

# **The Beat of *Our* Drums: The Role of Community in Shaping Black Musical Success**

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## ABSTRACT

*Purpose* - This thesis focuses on the experiences of Black music artists in the creative and cultural industries (CCIs) and their perception of community. As Black people are still faced with discrimination in their daily lives as well as in their careers, this research focuses on if, and how, community impacts the development of said careers. Although the CCIs are often viewed as a fair and equal field, the reality is far less glamorous. So, how do Black music artists navigate an industry that often marginalises them, and what role does community play in supporting their career development? This thesis aims to study the relation between Blackness, community and the music industry. It also considers the impact of intersecting factors such as gender and class, examining how their interplay may shape an individual's understanding and experience of community. The research question is the following: *How do Black music artists view the importance of community in the development of their career?*

*Methodology & Data* - This thesis employs a qualitative methodology and a thematic analysis approach to explore the concept of community among Black music artists. The study is based on ten semi-structured interviews with artists working across a variety of musical genres and creative practices. Participants include singer-songwriters, DJs, rappers, producers, musical theatre performers, voice actors, and a studio owner, each offering unique insights into their experiences, influences, and understandings of community within their respective artistic and professional environments.

*Main Findings & Conclusions* - This thesis demonstrates that community plays a significant and multifaceted role in the lives of Black music artists. Participation in a community not only fosters creative expression but also cultivates vital support systems and professional networks. These networks serve various functions, enhancing mental well-being while also generating career advancing opportunities and increasing visibility of Black artists in the music industry. The findings further suggest that for individuals from marginalised backgrounds, community often acts as an essential coping mechanism and a source of resilience. The results also suggest that Black women's perception of community is shaped by the intersecting challenges of racism and sexism.

KEYWORDS: *Black music artists, community, CCIs, support systems, career development*

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Image 1. Avalon, M. (2023). *Hussein Suleiman* [Photograph]. *Seat at the Table*. <https://sattbook.com/products/book>

## **Preface**

After reading Racky Westrick and Martika Avalon's book "Seat at the Table" on the stories of 50 Black Dutch creatives, I began to wonder about the role community plays in the careers of Black music artists. While reading the book it became clearer that through all these hardships and setbacks, the one thing that all of these creatives had in common was *people*. Whether it was conscious or not, they all seemed to benefit from the help of people and their experiences were somehow all echoing back at one another. At the end of the book, each individual story became a bigger one: a story of collectivity and community in an industry where finding success as a Black person does not always come easy. Through the stories and experiences that were told in the book, it became evident that the influence was reciprocal: the artists benefiting from the community, but also giving back to it.

## 1. Introduction

*I'm a reflection of the community.* Tupac Shakur

*I think community is important for humans. And when I think about the Black community and I think about art, for us it's such a specific, perspective, and not that all Black folks are monolithic, but there's some sorts of ways of life when we're talking about Black history and we're talking about Black future that we can all talk about freely and feel like we can be honest and we can support each other and we can feel seen and feel heard.* Janelle Monáe

Many Black artists have extensively taken part in community engagement and given back to community. Artists such as Kendrick Lamar have chosen to use their musical and financial success to the benefit of community (Global Citizen, 2016, para. 2). The 37-year-old rapper from Compton has given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Compton Unified School District's different after-school programs to help "keep Compton students off the streets and in the classroom" (Global Citizen, 2016, para. 5). As the artist takes his influence as role-model very seriously, he also donated 50,000 dollars to his old high school's music program: "I always thought how great the opportunity would be to give back to my community off of what I do in music... [to] have these young kids look at me as some type of inspiration is an honour" he said at the Generational Icon award ceremony (Global citizen, 2016, para. 7). In 2024, Lamar also donated 200,000 dollars to Los Angeles charities and community initiatives in the hopes of supporting several local initiatives focused on youth empowerment, education and community development. (Philanthropy News Digest, 2024, para. 2).

By physically giving back, through grants and donations, or by focusing on developing mentorship programs, Kendrick Lamar represents a generation of Black artists who are trying their best to give back to help their community and make a positive impact on other aspiring artists' lives. Whether it is because they want to replicate the help they once received, or because they lacked such help in the development of their own career, there seems to be a real need for connection and community building among Black music artists in the creative and cultural industries (CCIs). Others like Janelle Monáe speak about the importance of sharing one's experiences, good and bad, to better sustain Black artists' careers, but also to help others achieve what they have: success. As success does not come easily in the CCIs, especially for Black artists who are faced with issues that transform their journey into an "odyssey" full of obstacles (Black Lives in Music [BLiM], 2021, p. 4), community seems to hold a special place in artists' creativity, as well as in their careers.

Conversely, many Black music artists benefit from community in many ways. In aspects such as social life, creative process, networking or opportunity building, being part of a group of people can allow artists to grow and make meaningful connections (Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitch & Ranczakowska, 2025, p. 11). Janelle Monáe, singer, songwriter, rapper and actress, talks about the important lessons that can be gained from mentorship and channels of support within the Black

community. Especially for aspiring artists, there is a lot to learn from more established artists. There is much research on how mentorship benefits developing artists in building their craft (Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 5) and an influential network (Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 7). Whether it is from a career development or a creative point of view, there is much to be gained from others who are more familiar with the industry's inner workings (Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 7). While creating a sense of belonging and empowerment between individuals, community can ultimately also play a role in advancing social issues and combating unequal treatment in the field, as it creates a unification of voices and a stronger foundation for change (Maton, 2008, p. 5). Yet, despite its visibility in the media and importance for major artists, the link between Black artistry and communities has yet to receive ample academic attention. Therefore, this thesis asks: *How do Black music artists view the importance of community in the development of their career?*

### *Black music artists and the CCIs*

If we are to talk about the community, we first have to talk about the people that are a part of it, in this case, music artists. There are many ways to define artists, and all of them have their own justification. Following Mitchell & Karttunen's perspectives on the subject, there exists different angles from which one can define artists. Whether it is a definition based on self, on production or even society, the word "artist" will take on a new meaning (1992, p. 8). I choose to define artists from a production angle, thus defining artists as people who take on artistic activities and "produce works of art" (1992, p. 8).

In their practices, artists are sometimes perceived as lone wolves or "individualistic creators" (Montuori & Purser, 1995, p. 73), while on the other hand they are also described as individuals who work with others rather than alone (Becker, 1982, p. 1). Most of the time, music artists are seen as cultural agents who create music through a combination of individual expression and social collaboration (Toynbee, 2000, p. 102). But, more often than not, it is through collaboration that art comes to life. Like any other activity, artistic creation involves the "joint activity" of numerous people (Becker, 1982, p. 1). While ephemeral, it is through this activity and cooperation that the art comes to exist and persist, always showing "signs of that cooperation" (Becker, 1982, p. 1). This thesis will focus on music artists of Black descent, creative individuals who contribute to the cultural and commercial domains of music production and dissemination. They are engaged in the creation, performance and/or recording of music. This includes singers, composers, producers, performers, recordings artists and even DJs.

These music artists are active in the CCIs, sector that has often been regarded as meritocratic and egalitarian, and creative work as open to everyone (O'Brien et al., 2016, p. 118). However, the reality is far from that. Contrary to the belief that the creative economy is free of "rigid caste systems" (Florida, 2004, p. 78) and that it is built on creative talent rather than sex, race or class (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2012, p. 497; Florida, 2004, p. 78), social inequalities and discrimination remained omnipresent in the CCIs. In life as in work, when faced with discrimination, Black people have to go the extra mile to achieve success and recognition (Center for American Progress [CAP],

2019, p. 1). Therefore, looking at the experiences of Black music artists will allow for a better understanding of how groups facing discrimination cope with their situation.

In this so-called equal industry that are the CCIs, White fields versus fields with stronger Black representation are ultimately not experienced the same way by Black creatives. Firstly, middle-class cultural spaces are predominantly White (Meghji, 2019, p. 54). These spaces can be physical (for example classical concerts' audiences being mainly White), as well as symbolic (the stories told in books mainly being written about/around White characters), but both result in further excluding Black bodies and reducing Black voices from cultural spaces (Meghji, 2019, p. 61). This can also be applied to the music industry, where we find that some genres are more easily associated with Black people than others. For example, in genres such as Jazz, Hip-hop, R&B or Rap that have Black roots, Black creatives are well represented and accepted (maybe even expected), while in other genres such as Opera, Rock and Electronic music (although some also have Black roots) Black individuals aren't as easily accepted or expected (Schaap et al., 2022, p. 1282). So, in such spaces, how does finding community affect one's career?

As social beings, we often turn to others when we are in difficulty: we turn to our community. The questions of race, racism and the CCIs in general have increasingly received academic attention, with a growing number of studies pointing out how minoritised groups have to deal with inequality (Ali & Byrne, 2023, p. 494 ; Hesmondhalgh & Saha, 2013, p. 179 ; Malik & Shankley, 2020, p. 167). However, this research has so far lacked two things: (1) a focus on the music industry – an industry that is both exemplary for the CCIs but also partially dominated by Black artists, and (2) how communities, or the lack thereof, impact the journeys of Black creatives.

#### *From industry to community*

Further developing the previous point, the benefits of community are plentiful. Community can become a support system, a way of finding inspiration or inspiring others, a way of learning and growing as an artist, or even a way of finding encouragement in one's career. Through communities, music artists learn how to build confidence, find psychosocial support and a safe environment to experiment and learn skills needed to succeed in their field (Goodwin, 2019 p. 129). In academia, the traditional view on community is that it only exists amongst people in a "bounded geographical area" (Bradshaw, 2008, p. 5). However, community is also the broader "social relations that bond people" (Bradshaw, 2008, p. 5). These bonds might be of importance in the CCIs that can be very competitive and hard to break through.

Therefore, this thesis analyses the link between community and career development in the context of Black music artists. As a Black artist, does one feel the need for community, what does one see as a community, and is this community an ethnic, musical or even digital one? As our world evolves with technology, so does the meaning of community, and while it once may have found its place in the physical world, it now also exists online. This ultimately broadens the spectrum of research on this subject as do authors such as Sobande and Hesmondhalgh through their research on online communities in the CCIs (Sobande et al., 2023, p. 1457). Additionally, how does community



come into play in predominantly White fields versus fields with a stronger Black representation? In music particularly, where some genres are considered more White or Black than others (Schaap et al., 2022, p. 1282), this raises the question of how Black artists are shaped by these standards and if, in turn, these standards impact the trajectory of their careers. Thus, I will answer the aforementioned question: *How do Black music artists view the importance of community in the development of their career?*

#### *Societal and academic relevance*

This research is of academic relevance as a lot has been written on Black artists and communities separately, but there is a lack of academic research on both subjects together. As inequalities persist, it is necessary to better understand if concepts such as community have a positive impact on the careers of Black creatives in the CCIs. Doing so would allow for a smoother development of forms of care, and a better overview of different ways minorities deal with obstacles in the development of their careers. This study aims to offer a glimpse into the reality of Black music artists, in hopes of taking a step towards a fair and equitable working environment in the CCIs, more specifically the music industry.

It is also of societal relevance as issues of racism and unequal opportunities in career development unfortunately remain in our society. There is a lot to explore between career and community, especially through studying minorities who have been known to come together in times of need. Looking at the possible bond that exists between Black music artists and community, finding out if there exists a positive relationship between said community and career development would be beneficial to better understand the influence that a sense of belonging and communal effort (or lack thereof) can have on one's success. Although climbing the ladders of success could be seen as a solitary and lonely act, this research can help to explore if it is not rather a common endeavour.

## 2. Theoretical framework

In this section I will look at what career development means in the context of the CCIs, the inequalities that exist in the sector, and finally the role that community plays in the development of Black music artists' careers.

### 2.1. Career development

In order to make it as a music artist, one needs to develop their career and go through many steps. Career development is the “interactive progression of internal career identity formation and the growth of external career significance” (Hoekstra, 2010, p. 159). In other words, it is the simultaneous evolution of how an individual views their career, and how other people or institutions see it as significant (Hoekstra, 2010, p. 160). The development of a career is more often than not influenced by external sources such as family, friends, schools, clubs and communities (Hoekstra, 2010, p. 161), offering opportunities but also challenges that can respectively encourage or hinder one's career success. Scholars generally understand that “career success” is driven by factors such as “education, intelligence, personality, motivation, family status, gender, career strategies (e.g., networking) and mentoring relationships” (Heslin, 2005, p. 376). Objectively, successful careers are usually defined as having a high paying job with status and regular promotions (Heslin, 2005, p. 377). Subjective career success is, on the other hand, defined by the level of satisfaction one feels towards their job (Heslin, 2005, p. 378). Depending on one's personality, career path and field, the definition of success thus remains different. This means that, for individuals trying to make a name for themselves in the CCIs, the reality of a successful career will be different than in other fields.

The concept of career in the CCIs is very far removed from the popular conception of a career as a “planned, linear, sequential escalation from well-defined position to well-defined position based on training and remuneration within a single firm” (Mathieu, 2011, p. 5). Often, careers in the CCIs are viewed as more “free” and even “boundaryless” (Mathieu, 2011, p. 7). They lead “across, rather than within, organisations”, with a shorter duration of contracts and project based work (Mathieu, 2011, p. 8). This makes the reality of working in the CCIs very different than any other industry. In the creative sector, the progression of one's career can be curved by the unstable nature of the work and career milestones are different than in more traditional careers. As explained by Sherwin Rosen in “The economics of Superstars” (1981), the unequal distribution of wealth and activities in the CCIs has allowed a small number of people to earn a lot while monopolising the market (p. 845). Thus resulting in a lot of people being stuck at the “bottom”, struggling to make it to the top as now more than ever, talent is not enough.

Contrasting with the idea that the CCIs offer a new type of economy based on talent and merit (Florida, 2004, p. 378), a career in the CCIs is often defined by long and unsocial hours, low pays and precarious conditions (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 499). In fact, in hopes of gaining some exposure, artists often have to invest a lot of time, effort and money in their career before enjoying the fruit of their labour (Scott, 2012, p. 238). However, White creatives from a middle-class background tend to navigate this precarious environment better than fellow creatives that are Black

and working class. In the UK, Black creatives earn “£27,200 pa vs £30,600 pa” for White creatives (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 500). This can be explained by the fact that they are over-represented in lower paying occupations and have low representation in higher paying jobs (p. 500). 63% of Black music creators state having experienced direct or indirect racism, and 71% have experienced micro-aggressions (BLiM, 2021, p. 13). In a survey conducted by Black Lives in Music, over half of the participants have attested to feeling like they could not achieve success because of obstacles related to their race or ethnicity (2021, p. 18). We can assume that for Black music artists, opportunities do not come as often as they should. As such, to better understand career development of black artists, it is important to dive further into inequalities in the CCIs.

For creatives, while it can be comforting to believe that success can be achieved by sheer determination and hard work, the reality of the industry is usually a bit different. The lines between work and leisure are often blurred (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010, p. 6), opportunities do not always rhyme with financial stability and it may feel like more “giving” than “taking”. In fact, the precariousness of work in the sector affects the workers economically as well as psychologically (Patrick & Elks, 2015, p. 49; Goodwin, 2019, p. 123), and they are forced to hustle their way to the top by forming connections, consolidating reputations and exploring opportunities that will hopefully turn into work (Alacovska, 2019, p. 1122; Mehta, 2017, p. 23; Goodwin, 2019, p. 123). Therefore, building a career in the CCIs seems to require other skills than just creative talent or merit, skills such as good self-management and the ability to network (Bridgstock, 2009, p. 38; 2011, p. 11; 2013, p. 180; Goodwin, 2019, p.123). The necessity for such skills could explain while creatives eventually end up gravitating towards one another, building communities of practice, focused on shared creation (Fourie, 2009, p. 124; Goodwin, 2019, p. 124). Additionally, working with other artists seems to increase motivation to create in artists (Carr & Walton, 2014, p. 170), as well as the quality and visibility of the work created (Deshmane & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2023, p. 2). More will be said on this aspect of communities in a later section of this literature review, as the focus now is how inequalities affect career development in the CCIs.

As the industry is changing, so is the reality of developing one’s career as a music artist. Many music artists take a DIY (Do It Yourself) approach to working in order to live from their music (Everts et al., 2021, p. 98). This means that music artists now take on responsibilities that usually might have been handled by a team or a manager, broadening the scope of activities they engage in from purely musical to also administration and business related. This adds on a layer of difficulty in the development of one’s career, as even though time can be spent working on music, a lot of it is spent elsewhere. When put into numbers, an empirical study shows that 41% of a music artist’s time is spent on creative work such as writing, rehearsing or performing (Everts et al., 2021, p. 104), 17% on “managerial activities” like strategising and handling various issues, 16% on “business activities” like administrative and financial work and finally 7% on “technical activities” such as logistics and merchandise (p. 104). Such numbers reflect that artists, especially in earlier stages of their career (p.104), spend more than half of their time on activities other than purely creating art, as they are obliged to take on other responsibilities in order to build their career.

In this changing music market, marked by new technologies that offer opportunities to not

depend on labels or radio stations for example (Everts et al., 2022, p. 3), artists have to find new strategies to make their music heard. These changes can be beneficial as they open up new revenue streams (p. 3), but they also change the way artists navigate the industry. Traditional milestones such as being played on the radio for the first time, playing big venues or being featured in a magazine are being used by artists to signal their “suitability” and capacity to be successful to gate-keepers (p. 6). While some milestones like playing abroad or going on tour signal artists’ experience in the industry, others like playing at well-known festivals or famous radios represent “social relationships with high-status industry actors” (p. 6). Milestones that could traditionally be viewed only as pleasurable for the artist to achieve, are now used to build a positive reputation and help artists in the development of their career (p. 7).

However, because of the changing musical landscape, such milestones in turn become subjective. What was a descriptor of success a few years ago might not be deemed as important of a milestone now. Additionally, depending on the artist, deriving pleasure from playing music for an audience might be enough to feel some sense of success (Fisher et al., 2010, p. 326), while for others attaining financially-based goals represents success (Fisher et al., 2010, p. 326). It is therefore important to note that while in other careers getting promoted to a higher paying job or getting assigned more responsibilities might be common milestones, in the music industry, success markers are less obvious and can look different based on the artist, their personal convictions and goals. Finally, a milestone can look different from one genre to another, as for example it might be more important for a pop artist to be featured in a magazine than for an indie rock band who values live performances more. For Black artists trying to develop their careers, depending on the genre they are active in and their personal goals, achieving success can look different its traditional definition, especially considering all the inequalities that exist in the CCIs.

## **2.2. Inequalities in the CCIs**

The CCIs have often been regarded as open and egalitarian. However, as I have previously established, the industry is marked with rather significant inequalities. Interestingly enough, some reports reveal that some creative workers still believe in the meritocratic nature of the industry (Brook et al., 2017, p. 6), although data undermines this belief. Most people who still believe in meritocracy in the CCIs, are those in influential positions in the sector and who are highly paid (Brook et al., 2017, p. 7). In essence, those in positions of power are more inclined to believe in meritocracy, as it serves their interests. This highlights the gap between people’s perception of the working conditions in the CCIs and the reality.

Additionally, this emphasises the difference in exposure to opportunities in the industry, with those reaping the rewards often being the strongest believers in the meritocratic ideal. Reports also show that this same group is most skeptical when it comes to discussing the impact of social factors such as ethnicity, class and gender on chances of success in the industry (Brook et al., 2017, p. 7), meaning they are less likely to acknowledge the exclusion of certain groups from the industry. Moreover, because of the aforementioned network and project-based nature of the work (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 498), the job searching and hiring processes remain very unequal. The CCIs

favour people who have social or economic capital, and as employers tend to hire people who resemble them (White men), this further excludes ethnic minorities and perpetuates a “white middle class monoculture” (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 500; Randle et al., 2007, p. 91). In the UK, while data from CIC (2019) suggests that there were 2 million jobs in the CCIs in 2017, only 7% was accounted for by ethnic minority workers in 2011/12, and 11% in 2016 (Malik & Shankley, 2020, p. 169). This creates an imbalance in the industry, with dominant groups reinforcing their influence by surrounding themselves with others in similar positions of power.

Because creativity and talent cannot guarantee success, less influential groups often bet on connections and networks to increase their chances of making it. In the “PANIC! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries” report (Brook et al., 2017), when the respondents were asked to provide a short overview of which type of professionals they knew, the answers reflected that most of them knew a higher percentage of creatives versus workers in other sectors (p. 9). In other words, creatives surround themselves with other creatives. Whether it is a conscious or unconscious decision, there is an undeniable need for creatives to connect with like-minded people who are facing the same obstacles. This contrasts with the belief of some that the creative industry is fair, and raises the question of how fair and accessible it really is when data suggests that it is in fact quite “homogenous and coherent” in terms of representation (Brook et al., 2017, p. 10). As of 2018 in the Labour Force Survey, out of 220 respondents in the British music, performing and visual arts industry, 4,8% of the workers were from ethnic minorities (Brook et al., 2017, p. 11), further emphasising the existence of a White middle class monoculture.

This also transcends to spaces of production and consumption. Traditional cultural spaces are typically quintessentially “white spaces” that often are not welcoming to Black people (Meghji, 2020, p. 54). When attending an exhibition or a concert, Black individuals face micro-aggressions and sometimes profiling, affecting their perception of the cultural sphere and resulting in the adoption of different archetypes. However, while Black individuals often feel unwelcome in certain cultural spaces, White individuals tend not to view these spaces as unusual (Schaap et al., 2022, p. 1282; Anderson, 2015, p. 1), as they may not be aware of the privileges they benefit from. Ali Meghji’s research on Black middle class identity (2020, p. 64) shows that Black individuals deal with this discrimination in different ways: they may decide to disconnect themselves from cultural activities, or view it as a way to defy the White space.

Ali Meghji explores how Black middle-class individuals navigate their identity within a society structured by racial and class-based inequalities. Building on this, if Black people feel uncomfortable consuming art, how can they build a successful career in a space that is not welcoming to them? Thus, in this predominantly White space, Black creatives are faced with the reality that opportunities are not only a result of hard work and talent, but are also given to individuals who have certain “economic, social and cultural resources and or capital” (Ali & Byrne, 2023, p. 494). Brook et al. also argue that “cultural occupations have a “somatic norm” of White, male, middle classiness” (Ali & Byrne, 2023, p. 496; Brook et.al, 2020, p. 22) which ultimately impacts the careers of Black people in the CCIs.

This is also emphasised by the fact that Black people are expected in certain spaces and not

in others. This phenomenon is explained by the reality of the “somatic norm” or the existence of “racial contracts” demarcating spaces accordingly to one’s racialised body (Puwar, 2001, p. 651). In the context of music, this could signify that Black music artists are more likely to be expected in certain genres such as Hip-hop (Clay, 2003, p. 1348; Rose 1994, p. 100; Schaap & Berkers, 2020, p. 600), but not necessarily in others such as classical music or even Rock; as ultimately the consumption of content is “informed by notions regarding: race-ethnicity (...), gender (...); or both” (Schaap & Berkers, 2020, p. 600). On the other side, it seems as though White artists do not always feel legitimate to be part of certain movements. For example, some rappers have an understanding that certain doors will be automatically opened to them, while certain doors will remain closed because they are White (ABC News Live, 2023, para. 3):

As a white boy, there are certain doors that being white, that you’ll automatically get in, that perhaps no Black person or other race could ever get in. But there’s also certain doors as a white boy that you can never get in. No matter what. (Sparxxx).

As rappers’ success often comes from their ability to be authentic and real in their music, listeners can feel more weary of White rappers “misrepresenting themselves or presenting a front stage persona that is very different from the one they have backstage” (Olson & Shobe, 2008, p. 1009). This, in turn, makes them less credible and less likely to resonate with a Black audience. Inverting Black narratives, Eminem has shared his experiences as a White rapper in the industry, describing his whiteness as “poverty” as it held him back in the beginning of his career (Hess, 2005, p. 385). However, this needs to be balanced with the reality that although their Whiteness might make them less believable (from a very traditional and old school view of Hip-hop), being White remains a privilege, especially in having access to White audiences for example (Hess, 2005, p. 385). It is therefore valuable to explore whether variations across genres and spaces influence an individual’s sense of connection to their community.

As gender and class form another layer of inequalities, it is important to view intersectionality as an inherent part of Black creative’s experiences in the CCIs. Crenshaw introduced intersectionality in 1989 (p. 139), underlining the ramifications of studying gender and race as distinct categories, resulting in the experiences of Black women being ignored (Schlesinger et al., 2017, p. 5412). Ever since, it has been widely applied to highlight how “oppression and discrimination impact people differentially based on the intersections of gender, race and class” (Schlesinger et al., 2017, p. 5413). The 2021 Black Lives in Music Report shows that whilst race and ethnicity are “the primary grounds for discrimination in the survey”, gender comes in second for Black women, and the combined effect of race and gender conclude in lower pay and status of Black women in the industry (BLiM, 2021, p. 32). Additional research shows that, in the music industry, Black women are constantly sexualised and dehumanised (Jennings, 2020, p. 48; Diko, 2025, p. 2), emphasising the importance of studying how both phenomena impact each other.

### 2.3. Community

When we think of communities that materialise in the physical world, our mind often goes to neighbourhoods. All around the world, we can find neighbourhoods that house specific groups of people: they are called ethnic neighbourhoods. It was often believed that people who chose to live in ethnic neighbourhoods, like Little Italy, Chinatown or even Greektown (Logan et al., 2002, p. 300), did so out of necessity and convenience to adapt more easily to their new environment after migrating (Logan et al., 2002, p. 300). These neighbourhoods were therefore also called immigrant enclaves, as “they concentrate immigrants who are recently arrived and have few socioeconomic resources” (Logan et al., 2002, p. 300). While that proves correct in some cases, there exist other social motivations for wanting to move in these neighbourhoods, such as “taste and preference” or even just the desire to create a place that reflects and “sustains ethnic identity” (Logan et al., 2002, p. 300). Such instances reflect the desire of people from the same ethnic background to connect and create bonds in the physical world, although this desire can also materialise on the internet.

In some cases community can exist without a “physical touchstone” (Joinson et al., 2007, p. 122). While some believe that online communities can take away from physical interactions and result in alienation (Joinson et al., 2007, p. 122), online communities can be a big help. For racialised creative workers in particular, such communities have real benefits for their members (Sobande et al., 2023, p. 1457). As this form of networking is based upon “identifying other people who have similar experiences of building creative careers as racialised” (Sobande et al., 2023, p. 1457), it has helped racialised creative workers to find solidarity in communities that allow them to produce “dynamic and oppositional works which support their racialised communities” (Sobande et al., 2023, p. 1462), proving to have both professional and political benefits (p. 1457). While it can be difficult to make one’s voice heard as a Black creative in the CCIs, Black women in Britain communicate “their perspectives” autonomously, in the form of: “newsletters, pamphlets, or establishing independent publishing houses” (Sobande, 2020, p. 101). Inspired from a DIY perspective, a lot of DIT (Do It Together) online spaces have emerged, allowing Black women to express “their views, campaigning and creative work” (p. 101), further emphasising the importance and relevance of online communities today.

Thus, community has been defined in a variety of ways. While the concept of community is often described as something that is rooted in the physical world, it also often implies connection more broadly, whether it is based on shared beliefs, common interests or circumstances (Chaskin, 1997, p. 522). In fact, people tend to surround themselves with people with whom they share a common reality (Baek & Parkinson, 2022, p. 3), which further explains the creation of communities of like-minded people. Community creates a process that allows people to build “momentary or lasting connections” (Grundmann & Osterloh, 2020, p. 31). However, as stated earlier, this can now also be done online. Digitalisation and platformisation have led creatives to build communities online, facilitating solidarity between cultural workers, more specifically of colour (Sobande et. al, 2023, p. 1455). I therefore base my research on Chaskin’s definition of community, nuancing it with the fact that as society and technology evolve, community takes on different forms than in the past.

As it touches upon aspects of shared connection, beliefs and even circumstances, this definition fits the idea that for Black people specifically community can also be defined as a group of people brought together by racism (Blackwell, 1975, p. 1). This highlights the reality they face in their daily lives but also in their careers as artists, where racism and discrimination still persist.

As addressed in the introduction, empirical research in the music industry shows that for groups that do not have natural access to resources, community can be a useful way to promote each other and get to said resources. In Canada, a study on immigrant jazz musicians shows that the lack of community has an impact on their careers, as the absence of a good network is described as an disadvantage (Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016, p. 6). While this might not always be the case for “invisible minorities”, “visible minorities”, non-caucasian or non-white people (Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016, p. 2), seem to have more difficulties building career in the CCIs and wish that more help was available to help them better integrate the creative sector (Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016, p. 10). While some forms of support do exist, the reality is that not everyone has access to them and that finding them requires a good network (Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016, p. 8). Although associations, community organisations and governmental programs should be tailored to the needs of immigrant artists, this could ultimately result in further alienation of such groups, which is why it would be preferable to directly integrate them within the local community (Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016, p. 10). To combat this lack of access to resources, many turn to mentorship where they learn the ropes of the industry from more seasoned artists while also improving their craft (Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 5; Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 7).

Research by de Peuter et al. (2023) highlights other ways in which creative and cultural workers come together. A crisis like COVID-19 resulted in collective responses such as enacting new care practices, policies and embracing collective support gestures such as crowdfunding (p. 387). Additionally, as there has always been a common “misconceived overlap between leisure and work” in the CCIs (Skaggs & Aparicio, 2023, p. 438), historically workers have turned to each other to collectively bargain better boundaries and working conditions (p. 438). In the context of musical communities, occupational communities like Nashville songwriters have been sticking together to face the transition to a digital economy which has made individual work risky (Skaggs & Aparicio, 2023, p. 440). As songwriting is highly competitive, instead of writing songs alone in hopes of a higher royalty payout, artists work together more often and in bigger groups, and numbers show that from 2000 to 2015 country songs written by one songwriter went from over 20% to only 5% (Skaggs & Aparicio, 2023, p. 440). However, such collective support is not equally accessible to all, as Black individuals often face exclusion from these dominant networks.

The reality of the industry is that Black individuals feel as though they are not reflected in the cultural scene, almost as if they were not meant to be a part of it (Meghji, 2020, p. 63). As a result of this exclusion of Black voices and “Blackness” (p. 63), Anderson advances: “Blacks reflexively note the proportion of whites to Blacks, or may look around for other Blacks with whom to commune if not bond” (Meghji, 2020, p. 55; Anderson, 2015, p. 10). Ultimately, when faced with discrimination, Black people may need to look for community. In other words, Black people have to help themselves by creating and finding opportunities themselves in the industry. This can be further



explained by the concept of Black “self-help”, which is understood as the “development of self-reliance” (Ohri et. al, 2023, p. 1928) in the Black community. The growth of this movement can, according to a study by the Funding Register for Ethnic Minority Self-Help Groups (Home Office, London, HMSO, 1979), be attributed to the demoralising effects that discrimination has on Black people (p. 1928). This movement can be broken down into five categories: (1) “government-sponsored organisations”, (2) ethnic cultural activities, (3) ethnic religious groups, (4) “community care groups” in charge of different types of clubs, (5) “umbrella groups or political pressure groups” (p. 1928). This is extremely relevant to this thesis as, for some, cultural and creative activities seem to be a gateway to community.

In addition, empirical research has highlighted the importance of community in daily and professional life. An empirical study on highly achieving African American women shows that the combined effects of racism and sexism highlighted the sense of a collective identity in those women and that many sensed support and empowerment from other Black women, even without direct interactions (Richie et al., 1997, p. 145). This study further emphasises the intricate ways in which community can provide support to Black individuals faced with obstacles in their careers, underlining the need to study this dynamic.

In fact, many Black artists’ communities are founded by already successful and established Black artists wanting to empower and amplify voices that are often left unheard (Artland Magazine, 2020, para. 1), hoping to help people so they can ultimately help others too. In fact “the most primitive forms of community depended on feeling rather than reason since the first communal ties among humans arose from a feeling of silent understanding”, or in German: “*Verständnis*” (Tönnies, 1887, p. 15). It is this unspoken understanding that seems to draw individuals to their community, something especially vital in an industry where access to opportunity is unequal. In such an environment, community can have a big impact on the wellbeing of Black artists.

Further research focuses on the important impact Black community has on the wellness of Black individuals. After being asked about the personal benefits that emerged from being surrounded by other Black people, participants in an experimental research reflected upon how social and spiritual well-being was positively impacted by Black community involvement (Grayman-Simpson, 2012, p. 26). For Black people, the biggest benefit of being surrounded by other Black people was found in the social wellness aspect. In fact, there are personal rewards that come with being part of a bigger cultural group, such as the “persistence of a salient communal sense of self among people of African descent in America” (Grayman-Simpson, 2012, p. 33). This reveals the significant impact that being part of a Black community can have on Black individuals. Building on this understanding, I anticipate a similar dynamic among Black music artists, which I will explore further in this thesis.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Description and justification of method**

The research question “How do Black music artists view the importance of community in the development of their career?” was answered by conducting qualitative research. Qualitative methods are ideal to capture personal stories, emotions and motivations, and take a human-centred approach. Qualitative research is also ideal for exploring social behaviours and meaning-making (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 91). As this research focuses on understanding Black music artists’ experiences, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews.

As mentioned previously, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, leaving space for flexibility while retaining structure. Conducting such interviews helped to better understand how and if community plays a role in Black music artists’ careers, and to dig deeper into why they think that is. It allowed me to generate rich, detailed data while allowing adaptability during the interview process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018, p. 3). Additionally, such interviews are ideal when the goal of the research is to better understand the participant’s “unique perspective rather than a generalised understanding of a phenomenon” (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021, p. 1358; McGrath et al., 2019, p. 1002) and allows the interviews to be focused while giving the interviewer the space to explore relevant ideas that might come up while doing the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021, p. 1358).

#### **3.2. Sample and sampling strategy**

My experience in the music industry as a Black woman helped to evoke trust in the participants and facilitate contact with them. The sample consists of ten Black music artists (see table 1). Considering that I wanted to address the implications community has on career development, the sample consists of artists who have accumulated valuable experience in the music industry. Interviewees’ ages ranged from 22 to 36 years old. To ensure that the information gathered from the interviews was reliable and valuable, all of the artists interviewed had at least four years of experience in the music industry, going up to fifteen years of experience. As some research defines the first decade of a career in the CCIs as very formative in establishing oneself as an artist (Shaughnessy et al., 2022, p. 2), this thesis offers a good range of artists still developing their career, and more established artists.

As the study also aimed to explore intersectionality and the influence of gender on the artists' experiences and perceptions, the goal was to have an equal number of female and male interviewees. When it came to genres and disciplines in the music industry, the study was not limited to only one, but on the contrary looked into creating a diverse sample with artists from different areas of the music industry. Therefore, opting for a purposeful sampling strategy with a maximum variation sampling technique (Patton, 2002, p. 235), I interviewed singers, producers, songwriters and DJs with experience in multiple musical genres. This diversity in genres also offered a variety of point of views on how experiences differ from one musical genre to another, and further analyse if Black artists in predominantly White genres feel the same as artists in genres with more Black representation.

A total of ten Black music artists were interviewed. The first criterion was to be an artist of African descent, and the second one was to be a music artist. Being Black includes ethnic categories of African, Caribbean and any other Black background, therefore also including people of mixed heritage (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team, University of Leicester, 2021, p. 15). As introduced earlier, I defined the artist as someone who produces works of art (Mitchell & Karttunen, 1992, p. 8), therefore defining the music artist as someone who is involved in the production of music. More specifically, the interviewees were: singers songwriters, producers, DJs, studio owners and voice actresses. All of them fell into more than one of the aforementioned categories. Four of the participants identified as female, while six identified as male. Whilst the goal was to have an equal number of male and female respondents, and whilst an equal number of requests was sent out to female and male potential respondents, circumstances did not allow for an equal distribution. However, this reflects the reality of the music industry where women unfortunately remain underrepresented, as exposed in the "Lost in the Mix" report published in 2023 (Lazar et al., 2023, p. 22). The genres in which the interviewees were active were: (Neo) Soul, R&B, Alternative Hip-hop, Rap, Black music, House, Jazz, Jungle, Reggae, Dancehall and Footwork. Once again, most of the interviewees fell into more than one of the previously mentioned categories and felt like their music was fluid in terms of genres and influences. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were given to all of the participants.

To find interviewees, a mix of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used. This type of sampling is helpful when participants are difficult to locate (Babbie, 1975, p. 194) and as networking is very important in the music industry, the first participants in the interviews were able to provide contacts which were interested in taking part in this study, allowing for more interviews to take place. Working this way offered a higher number of positive answers. Furthermore, snowball sampling is cost-effective and efficient, as it reduces the time and cost involved in finding suitable participants compared to other methods. Social network was leveraged by relying on referrals from initial participants, helping to build rapport within the target sample. This, in turn, allowed for the sample to be more targeted.

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Participants	Gender	Years of experience	Role	Country of residence	Musical genre
1. Carla	Female	13	Singer-songwriter, musical/voice actress	Netherlands	R&B, (Neo)Soul/ Jazz
2. Pete	Male	14	DJ, rapper, singer (live performance with band)	Netherlands	Mellow Hip-hop
3. Ana	Female	10	Singer songwriter, producer	France	R&B, Neo-Soul, Jazz, Pop (alternative)
4. Frank	Male	5	Rapper, singer, producer	Netherlands	Rap, Hip-hop, alternative R&B
5. David	Male	10	Singer songwriter, composer, musician	France	Black music, R&B, Soul, Funk
6. Keith	Male	15	Singer songwriter, producer, vocalist, studio owner	Netherlands	Soul, R&b, alternative Hip-hop
7. Christa	Female	7	Singer songwriter, producer	Netherlands	R&B, Soul, Alternative
8. Lola	Female	9	Singer songwriter, DJ	Hong Kong	Reggae, Dancehall, Neo-Soul, Jungle, Footwork
9. Tom	Male	4	DJ, producer	Netherlands	House
10. Paul	Male	6	Rapper, songwriter	France	Rap, R&B

Table 1. Participants list

### **3.3. Operationalisation of relevant concepts**

Drawn from the theoretical framework, this thesis conceptualises and operationalises the following concepts: career development in the CCIs, inequalities in the CCIs and finally community (see table 2). The reliability of the findings was heightened by building the interview questionnaire on concepts and constructs discussed in previous academic research, ensuring that it is well conceptualised and relevant to the current working conditions of Black music artists.

#### **3.3.1. Interview guide development**

The goal of the interviews was to determine how the interviewees viewed the importance of community in the development of their career. To ensure consistency while allowing for open-ended responses, an interview guide was developed (see appendix A). Therefore the aforementioned concepts were integrated in the questionnaire and discussed with the participants. The study aimed to explore how different aspects of the artists' careers and experiences in the industry affected how their perception of community and whether or not they deemed it to be helpful in their career advancement.

The three main theoretical concepts of the thesis were translated into questions by going through the theoretical framework and selecting the most important themes in it. To ensure that the interview questions would be relevant and reliable, the procedure was the same for each concept. The main themes that were found were entered in a table, followed by a summarising sentence and sample interview question (see table 2 for examples). The average number of themes found for each theme was 6. I first made questions myself and then asked ChatGPT to also do so. ChatGPT was used to help identify more themes that could be discussed in the interviews, and offered interesting insight on the subject. The collaboration was one of co-creation and contributory work as it served as a support tool, amplifying creativity and decision-making without operating independently. The goal was to benefit from "AI Creativity" by "playing to each other's strengths to achieve more" (Z. Wu et al, 2021, p. 172).

Finally, for career development a total of four questions was selected, six for inequalities in the CCIs, and as community was the main focus of the study this part comprised eleven questions. As the goal was to have around 20 questions and an interview duration of 45 minutes to an hour, the end number of 21 was deemed sufficient and well adapted. Moreover, focus was put on the community aspect and less on the two first concepts as they served as more of a backdrop to the main topic of community. As in the theoretical framework, the subject of career development was discussed first, then inequalities and lastly community. Before starting the interviews the informed consent form was discussed and signed, followed by demographic questions such as age, years in music, gender, ethnic and cultural background, educational background and location.

### **3.3.2. Career development**

Having established that the CCIs are highly based on network and social capital (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 498), and that the precarious conditions of the CCIs are emphasised for Black creatives (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 500), economic precarity and career sustainability were discussed while also touching upon subjects such as access to influential networks, nepotism and gatekeepers in the CCIs and how that impacts the artists.

Just as Meghji's work depicts of the mainly white middle class cultural space, issues such as representation but also stereotypes were addressed with the interviewees. Moreover, as indicated by the 2021 Black Lives in Music report (p. 13), numbers underline the opportunity gaps between White creatives and Black creatives, I also focused on questioning if and how they feel and fill those gaps, and consecutively how they build a career in this industry. This naturally lead into addressing issues such as Black artists' resilience and strategies for success in the music industry, allowing for a better understanding of how they navigate through it.

### **3.3.3. Inequalities**

In terms of inequalities in the CCIs, economic inequalities were touched upon (income disparities, precarious work) as the studies by O'Brien (2016, p. 118) and Eikhof & Warhurst (2013, p. 499) have underlined the discrepancies that exist in these different aspects of creative work.

Studies show that creatives from minoritised groups are more likely to experience unemployment and precarious labour conditions than White creatives (Malik & Shankley, 2020, p. 167), therefore I discussed racial inequalities (representation, recognition, discrimination) with the interviewees, but also gender inequalities as the research I discussed highlighted the disparities that exist between men and women in the CCIs.

### **3.3.4. Community**

As this thesis focuses on coping strategies of Black music artists to battle the inequalities and career advancements issues in the industry, this lead me to address the concept of community. Do Black artists use community as support, and if they do, in what shape does that support come? Informal forms of care such as mentorship and collaboration between artists were also addressed.

Additionally, I stated earlier that this community could be physical, but also digital as we notice a growing trend of community building especially between creatives from minoritised groups on social media (Sobande et al., 2023, p. 1499). How does the importance of physical spaces (local scenes, venues, community centres) come into play versus online communities, for example on social media?

Moreover, the differences in community in parallel with musical genre, but also with gender were questioned, allowing to analyse if coping strategies differ in those cases. The bottom line was to see if the existence of community allowed for activism and collective action, and if that space is used as a space for resistance and empowerment, and how that impacts the career of Black music artists.

Concept	Description	Example question
Career development	Career success is driven by a variety of factors and is highly subjective. Moreover, the reality of building a career in the CCIs is different than more traditional career paths.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you describe the reality of building a career in the CCIs?</li> <li>2. What would you consider a milestone in your field?</li> </ol>
Inequalities	The industry has often been regarded as egalitarian but many inequalities persist. Cultural spaces are predominantly White, resulting in Black individuals not feeling welcomed in the CCIs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have you ever felt excluded from any creative or professional space?</li> <li>2. Have you seen patterns in who gets opportunities or visibility in your field?</li> </ol>
Community	Community can take on many forms and can help artists to build a network that can aid in developing their career. However, due to the lack of representation of Black people in the industry, Black music artists help themselves.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How has community manifested in your life?</li> <li>2. Do you feel as though you gravitate more towards Black artists like yourself?</li> </ol>

Table 2. Interview guide development examples

### 3.4. Data collection process

Depending on interviewees' availability, location and preference, the interviews were conducted (by myself) either in person or through Zoom. With participant consent, an audio recording of all the interviews was made on a separate device locked with a password and accessible only to the researcher, ensuring the safe storage of the data.

Additionally, all of the recordings were put on a cloud and transferred to a back-up hard disk to minimise the risk of losing data. Said data will be deleted upon completion of the Master Thesis. The interviews lasted between 45 to 75 minutes and were then transcribed verbatim for analysis. All of the data was gathered and transcribed through TurboScribe between May 8th and May 25th 2025, and were cross-checked against the audio recordings to maximise accuracy. For the most part, the data collection went as planned as the interviews were completed in the estimated time period that was carved out to do so.

### 3. 5. Data processing and analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the data was transcribed. As mentioned earlier, in this phase of the process, an AI-tool was used to ensure efficiency in the process, but also reliability and a high quality transcription. TurboScribe was used to transcribe the audio recordings, and all interviews were conducted in English. The transcriptions were kept in the software but also backed up on a separated hard drive to ensure safe storage of the data.

From the interview transcriptions, the data was coded in ATLAS.ti following a thematic analysis approach. Employing thematic analysis (TA) helped to identify, analyse and interpret “patterns of meaning” within the data (Clarke & Braun, 2016, p. 298). As TA is flexible in terms of research question but also sample size, constitution, data collection methodology, it helps to better understand participants’ experiences and is very useful for research that seeks to study what participants “think, feel, and do” (Clarke & Braun, 2016, p. 298). The study followed the following the TA six-phase framework (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3354):

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Step 3: Searching for themes

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Step 5: Defining themes

Step 6: Writing

With the help of ATLAS.ti, codes were identified and bigger themes were drawn from the collected data. TA helped answer the research question as it aided to analyse and draw on common patterns found in the interviewees’ answers, allowing for a better understanding of how exactly Black music artists view the importance of community. In light of the research question, 57 initial codes with 522 occurrences were produced, some initial codes were: benefits of community, motivations for finding community, feelings about community, importance of having people around. These codes were organised in eight code categories that became the following sub-themes that highlight community’s importance in: fostering (1) creativity and (2) resilience in creative pursuits; creating (3) personal support systems, (4) professional support systems, (5) safe spaces, (6) a shared identity; and finally creating (7) career building opportunities and (8) exposure for Black music artists. These sub-themes were then organised under three overarching themes (see coding framework in appendix C):

1. Creative influence: (1) creativity, (2) resilience
2. Support systems: (3) personal support systems, (4) professional support systems, (5) safe spaces, (6) shared identity
3. Networking roles: (7) opportunities, (8) exposure



After finding these bigger themes, findings were reported and discussed, before addressing the limitations of the research. Finally, a conclusion was reached and the research question was answered.

### **3.6. Validity, reliability and reflexivity**

Considering my cultural background (French and Beninese) and musical background as a singer songwriter for the past five years, a reflexive approach was adopted to acknowledge and critically reflect on any potential bias and influence on the data collection and analysis process. To avoid any bias during the interviews I remained consciously aware of my positionality and took steps to minimise leading questions or assumptions based on shared cultural or musical knowledge. Consistence was maintained across all interviews and data handling stages.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to ensure comparability while allowing for flexibility and depth. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and coding was applied systematically using a ATLAS.ti to track themes and patterns. Combining these practices strengthened the trustworthiness of the study by promoting transparency, accountability, and critical self-awareness. Overall, the inclusion of reflexivity alongside methodological rigour contributed to a more nuanced and ethically sound interpretation of the data.

### **3.7. Ethical considerations**

In case of in person interviews, a printed out informed consent form was given to the participant and then signed (see appendix B). In case of online interviews, the form was sent over email, signed and sent back to the researcher. It informed the participant of the nature of the research and who to contact in case of further questions while clarifying information on time involvement, data collection and retention.

Consent was obtained prior to each interview and participants were made aware of the possibility to step out of the interviewing process at any moment. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising names, giving participants pseudonyms and removing identifiable details from the thesis.

## 4. Results

### *What are communities to Black musicians?*

This section of the thesis will present three main themes: community as important for (1) creativity, (2) support systems and (3) networking. Sub-themes were found for each of the three patterns. For the creative influence, I show that community boosted the artists' creative processes but also gave resilience in creative pursuits. For the support system aspect, community was found to be important on a personal but also professional level, to encourage the creation of safe spaces and finally create a feeling of empowerment and shared identity. Finally, the importance of community in networking was found to afford opportunities and visibility to Black music artists.

After talking to these ten music artists, I realised that for them, community is more than just people, it is what makes working in the CCIs viable. Like in the CCIs in general, the music industry is filled with hurdles, setbacks and difficult working conditions. In the introduction of this thesis, I defined community as a social bond between people (Bradshaw, 2008, p. 5). While this definition still stands, through these interviews, the intricate meaning and real-life impact of community has become clearer and grander.

For David, 28, your community is your “tribe”. David tours Europe with his band while also working on his personal music project and after almost ten years in the music industry, he feels as though his authenticity is what led him to find his community: “The moment I started being authentic, the moment I attracted everyone that I needed to attract. And this is a quote from a famous band that I love, “A Tribe Called Quest”(…) And I don't know which song, but they say your vibe attracts your tribe.”. As this word was “powerfully” institutionalised during colonial rule particularly in Africa, (Sneath, 2023, p. 3), David's choice of word is interesting in the context of this research on Black music artists. While the history of the word and its meaning are problematic, its ethnological meaning “has come to be any aggregate of families or small communities which are grouped together under one chief or leader, observing similar customs and social rules, and tracing their descent from one common ancestor” (Sneath, 2023, p. 2). In this sense, if community can be defined as a tribe, it would be less about social ties and more about cultural ones.

This idea of community having a high cultural context can also be found in other participants' definition of the word. For Paul, 28, rapper and songwriter who has been making music his whole life but started doing so professionally around six years ago, community has a big cultural significance. For him, it is not just the act of surrounding yourself with people, it is a cultural process that feels especially particular to genres such as Hip-hop which have been very influential in the lives of Black and Arabic minorities.

Well, I'd have to go back as far as before I existed. I feel like Hip hop or Rap music in general has always been a very cultural thing that has been serving for Black Arabian minoritarian communities. Because it's actually been used as a platform to express ourselves and say what we have been going through, and allowing ourselves to say things the way that our grandparents, or our parents probably

could have not said before because they didn't have the elements to do that. So for me the community is based towards the culture. (Paul)

These quotes show that for many, community goes beyond the idea of people meeting and connecting on a superficial level. This vision of community can also be traced back to theories on Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) that underline the six forms of capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant) through which Communities of Color foster cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). This theory challenges deficit-based views of marginalised communities by highlighting their strengths and resources. Thus, when artists describe their idea of community, they are often reflecting upon this layered network of support that is grounded in rich cultural roots.

### **4. 1. Creative influence**

#### **4.1.1. Community and fostering creativity**

Community has an impact on the creative process of artists. Most respondents shared that having a community helped them to create or advance in projects, as it allowed them to share their process, co-write or bounce ideas off of each other. Research shows that collaborating with other artists might enhance the “quality and visibility” of music thanks to artists putting a variety of skills and resources together (Deshmane & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2023, p. 2). Moreover, considering the industry’s harsh reality, collaborations help artists find support (Deshmane & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2023, p. 10) during the collaboration’s duration. Going back to the example of Nashville songwriters given earlier, in a very competitive environment that is the music industry, working together is beneficial to artists’ careers (Skaggs & Aparicio, 2023, p. 440). The supporting effects of community will be extended upon later.

Some participants shared that connecting with artists who shared the same creative process as them was important when they made music, as it allowed them to stay true to their creativity and creative process. Ana, a 26-year-old singer songwriter and producer who has been making music for almost ten years now, feels as though her community reflects her creative process, which in turn enhances it. Therefore, when connecting with people she tends to gravitate towards those who have a similar process to hers: “So, I will also, if I want to connect with people, I will go towards people that maybe have the same creative process as me.” (Ana).

Having such people around allowed the participants to create music together but also to share similar interests which were fulfilling to their personal and professional lives. While community has an impact on the creative process of said artists, it also helps them to stay productive. Community drives artists to create, as they encourage each other and give feedback on projects. Frank, who has been making music for five years, shared that although he feels as though he is still in the process of building a solid community around him, the people that are becoming a part of it are pushing him to write more and more:

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Whenever like, sometimes we just we just know we're not writing songs, but we've just been writing lowkey. But we see each other and we show a little bit of our stuff and I just like damn I gotta start writing more. And like sometimes it's like me I get it like it's like my demos and everything like yeah, it's the creative drive of community is like super super cool (Frank)

For Frank, community comes to life through helping one another stay creative and motivated. Working with others, in music creation as well as in other aspects of life can increase motivation to “pursue related activities in the future” (Carr & Walton, 2014, p. 170) as well as “interest and performance” (Carr & Walton, 2014, p. 170). In short, community is important when creating as it allows artists to keep up with their craft and share meaningful projects with one another.

### 4.1.2. Community and resilience in creative pursuits

While Black music artists report that community plays a role in their creative process, findings also reflect that community is a real driving force in said artists' careers.

Multiple respondents shared the idea of community giving them resilience and enriching their experiences as artists. For some, sharing a community with people with a similar background as them became a driving force in terms of understanding each others' experiences as people of colour in the music industry. One participant in particular shared the importance of community in staying resilient through all the hardships that come with being a Black music artist. While there exists a wide array of definitions of “resilience”, it fundamentally is explained as “positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health despite experiencing adversity” (Herrman et.al, 2011, p. 2; Wald & Taylor, 2006, p. 1). For Black music artists, in their professional but also daily life, adversity comes in the form of discrimination, micro-aggressions and other negative experiences which persist in cultural spaces (Meghji, 2020, p. 64). The following quote echoes concepts such as social resilience which explain how community deals with different forms of stressors that are affecting them (Haugsevjé & Heian, 2014, p. 3; Hall & Lamont, 2013, p. 6):

Yeah, but also like through, I think like it gives like resilience. Obviously like a network um like more than than the creative process personally it's super enriching. Um yeah, I think it helps you you cope better from all like the externalities and like the difficulties of being like a POC artist or creative in general uh in the west, you know, yeah (Frank)

For Frank, being a person of colour (POC) in the music industry comes with feelings of exclusion but also with witnessing your culture and voice being reappropriated and stolen: “They could just uplift our voice and give us our space, but they're getting into our space and taking our voices.”, “they” being the majority of White cultural workers and agents in the industry. As I will later explain the importance of community in claiming back spaces in the music industry, the focus here is how it pushes artists to keep creating and look forward to opportunities and milestones in their careers. While resilience often comes into play after a setback, sometimes community just acts

as a motivator to keep going forward (see section 4.1.1). Christa, who makes alternative R&B and Neo-Soul referred to community as a “force” that gives her “drive” and “energy to go forward and to look for more opportunities”. As she has now taken on a day job and is less active in the music scene, she recalled moments when she felt a stronger connection to the community of creatives that were around her, and who kept her going through it all.

In other words, results indicate that Black music artists feel as though community helps them in not giving up their dreams and staying motivated, even in times where they do not feel as confident in their career. The precarious and unstable nature of the CCIs (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 499) forces artists to take on a “fake it till you make it” mentality and learn to hustle, build confidence and network, rather than bet everything on sheer talent (Goodwin, 2019, p. 123). Community sometimes plays a role in helping build that confidence and in pushing one another. Tom, a house DJ and producer shared that it helped him gain confidence in his craft which ultimately helped him upkeep his career:

And sometimes you'd hear certain statements being thrown that you need to be a bit more confident. And that was a bit motivating, even though it came across at the wrong time. Yeah, but that helped with just me not giving up. (Tom)

Such words are one of the things that helped him not give up on his DJing career even though things haven't always been easy. In conclusion, the first set of results reveal that Black music artists view community as important their career, first creatively. Further results show that artists view community as a support system, personally and professionally.

## **4.2. Support systems**

Indeed, the findings show that on many different levels, community comes through as a support system. Whether it is personally or professionally, community is a way for Black music artists to find support or create support for others and help artists feel empowered. Community offers support in building confidence as an artist but also provides a safe space for social support (Goodwin, 2019, p. 129).

### **4.2.1. Community and personal support**

On a personal level, community is an uplifting force in artists' lives. Carla is an artist who has been in the music industry for more than 13 years. She has built a significant career as a singer songwriter, musical and voice actress in the Netherlands. When asked what community meant to her she said that community was “the people who uplift you, who share in your journey, support you and who understand your roots. My community is where I find inspiration, strength, and a sense of belonging.”. As stated earlier, community has a cultural significance. Similar to physical ethnic

communities (ethnic neighbourhoods), there exists a desire to be around similar people and maintain a common “ethnic identity” (Logan et al., 2002, p. 300) that connects us to our “roots” and provides us with a sense of “belonging”. For Carla, community helps her connect to where she comes from and what she stands for, while allowing her to feel as though she “belongs”. The importance of sharing this community with people who have gone through similar experiences is crucial as it helps artists feel understood and seen.

This was once again brought up by Ana who said that she shared many similarities but also problematics such as racism with her community: “Because we have many things in common, or we encounter the same problematics in life. I'm talking about a lot of things, like maybe issues with racism.”. She adds that “A lot of people, if they don't have a similar background, or similar issues, it's difficult to connect with them because they just don't understand. And it's not their fault, but sometimes people just don't understand what you can encounter.”. Sharing a similar background and having gone through similar experiences impacts the level of connection to people. Research on status and value homophily, as well as on the impact of a shared reality on social connection show that people “tend to be surrounded by and be friends with individuals who are similar to themselves in demographic attributes such as age, religion, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status” (Baek & Parkinson, 2022, p. 3; McPherson et al., 2002, p. 415). This can help create a feeling of shared understanding which in turn can help create a sense of “shared reality” (Baek & Parkinson, 2022, p. 7, Higgins et al., 2021, p. 103).

Through good and bad times, the participants shared that their community is present in offering them support and filling each other's cups. For some, Black men in particular, such community has not always been easy to find. One participant shared the importance of having a space where they could be free to express themselves and share their emotions without any judgment:

There's also a problem with the community. That's a very big problem sometimes Black men, Black men don't talk too much about their problems. They don't verbalise too much and this is something we've been taught as kids. You don't have the right to expose how you feel and cry or feel wrong or anything. So it used to be complicated but with time it became simple (...) So being in this situation and having a certain community and people who don't judge and actually listening, “you know what, I understand because I'm going through this”. And it's been very very helpful. I don't complain too much, I always try to stay positive but whenever I complain, I get pissed off, they just let me. (Paul)

Paul feels as though Black men are not usually given the chance to be vocal about their emotions, or even feel them. Literature on this topic highlights the reality that Black men are not given “the same privileges as their White peers in terms of emotional display” (Jackson, 2018, p. 1). Because Black men are often portrayed as “poor, hyper masculine and threatening” (Jackson, 2018, p. 2) they compensate by downplaying their identity and feelings to conform into a perception that is

“agreeable to Whites” (Jackson, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, within this reality, finding community amongst people who make space for feelings and share the same realities, made life easier for him.

Moreover, participants shared that the lack of community impacted them as results show that it influences motivation levels in their creative pursuits. Once again for Christa, balancing music and another job makes her feel less connected to her community. She refers to it as a “void” that “makes her feel sad” and not “believe in herself anymore”. She continues by saying that while she does try to stay motivated by encouraging herself, the lack of people around her does impact her approach to music:

I don't know. It just makes such a difference because right now, as I don't feel like I'm connecting to my community anymore, (...) Even though I do believe in myself, you need people. You need to be that happy voice that tells you that you can do it when you're alone. You can tell yourself, yeah, I can do this. I give myself the pat on the shoulder. I literally give myself the hugs. I'm definitely hyping myself up every day, but at one point, you need other people. We cannot say, we can do everything on our own. That's bullshit. You need other people. (Christa)

While results show that Black music artists view community as indispensable on a personal level, they also indicate its importance on a professional level.

#### **4.2.2. Community and professional support**

In addition to providing support on a personal level, findings also show that community provides support in the professional aspect of the artists' lives through mentorship for example. One participant in particular felt like mentorship played a role in guiding him through his career and perfecting his craft. Indeed, in mentoring, one of the objectives is “enhanced competence” (Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 5) which is attained by the tutoring of another artist in the field, the mentor, who often possesses more skills than the mentee. For Tom, mentorship allowed him to improve his DJing skills thanks to the help of fellow DJs: “But also, in terms of mentorship and guidance, like I've had people who helped me to just get closer to improving my craft, understanding how to do stuff.”.

Sharing knowledge is one of the ways in which artists benefit from community in their careers. For Carla, community means supporting each other, sharing knowledge and creating opportunities that allow everyone to grow “on our own terms, without waiting for validation from traditional structures.”. This knowledge sharing process also takes the shape of community workshops or masterclasses, which like mentorship, helps participants advance in their career and hone their craft:

I would just apply for many different things in the community. Because there were people offering these kinds of courses. Or workshops. I would actually just apply for them and just go. That's how I

built more and more network. And I built visibility. (Christa)

Christa says that she improved her musical skills such as singing, songwriting and producing through taking classes, where she connected with a lot of creatives and started building her network. Indeed, just like mentorships can help gain access to formal and informal networks (Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 7), workshops and other initiatives can help creatives connect and establish a network. As the CCIs remain homogenous (Brook et al., 2017, p. 10) and as work sometimes proves hard to find, networking becomes essential to form connections that might turn into opportunities (Alacovska, 2019, p. 1122).

Another professional benefit of community mentioned by some of the participants is financial benefits. One participant recalls the huge impact community had on their career when he and his band were able to release a CD thanks to crowdfunding, which aligns with the research by de Peuter et al. (2023, p. 387) on collective responses in times of COVID. While this participant's experience with crowdfunding did not necessarily take place during the pandemic, in times of financial difficulty he and his band benefited from the help of their community. Crowdfunding is one of many "informal mutual-aid initiatives" that has emerged "from and for cultural workers" and are an expression of collective support (de Peuter et.al, 2023, p. 387).

I think one of the first moments was when we released, it was a long time ago. When my band, we released a CD, and we did like crowdfunding. Yeah. And this is so, I mean, I'm not a big fan of asking people for money, but my God, it was such a beautiful experience. Because to realise how much people actually care, it's really humbling. And also like there's this like sentiment of gratefulness that is really insane. And we managed to raise enough money to do this. So it's really crazy. (David)

Finally, one of the ways in which community offers professional support to artists is in giving them guidance on how to navigate the music industry, learning from the experiences of other artists who had to find their way in this field. By observing others' successes and failures Paul was able to understand how he should navigate the industry and what he should be careful of. He says this whole process has been an "indicator" of the things he should be "careful of", and believes it helped him to understand how he could "advance with all these elements" through his career. This ties into previous research by Wijngaarden et al. (2020) on the transfer of tacit knowledge shared through "practice, observation and sharing" (p. 87) within co-working spaces where collegiality and shared experiences foster innovation and professional growth, as in Paul's experience. In addition to having personal and professional benefits, results indicate that community's importance also lies in the safe spaces it helps to create.

### **4.2.3. Community and safe spaces**

During the interviews, participants shared the importance of creating safe spaces. For most, it comes as a natural reaction to not feeling included in other communities. According to Meghji, in



the face of discrimination Black individuals might react in different ways, and some might defy the White spaces (Meghji, 2020, p. 64). Here, creating safe spaces could be seen as a form of defiance. Tom has been in the music industry for a while but after moving countries he has struggled to find his community. However, this has inspired him to think about creating a community rather than trying to join one. It is natural to try and fit in pre-existing spaces, but when one feels as though they are not finding their place, they might think of how they can build their own: “I think when you feel that it's difficult to be part of a community, you end up thinking of how you can create your own, which I think is a great coping mechanism.” (Tom).

Furthermore, findings show that Black music artists feel as though space needs to be claimed, or even reclaimed in order for them to be able to thrive in their creative expression. This is because for most non White creatives, cultural circles still feel like very White dominated spaces. These spaces replicate White supremacy and are characterised by “the constant arrival and circulation of certain (white) bodies and exclusion of racialised others” (Meghji, 2019, p. 56). Therefore, Ana feels as though creating spaces that are majorly Black will help “take the power back” and regain creative freedom without having to conform to the industry’s standards:

Yeah, and maybe doing this and just, like, I would say staying in our community and working with people that look like us is just maybe taking the power back in a way. (...) just to have the freedom of creating whatever we want. (Ana)

This is also very important to Keith, 36-year-old singer-songwriter, producer and studio owner who has been in music for many years. After playing in a few bands, Keith decided to take on music production and slowly but surely found his community. After all these years he sees the importance of community particularly in “claiming” space as it will not automatically be opened to you:

And I think because again, because there's not much space, there's space for everybody, but some space needs to be claimed. Like the seat at the table, which you're referring to, you have to claim that space. (...) You have to create new standards and there's no greater energy than a collective energy. So community is very important. (Keith)

Participants say they feel more welcomed, understood and seen, as they are not only surrounded by Whiteness but also by diversity in culture or gender. For Lola, this space not only helped her feel safer, but also created a safe place for others. In “Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place”, Nirmal Puwar studies how usually excluded bodies fit, or do not fit in spaces that are dominated by Whiteness and masculinity (Gatens, 2007, p. 162; Puwar, 2004, p. 32). To counter such spaces, some artists like Lola create their own collectives based on their own set of values. Lola says “But yeah, it's good to have created an alternative space with friends that feels a bit more safe and a bit more welcoming and a bit more understanding of the roots of a specific music that you're playing without, you know, just this like just, you know, white bros.”. She adds that as

there are not many queer events in town, her collective's approach to alternative clubbing is to feel welcoming to people who don't "usually fit into those spaces where you have these like straight white dudes listening to Afro house". These spaces tend to be "close-minded" and would not necessarily be open to "maybe a flamboyant gay man or like a very butch lesbian woman" (Lola). Therefore, creating diverse spaces and organising events that promote acceptance is the answer for artists who feel as though traditional spaces are not welcoming of them. Additional results show that the lack of space for Black artists in the industry is also a result of social class issues and that the lack of access to funds or musical education impacts the development of artists' careers.

I have some friends who were like the only colored person or Black person in their class on the conservatory, and they always tell me the same thing, that there wasn't like much space for them or that they sometimes had some situations with teachers that couldn't fully understand some things that we feel. And that, to me, it does grab me. (Keith)

Because of the inequalities present in such spaces, Keith thinks it is important for people of colour to be more present in more classical environments such as conservatories and feel free to branch out of genres such as R&B: "That's also a reason that I think not every person of color has to be a beat maker or a rapper or a typical R&B singer or whatever." (Keith). Other participants refer to these spaces as still "very segregated", with "barely any Black people in those schools" (Christa). That is also why it is important to allow new generations of Black artists to know that more is available to them than society lets on:

Yeah, these kids, they have to know that that's also like a socio-economical thing (...). When you're lucky enough to have a little bit more privileged background, which is, I guess, more common in white culture than the colored community. But whether you're colored or white or whatever, if you're in a different social class, it's more easy to get access to music education. (Keith)

Additionally, a feeling of empowerment and shared identity came through the research's results.

#### **4.2.4. Community, shared identity and empowerment**

The findings show that Black music artists often feel a sense of empowerment and collective identity emerging from community. While some connect the feeling of empowerment to feeling seen and seeing themselves in others, some share that being around others gives them clarity on the steps they have to take in their path, making them feel more confident especially in the beginning of their career. Christa states that being around people of similar background helps her feel a sense empowerment but also reassurance. For her, it is all the more empowering as it feels like an acknowledgement of other artists who are normally ignored because they are not deemed "relevant" enough because of their background. This quote highlights Blackwell's definition of community for Black people as a group of people brought together by racism (Blackwell, 1985, p. 1):

Yeah I do feel more I would say it feels good. (...) And also I would say in general the reason why we have this sense of feeling more empowered is because in spaces where you are not fully seen, to be with other people that are also not fully seen, is like you see each other then you know. And then you actually, you see, you see all of it, all of them and you are like “damn the world deserves to see you man” you know “the world deserves to actually like see you fully entirely” and I guess that's so important to actually acknowledge even the idea that so many people overlook other people. Just because of the way they think that they are not relevant or you know, they don't even consider looking at you or something, or being around you because you are of African descent or anything. (Christa)

For female music artists, results show that the female community also offered them a feeling of empowerment and support, all the while creating a sense of collective identity. For Black women, in daily as in professional life, there is often a feeling of being ignored and “rendered invisible” (Jennings, 2020, p. 52). Christa states: “I mean, like, I guess being a black woman definitely has an impact on how much people take you seriously.”. Phenomena like the hot girl summer movement, inspired by the lyrics to a Megan Thee Stallion song “Cash shit” (Jennings, 2020, p. 48), are representative of women empowering each other to be unapologetically themselves and confident (Jennings, 2020, p. 48). This recalls Richie et al.'s research on the combined effects racism and sexism can have on African American women, where women stated that their shared identity helped them feel supported and empowered, sometimes without any direct interactions (1997, p. 145). This is exemplified by the hot girl summer movement which has created a sense of unity and silent understanding between women:

For example, if I think about being a woman and the women community is already very nice when you think about how we have our own little terms like hot girl summer that's like little details where you feel like it gives you a collective identity. That energy is empowering and it gives you also this feeling that you belong somewhere (Christa)

This is intensified by the enduring challenges Black female artists face, particularly the systemic lack of respect and the sexualization of their physicality. Historically, Black women have been deemed “sexually immoral and hypersexual” (Jennings, 2020, p. 48), especially in the music industry where they are constantly “dehumanised, objectified and ostracised” (Diko, 2025, p. 2). Participants shared that if they fit people's expectations of them, or sexualised themselves they would “get somewhere”. Another participant shared that “there are still narrow ideas about what success should look or sound like, especially for women of colour.” (Carla). Whether their bodies or their music, Black women are well aware that the limitations they face have an impact on their careers:

It's, like, if you're a woman, you somehow have to be a certain way in order to get somewhere. And, if you're not, (...) you're going to be overlooked. And,

## Black music artists and the importance of community

sometimes, I feel like if I would be more what people expect me to be or want me to be, then it would have been faster. I think so, because I'm not the typical girly, like, I'm not going to sexualize myself to get somewhere. I'm not doing it. If I want to, it will be because I want to. (Christa)

Additionally to fostering empowerment, findings show that community also encourages the development of a shared identity between individuals. For Black music artists, community signifies being able to identify one self to others based on cultural or ethnic background, music genre, creativity or even just shared values and beliefs. This is because, as stated earlier in section 4.2.1, people tend to be attracted to people who look like them (physically, or in terms of values). In Carla's community, there is a "shared understanding of where we come from, how we create, and how we support each other". She and her community take pride in their roots which make her feel as though she is part of "something bigger" and reminds her that she is not "doing this alone". Therefore, while results show that not all Black music artists automatically gravitate towards Black music artists like themselves, data shows that in most cases they find themselves connecting to individuals who "look" like them, have had similar life experiences or share the same love for music and culture in general. For some, this also takes place in digital spaces like instagram where connection is simplified:

I feel like I have met a lot of people through insta. People just texting like "Hey, I saw you're a black DJ in Hong Kong. I'm a black DJ from Amsterdam, do you want to meet up?" because there is so little black people and younger black people, and then also younger black DJs here. So it's like kind of this immediate connection. (Lola)

This reflects the importance of digital spaces for Black creatives, which was addressed in Sobande et al.'s research. Their research highlighted the "positive aspects of digital technologies in terms of their potential to facilitate community and solidarity between BBA cultural workers, and more generally among people of colour" (Sobande et al., 2023, p. 1455). As this participant's career is evolving in an environment where there are not a lot of Black artists, social media allowed her to make meaningful connections and build connections with other Black artists. For this reason, and the reasons exposed in section 4.2.1, Black music artists find comfort in Black community as it fosters a sense of collective identity and solidarity. Some participants say that gravitating towards Black music artists like themselves might be "unconscious" as it is more of the acknowledgment that "you're part of the movement and culture, and you know where it comes from, and you were born in it" (Tom) that facilitates connection. For some, it is not only about sharing the same cultural "struggle" but also the same cultural "power":

It's just literally like again, it is a sense of community because it's like people looking like you. (...) not even looking like you, but sharing the same cultural struggle. Like not struggle also cultural power you know, because that's actually what it is more I think. I think it's very, I mean I see like the African continent as the, the source of most music. (...) so therefore I gravitate towards it because it is like, where it comes from you know and I feel it like deeply in my bones. (Christa)

This ties back into the cultural significance of community, emphasising that people who “look like you” and with whom you share similarities are more likely to understand you, which in turn heightens feelings of shared identity. To conclude, on a personal level as much professional one, community is a very important support system for Black music artists.

### **4.3 Networking roles**

The data that has emerged from the interviews shows that as well as having an influence on creativity and creating support systems, community plays an important role in networking. Community creates career building opportunities as well as exposure, visibility and representation for Black music artists.

#### **4.3.1. Creating opportunities through community**

One of the most influential ways in which community works for Black music artists is in creating opportunities. Participants shared that they were able to advance in their career, of course through hard work, but also thanks to a network that they built through community. As mentioned earlier, exposure to opportunities remains unequal and artists often bet on their social circle to increase their chances of success (Brook et al., 2017, p. 8). One participant said that most of the opportunities he had in his career came from his community. As a DJ, rapper and singer, the network he built from his community created a number of opportunities that he could not pass up, like performing in renowned museums in his region. Through this example, the link between community, network and opportunity becomes clearer, as it becomes evident that the connections artists build allow them to get more work. Pete says: “You know, you get to do these nice things because the community just pitches you, you know, so, most of the opportunities I’ve ever had came from community.”.

Another participant describes it as a virtuous circle of opportunities. One opportunity creates another which creates another: “Yeah and that um indirectly creates more work because you made some other work, get some work in, you get hired for some new thing, which in itself creates uh creates new funds okay yeah so it's like a circle it's kind of a circle yeah.” (Keith). Being active in different fields of the music industry has helped him to broaden his network, which in turn has increased the amount (and type) of opportunities he receives. As stated in section 4.2.2, this is also the case with mentorship as it allows mentees to have access to the mentor’s network which can help boost the “expected success of newcomers” (Janosov et.al, 2020, p. 5).

However, there are other ways in which community influences Black music artists’ access to opportunities and success. In a field where opportunities are sparse and maintaining a sustainable career is a challenge, getting a chance is of the utmost importance. Respondents shared that community helped them as people “vouch” for you and “share your name in rooms that you’re not in”, resulting in opportunities being “shared within each other” (Tom). Therefore, it is critical for

creatives to be surrounded by people, on a social but also professional level, as they might be the ones to find you your next gig. For Lola, community played a role in getting more DJing opportunities at the start of her career. After she learned to DJ on her own, she signed up to play a set at a community radio that got broadcasted online: “People can hear the stuff that you've played. And then if they like it, they want to book you for a venue or for their club or whatever, then they just reach out to you.”. After that she says things “went crazy” and opportunities started coming her way. This experience emphasises the importance of community in Black music artists’ career in a very practical way: getting opportunities to showcase their talent. Finally, the participants shared how community helps them create visibility for Black artists in their field.

### 4.3.2. Creating visibility through community

The results reflect the lack of representation of Black music artists and overall diversity in the industry. There is a common understanding that Black voices are not being heard, or that they are being used to make the music industry come off as more diverse than it actually is.

For some, it feels as though there are “quotas in place”, as Carla shares that media companies “often feel like having one person of color is enough like it’s a checkbox for diversity”. This idea of check box reflects that the industry is still dominated by Whiteness and masculinity (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013, p. 500). Carla adds: “Race, gender and class all play a role in an industry still largely controlled by older white men, it often feels like you have to work twice as hard just to be seen and heard”. Her feelings are one with those of many Black music artists that feel like the industry standards remain non inclusive. On the other hand, studies shows that while POCs might see these White spaces as “informally off limits” (Schaap et.al, 2022, p. 1283; Anderson, 2015, p. 10), White people do not feel as though they are remarkable or abnormal (Schaap et.al, 2022, p. 1282; Anderson, 2015, p. 10). All of this explains why Black people still feel as though they are not meant to be a part of the cultural scene (Meghji, 2020, p. 63), because they are not reflected in it. Ana shared that the standard today is a “White pop artist” which is promoted by “White rich men”. She adds that labels want black artists to “conform and adapt to the norm”, as to them the norm is “more white pop artists”. Others like Lola shared that especially being Black in Europe, the industry tends to be “sexist and somewhat colorist”. She also notes that when you look at bigger established artists they all tend to have a “certain look”. Finally, Keith shared that even when influential people in the industry happen to “look like us”, they still lack the desire to change the way the industry works and their behaviour comes across as self serving: “Because let's be honest, 90% or 95% of the people who call the shots on a higher level or a national level don't look like us. Some of them do, but maybe they're happy just to be in there. They're afraid to disrupt things or whatever, and are happy to pay their own home.”.

Additionally, the data confirms that there are some spaces in which Black artists are not expected to be seen, further perpetuating stereotypes of Black music artists. These findings are in line with previous research on “racialised expectations” that exist in music, where artists are considered to “fit” a certain genre based on the way they look (Schaap et.al, 2020, p. 1285). David shares that

although he feels there are certain expectations of the music he “should” be playing, he stills creates the music that feels authentic to him:

For example, (...) Because I'm black, I should start wearing this type of clothes. I should act this way. If I want to work, of course. But I decided to say, fuck it. So what happens? Of course, I have less. I have less things. If you talk about success in the industry, I have less concerts. I have less money. But the moments I spend with the audience are so true. (David)

Findings show that discrimination is also present in music genres that have roots in Black music, which further encourages Black music artists to create exposure and visibility for themselves. For example, techno emerged in Detroit the 1970s and can be traced back to the Black pioneers such as Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Sanderson (Tsitsos, 2018, p. 270).

Like a lot of popular electronic genres, like take anything like house or jungle or techno all have Black origins. But then today, you know, like the face of house tends to be like a white, you know, the face of techno tends to be a white guy as well. And so even jungle as well, drum and bass and jungle also have roots in like dub and British Black Caribbean culture. (Lola)

Therefore, community plays a crucial role in creating visibility for Black music artists, who feel as though they have to vouch for themselves in the music industry. Going back to the literature review, this visibility is often created by more established Black artists who use their voice to amplify those of less established artists (Artland Magazine, 2020, para. 1), tightening the bonds between them. Keith shares that “new movements” and “new generations” have to create “extra disruption, create collective energy and especially leverage”. He adds: “ Because when you see a whole collective of people, when you enter a space not only with artists, but with community, with fans, with people who support it, they have a say in things.”. Going back to section 4.2.3 on safe spaces, such spaces and collective energy create exposure for Black music artists who often feel ignored. This connects back to concepts such as the subaltern, which describes exclusion (Thomas, 2018, p. 862) or lower status and subordination (Green, 2002, p. 2). In other words, we could say that Black music artists are creating subaltern communities who are working together to (maybe) reach inclusion in the industry, but most importantly to make sure they are seen and valued to the full extent of their talent.

In conclusion, from creative importance, to being a significant support system, to crafting networks of opportunities and exposure, results show that Black music artists view community as an influential element in the development of their career.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion

This thesis aimed to unveil how Black music artists view community in the development of their career. Building upon ten interviews, it aims to answer the following RQ: *How do Black music artists view the importance of community in the development of their career?* The results show that Black music artists view community as a necessity in the development of their career. This section discusses how these findings confirm, challenge and extend existing literature on creativity, support systems, representation and opportunities within the CCIs.

#### *Community as a creative and motivational force*

For Black music artists, community is influential in helping them stay productive and creative. The communal aspect of music creation was already addressed in the introduction of this study, but the results show even more clearly that artists benefit from being around other creatives. Community practices are important in fostering creativity, as previously suggested by Toynbee (2000, p. 102) who emphasised the role of collaboration in the artistic process. Participants in the study report that they experienced a “collective energy” when working with other artists, thus highlighting that collaboration fosters creativity but also motivation. Black music artists value the cultural aspect of music for its ability to further collective initiatives and bring people together. This emphasis on communal connection through music extends concepts such as Durkheim’s “collective effervescence” (1912, p. 348), which describes the heightened emotional energy generated in group settings. This effervescence is also explained as an “emotional contagion,” where shared experiences amplify individual emotional states (Collins, 2004, p. 107; Heinskou & Liebst, 2016, p. 355), which may be favourable for creation.

Similarly, Goodwin (2019, p. 129) regards artists as each other’s support systems, particularly in the face of industry-related stress. This thesis confirms those insights while also extending them by showing that creativity is sustained by artistic collaboration but also by emotional and cultural resonance. For Black music artists, being surrounded by like-minded individuals becomes a driving force in their creative pursuits, perpetuates hopes and enhances emotional endurance in the face of marginalisation. While this thesis confirms that minorities would benefit from community (and governmental programs tailored to their needs, cf., Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016, p. 10), it also nuances that idea. Indeed the results show that marginalisation pushes Black music artists to create their own safe spaces and support systems which foster the growth of their career.

#### *Creating emotional support and fostering mental wellbeing*

In terms of support systems, there are a multitude of benefits that come with being part of a community. Reports by Gross & Musgrave indicate that musicians in the UK suffer from the working



conditions of the industry: 71.1% of their respondents self-reported as anxious and 68.5% as depressed (2020, p. 2; Gross & Musgrave, 2016, p. 5). While the CCIs are quite difficult to navigate, this thesis' results indicate that for Black music artists, there exists a relation between community and alleviating feelings of loneliness or even sadness. This aligns well with Grayman-Simpson's findings that community is vital to Black individuals' psychological wellbeing (2012, p. 26). In this regard, the results of this study demonstrate that community is often the primary source of resilience when other forms of support are lacking. Our participants report finding strength and hope in their community, which ultimately affords them a sense of emotional stability.

At the same time, this research nuanced the notion that community is always rooted in ethnicity. Community can be created in a number of ways, but the most frequent ones seem to be: shared values, shared creative influences, and shared cultural background. As stated earlier, ethnic and cultural background do play a role in Black music artists' quest of community, but the love for music and a shared mindset are also of importance. Black music artists seek community in those who they can identify themselves with. The importance lies in being able to feel understood and create music that resonates with the other. However, this does create a tendency (sometimes subconsciously) to get closer to people who understand their struggles, which may result in being surrounded by people who have a similar ethnic background due to similar life experiences. This may also include individuals who are part of another minority group, or who empathise with them. In essence, shared affinity strengthens community ties, thus revealing cultural and social strata. Paul DiMaggio explained how individuals use culture as a set of cognitive schemata to navigate interaction, emphasising the "cultural matching" process of (subconsciously) interpreting cues to assess cultural similarities, which then facilitate communication (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269). As well as on a personal level, this comes into play on a professional level by creating alternative networks of support inside the community.

The participants in this study also highlighted the value of mentorship, workshops and other community based initiatives in offering guidance. Such initiatives allow Black music artists to learn from other artists' experiences and growth. The importance lies in the lack of access to such networks outside the community. While this lack of access is also impacted by factors such as class and gender, the lack of resources pushes Black music artists to look for their own resources. These findings support and expand on Tremblay & Dehesa's research which emphasised how the lack of resources available to artists (2016, p. 10) pushes them to look to others for guidance. Community, then, emerges as a way to work around exclusionary industry practices.

#### *Creating spaces in response to systemic exclusion*

To counteract exclusion, Black music artists end up creating their own spaces. This thesis supports Meghji's studies on White spaces (2020, p. 64) which explained how the lack of representation and inclusion of Black bodies in the CCIs can sometimes result in a defiance of the status quo. The participants expressed frustration at the industry's claims of diversity which often fail to translate into real change and inclusion. The findings resonate with the notion of Black "self-

help”, as discussed by Ohri et. al (2023, p. 1928), and highlight the desire of artists to build their own standards and craft their own tables to sit at. This comes as a proactive response to exclusion and a conscious reshaping of the industry’s norms.

To overcome the standards that exist in the music industry, Black music artists have to transcend pre-existing concepts on Blackness and the persisting “racial contracts” in place (Puwar, 2001, p. 651). In very practical terms, more inclusive and diverse spaces come into existence through Black led events, Black owned labels or studios, or even Black produced music. In this way, community comes as a direct response to exclusion and misrepresentation. Black music artists call upon like-minded peers committed to change the industry’s mechanisms and its treatment of Black bodies, not to conform to existing norms but to create a new cultural vision on their own terms. This thesis also extends the research of Sobande et al. (2023, p. 1457) which emphasises the importance of creating alternative spaces online, as it offers a deeper look into how such spaces can aid career advancement.

#### *Creating access to networks and career opportunities*

This thesis’ findings imply that while community can often be reduced to only networking, its benefits and influence on Black music artists’ careers is immense. Artists who have somewhat of a sustainable and successful career are the ones who have a solid community around them, a community that helps them on a personal as well as on a professional level. The community becomes an ecosystem that allows artists to build a more balanced career. This further expands previous research on the lack of resources and the use of community (Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016, p. 2), or the lack of exposure and the creation of alternative spaces (Sobande et. al, 2023, p.1457) and the numerous inequalities that exist in the CCIs.

The uneven access to opportunities in the industry affects Black music artists in many ways. It impacts them financially, mentally and can also impact their credibility to gatekeepers (Everts et al., 2022, p. 6). In line with previous research on network, community and success (Bridgstock, 2009, p. 38; 2011, p. 11; 2013, p. 180; Goodwin, 2019, p. 123), this study found that community plays a key role in enabling access to opportunities. Participants shared that they often benefited from their community to secure gigs, (song) placements, collaborations and other opportunities that might otherwise remain inaccessible due to institutional gatekeeping. In response to these inequalities that prevent the inclusion of Black bodies into mainstream circuits, community networking affords them different routes through alternative infrastructures. However, this thesis challenges the idea that networking alone is an equaliser in the CCIs. Participants described how race, class and gender shape their access to networks and resources in the music industry. This supports the intersectional critique brought forth by Brook et al. (2017, p. 7) that highlighted the effects of ethnicity, social class and gender on success in the CCIs. Therefore, this thesis put forth the importance of looking at the experiences of Black music artists as nuanced and complex.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, this research confirms the crucial role of community in the development of Black music artists' careers. It reveals that community is not only valued but also essential to navigate the challenges that persist in the CCIs. Community emerges as a multifaceted support structure that fosters creativity, emotional wellbeing, resource sharing, and provides a safe space for identity affirmation. Community allows Black music artists to eventually feel seen in an industry where their experiences are often erased and their voices muted. This thesis also shows that the formation of community is not always based on ethnic homogeneity but also on similar life experiences, shared values and mutual understanding. However, for many Black music artists those values are often rooted in common racialised experiences which emphasises the need to create more inclusive structures within the industry. Because such structures are currently lacking in the industry, Black music artists respond by creating their own, challenging the boundaries and expectations of the industry itself. This thesis contributes to a growing body of literature that understands community not as an auxiliary factor but as central element in the development of balanced and sustainable careers for Black creatives.

## 5.2 Limitations and further research

### *Practical implications*

In practice, such findings bring attention to the importance of implementing community on a more structural level to help aspiring Black artists build their careers. Having verified the strategic role community plays in said artists' careers, it is now important to think of initiatives, programs or policies that could be put in place or adapted to the experiences of Black music artists. As we have seen that Black creatives choose to create spaces because they do not fit the ones in place, allowing such spaces to take more place on an industry level would enable Black artists to take a more balanced approach to career development. While initiatives such as community workshops, seminars and masterclasses are impactful on a smaller scale, giving them visibility on a bigger scale would be helpful as such programs are often underfunded and operate on the sidelines of the industry. Policies that increase access to these resources would benefit individual career development as well as contribute to a more equitable creative ecosystem, highlighting the need for institutions and gatekeepers to recognise the value of these spaces and begin integrating them into formal structures through funding or partnerships for example.

### *Limitations*

This research, while offering valuable insights, is not without limitations. First, the sample, although rich in qualitative depth, is relatively small and reflects artists primarily active in genres where Black musical influence is already expected or prominent such as Hip-hop, R&B, Jazz. This may have constrained the diversity of experiences captured and undeniably limits the generalisability of the findings across the broader spectrum of the music industry. Therefore, while snowball sampling helped find interview participants and facilitated communication, drawing from one network had drawbacks as it resulted in a higher number of participants who shared similarities rather than completely different people.

Second, while gender and class emerged organically during the interviews, they were not focal points of analysis. While having touched upon the experiences of Black women in a White male dominated industry, these experiences still remain under-explored within the thesis and deserve focused attention in future research.

Finally, while the thesis draws connections between cultural heritage and common values, it does not explicitly theorise the role of diasporic identity or African cultural background in shaping the communal principles described by participants. This remains an area that requires further inquiry.

### *Indications for future research*

Building on these findings, future research should seek to expand the scope both demographically and thematically. First, including Black music artists active in genres with less ethnic diversity, could help uncover how the lack of cultural representation shapes their

experiences and coping strategies. For example, by conducting cross genre comparison research, this could provide further insight into how the somatic norm and racial contracts (Puwar, 2001, p. 651) manifest differently across different genres.

Second, future studies should adopt an intersectional framework to examine how race interacts with gender, class and sexuality in shaping access and relation to community, networks and opportunities within the music industry. Once again, comparative research between male, female and artists with varying gender identities would be valuable in better understanding and mapping experiences of exclusion and support.

Lastly, as participants vocalised the importance of Black community for Black music artists, further research could explore the cultural specificity of communal practices among artists of African descent. A focused inquiry into how cultural heritage influences collective music-making and community-building could offer interesting perspectives on artistic solidarity and resistance.

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## Appendix A

- **How do Black music artists view the importance of community in the development of their career?**
  - Age
  - Years in music
  - Education
  - Gender
  - Ethnic background
  - Genre
  - Location

### A. Career development

1. How would you describe building a career in the CCIs? **Follow-up:** how did this go for you? What is your pov precarious working conditions and career sustainability in the CCIs?
2. How do you define success? Do you feel successful? **Follow-up:** In what way? (And in what way do you consider yourself less successful? If applicable)
3. What do you see as career milestones in your field? Do people pursue them? Why and how does this apply to you?
4. Do you think your experience as a Black artist has shaped your career development? If so, how?

### B. Inequalities

1. Do you think your ethnic background and/ or gender affects how you interact with artists, gatekeepers or audiences in the CCIs?
2. Have you ever felt excluded from certain creative or professional spaces in your field? If yes, what made you feel that way?
3. Do you feel that there are certain “unwritten rules” or norms in your industry that work against Black creatives?
4. Have you seen patterns in who gets opportunities or visibility in your field? What do those patterns look like to you?
5. How do you think ethnic/class background/gender impacts access to networks and support in your field?
6. How do you cope with or resist the inequalities you encounter in the industry? Do you feel that discrimination or exclusion has pushed you to create or find alternative networks of support?

### C. Community

1. What does the word *community* mean to you, personally and professionally?

## Black music artists and the importance of community

2. How have communities manifested in your life? (Online/musical/ethnic?) Would you say you have found your community/ies? If you haven't found them, is this something that you're looking for? Why/why not?
3. How does this community materialise in your career? (Mentorship, collaborations, collectives?...)
4. How would you describe the benefits of community in your career?
5. Do you feel that the type of music you sing/produce/compose affects how you perceive community? If yes, how?
6. Does your community (also) provide you with a sense of collective identity? How so?
7. Do you find yourself gravitating more towards Black artists like yourself or actively seeking Black community?
8. Do you feel stronger or more empowered in your work when you're surrounded by other Black creatives?
9. How has community/networking helped you in terms of creating opportunities for yourself and building your career? Can you recall a specific moment when your community helped you grow professionally? (amplifying your work, offering help, or simply being present?)
10. During difficult times (like the pandemic or personal/professional setbacks), did community play a role in helping you get through?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences, challenges, or wins that relate to being a Black artist navigating this industry?



## **Appendix B**

### **CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH**

#### **FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:**

Aniola Aboh, 747568aa@eur.nl

#### **DESCRIPTION**

You are invited to participate in a research about Black music artists and community. The purpose of the study is to understand how Black music artists view the importance of community in the development of their career.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms,

- my questions will be related to topics such as career development, inequalities in the music industry and community.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will make an audio recording of the interview. I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

#### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will not use your name or other identifying information in the study. To participants in the study will only be referred to with pseudonyms, and in terms of general characteristics such as age and gender, etc.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

#### **TIME INVOLVEMENT**

Your participation in this study will take up to an hour. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

#### **PAYMENTS**

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

#### **DATA COLLECTION AND RETENTION**

During the interview the following personal data will be collected from you: Age, gender, audio recordings, occupation, cultural background, ethnic background.

Your data will be retained for a maximum of a year, in order to complete my thesis project.

#### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

## **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— Yosha Wingaarden at [wijngaarden@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:wijngaarden@eshcc.eur.nl).

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email Aniola Aboh at [747568aa@eur.nl](mailto:747568aa@eur.nl).

## **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be recorded during this study:

Name Signature Date:

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

## Appendix C

Codes	Quotes	Sub-theme	Theme
Creative process	“So, I will also, if I want to connect with people, I will go towards people that maybe have the same creative process as me”	Community and fostering creativity	Creative influence
Being around other creatives	“Sometimes we just we just know we're not writing songs, but we've just been writing lowkey But we see each other and we show a little bit of our stuff And I just like damn I gotta start writing more And like sometimes it's like me I get it like it's like my demos and everything like yeah, it's the creative drive of community is like super super cool.”	Community and fostering creativity	Creative influence
Empowerment	“Yeah, but also like through I think like it gives like resilience. Obviously like a network um Like more than than the creative process personally it's super enriching um Yeah, I think it helps you you cope better from all like the externalities and like the Difficulties of being like a POC artist or creative in general uh In the west, you know, yeah.”	Community and resilience in creative pursuits	Creative influence
Support	“And sometimes you'd hear certain statements being thrown that you need to be a bit more confident. And that was a bit motivating, even though it came across at the wrong time. Yeah, but that helped with just me not giving up.”	Community and resilience in creative pursuits	Creative influence
Connection in hard times	“Which I think has been great because, you know, I feel like being able to be sought out as someone who can give advice, it's a great role to play in someone's life.”	Community and personal support	Support systems

## Black music artists and the importance of community

Codes	Quotes	Sub-theme	Theme
Importance of having people around	“Also, I think having, yes, a little community, like people that you can rely on when you feel down or even people that you can write with or you can go to events with or you can share, I don't know, books with. It can be super fulfilling, but also you can create new stuff and just share some ideas in general. And it's good to be alone because you just need to be alone sometimes.”	Community and personal support	Support systems
Guidance	“But also, in terms of mentorship and guidance, like I've had people who helped me to just get closer to improving my craft, understanding how to do stuff.”	Community and professional support	Support systems
Knowledge sharing	“Because it made me understand that Um Well Looking at somebody else's struggle Or somebody else's success Has been a very big indicator Of what are the things I need to be careful of What are the things that I don't need to be That much cautious of In how I can advance with all these elements.”	Community and professional support	Support systems
Building safe spaces	“We all had the same need for a space where we could create, produce, reverse etc etc. So to me that seemed like a logical step and I formed an alliance with other professional musicians to like household a spot where we could like develop and develop other artists.”	Community and safe spaces	Support systems

## Black music artists and the importance of community

Codes	Quotes	Sub-theme	Theme
Building safe spaces	“But yeah, this is one of the reasons why I created like a DJ agency with friends so that we have a bit more of an alternative approach to electronic dance music. And you can have different DJs like just showcasing their music and their passion without feeling like you're only surrounded by straight white guys pretty much all the time. Yeah, so yeah, it's definitely changed the way that I party as well.”	Community and safe spaces	Support systems
Shared identity	“So yeah, like the artists I work with are really driven by that and I'm really like fired up to create and expand a community like that so that we can all feel that, so we can have a kind of collective energy in that.”	Community, shared identity and empowerment	Support systems
Likemindedness and shared struggles	“But, yeah, I will gravitate towards people that are part of the community. They just understand more of the issues that we can encounter, especially in the music industry because we are talking about.”	Community, shared identity and empowerment	Support systems
Opportunity building	“And create opportunities that allow us to thrive on our own terms.”	Creating opportunities through community	Networking roles

## Black music artists and the importance of community

Codes	Quotes	Sub-theme	Theme
Building a network through practice	“Because there were people offering these kinds of courses. Or workshops. I would actually just apply for them and just go. That's how I built more and more network. And I built visibility. Because every time at the end of those courses you have to do a performance. And then you're just exposing yourself. Even though you're not ready. You have to do this. So that's how I built the beginning of my career. By just working on my craft in that way.”	Creating opportunities through community	Networking roles
Creating exposure	“Give visibility to other artists, emerging ones.”	Creating visibility through community	Networking roles
Representation	“Yeah, show that, you know, we are not only creators of a lot of those genres, but that we also should be there to dominate the scene and show our talent and, you know, show some representation.”	Creating visibility through community	Networking roles

**Appendix D**

Participants	Gender	Years of experience	Role	Country of residence	Musical genre
<b>1. Carla</b>	Female	13	Singer-songwriter, musical/voice actress	Netherlands	R&B, (Neo)Soul/Jazz
<b>2. Pete</b>	Male	14	DJ, rapper, singer (live performance with band)	Netherlands	Mellow Hip-hop
<b>3. Ana</b>	Female	10	Singer songwriter, producer	France	R&B, Neo-Soul, Jazz, Pop (alternative)
<b>4. Frank</b>	Male	5	Rapper, singer, producer	Netherlands	Rap, Hip-hop, alternative R&B
<b>5. David</b>	Male	10	Singer songwriter, composer, musician	France	Black music, R&B, Soul, Funk
<b>6. Keith</b>	Male	15	Singer songwriter, producer, vocalist, studio owner	Netherlands	Soul, R&B, alternative Hip-hop
<b>7. Christa</b>	Female	7	Singer songwriter, producer	Netherlands	R&B, Soul, Alternative
<b>8. Lola</b>	Female	9	Singer songwriter, DJ	Hong Kong	Reggae, Dancehall, Neo-Soul, Jungle, Footwork
<b>9. Tom</b>	Male	4	DJ, producer	Netherlands	House
<b>10. Paul</b>	Male	6	Rapper, songwriter	France	Rap, R&B