits associated with performing arts participation. Academic benefits include increased academic involvement and achievement as measured by increased school attendance, higher GPAs, more time spent doing homework, and a more positive view of school and one's ability to achieve academic success. In general, a positive association between extracurricular performing arts involvement and the pursuit of higher education is designated across studies. These academic benefits can even extend beyond postsecondary education, as the arts can provide social capital and professional networking opportunities to bolster career aspirations in any number of fields (Barber et al., 2001; Daykin et al., 2008; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005).

Music participation increased grades in math and English and time spent on homework (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Performing arts (types not specified) showed an increase for full-time college at 21 years of age, attachment to school, and cumulative GPA. When including studies that mentioned activities that likely include performing arts but do not explicitly state them, such as activity participation, supervised activities, organized activities, etc., more positive academic outcomes were found, including increased academic performance, decreased dropout rates, and higher standardized test scores. This is true in the past and the present. "Currently, the literature generally supports the original findings that there is a positive relationship between extracurricular activity participation and academic achievement (Broh, 2002; Crosnoe, 2001;

Eccles & Barber, 1999; Gerber, 1996; Hanson & Kraus, 1998; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2003; Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001; McNeal, 1998; Melnick, Vanfossen, & Sabo, 1992b; Spreitzer, 1994). Studies focusing on gender differences have reported similar findings for male and female students” (Feldman & Matajsko 2005, p. 178). Furthermore, the effect of performing arts participation had a higher positive association with higher education for males than females (Barber et al., 2001).

The Feldman review noted that in some instances control variables, such as mother’s level of education, the student’s verbal and numerical ability, socioeconomic status (SES), and others, can potentially decrease or even eliminate the positive associations of performing arts and/or other extracurricular activities on academic outcomes. This effect is known as “selection bias”, which “occurs when individuals or groups in a study differ systematically from the population of interest leading to a systematic error in an association or outcome” (Nunan et al., 2017, p. 1). This means that the type of student who would choose the performing arts may already possess, to some degree, the academic strengths that participation in the performing arts supposedly foster - for instance, a student who chooses to take a drama class may already have good grades, a positive attitude about school, and other advantages. So while participating in drama will likely continue to encourage positive attitudes and high levels of achievement, the drama class did not strictly *cause* these effects.

Even so, performing arts participation could have similar effects on students that were recruited into the program instead of self-selected based on “The link between peer-group identity formation and activity involvement” (Eccles & Barber, 1999, p. 29). Current theories of peer identity formation through activity involvement are consistent with past theories, which

explain how collective social involvement, especially in more structured activities, help adolescents shape their individual and personal identities throughout the process (Adams and Marshall, 1996; Erikson, 1968; Williams & McGee, 1991; Youniss, Yates, and Su, 1997 as cited in Eccles & Barber, 1999).

So it stands to reason that if a student without the advantages of variables such as a mother with a college degree or high verbal and numerical ability joins a social group and begins forming his identity with and surrounded by a group of friends that *do* have those advantages, his attitudes toward academics, level of academic commitment, and academic performance may improve as a result of positive peer influence. Whether or not a student would be able to match the level of academic achievement of his peers with self-selection is beyond the scope of this literature review, but the probability of his base level of academic attitude, effort, and achievement increasing as a result of the influence of peers in the performing arts department is worth considering.

### **Substance Use**

Substance use presented contradictory findings across studies according to Feldman and Matajsko's 2005 meta-review. Cooley et al's (1995) study distinctly mentioned music and drama but only concluded generally across all activities, finding substance use to be lower overall for participants in any activities compared to nonparticipants and that substance use varied across groups - further explanation was not offered. Zill et al (1995)'s study differentiates band, orchestra, chorus, and play/musical from varsity sports and general activity participation and found that participants in all four types of performing arts had a far lower likelihood than non-participants to indulge in smoking, drug use, and binge drinking. But does *non-participants*

refer to students not participating in performing arts specifically (but perhaps participating in sports or other activities) or not participating in any activity at all?

These findings potentially conflict with Borden et al.'s (2001) findings that school-based activity participation predicted greater alcohol use, though no definition for school-based activities is given. Crosnoe (2002) found that non-athletic females engaged in risky behaviors the least but non-athletic activities and/or involvement are also undefined. Does this mean girls who participate in other activities or no activities? The independent variables listed are athletic participation and friends' behaviors, which does not clarify the type and/or degree (if any) of participation in activities outside of athletics. Further complicating the data was Eccles et al.'s (2001) study, which found that participation in 1-2 organized activities was associated with less substance abuse than nonparticipation, but participation in more than 2 activities did not present a significant difference from nonparticipation for cigarette use and alcohol consumption. As with other studies, this one did not clarify whether or not performing arts was included in its definition of organized activities. Eccles and Barber's (1999) study did separate the performing arts and initially found that those who were involved in performing arts during 10th grade had lower instances of risky behaviors, especially alcohol consumption, in 10th and 12 grade than those who were not in the performing arts. But, when previous levels of alcohol consumption were controlled in the longitudinal regression analyses, 10th-grade performing arts participation had no discernible effect on the direction or extent of change in drinking patterns over the years during and after high school.

Among these contradictory findings was one definite statistic: substance abuse was the only category in which one study (Eccles & Barber, 1999) found reliable evidence of an



interaction through gender-by-activity. Males who participated in the performing arts were less likely than their female peers to drink alcohol in Grades 10 and 12. No explanation for this phenomenon was offered.

Confronting a contradictory set of findings regarding the relationship between substance use and performing arts participation is frustrating but not surprising given the many nuances surrounding substance abuse and the numerous intersectionalities between substance abuse and the performing arts. The few data-driven conclusions that can be drawn are that performing arts participation does decrease adolescent engagement in several risky behaviors, as cited by Zill (1995) and Eccles and Barber (1999) above, if only during the high school years. And similar to the findings about academic achievement, participation in any activity contributes to positive outcomes for its participants, even if only by spending time and forming friendships with other self-selecting students.

### **Sexual Activity**

Interestingly, the data regarding the relationship between sexual activity and performing arts participation was more uniform across studies than the previous data about substance abuse. Band, chorus, drama, and dance were related to less overall sexual activity defined as number of partners, intercourse frequency, and age at which sexual activity began (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Teen motherhood (but not fatherhood) rates were also reduced; (Miller et al., 1998; Zill et al., 1995 as cited in Feldman & Matajsko, 2005). Students also reported improved knowledge and attitudes about HIV/AIDS and significantly increased condom use after participating in an educational drama HIV/AIDS intervention program ( Denman et al., 1995; Elliott et al., 1996; Harvey et al., 2000 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008) Also, improved knowledge and attitudes

about healthy sexuality and access to and availability of contraception as a result of participation in drama production and workshops on these topics were reported (Lloyd & Lyth, 2003 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008).

Curiously, teen fatherhood rates were not reduced as a result of performing arts participation, but since the level of risk and responsibility is undoubtedly higher for teen mothers than fathers, the result is not entirely unfounded. It is also encouraging to note that using drama to educate students on sensitive topics had a positive result. Anecdotal evidence from years as a touring actor with various national educational theatre companies on topics including safe sex corroborate these results. As found with academic achievement substance use, participation in unspecified ECAs (“organized activities”, “supervised activities”, etc) was also associated with decreases in overall sexual activity and engaging in sexually risky behaviors. (Daykin et al., 2008; Feldman & Matajkso, 2005; Zill et al., 1995).

### **Psychological Adjustment**

The outcomes of psychological adjustment depend on which of the following three categories a student falls under: voluntary general ECA participation (which can include but does not singularly identify performing arts as an activity), voluntary performing arts participation (both during and after school and as part of school and community education), both of which are outlined in Feldman and Matajsko’s 2005 review, and compulsory participation in drama therapy, a form of drama in which the curriculum used during and after school is tailored to address certain needs in the community (Feldman & Matajsko, 2005). A meta-review of seven studies which evaluated the effects of drama therapy had curricula addressing social/emotional learning (ie social skills, empathy, conflict resolution, etc) and sexual health (safe sex practices,

appropriate physical boundaries, HIV/AIDS awareness) and its results (Daykin et al., 2008). Since psychological adjustment is undeniably complex, it seems prudent to examine effects based on the aforementioned categories and then attempt to make generalizations across categories as appropriate to conclude.

As seen in previous sections, general ECA participation bears positive associations. Feldman and Matjasko's (2005) review found activity participation lessened depressed moods in students and generally saw an increase in wellbeing for involved students as compared to non-involved students. Since ECA involvement of all types provides adolescents with the opportunity to and the context in which to express themselves individually and socially both independently and within a group, it logically follows that this involvement increases positive indicators of mental health such as a sense of purpose and belonging, self-expression, and social enjoyment. Alongside the increase of positive mental health indicators is a decrease in, or at least as a protective measure against, negative mental health indicators like isolation, lack of purpose and direction, and depressive moods. (Barber & Eccles, 1999; Daykin et al 2008; Feldman & Matajsko, 2005, Zill et al., 1995).

Unfortunately, separating the performing arts from general activity involvement revealed some negative effects. Male performing artists had a consistent or increasing sense of worry from ages 16-18 while participation in all other types of activities caused a decrease in worry over the same age range. Even worse, performing arts participation was linked to higher rates of psychological visits and suicidality from high school to the age of 24 (Barber & Eccles, 1999). However, the study addressed issues of causation versus correlation that came to mind from experience as both a performer and teacher and summed it up thusly:

Perhaps performing arts is considered a more nonconformist activity, and marginalized youth may find a place for themselves in a performance art that would not be open to them in the more traditional activities...being a member of the marching band does not confer the same social status as playing on the football team. (Barber et al., 2001, p. 447)

The viewpoint espoused by this study further supports the hypothesis that recruiting more males into performing arts, especially those who would not have self-selected, will make the performing arts more inclusive to all types of people, which will in turn lessen the current stigma. When the performing arts are not viewed as a *nonconformist activity*, the outcomes are quite different from those found in the Barber et al. (2001) study. A systematic literature review of works published from 1994-2004 exploring performing arts' (defined as music, drama, dance, and performance) effects on adolescents aged 11—18 in community and non-curricular educational settings (Daykin et al., 2008) found many benefits. Social benefits include improved social skills and interactions with parents, teachers, and other students as reported by all parties (teachers and parents reported about their students/children and students self-reported). Positive changes in behavior were reported by teachers and parents, and the effects were especially strong in at-risk communities (Bradley et al., 2004; Douglas et al., 2000; Mattingly, 2001 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008). Students reported a sense of enhanced wellbeing, self-expression, and self-confidence, as well as an improved ability to manage difficult emotions and stress (McArdle et al., 2002, Positive Futures, 2005, Walsh-Bowers & Basso, 1999 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008). Social exclusion was addressed through successful community integration (Jackson, 2003; Wilkin, Kinder, White, & Doherty, 2003 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008), appropriate boundaries for physical contact were learned (Orme & Salmon, 2002 as cited

in Daykin et al., 2008), and students reported a sense of excitement, satisfaction, and fun (Colley & Comber, 2003; Harland et al., 2000; Miller & Budd, 1999 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008).

“The authors concluded that by actively involving young people, addressing their concerns and using activities that engage them in productive group work processes, drama can be usefully applied whatever the resources available” (Daykin et al., 2008, p. 260).

### **Truancy and Delinquency**

If a student is invested in activities after school, it stands to reason that investment during school hours will also rise, even if only using the metric of school attendance. While the literature did not include individual schools’ policies regarding in-school attendance, grades, behavior, etc for ECA eligibility, personal experience and anecdotal evidence attest to the fact that many schools have such requirements in place - for example, some schools look at attendance data for the school day and if a student had one or more periods with an unexcused absence, he would not be able to participate in ECAs that day. This helps motivate students to attend school during the day if for no other reason than to participate after school. This can incidentally improve school day performance as well.

Even when schools do not have such policies in place, attendance often rises regardless. As a former teaching artist for The Leadership Program in NYC, implementing an interactive drama curriculum entitled the Violence Prevention Program (VPP) in at-risk secondary schools around the NYC metro area, attendance data for both in-school enrichment (ICE) and after-school (AS) VPP programs had a positive relationship with each other. If a school had ICE programming, AS enrollments would rise. If a school had AS programming, school day

attendance would increase. Schools with both ICE and AS programming saw increases in attendance, a positive attitude toward school, and achievement (Thompkins & Chauveron, 2010).

Reviews of the literature further validated the aforementioned personal experience with the Leadership Program regarding truancy and other types of delinquency. Feldman and Matajsko's review (2005) showed that students who participate in structured activities display low antisocial behavior, ECAs are associated with less misconduct among high adversity students, and students who engage in general activity participation show reduced delinquency. As noted before, these categories do not clearly include or exclude the performing arts from their analyses. Males who participated in the performing arts were less likely than their female peers to drink alcohol and skip school in Grade 10 (Barber & Eccles, 1999) and performing arts participants had a far lower likelihood than non-participants to be truant, drop out of school, or be arrested (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Zill et al., 1995).

As truancy is among the most common form of juvenile delinquency and truancy often serves as a gateway to further delinquency, implementing engaging performing arts curriculum and after-school programs and actively recruiting and retaining males into said classes and programs can lower rates of criminal activity, help keep students safe and set them up on a path toward success at school and away from criminality in the streets. Staying after school can also protect non-delinquent teens from simply being around when criminal activities occur, such as drive-by shootings (Kennedy et al., 2020). When viewed from this perspective, it is not necessarily an overstatement to say that performing arts participation could potentially save lives in at-risk communities.

## **Young Adulthood**

The benefits of performing arts participation do not stop when high school ends. Feldman and Matajsko's (2005) meta-review includes several longitudinal studies. Performing arts participation predicted more years of education beyond high school, better educational outcomes, less risky behaviors, academic achievement, and prosocial behaviors. The study later details how participation in the performing arts help students develop social capital, which can then lead to career, cultural, and social networking opportunities as adults (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1992; Kahne et al., 2001; McNeal, 1999; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Patrick et al., 1999 as cited in Feldman & Matajsko, 2005). Across all longitudinal studies, a positive association to some degree between adolescent and adult participation in leisure activities of choice was found. Involvement in the performing arts through adulthood is seen at many levels, ranging from being a season ticket holder at a local theater to becoming a professional actor, as well as being involved backstage and in leadership positions in numerous community and educational performing arts programs (Borgonovi, F., 2004; Iyengar, Bradshaw, & Nichols, 2009).

As discussed earlier, performing arts participation did predict more psychological visits and higher suicidality between the ages of 18 and 24, but the study concluded that this could be due to the perception of the performing arts as an activity associated with nonconformist people and behaviors, not necessarily as a result of the performing arts as a discipline. The same study found that occupational status and income rose for performing artists. Therefore, participation drew both negative and positive consequences in adulthood (Barber et al., 2001).

Given the numerous academic, social/emotional, and even physical benefits of performing arts participation for individuals and groups across a broad range of qualitative and quantitative measures starting in adolescence and continuing into adulthood, especially in at-risk communities, the fact that so few adolescent males choose to avail themselves of these benefits mainly due to outdated gender stereotypes should be considered an educational crisis at this point (Barber & Eccles, 1999; Daykin et al., 2008; Feldman & Matajsko, 2005; Zill et al., 1995). This is why finding an answer to the question, *Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* Should be imperative for performing arts educators.

### **Adolescent Male Performing Arts Participation Patterns**

Clearly, there is a wealth of literature espousing the numerous benefits of performing arts participation. However, adolescent male attitudes about the performing arts and subsequent participation patterns and trends across the schooling years and into adulthood directly influence the extent to which students gain the aforementioned benefits. By understanding male attitudes about and participation patterns in the performing arts, educators and leaders can disrupt the current paradigm through recruitment and retainment of adolescent males into performing arts programs during and after school.

First, male attitudes regarding the performing arts tend to start to shift when they enter adolescence and worsen as they continue through this developmental stage. In a study entitled *School Subject Preferences: Age and gender differences revisited*, it is found that gender becomes a stronger influencer of subject preference as the student ages. This study's data regarding the differences between overall rankings of school subjects based on gender shows



stronger gender bias in grade 11 overall as well as lower ranks for drama and music in grade 11 than in grade seven (Colley & Comber, 2003).

These attitudes align with both initial and longitudinal participation rates in a range of non-athletic activities including the performing arts. Intensity (the amount of time devoted to activities within a specific timeframe, such as a semester or school year), duration (the number of semesters/years a student participates in the same activity) and breadth (the number of activities in which students are involved) of participation decreased over time, with overall participation intensity showing steeper declines by later grades. This is especially true in areas with lower participation rates to begin with like the performing arts (Denault & Poulin, 2009). This downward pattern of participation coincides with lower academic outcomes as well. “The normative decline in students' academic motivation and achievement at the transition to middle school has been explained by a lack of fit between the developmental needs of the youth adolescent and the capacity of the school to meet those needs (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, & Reumen, 1993). The transition often brings a larger and complex peer ecology, a departmentalized curriculum, and less support from teachers (Eccles & Roeser, 2009)” (Im et al., 2016, p. 4).

It may seem paradoxical that at adolescence, the stage of development when the positive impacts of performing arts participation are most felt, is the same stage at which participation rates after school and involvement during school start to decline. However, perhaps *because* this downward trajectory typically starts at this stage, those that choose participation or are recruited into it stand to benefit the most.

### **Participation Trends: Duration, Intensity, and Breadth**

Positive trends in duration, intensity, and/or breadth of participation have been shown to help alleviate the *normative decline* in both curricular and extracurricular involvement that often occur during the middle school transition. Surprisingly, initial levels of participation proved to be more accurate predictors of outcomes in later years than tracking rates of change that occurred over time. Denault and Poulin's (2009) study showed that high levels of intensity and/or breadth of participation in early-to-mid-adolescent years were predictive of lower rates of decline in all three participation dimensions over time. In fact, high participation patterns in early to-mid-adolescence may be a good predictor of a positive developmental trajectory throughout adolescence, no matter what levels of change take place over time (Denault & Poulin, 2009).

Unsurprisingly, the higher the duration, intensity, and/or breadth of participation for the student, the higher the probability and depth of beneficial outcomes. Participants with high initial levels of intensity and/or breadth displayed more commitment to school and possessed more positive societal values by Grade 11 than participants with lower intensity and/or breadth and nonparticipants (Darling 2005; Fredricks and Eccles 2006a; Gardner et al., 2008; Mahoney et al., 2003, as cited in Denault & Poulin, 2009). As activity duration increases, skills and knowledge in that activity domain refine while relationships with activity leaders and fellow participants flourish (Busseri et al., 2006; Larson & Verma 1999, as cited in Denault & Poulin, 2009). Put another way, the more time spent in activities, the greater the exposure to the positive factors participation provides (Gardner et al., 2008 as cited in Denault & Poulin, 2009). Moreover, time spent in activities lessens the amount of time for and the likelihood that students will engage in risky behaviors after school (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006a; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Osgood et

al., 1996, as cited in Denault & Poulin., 2009 ). Regarding breadth, students that participate in numerous activities can develop a wide array of skills, interests, and talents (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Larson et al., 2006; Rose-Krasnor et al., 2006, as cited in Denault & Poulin, 2009 ) while socializing with a wider and more diverse group of students and teachers (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Denault & Poulin, 2009).

While high initial participation in one or more activities is ideal, students who begin participating later can and do experience positive outcomes. In a study examining participation effects from seventh and eighth grade on ninth grade outcomes, students who began participating in the eighth grade (delayed participation) enjoyed close to as many benefits as students who started participating in seventh grade and continued into eighth (continuous participation). On the other hand, students who began participating in seventh grade but stopped in eighth (discontinued participation) had similar outcomes as nonparticipants in ninth grade. Hence, the duration of participation is less critical than the participation trend. Starting an activity in a later grade yielded better results than trying an activity for one year and then quitting the next, even though both of these instances equal one year of participation (Im et al., 2016). This is why a commitment to initial recruitment coupled with longitudinal retainment is essential - students stand to benefit much more from continuous participation than merely trying something once.

Regarding performing arts specifically, both delayed and continuous participation yield a more consistent relationship with higher grades, academic values, higher initiative development, and teacher-related engagement than athletic participation (Larson et al., 2006, as cited in Denault & Poulin, 2009). Continuous music participation has an indirect association with lower substance use and higher self-esteem through increased teacher support (Foster & Jenkins, 2017).

This may be a result of arts participation providing more quantity and quality of conversations with teachers outside of the classroom to discuss recitals, upcoming performances, etc. (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). Peer relationships improve as well; performing artists experience fewer negative peer interactions than participants in other (or no) activities (Hansen et al., 2003, as cited in Im et al., 2016). Additionally, children involved in arts education have a higher likelihood of arts engagement into adulthood. (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Broh, 2002, as cited in Oosterhoff et al., 2017). The pattern of participation set in early adolescence can and often does set the stage for lifelong arts engagement, benefitting the person, their community, and society at large.

### **Intersectionalities**

Though broad conclusions regarding average adolescent males and their relationship to the performing arts in contemporary Western countries can and have been drawn, it is important to consider the impact of race and/or socio-economic status (SES) on these results. Generally, the literature did not explicitly study the impact of these intersectionalities on performing arts participation and the benefits thereof; this is an area for which further research is required. Even so, certain conclusions could be drawn through the interpretation of the literature using an intersectional lens.

### **Race**

Many studies on this topic featured sample sizes that were overwhelmingly Caucasian and thus were unable to differentiate based on race. Among the two meta-reviews, most studies listed controlled for race and/or listed race as a covariate in their findings and thus did not find

significant differences in outcome on that basis. (Feldman & Matajsko 2005; Foster & Jenkins, 2017).

A study on the effects of the performing arts on both gender and race examines how curricular performing arts participation influences academic identity development for African American males using African American Male Academic Identity Development (AAMAID) theory at an urban high school (Walton, 2018). The study explained that “...effective performing arts education experiences use students’ culture to promote positive ethnic and racial identity, encourage high achievement, and help redirect the feelings of anxiety, anger and alienation students of color often experience in U.S. schools (Engdahl, 2012; Kazembe, 2014; Walton & Wiggan, 2014)” (Walton, 2018, p. 4 ). Such instruction was found to improve academic performance, create positive in-school experiences, and encouraged affirmative race identity development for the African American males who participated in the performing arts program (Walton, 2018). These findings corroborate burgeoning research demonstrating that school-based arts engagement may enhance academic achievement for African American males (Kazembe, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Walton, 2015, as cited in Walton, 2018). Even so, this study bemoaned the dearth of research on this topic, which this literature review, conducted 2 years after this study was published, can still confirm.

Educators need to employ culturally relevant curriculum and practices to reach African American males in their schools, who are too often subject to “...discriminatory disciplinary practices (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012), disproportionate special education placement patterns (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), race-based academic tracking policies (Kohli, 2014), lack of access to qualified teachers (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012), and

inequitable school resource allocation (Ostrander, 2015)” (as cited in Walton, 2018, p. 3). Each teacher must learn about the students they teach and their culture so that the curriculum can be tailored to meet their needs.

While participation benefits are more or less similar across ethnicity and gender, several studies have found that Latino males had the smallest rates of extracurricular participation overall (Lugaila, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Ream & Rumberger, 2008 cited in Im et al., 2016). A national data set found that among seventh through twelfth graders, 36.7% of Latinos had no participation in extracurricular activities compared to 25.6% of African Americans and 21.0% of Caucasians (Feldman & Matajsko, 2007, as cited in Im et al., 2016). Scholarly analysis suggests the lack of Latino involvement may be due to language barriers, parental ignorance regarding participation benefits, and cultural values of familial obligation that may result in the youth being expected to get a job, look after younger siblings, and other responsibilities as they approach adolescence (Peguero, 2010 as cited in Im et al., 2016). If Latino males have the lowest rates of extracurricular participation, and the performing arts are usually among the least popular choices for adolescent males, it can be reasonably assumed that the most underrepresented group in the performing arts is adolescent Latino males. Therefore, recruitment strategies should focus on this group.

### **Socio-Economic Status (SES)**

Like race, most studies included in the two meta-reviews controlled for SES in some way, listing covariates like free or reduced-price lunch, family education and/or income levels, parents' job(s) and/or career, mother's education, or socio-economic status. Of the studies that found SES to be a factor in Foster and Jenkins' (2017) meta-review, the following associations

were positive or neutral. Students in performing arts courses at a diverse, low-income middle school in Miami, Florida had better GPAs, reading and math ability, and lower suspension rates than nonparticipants (Winsler et al., 2016). A group of 90 males in Hong Kong ages 6 to 15 had higher verbal comprehension and retention than nonparticipants - family income and parental education levels were controlled (Ho et al., 2003). Two National Educational Longitudinal Studies (NELS) found a substantive correlation between SES and music participation, and between music participation and achievement academically and on standardized tests (Morrison et al., 1999).

Surprisingly, a more recent educational longitudinal study found music students did not have better outcomes than non-music students when analysis was adjusted for factors at the school level (Elpus, 2013). Two additional studies controlling for socioeconomic status and parental education and income respectively did not find significant differences between participant and nonparticipant groups (Rickard et al., 2012; Schellenberg, 2011). As mentioned previously in the discussion of the benefits of performing arts participation, these studies may be demonstrating the effect of selection bias - students who choose to participate in the performing arts of their own volition may already have certain advantages in place. This is why focusing recruitment efforts on students who would not necessarily choose the performing arts is crucial - these are the students who arguably need the benefits of performing arts participation the most.

More information about the impact of performing arts participation for low-income, at-risk youth can be found the Daykin et al (2008) study discussed previously, which found positive changes in reported behavior among at-risk young people (McArdle et al., 2002), and purported that low-income students tended to benefit the most from drama interventions as they

gave students access to important practical health information that they may not otherwise learn about in their schools and communities (Daykin et al., 2008).

As evidenced above, performing arts participation seems to have an even stronger impact on adolescents with lower SES. This makes sense, as the performing arts can be used as a tool and resource to teach students about issues they may not learn about in underfunded schools or at-risk communities. Furthermore, participating in the performing arts as a discipline in and of itself can help begin to bridge the gap in cultural capital that students from higher SES may be exposed to more often in their communities. Providing at-risk students with access to the key cultural resources the performing arts provide is indispensable. So to answer the question, “*Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?*”, preserving and/or creating performing arts opportunities in at-risk students and communities must be made a top priority.

### **Theories - Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender Identity**

The glaring question at this point is simply, *why?* Given the host of benefits associated with consistent, continuous participation in the performing arts for adolescent males from all kinds of backgrounds, why do they seem to have a negative opinion about and low-to-nonexistent rates of performing arts participation? Because for many young men, the cost of those benefits is their very masculinity.

Toxic or hegemonic masculinity is an amalgamation of theories of masculinity across eras, cultures, and individuals that are harmful to society. It is defined as, “the dominant notion of masculinity in a particular historical context” (Kupers, 2005, p. 715) and is the basis upon which being a *real man*, for many men and women, is currently defined (Kupers, 2005). The



context to which Kupers refers is modern European and American culture, where hegemonic masculinity is built on two pillars: domination of females and a social chain of command built on intermale dominance (Connell, 1985; Jennings & Murphy, 2000; as cited in Kupers, 2005). It is also shaped to a significant extent by the stigmatization of homosexuality (Frank, 1987, as cited in Kupers, 2005). This stereotypic ideal of masculinity shapes the social development and aspirations of adolescent males (Pollack, 1998, as cited in Kupers, 2005). Characteristics of modern Western hegemonic masculinity, "...include a high degree of ruthless competition, an inability to express emotions other than anger, an unwillingness to admit weakness or dependency, devaluation of women and all feminine attributes in men, homophobia, and so forth"(Kupers, 2005, p. 716).

Behaving in accordance to this theory, as most adolescent males are implicitly and/or explicitly encouraged, stands in direct opposition to the typical performing arts ethos in which males learn to express emotions and reveal vulnerability through the cultivation of artistry alongside and in cooperation with females and homosexual males. Though extraordinary physical prowess and mastery are core aspects of dance and the performing arts are extremely competitive as a career field, these are not truly compatible with hegemonic masculinity in which physical aggression, competition, and dominance between males often using brute force - all core ideals of toxic masculinity and arguably most athletics, where male participation rates are highest - are largely absent from the performing arts (Laegart et al., 2017).

The gendering of activities like the performing arts may have originated during the Victorian era, when separate spheres ideology branded cultural interests as intrinsic to the feminine sphere since they tend to be passive, cooperative, and intellectual. Assigning gender to

cultural interests often leads to gendered socialization practices regarding the arts, first in the family and then at school (Bihagen & Katz-Gerro 2000; Christin, 2012; Katz-Gerro & Jaeger 2015; Tepper, 2000 as cited in Laegart et al., 2017).

Using the history and framework of hegemonic masculinity, gender can be understood and experienced as a set of behaviors -as something one does rather than who someone is. To this end, gender identity theory is, “the extent to which a person perceives and identifies the self to be masculine or feminine in relation to what is considered masculine or feminine in a specific context” (Egan & Perry, 2001; Tobin et al., 2010; Vantieghem et al., 2014b; Wood & Eagly, 2009, as cited in Lagaert et al., 2017). Using the performing arts as said specific context, a study of 5,000 Flemish students aimed to “...uncover the identity-related and interactional mechanisms behind the gendering of taste during socialization” (Lagaert et al., 2017, p. 482). Two essential components within Gender Identity Theory measured student responses in this study - gender typicality and pressure for gender conformity. The former defines the extent to which one identifies as a typical male or female, while the latter refers to both internal pressures people place on themselves and external pressures felt from others to conform to gender stereotypes.

The study found that higher the gender typicality and/or pressure for gender conformity were associated with a slightly higher level of interest in the arts for women, but with a steep decline in interest in the arts for men (Lagaert et al., 2017). They concluded that gender identity, as measured by gender typicality and the pressure for gender conformity, has a significant impact on male formation of cultural taste(s) during adolescence while the impact on females was nearly negligible. The view of the female as inferior may explain why it is tolerable for (some) adolescent females to like or do things typically associated with adolescent males, who are seen

as superior to females, than vice versa (Cann, 2014, 2015; Kane, 2006, as cited in Laegart et al., 2017). After all, being a female *tomboy* is generally accepted, whereas no such equivalent term or way of being for males exists.

Further research confirmed this gender gap in cultural activity involvement across modern Western societies. As noted earlier, school subject preferences for males start low for the performing arts and decline with age (Colley & Comber, 2003). Canadian and British qualitative research connects gender identity to pop culture preferences in music, movies, and television (Cann, 2014, 2015; Cherland 1994, as cited in Laegart et al., 2017), and further American research indicates that gender conformity and identity ideals strongly influence stereotypically gendered subject choices and extracurricular engagement among students (Leaper et al. 2012; Leaper & Van, 2008, as cited in Laegart et al, 2017).

### **Strategies to Motivate Adolescent Males**

At this point, the problem of the lack of male participation in the performing arts is clear. Despite the abundance of benefits that performing arts participation hold for adolescent males regardless of race and/or SES, the majority of adolescent males refuse to participate because they have been socialized to believe through hegemonic masculinity that the performing arts are somehow inherently feminine and thus inappropriate for males. Furthermore, as Laegart et al. (2017) found, the more stereotypically masculine a male is and/or the more pressure he feels to conform to hegemonic gender norms, the less likely he is to show an interest in the performing arts.

To begin to solve this problem, it may be helpful to first look at males who do participate in the performing arts against these odds. A handful of studies have focused on these *boys who*

*dare*, meaning those who consciously dare to resist the force of hegemonic masculinity to follow their passions in the performing arts (Connell, 2005, 2008; Hutchings et al., 2007; Gard, 2008, as cited in Ashley, 2009). Who are these boys? Ashley found they ranged from upper middle class Caucasians inspired by exposure to cultural capital to blue collar African Americans inspired by their involvement with evangelical religion. Much like the benefits of performing arts participation don't discriminate based on intersectionalities, the boy who dares to resist can be anyone. As one such daring boy put it, "If you're strong enough to dance...you're strong enough to put up with the shit" (Ashley, 2009, p. 10).

In addition to the individual level, *boys who dare* can be part of a small or large group or even an entire school that is dedicated to resisting hegemonic norms. This is why in all-boys schools and coeducational schools of all kinds (public, private, magnet, etc) that focus on the performing arts in their daily instruction tend to have more males participate and that participation is generally considered more socially acceptable than at a school that does not. Regarding school chorus, boys described a domino effect - as soon as a few boys joined, their male friends would join, and so on until enough boys were involved to destigmatize involvement.

In a review of three studies examining *boys who dare*, the following themes emerged when boys were asked why they dared to sing and/or dance: to be with male friends who also did, because older male role models at the school participated, and passion: from the self, friends and/or the teacher. Regarding the teacher, the qualities most sought were "...competence in art form, pedagogical expertise, and confidence that comes from a belief that boys can, should and will engage" in the performing arts (Ashley, 2009, p. 12). The gender of the performing arts

teacher did not have a significant impact on his/her effectiveness, even in all-boys schools (Ashley, 2009).

Along the same lines as those who suggest male teachers are desirable or even necessary to increase male involvement are those who advocate gender separation as a strategy. Male-only tactics have proven to produce mixed results. At one all-boys school, the stigma surrounding choir participation was greatly reduced but misogynistic attitudes rose among the students. The school adopted a somewhat problematic strategy called *Not for Girls*, and Y7 students commented that they enjoyed chorus because it was a group of boys together and because girls were absent. Ashley also noted incidents such as a Year 11 student making a risqué flirtatious comment to his female choir teacher during class.

However, a male choir teacher found that offering a separate male chorus for male treble voices and picking music for the mixed choir (meaning mixed male and female voices) in which treble voices were included allowed young adolescent male students whose voices had not, or were in the process of, changing needed outlets for singing that fit their voices. He found this increased the numbers of boys in both of his choirs and decreased the feelings of embarrassment or isolation that asking a boy to sing a girl's part caused (Demorest, 2000). This strategy seems reasonable, as the time just before and during the male voice change is a highly sensitive time in which the awkwardness of the voice change process could cause young adolescents to drop out, and separating boys for a short time during this process seems to help retain them for a longer duration.

For boys who do not (or will not) dare, programs with compulsory attendance (meaning no students self-selected), also found that instructor effectiveness was a key component for

success. In a review of studies examining drama interventions with at-risk students, the following qualities in an instructor were found to be valuable: motivated, able to lead a group, skilled in both creative activities for individuals and groups, and familiar with school settings, as most of the instructors in this study were from separate performing arts organizations that came to schools to deliver programming (Daykin et al., 2008). In addition to an effective instructor, the level of buy-in and support from stakeholders like classroom teachers and school staff affect the impact of a drama intervention (Walsh-Bowers and Basso, 1999, as cited in Daykin et al., 2008).

Even in the case of less successful attempts at drama interventions, the research found that students understood and could see the value in it. In one such instance, 90% of students had attitudes ranging from neutral to negative regarding their involuntary participation in a drama intervention, but 100% of the students identified ways in which the intervention facilitated cooperation among the groups involved (Daykin et al., 2008). Though leading large groups of unenthused adolescents can be difficult, the goals of performing arts instruction can still be met. As noted earlier, and it bears repeating, “By actively involving young people, addressing their concerns and using activities that engage them in productive group work processes, drama interventions can be usefully applied whatever the resources available” (Daykin et al., 2008, p. 258).

Whether performing arts educators find themselves in an environment where boys do or do not dare, consciously creating a gender-equitable school and/or community environment is essential for adolescent males and females alike. Teachers should take care to avoid school policies, curriculum, and interactions with students that reinforce hegemonic masculinity. (Laegart et al., 2017). This can be difficult, as these thought patterns are so ingrained. For

instance, choosing material that is stereotypically masculine may seem like a good idea but reinforcing hegemonic masculinity is often problematic, largely unsuccessful at recruiting more males, and may isolate the *boys who dare* that already participate (Demorest, 2000).

To ensure that gender identities and expressions of all kinds are welcome, it is crucial for teachers to be well-versed in their schools' anti-bullying policy and to ensure that gender-based bullying is included in said policy. Teachers also need to be vigilant when implementing these policies. Schools should provide guidelines on how to identify and rectify gender-based bullying (Laegart et al., 2017). If a school does not provide this, it is up to the performing arts teacher to raise the issue and take the steps needed to create a more gender-equitable school community.

### **Summary**

This chapter established the underrepresentation of adolescent males in the performing arts through statistical analysis of participation rates, history, patterns, and trends. The benefits of performing arts participation across a scope of independent variables were recounted and synthesized. The juxtaposition between the dearth of male performing artists and the benefits of performing arts participation was explored and explained through the framework of hegemonic masculinity and gender identity theories, which discourage males from the performing arts by labeling the activity as a) inherently gendered and b) feminine. The chapter concluded with strategies to rectify this discrepancy from the literature and a call to action from the author.

Chapter three describes how and why the TED talk format is ideal for organizing and disseminating strategies from the literature in chapter two and the author's personal experience

to recruit and retain adolescent males in performing arts programs by reframing the culture and conversation surrounding the performing arts.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Introduction

*Can a TED Talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* The wealth of literature explored in the previous chapter, coupled with years of experience as both a former adolescent performing artist and current middle school theatre arts teacher, director, music director, and choreographer, have provided more than enough information and authority on this topic to develop a TED talk that will be useful and inspiring to performing arts educators. This chapter explains why the TED talk format is the appropriate vehicle to equip educators in theater, dance, and instrumental/vocal music with effective strategies and resources to make their unique performing arts programs more inclusive for males.

### Overview

To review, there is a consistent and historical dearth of male participation in the performing arts dating back to at least the 1930s, when reputable research studies on the subject first appeared in the literature. More recent research has also indicated that the more stereotypically masculine a male is, the less likely he is to participate in the performing arts. This demonstrates that the lack of males in the performing arts is both a quantitative and qualitative issue: there are low numbers of males participating generally, and there are even lower numbers of more masculine males. Why do males consider the performing arts feminine? And what can we do to change that perception so that any and all types of males discover that the performing arts is a space where they belong?

Utilizing Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, strategies for teachers that demonstrate how to recruit adolescent males into performing arts programs and retain them in curricular and extracurricular offerings by reframing the conversation and culture surrounding the performing arts have been outlined. By using National Core Arts Standards (2020) as a basis for instruction, students from all backgrounds learn that the performing arts have practical benefits that can be applied to any college/career path they may choose to pursue, which aids in recruitment. Informing teachers of the scope of both financial and creative resources available would support their efforts to create and sustain thriving performing arts programs with the ability to retain students over their years in school. Reframing the conversation about performing arts by linking historical narratives of male performing artists to current gender and identity theories can push students beyond stereotypical cultural thought patterns to recognize the performing arts as a gender neutral and inclusive discipline with academic and artistic benefits for all.

Organizing the recruit, retain, reframe method into a TED talk for teachers in the performing arts will raise awareness of the issue of male underrepresentation, share strategies to increase participation in and the inclusivity of the performing arts for adolescent males, and enumerate resources for performing arts educators in an informative and engaging format that can be enjoyed as an online resource to be accessed and reviewed by anyone at any time.

### **Understanding by Design (Ubd) Framework**

The theory behind and templates used to organize the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) proved ideal for the TED talk format. The backward design method starts with the desired result at the end of a unit and instructional units to reach

that result are planned backward from that point- though the TED talk is not a curricular unit per se, this approach was useful nonetheless to organize the research into a TED talk. The desired result is to show teachers how to increase adolescent male participation, both initially in the recruitment phase and longitudinally in an ongoing retainment effort. To achieve these results, teachers must reframe the current conversation regarding the performing arts in their schools and communities using the methods, standards, and theories further elucidated in this chapter.

The recruit, retain, reframe plan was devised as a response to Wiggins and McTighe's 3 stages of Understanding by Design: desired results - recruit; evidence - retain; and learning plan - reframe (2011). Each stage is expanded upon to describe the strategies teachers should use to reach the goal of increased adolescent male participation. The UbD stages provided a handy framework to visualize the result, compile the research, and organize these into the final TED talk product.

### **Recruit - National Core Arts Standards**

The National Core Arts Standards website states that, "Twenty seven states and the Department of Defense have adopted revised arts standards in one or more arts disciplines...Currently, ten states are in the process of revising their state arts standards" (SEADAE, 2014, p. 1). As the majority of states are using these standards either explicitly or as a basis for revision of state standards, it is imperative for teachers to highlight to students how these standards develop not just artistic skills but practical skills that can be easily transferred to any college or career discipline. The four categories for arts standards are as follows: creating, performing/presenting/producing, responding, and connecting. Specific standards are contained within these categories (SEADAE, 2014, p. 1).

While the connection of these categories to the performing arts is inherent, students should be able to connect these categories to their own areas of interest outside of performing arts content, either independently or through the guidance of a teacher, small group work, etc. Many schools require some form of visual posting of standards in the classroom for teachers to review and students to refer to throughout the lesson plan. During this in-class review, teachers should encourage students to connect these standards to content areas beyond the performing arts. For example, Anchor Standard #1 under “Creating” asks students to “Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work” (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014, p. 1). Teachers could ask, “What other content/career areas might ask you to generate and conceptualize ideas and work?” Students will soon see how the arts are connected to many facets of life (SEADAE, 2014, p. 1). Teachers can recruit students at this point as they now realize that the performing arts will help them develop skills that go far beyond the classroom and the stage.

### **Retain - Resources for Teachers**

Being an educator in the performing arts presents unique challenges. Unlike core subjects, which are generally agreed upon by parents and teachers as, well, *core* to education, the opinions about and level of priority placed on the performing arts can and do vary widely from school to school and are more heavily influenced by the community’s cultural and socio-economic elements than perhaps any other content area. After all, no one thinks math is just for rural students or that urban students do not need literacy. But the performing arts can suffer from such lack of support, financially and otherwise.

The positive side to this quandary is that a plethora of resources beyond school district funding exist, ranging from broad federal agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts to community-specific organizations like Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, which can be tapped in lieu of or in addition to funding from the school itself. While presenting a truly exhaustive list of resources would be logistically impossible, imparting a broad list of general resources and instructing teachers where and how to look for community, city, and/or state-specific resources will help give them the continual support they need to in turn retain and support their students in a comprehensive and sustainable performing arts program.

### **Reframe - A (Very Brief) History of Male Performing Artists**

While satisfactorily summarizing the male contribution to the performing arts for students would be too much for any teacher to tackle, they can and should find key facts of famous men from one's area if possible and/or highlight male performing artists that relate to said teacher's curriculum, show season, etc. For example, a performing arts teacher in Minnesota could make a poster with photos asking, What do Chris Pratt, Josh Hartnett, Garrett Hedlund, and Vince Vaughn have in common? They are all actors from Minnesota! This is just one way to capture attention and open male students' eyes to the possibility of participation.

In addition to current references, painting a picture of the history of the male role in performing arts (no pun intended) contextualizes males in the performing arts and proves that the art form isn't inherently gendered. After all, in Shakespeare's time, only men were allowed to perform! A bit of relevant history in a performing arts curriculum can relate the performing arts to males in a new way, which can in turn inspire them to participate. Teachers should encourage

males by telling them that they can change history simply by being part of something other males may be too afraid to try!

Reframing the perception of the performing arts in any given school and/or community is personal and deeply dependent on the culture therein. Teachers must educate themselves regarding their male students' attitudes toward the performing arts and then use that information to reframe the conversation in a way that is meaningful to their particular students.

### **Current Theories of Gender and Identity and Their Relationship to the Performing Arts**

When students realize that their aversion to the performing arts may be cultural and not innate, it can broaden their perspective and motivate them to participate. If they know that males have been an integral (and at many times singular) force in the performing arts throughout history, they may wonder when and why that changed. This is where gender identity theory presents an illuminating framework. "Gender identity is the extent to which a person perceives and identifies the self to be masculine or feminine in relation to what is considered masculine or feminine in a specific context (Egan & Perry 2001; Tobin et al., 2010; Vantieghem et al., 2014)" (Laegart et al., 2017, p. 484). Teachers should ask male students why the performing arts tend to be considered feminine in our present context, and what would need to happen to change that. This can provide the catalyst needed to change the performing arts program to become a more inclusive space that meets the needs of the specific students within it.

### **Project Description: The Ted Talk**

The TED talk format is ideal for informing and instructing an audience of middle and high school performing arts teachers, directors, music directors, choreographers, and anyone else involved with engaging adolescents in the performing arts. While it is primarily focused on

teachers with curricular and/or extracurricular performing arts programs (or teachers interested in developing these), these lessons can easily be applied to theater companies, community organizations, and the like.

TED talks are a maximum of 18 minutes in length and usually feature one speaker delivering their original talk onstage in front of a live audience at a TED conference or simply delivering their talk to the camera. In both cases, talks are taped and can be shared on social media, the TED talk website, etc. under the creative commons license. Technology (audio/video, Powerpoint presentations) may be used to enhance the presentation.

A branch of the TED talks, TED-Ed-Educator talks, are talks by teachers for teachers. As the TED talk website explains, “TED-Ed has grown from an idea worth spreading into an award-winning education platform that serves millions of teachers and students around the world every week” (TED Conferences, n.d., p. 1). To see examples of TED-Ed-Educator talks, visit the TED talk website at [www.TED.com](http://www.TED.com) or search for the TED-Ed-Educator channel on YouTube.

### **Timeline**

To present a TED-Ed-Educator talk, a teacher must first participate in a TED Master Class, which is, “... an app-based course that will teach you how to identify, develop and share your best ideas with the world. The course is delivered online” (2020 Ted Conferences LLC, p. 1). The timeline is as follows:

Spring 2020: Complete Research Designs course. Register for TED master class.

Summer 2020: Take the TED master class, which consists of 11 self-paced one-hour sessions - the plan is to take 1 course per week. The TED master class

will be paced with the Project course so that the TED talk will be filmed in time to submit for the final project grade.

Fall 2020: Submit completed TED talk to the curators.

If it is accepted, the talk could either be featured on the website or lead to an invitation to speak at a conference. If it is not accepted, the recorded talk will be distributed to appropriate groups for educators and opportunities to present the talk live at education conferences, performing arts conferences, etc. will be actively sought.

### **Assessment**

How, then, does assessment of the research question - *Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* - happen? In the simplest sense, yes - the research question was answered. A TED talk was developed. There was enough information from experience and the literature to warrant one, the TED master class gave tips and tricks to make the talk organized, informative, and entertaining, and it was able to be completed and submitted on time using valuable feedback from the Hamline University support committee and Institutional Review Board throughout the development process. But the larger question is how to assess what happens *after* the TED talk is given.

As a student in the TED master class, there was no mention of this - the end goal was creating and delivering the talk. An email asking for information about assessments was responded to by recommending the TED website, which explains the audience survey process thusly:



The survey asks your guests one question: “How likely are you to recommend this TEDx event to a friend or colleague?”...Attendees select a number between 0 and 10 and are given additional space to explain why they chose the score they did - they might comment on the curation, the food, or how the event was managed” (p. 1).

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an assessment procedure for talks in place from the TED organization. Research into the *effectiveness* of a TED talk was also surprisingly absent from the literature. Of course many blogs, popular articles, etc are written about various aspects of TED talks, but locating academic resources specifically assessing the effectiveness of TED talks on audience members (both in person and from internet viewing) proved fruitless.

A precious few scholarly articles examined the educational benefits and uses for TED talks. A dataset of TED talks was compiled in part for “...schoolteachers to explore controversial contemporary topics with their students in order to stimulate awareness and critical thinking” (Taibi et al., 2015, p. 1092). Another found, “TED talks succeed in disseminating ideas and sparking public interest” (Denskus & Esser, 2015, p.166). Only one article mentioned assessment: “While learning is not formally assessed, TED Talks do seem to accomplish their goals of spreading ideas while sparking curiosity within the learner” (Nicolle et al., 2014, p. 777). This is true at least on a personal level, as Brene Brown’s TED-Ed Educator Talk entitled *The Power of Vulnerability* inspired the use of a TED talk for this project (TED, 2011).

This has led to the conclusion that the TED talk presenter’s duty is to blend research and personal experience into a structured, educational, and inspiring talk. It is then the audience’s job - in this case, performing arts educators and leaders working with adolescents - to shape the

strategies to fit the needs of their individual classrooms and communities and assess the effectiveness of the recruit, retain, reframe method as it applies to their situation.

### **Summary**

The recruit, retain, reframe method is a continual and cyclical process grounded in theories of gender identity and hegemonic/toxic masculinity and their relationship to performing arts participation. Once male students reframe their perception that the need to express oneself is not gender-dependent and realize that participation in the performing arts can help them reach their college and career goals, they are more likely to be motivated to participate throughout their school career. This results in increased numbers of males participating in the performing arts program for the first time (recruit) and males continuing to participate in performing arts programming across semesters, years, etc (retain). This method has been developed into a Ted talk for teachers that serves as an online resource.

*Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* Using the recruit, retain, and reframe method inspired by Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) Understanding by Design framework and informed by successful strategies outlined in the literature and discovered through personal and professional experience, I believe the answer to this question is a resounding *yes*.

### **Introduction to Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 critically reflects on the journey of both the capstone paper and project and evaluates the efficacy of the TED Talk. Pertinent data from the literature is reviewed and implications for policy and practice in the performing arts are discussed. Limitations of the

current project are listed, as well as next steps for future research to continue the conversation about adolescent male underrepresentation in the performing arts.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Introduction

*Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* This is an ambitious research question with a complex answer. First, the underrepresentation of adolescent males in the performing arts, which I have seen firsthand throughout my career as both an artist and educator in various capacities over the past 20 years, was confirmed tenfold by quantitative data in the literature. This proved that underrepresentation was and is a constant, historical problem far beyond the anecdotal evidence my colleagues and I have collected. Further examining the history and particulars surrounding the lack of male performing artists via qualitative research grounded in theories of hegemonic/toxic masculinity, gender typicality, and gender conformity gave me both a greater understanding of the problem and a more urgent desire to solve it. Finally, amalgamating strategies from both the literature and my professional experience, organizing them into the *recruit, retain, reframe* framework based on Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, and presenting these strategies in a TED talk format serve as not the end, but the beginning, of a much larger conversation.

### Overview

First, I share the many lessons this project has taught me from my multiple perspectives as a researcher/grad-school student, middle-school theater arts teacher and director, and lifelong performing artist. Next, I revisit the most cogent discoveries from the literature review that both corroborate and expand upon the experiences my lifetime in the theater have claimed. I explore novel understandings about and connections with the literature and conclude with a call to

action. Then, potential implications my project raised for policy and practice for performing arts education are presented. Next, the limitations that the TED talk necessarily raised are discussed with recommendations for future research for myself and fellow performing arts educators to conduct in our own classrooms and communities. Finally, the uses for my TED talk are outlined and the benefits I hope my talk will bring to the educational performing arts community are enumerated.

### **Lessons Learned**

Throughout the processes of research and writing this paper while completing the TED master class and creating a TED talk, I constantly had to navigate and reconcile the artistic and the educational, the personal and the professional, the informative and the entertaining. I was both a student and teacher, learning how to conduct scholarly research and compile it into a capstone paper and project that would help other teachers like me reach our underrepresented male students. Like most creative endeavors, I gleefully leapt in without looking beforehand. I am glad I did, because if I had known how complex both this topic and organizing my findings and experiences surrounding it, first into a research paper and then into a TED talk would prove to be, I probably never would have begun.

As I swam deeper and wider into the waters of this research and all the information I could not possibly cover in one TED talk, a quote from the TED master class curriculum became my mantra: “I will only cover as much ground as I can dive into in sufficient depth to be compelling”. This mantra grounded me as a graduate student in the creation of this capstone, as a teacher to use with my students, and as an artist as I continue to learn to express my ideas with a balance of clarity and passion.

I found it useful to view this capstone as a conversation starter about an issue familiar to any performing arts educator, but not one that has many known solutions. I am here to raise questions as well as answer them, to acknowledge problems as well as propose solutions. I am here to re-envision a more inclusive world and provide steps to make that vision a reality. As the TED master class taught me, the most important element of a talk is not to be *right*, but to have an idea worth spreading. Approaching my capstone from this perspective kept my creativity alive and gave me hope for this idea and the impact it will ideally have on the future.

### **Literature Review**

As a performer, educator, director, and leader who has been involved in the performing arts since toddlerhood, I certainly have and continue to enjoy the benefits the performing arts disciplines provide. They are foundational not only to my educational and artistic practice but to who I am as a human being. Discovering the plethora of benefits associated with the performing arts in the literature, not only for a stereotypical upper-middle-class Caucasian female with plenty of privilege like myself, but for people from all backgrounds, validated my professional practice and career alongside my personal beliefs (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Feldman & Matajko, 2005; Foster & Jenkins, 2017). Finding data to reinforce personal anecdotal evidence that the performing arts tend to provide *more* benefits to the less privileged invigorated me (Daykin et al., 2008; Im et al., 2016, Walton, 2018). My project is a call to action. In schools and communities where funding is scarce, creating and preserving performing arts programming must be prioritized at all costs.

I wish I could say the several literature sources I found confirming adolescent male underrepresentation in the performing arts (Anderson et al., 2017; Barber et al., 2001; Colley &

Comber, 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999) surprised me, especially in light of the benefits participation provide, but it did not. Too many male friends of mine during adolescence were bullied and ostracized for daring to be part of creating something beautiful in the studio and on the stage. As an adult working with adolescents, I saw these same patterns stubbornly repeated. I experienced it, but I never *understood* it. What is it about a male body moving rhythmically in space or filling the room with song that automatically equals homosexual? And even if it could or did, who cares?

Gender identity theories and hegemonic masculinity, as discussed in the works of Connell (1992) and Kupers and Rocheln (2005) and later researched in Laegart et al.'s (2017) study, laid the framework and foundation I needed for my project to explain what had been part of my world since early adolescence. While we are currently experiencing a critical cultural moment that calls these harmful ideologies into question, I still see firsthand the force of hegemonic masculinity, especially in adolescents. It is one thing for my adult male colleagues to start reevaluating their beliefs - it is quite another for my male middle schoolers to willingly risk rejection from friends to follow their passion. For most young men, the risk is too great to take.

Understanding my lifelong experiences and the results of research through the theoretical lenses of gender identity theories and hegemonic masculinity pushes the lack of adolescent males in the performing arts from a participation problem to a cultural crisis. Much in the same way as women have been historically excluded from STEM fields, I have seen and continue to witness young men being mocked, degraded, and humiliated for daring to express emotions and vulnerability through their musical and theatrical talents. It is no wonder men are on the whole

more violent and less empathetic than women. They are sick from our culture's hegemonic masculinity disease.

The only way I have found to combat this societal ill is to do everything in my power to intentionally, personally, and persistently recruit adolescent males into my performing arts programs - especially those who are the most resistant. It only takes one or two young men to try it. Then they convince one or two of their friends to join, and the culture of the performing arts begins to change. As my project explains, creating a cadre of *boys who dare* can indeed cause a cultural shift in schools and communities (Ashley, 2009; Demorest, 2000).

### **Implications**

#### **Policy**

To review, the literature recounts numerous benefits of performing arts participation, particularly for at-risk communities (Bradley et al, 2004; Douglas et al, 2000; Mattingly, 2001 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008). Individually, more positive behavior, a higher sense of wellbeing, increased self-confidence and self-expression, and better coping strategies were reported by students, teachers, and parents (McArdle et al., 2002, Positive Futures, 2005, Walsh-Bowers & Basso, 1999, as cited in Daykin et al., 2008). Collectively, social isolation was addressed through successful community unification (Jackson, 2003; Wilkin, Kinder, White, & Doherty, 2003 as cited in Daykin et al., 2008), students learned appropriate boundaries regarding physical contact (Orme & Salmon, 2002, as cited in Daykin et al., 2008) and students reported feelings of satisfaction, excitement, and fun (Colley & Comber, 2003; Harland et al., 2000; Miller & Budd, 1999, as cited in Daykin et al., 2008).



Notably, these results were achieved with modest financial resources. “The authors concluded that by actively involving young people, addressing their concerns and using activities that engage them in productive group work processes, drama can be usefully applied *whatever the resources available* [emphasis added]” (Daykin et al., 2008, p. 260). This is exactly the evidence my project needed to advocate for the efficacy of performing arts education in at-risk communities, which paradoxically tend to have little to no performing arts programming during or after school despite standing to benefit from it the most.

Advocacy for African American males, many of whom are members of aforementioned at-risk communities, through performing arts education is also critical. These young men often unjustly bear the brunt of “...discriminatory disciplinary practices (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012), disproportionate special education placement patterns (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), race-based academic tracking policies (Kohli, 2014), lack of access to qualified teachers (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012), and inequitable school resource allocation (Ostrander, 2015)” (as cited in Walton, 2018, p. 3).

Curricular performing arts participation aided in academic identity development for African American males through the African American Male Academic Identity Development (AAMAID) theory (Walton, 2018). Research showed that “...effective performing arts education experiences use students’ culture to promote positive ethnic and racial identity, encourage high achievement, and help redirect the feelings of anxiety, anger and alienation students of color often experience in U.S. schools” (Engdahl, 2012; Kazembe, 2014; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014 as cited in Walton, 2018, p. 4 ). Again, my project serves as a call to action, especially for our most underserved students.

Policy implications for a gender-equitable school community are also essential regardless of community demographics. To review, teachers should be well-versed in their school's gender-based bullying policies and take personal responsibility to enforce it. If no such policy exists, the teacher needs to raise this concern (Laegart et al., 2017). Beyond policy, performing arts teachers must consciously and continuously create a gender-equitable environment in their classroom. This is challenging, as our society currently operates under the auspices of hegemonic masculinity and acting in opposition to these forces is difficult. For example, many teachers feel compelled to choose stereotypically masculine material to encourage greater male engagement. A better strategy would be to choose material that is compelling regardless of gender.

### **Practice**

In addition to policy implications raised, my project recommends certain best practices for performing arts educators based on the literature and my personal and professional experience. First, it is important to reiterate that the gender of the performing arts teacher is largely inconsequential in regard to their effectiveness. As previously noted, “Whenever researchers have looked at whether or not any significant improvement in boys’ attitudes and achievements can be reliably attributed to male teachers, the conclusion has invariably been that they cannot (Hopf & Hatzichirstou, 1999; Burn, 2002; Ashley & Lee, 2003; Sokal et al., 2005; Drudy et al., 2005; Carrington et al., 2005; Martin & Marsh., 2005; Thornton & Bricheno, 2006; Carrington et al., 2008; Holmlund & Sund, 2008, Skelton et al., 2009)” (Ashley, 2009, p.3). What makes a performing arts teacher effective? To review, students listed “...competence in art form, pedagogical expertise, and confidence that comes from a belief that boys can, should and

will engage” in the performing arts (Ashley, 2009, p. 12) as desirable qualities. This is why teachers should use the National Core Arts Standards as a curricular guide to both cultivate artistry and connect the arts to other disciplines so students understand and experience the benefits of the arts, both inherent in the practice and as they relate to their other interests.

When it comes to effective practice for recruitment, initial participation levels were found to more accurately predict outcomes in later years than tracking participatory rates longitudinally (Denault & Poulin, 2009), so teachers should focus recruitment efforts on their youngest students. If possible, they should collaborate with teachers from elementary or middle schools to encourage early participation before students reach a middle or high school program - that way, when they enter middle or high school, participation is a matter of continuation. Even when early participation is not possible, both delayed and sustained participation still tend to result with higher GPAs, academic achievement, leadership development, and positive teacher engagement than non-participation (Larson et al., 2006, as cited in Denault & Poulin, 2009). My project shows that while initial recruitment should be made a priority, recruitment at any age or stage still stands to benefit students.

### **Limitations**

As the assessment of my project in chapter three describes, the gap between even a wildly popular TED talk and its concrete measured effectiveness as an agent of change has not, in the course of my research, been bridged in the literature. However, it does not take a spate of peer-reviewed journal articles to concede that a talk like Brene Brown’s “The Power of Vulnerability”, which A) has been viewed over 13 million times and has over 4,000 comments on YouTube (TED, 2011) and B) served as my inspiration to choose a TED talk as my product

has had significant social and cultural impact. While I certainly do not mean to imply that my talk will reach similar viewership, there is literature to suggest that TED talks have and are continuing to emerge as a valuable resource for educators and students alike (Denskus & Esser, 2015; Nicolle et al., 2014; Taibi et al., 2015).

Much like the artistic process itself, I dove into my project from a place of passion without focusing on the effect my art might have on my audience, as being results-oriented tends to quash the creative impulse. Clearly, reaching the goal of increased adolescent male participation through the creation of more gender equitable performing arts programs as a result of one TED talk is rather ambitious, but then again, so is being an artist and an educator.

### **Future Research**

As the aforementioned sections about limitations indicate, the TED organization should consider developing research methods to determine the effectiveness of their talks on the outcomes identified in the TED talk - for my talk, that would be data from teachers regarding initial and longitudinal rates of adolescent male participation, as well as qualitative research about male attitudes toward the performing arts, pre and post implementation of the strategies outlined in the talk. These are discussed as part of my talk and I look forward to continuing to collect this data in my own classroom and using the results as a basis for future strategizing and ongoing research.

Future research is also needed for Latino males. At the moment, the research indicates that Latino males show the lowest extracurricular participation rates overall (Feldman & Matajsko, 2007; Lugaila, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Ream & Rumberger, 2008, as cited in Im, M. et al., 2016) and postulates on possible explanations,

including language barriers, parental ignorance regarding the benefits of participation, and cultural values of family support that often result in expectations for young men to work in after-school jobs, provide care for younger siblings, and other duties (Peguero, 2010 as cited in Im et al., 2016). Recruitment efforts need to focus on this group and subsequent results need to be added to the literature. While limited research of this ilk for African American males exists, Walton (2018) argues that more research is needed and I agree.

### **Project Uses and Benefits**

As previously mentioned, the beauty of the TED talk is that it can be presented in person at workshops, meetings, conferences, etc and also be a handy online resource for educators to access whenever and as often as needed. Currently, there are no TED talks regarding adolescent male underrepresentation in the performing arts, much less any that outline strategies to change this phenomenon. I hope to start this conversation with my TED talk and welcome other performing arts educators, leaders, policy makers, etc to add their own research and thoughts. I believe this project benefits the performing arts community by opening up the topic, as it is the first TED talk of its kind. As mentioned in the introduction, I hope my TED talk will serve as the beginning, not the end, of this conversation.

### **Conclusion**

So to answer my research question - *Can a TED talk be developed on the strategies that can motivate adolescent males to participate in the performing arts?* - yes. I developed the first TED talk on this topic and it is my impassioned hope that the strategies discussed in the TED talk can and will create a more gender equitable performing arts community. How? Follow

performing artist Javier Galito-Cava's advice: "If you feel as though you don't fit in this world...create a new one" (Goodreads, 2020, p.1).

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