

NAVIGATING IDENTITY AND PERSISTENCE THROUGH MENTORING:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE TEACHERS IN  
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SCHOOLS

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to all members of the Jack and Mays family, both here on Earth and in Heaven . . . thank you for your continued support of my educational endeavors.

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experiences of 11 Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 public schools. Specifically, the goal was to capture the thoughts and experiences the 11 Black male participants held on racial identity development and persistence as a teacher, and the influence mentoring had on their development. The design of this study included data collection through multiple sources, including demographic surveys, informed consent, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews. The data collected for this study were analyzed via a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which involves six activities for examining transcripts and responses (van Manen, 1990).

The primary research question guiding this study was: What are the lived experiences of Black male teachers who have engaged in teacher mentoring programs at White K–12 schools? The primary research question and the secondary research questions of this study were undergirded by a theoretical framework consisting of both nigrescence theory (W. E. Cross, 1971) and mentoring theory (Kram, 1985). Four themes emerged from the data and represented the lived experiences of the 11 participants. The findings emphasize how Black male teachers navigate predominantly White K–12 spaces, their peers, and the students they teach. Additionally, each participant highlighted their awareness of their racial identity and the influence it had on the mentoring they received.

The findings of this study add to the existing body of knowledge on teacher mentoring programs and the success of Black male teachers by providing a view from a different setting (predominantly White schools). Implications for practice include implementing teacher mentoring networks/webs for Black male teachers and creating Black male teacher affinity groups. Future research should explore the experiences of Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 schools in other regions of the United States.

## **I. INTRODUCTION (BACKGROUND)**

The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.

(Baldwin, 1963, para. 2)

As a Black male in the United States, education has always been a top priority in my life. Childhood playtime consisted of educational activities, library runs, and “playing school” on numerous occasions. Having an aunt as a librarian also strengthened my focus on education. My K–12 educational experience had a few setbacks, but overall, I remained an A/B student who was determined to become a math teacher one day. I declared myself as an education major during my first year of college at Texas A&M University and my major never changed. I quickly realized in college that my most effective method of studying was to explain the content and concepts to someone else, especially in math courses. In my graduate studies at the University of Arkansas, I served as a math tutor to student-athletes. Although teaching was my passion, my first professional job led me to Salt Lake City, Utah, where I worked with the Black student population at the University of Utah.

As the advisor for the Black Student Union at the University of Utah, I encountered many students from Utah and surrounding states who were focused on becoming better versions of themselves. The student population seemed elated to see me, a Black male from the South, in a space Blacks rarely occupied. From my own experiences, I was accustomed to being one of few, due to both Texas A&M and the University of Arkansas being Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). I made connections with Black faculty and staff, graduate students, and community members

who were all in support of the work I was responsible for doing in my role. Although external doubt existed about my ability to execute the work due to my young age, through my actions I was able to demonstrate my dedication to the students. Support within this role was something I had to find on my own. As a new professional, I actively sought out relationships with individuals who were seasoned in the field and willing to share their expertise and knowledge of the campus culture. However, although these connections were helpful, I was not able to persist at the University of Utah. Though I enjoyed my work, I always felt it was time for me to go into the K–12 classroom and serve as a teacher.

In August of 2012, I decided to leave Salt Lake City and return home to Houston to start a new job as a middle school math teacher. This was a leap from the previous year I spent in service working with college students. The cultural climate of Utah was drastically different than what I had experienced growing up in Houston, and the level of professional support I received was minimal. Becoming a teacher provided a different level of support. Day one of new teacher professional development began on a humid Houston morning and I could immediately feel the difference in environments. I was introduced to my mentor, Mrs. Desiree Thomas, who also taught seventh-grade math and had done so for the past 5 years. Desiree grew up in El Paso, a city 11 hours west of Houston. An alumna of Prairie View A&M University, a Historically Black University (HBCU), Desiree identified as a biracial woman with a Black father and a Latina mother. As a mentor, Desiree used a pragmatic approach and was familiar with the “ins and outs” of both the school and district. Accessible, approachable, and patient are words that all describe the way in which Desiree handled the questions and concerns I would bring to

our mentor–mentee meetings. I considered Desiree to be my first responder whenever I needed guidance, support, or an impromptu venting session. In addition to assigning mentors, the district required new teachers to attend monthly meetings where topics of classroom management, parent collaboration, student achievement, and new teacher stress were all discussed. These meetings provided an opportunity for new teachers to network, collaborate, and receive support from other district employees. This year of intentional mentoring aided in my retention and persistence as a teacher in the district.

Year two and year three of teaching were not mandated mentoring years in the district. However, I still collaborated with Desiree during these years as we continued to both serve as members of the seventh-grade math team. During this time, our mentor–mentee dynamic became more reciprocal as we would share with one another new ideas for integrating technology into the classroom and implementing different curricular designs. This relationship allowed for both professional and personal growth. Years four and five brought about the opportunity for me to swap roles and serve as a mentor to two new math teachers. Both individuals were completing the requirements necessary to become certified through an alternative certification program (ACP). Given this dynamic, their exposure to pedagogical concepts and curriculum design was limited. However, embodying what was modeled during my time as a mentee, I stepped up to serve as a guide, resource, and support for two Black male teachers who were brand new to the profession. Mentoring was a way for me to not only help others, it also allowed for my own personal and professional growth. My communication skills, critical thinking, and collaboration were all enhanced during this time. Both mentees attributed their retention

in education to the mentoring they received during year one, much like I had with Desiree.

Year six presented the opportunity for me to grow in a new school in a different district. Although this district was only five miles north of my previous district, the demographics of the student population differed greatly. The new district was smaller in mile radius; however, the property tax base was higher than in the previous district. Moving from a school where most of the students and teachers resembled my identity to a school where I was the only Black male teacher was a tough experience. Feelings of isolation were met with a sense of entitlement from parents, students, and other teachers. A debate occurred at the beginning of the year about whether I should teach sections of gifted and talented courses (Pre-AP) because of the setting and student demographic of my previous schools. For months, I felt out of place and visibly different from others. Every day I felt the invisible, but visible, spotlight that shined brightly on me as I navigated the predominantly White space. Teachers with whom I collaborated always acted as though I were their competitor as they sought out ways to “win against me.” However, I knew there was a purpose for my being at this campus and began to make an impact with both students of color and White students who finally had a Black male teacher. This defining moment encouraged my passion to persist each day.

Formal mentoring on this campus was nonexistent. I realized this fact when the new teacher in the classroom next to mine would constantly ask for my input and advice on certain actions happening in her classroom. We had weekly conversations related to student behavior, STAAR test preparation, and navigating a new space. I unofficially became the mentor to a White female teacher at a school where I was the only Black

male teacher. As the only Black male professional in the school, I sought out connections with others who were willing to provide context and insight into the campus and community dynamics. These informal engagements provided me the opportunity to understand the history and culture of the school. I gathered from conversations that I was the first Black male to teach at a campus that had been open for 30 years. This was a bittersweet revelation because I was elated to serve as the first and shocked to know that students had been deprived of the opportunity to interact with Black male teachers. Later in the school year, I had a conversation with a Black female staff member who mentioned that she did not know how long it would take the school to hire another Black male. Additionally, we discussed my experience at the school, and she made a comment about me being able to “speak to both sides.” I immediately knew what she meant by this statement. Her statement was one that I had heard since childhood—the idea that because I had the ability to speak using a certain vernacular, I was able to properly interact in White spaces. Realizing the hidden message of her statement, I began to wonder whether other Black male teachers in White schools had similar experiences with mentoring and persistence while navigating their identity. This curiosity is embedded throughout my study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

What does it mean to be a Black male teacher in America, and what does it mean to be a Black male teacher in a predominantly White school? Being Black in America is a difficult task. Despite advances toward equality in America, there still exists a deep racial divide in societal and educational opportunities (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Trent, 1990). Furthermore, despite the belief by some that we are living in a post-racial America

(Kline, 2008), both racial stratification and systemic racism are embedded in all aspects of American life (Trent, 1990). Black Americans are forced to deal with the complexity of being Black in White America. Du Bois (1903) spoke to this complexity:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 5)

Black identity development is a layered process that factors in the successes, setbacks, and historical nature of Black existence. Prior to being anything closely related to accepted, Blacks were denied participation in owning land, voting, and receiving formal education in American schools. Oppression came in the form of racism for Black Americans and in the form of both racism and sexism for Black women. The intellectualism of Blacks was questioned by White individuals through theories proposed by scientists like Darwin and Gobineau (Wright, 2002). Throughout the 246 years of slavery in America, Blacks were mistreated, neglected of basic human rights, and labeled as inferior to Whites. Whether freed or enslaved, Blacks were not granted basic rights in the *Dred Scott v. Sanford* decision in 1856, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 that freed all slaves in confederate states. Years of hatred toward Blacks were combined with beatings and lynchings despite Blacks being freed from chattel slavery in 1865. Freed Blacks were met with the constitutional ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which allowed for racial segregation in housing communities, stores, trains, diners, and

even schools. The landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* provided some relief from racial segregation as the court decided racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. However, an implementation strategy for school integration was not decided upon immediately, which resulted in increased racial tension (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Milner & Howard, 2004).

Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Black schools employed Black teachers with ease. The Black teaching force reached close to 80,000 teachers at the turn of the 20th century (Milner & Howard, 2004). Teachers were seen as professionals and were considered leaders, role models, and extended members of the family. Black teachers not only taught the community, they also lived in the community. When the decision for integration was made, most Black teachers were not included in the integration plans (Milner, 2006). Massive layoffs ensued as more than 35,000 Black teachers were left looking for employment in the 10-year span after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Milner & Howard, 2004).

Sixty-one years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, during the 2015–2016 academic year, White students represented 48.9% of all public K–12 students in America, whereas Black students represented 15.5% and Hispanic students represented 25.9% (Snyder et al., 2019a). Specifically in Texas, Hispanic students represent the majority of public K–12 students at 52.4%, Whites at 27.9%, and Blacks at 12.6% (Texas Education Agency, 2020). Though racially diverse, schools are experiencing segregated student populations that are comparable to the years before integration measures were required (Moore & Lewis, 2014). Continuing with this trend is the overrepresentation of White teachers who represent 79.3% of K–12 teachers in American schools whereas

Black and Hispanic teachers represent 6.7% and 9.3%, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Specifically in Texas, White teachers make up the largest group with 58.6%, whereas Hispanic teachers represent 27.6% and Black teachers represent 10.5% (T. G. Smith, 2020). When stratifying the data by gender, female teachers represent 76.5% of the teaching force and male teachers represent 23.5% of the teaching force (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Black males represent roughly 2% of all public K–12 teachers in America yet contribute the most to the turnover rate of public-school teachers (Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

The teaching profession has also shifted over time; men were considered schoolmasters in the late 1700s and used the teaching profession as a stepping stone to other careers (Rury, 1989). As male teachers continued to move to other professions, women began to take over American classrooms. The hegemonic nature of this shift was undergirded by the idea that women were nurturing, maternal, and willing to do the job for less pay. This increase in the representation of women as public-school teachers in America is said to have initiated the “feminization” of the teaching profession and the formalization of the teaching profession in operation today (Rury, 1989). Given the literature that reflects Black male complexity and the data that reflect the scarcity of Black male representation in the K–12 teaching force, the mentoring experiences of Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 schools are deemed vital to explore, understand, and improve.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the mentoring experiences of Black males teaching in predominantly White K–12 public schools. I interviewed 11 Black male teachers about their lived experiences to understand whether and how mentoring affected their persistence, personal development, and career development, while taking into consideration the role of racial identity development (nigrescence) throughout these experiences. Additionally, I used detailed descriptions gathered from interview data to share these experiences from the perspectives of the participants. It was my hope that these experiences would provide valuable insight into how Black male teachers navigate and persist in White spaces.

## **Research Question**

I developed the research questions to address the purpose statement and to highlight the phenomenon of being a Black male teacher in a predominantly White K–12 public school. The primary research question used to guide the study was: What are the lived experiences of Black male teachers who have engaged in teacher mentoring programs at White K–12 schools? The following secondary research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do Black male teachers use mentoring to persist in White K–12 schools?
2. How have mentoring experiences influenced the personal development of Black male teachers?
3. How have mentoring experiences influenced the career development (and retention) of Black male teachers?

Both persistence and PWIs are terms used in the postsecondary school realm to measure college student retention and to describe a college setting in which the majority of the students enrolled (i.e., more than 50%) identify as White. Within this study, the term persistence is used to refer to consecutive teaching years and the term PWIs is used to refer to public schools (traditional and charter) in which the majority of the students enrolled identify as White.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks used for this study were nigrescence theory (W. E. Cross, 1971, 1991), also referred to as the theory of Black identity development, and mentoring theory (Kram, 1983, 1985). In his foundational work, W. E. Cross developed five stages of Black identity development—pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment—and used these five stages to describe the racial identity path Black Americans navigate. The first two stages, pre-encounter and encounter, are said to occur during the adolescent stage of life. Black Americans often absorb the belief that White culture is dominant and are oblivious to this until they encounter some type of event (or series of events) that causes them to become aware of racial differences. In the immersion/emersion stage, Black individuals use their new awareness to become more knowledgeable of their Black identity. The unlearning of a superior White culture is met with a dislike of Whiteness. The internalization phase is the phase in which an individual is secure with their Black identity and exhibits a greater appreciation for Blackness while developing relationships with individuals of different racial identities (including White Americans). An individual

at the internalization-commitment stage has a personal sense of identity and uses this to advocate and commit to the growth and success of the Black race.

Mentoring theory was derived from the foundational work of Kram (1983), who studied the relationships of several mentoring pairs in a professional setting. Within this study, two functions emerged in the mentor–mentee relationship: career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions are facilitated through coaching, protection, and exposure and highlight the new knowledge and growth a mentee has in the organizational structure. Psychosocial functions are demonstrated through role modeling, counseling, and acceptance and highlight the trust and enhanced identity of the mentor–mentee relationship. The relationship between mentor and mentee can determine the value of mentoring (Kram, 1985).

Using nigrescence theory (W. E. Cross, 1971, 1991) as a framework provided insights into the lived experiences of Black males retained as teachers in predominantly White schools who engaged in formal mentoring. Additionally, mentoring theory (Kram, 1983, 1985) enabled me to explore the personal and professional impacts of mentoring on Black male teachers. Both theories influenced the design of the study to address the research questions. A more detailed discussion of the two theories is provided in Chapter II.

### **Brief Overview of Methodology**

Qualitative research can be used to provide an analysis of the way people communicate (Gibbs, 2008). Using a qualitative approach is meaningful and allows for diverse understandings and viewpoints. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the mentoring experiences of Black males teaching in predominantly White

K–12 public schools. Phenomenology is used to capture the essence of an experience from the perspective of those who have lived it (Merriam, 1998). The use of phenomenology allows for the human experiences of the participants to be fully represented through rich descriptions in an effort to highlight the emergent themes. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is an appropriate tool for exploring and describing shared experiences related to phenomena. The research design for this qualitative study called for informed consent, demographic surveys, and semi-structured interviews.

### **Significance of the Study**

The majority of K–12 students in America will graduate from high school without encountering a Black male teacher. This research was intended to contribute to the body of literature surrounding Black male teachers by (a) voicing the experiences of Black male teachers in White schools, (b) illuminating the intersection of racial identity and career identity in the teaching force, and (c) providing educational leaders with potential tools to retain Black male teachers. The findings of this study can be beneficial to developers of teacher preparation programs, current K–12 teachers, educational administrators, and educational policymakers to enhance the experiences of Black male teachers in the teaching force. Additionally, results can be used to inform the strategies educational leaders and policymakers develop and use to attract and retain Black male teachers. This study is significant due to the existing literature focusing heavily on Black male teachers in Black urban schools (Bristol, 2018; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2014). The existing literature also focuses on Black males being needed in classrooms to support and advance young Black male students (Brockenbrough, 2012).

The information included in this study was intended to reduce the current gap in the literature through an analysis of Black male teachers in settings often excluded from the research and where Black men are often excluded. By using W. E. Cross's (1971) nigrescence theory and Kram's (1983) mentoring theory, I designed this study to expand on professional mentoring theory as the theory does not include issues of racial identity development.

### **Key Terms**

**Black or Black American** – For the purposes of this study, a Black person is defined as someone who self-identifies or is identified by others as Black or African American, has at least one Black biological parent, and was born in the United States.

**Mentoring** – Mentoring is defined as the formal relationship between two individuals in a professional setting where one individual has more expertise than the other individual. The individual with the expertise uses their knowledge of the field to assist the new individual.

**Persistence** – Persistence is defined as the ability to keep going, to keep striving, and to keep pursuing despite adversity. In the context of this study, persistence was measured by the consecutive years of teaching in a K–12 setting.

**Predominantly White K–12 schools** – Predominantly White schools are those K–12 public schools (traditional and charter) in which White students represent 45% or more of the total student enrollment, making this population the largest single racial group in the school.

**Racial identity development** – Tatum (1997) defined racial identity development as “the process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group” (p. 16). For the purposes of this study, this definition was used for racial identity development.

### **Organization of the Study**

The dissertation is divided into five chapters where each chapter highlights a certain aspect of the research topic and design. The current chapter introduced the study and allowed for the inclusion of my personal experiences with mentoring in the professional setting. I used this personal reflection to describe how my interest in the research topic came into existence. The background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, brief overview of the methodology, study significance, and key terms were also included in Chapter I. Chapter II consists of a review of the literature that includes a discussion of the historical racial experiences of Blacks in America, the historical context of Black educators in America, and the current realities of Black male educators. The literature on nigrescence theory and mentoring theory, the two theories used to construct the theoretical framework for this study, is provided in Chapter II as well. Chapter III follows with a detailed description of the phenomenological methodology used for this study. The research design, selection of participants, data collection methods, data analysis, and the role of the researcher are all described within this chapter. Chapter IV presents the results of this phenomenological analysis. The chapter begins with profiles of the participants and concludes with a review of the emergent themes of the participants’ experiences. Chapter

V, the final chapter, includes a summary of the study as well as a discussion of the research findings, implications for future research, and conclusions.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sometimes people try to destroy you, precisely because they recognize your power—not because they don't see it, but because they see it and they don't want it to exist. (hooks, 2006, p. 56)

Chapter II begins with an overview of the research strategy used to conduct the literature review for this study. Following the research strategy overview, Chapter II moves to a discussion of the literature that is relevant to the study's topic. Within the discussion, the gaps in the literature are also presented. This section includes the following topics: the historical context of Blacks in the United States, including slavery and racial segregation; the state of the Black male in America; Black teachers in K–12 education, including the impact of *Brown v. Board of Education*; Black male teachers in K–12 education; teacher mentoring programs; Black identity development; and mentoring theory.

This chapter includes a review of the literature related to Black males and teacher mentoring programs. In order to provide an in-depth look at the literature, a search via Texas State University's library site, Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ProQuest Central was conducted on the topic. The key terms *Black*, *African American*, *men/male*, *White*, *White schools*, *race*, *Black identity*, *identity development*, *persistence*, *teacher mentoring*, *new teacher mentoring*, and *teacher induction* were used. Additional terms arose, such as *teacher burnout*, *teacher retention*, and *teacher attrition*, and were included in the search as well. The search was restricted to scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books published within the last 10 years (i.e., 2011–2021) and any relevant

foundational works. Literature beyond the 10-year mark was used to support more recent literature.

### **Historical Context of Blacks in the United States**

The history of Blacks in the United States is intentionally crafted and presented in a manner to appease Whites in America. Public school history textbooks are exclusionary of certain aspects of Blacks in America (DeGruy, 2017). The mistreatment of Blacks, the (mis)education of Blacks, and the success of Blacks amidst adversity are a few topics that are often excluded. The history of Blacks in America is a tumultuous one filled with pain, adversity, and struggle. The racial injustice experienced by Blacks in America is reflective of the power and privilege dynamic that has been fostered in America since the inception of chattel slavery (DeGruy, 2017).

#### ***Slavery***

Enslavement in the United States began in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 when the first 20 African slaves were brought overseas unwillingly (Schneider & Schneider, 2014). The travel conditions for these 20 enslaved individuals have been described as unsanitary and horrific (Schneider & Schneider, 2014). Once on land in the North American British colonies, the conditions for enslaved individuals were still deplorable. Slave breeding, slave trading, and slave auctioning commenced as European Whites realized the value of enslaved property as property (Schneider & Schneider, 2014). Slavery marked the beginning of the dehumanization of Blacks in the United States. As Africans were pulled from their villages and land, mostly in West Africa, they were stripped of their culture and regard as humans and were forced to develop new identities (DeGruy, 2017; Schneider & Schneider, 2014). Not only were enslaved individuals treated as animals by

White enslavers, they were also viewed as inferior and considered as property rather than humans.

The deep-rooted history of slavery is engrained in the fabric of the United States. Black slave labor is the foundation of the United States, as this was the largest industry in the nation and was embedded in the government (DeGruy, 2017; Schneider & Schneider, 2014). The institution of slavery in the United States existed for 246 years until 1865, when the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was passed by Congress and abolished slavery and involuntary servitude in the United States (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). Shortly after, in 1868, Congress passed the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, granting Black Americans citizenship and “equal treatment under the law” (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). Emancipation for enslaved individuals was followed up with Black Codes in the South, where states formed a variety of laws to continue to force labor out of Blacks. These Black Codes set parameters on what Blacks could and could not do in certain states. Additionally, White landowners crafted ways for Blacks to continue to provide labor on plantations and farms by allowing Blacks to earn income but charging them fees with high interest rates for the use of tools. This labor resulted in peonage, the system in which an employer requires a worker to pay off debt with work (DeGruy, 2017). Although Black Codes and peonage were short lived, both greatly influenced the progress of Blacks in America.

### ***Racial Segregation***

Following the 246 years of slavery, enslaved Blacks were considered freed on paper, but not in practice. It would take almost 100 years after the passing of the 13th Amendment for the United States to attempt to right its wrongs. During this time, White

Americans were fearful of the power that existed in the pain they forced upon Blacks (DeGruy, 2017; Equal Justice Initiative, 2018; Wright, 2002). This fear furthered the belief in White superiority and relegated Blacks to occupations that Whites did not want and to communities of isolation. The belief in mixing Blacks and Whites together, whether in communities, jobs, or places of worship, was met with resistance from many Whites during this time. This era, often referred to as the Jim Crow era, was a period of time during which laws were established to legalize racial segregation. The statement of “separate but equal” was the legal principle for racial segregation and established the color line in the United States (DeGruy, 2017; Equal Justice Initiative, 2018; Wright, 2002). These laws were formed to exclude Blacks from both political and economic gain, relegated Blacks to second class citizen status, and did not provide equal treatment under the law. Freed Blacks were met with the constitutional ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which legally allowed for racial segregation in housing communities, stores, trains, diners, and even schools. Jim Crow laws and the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling institutionalized a legacy of disadvantages for Blacks in the United States (DeGruy, 2017; Equal Justice Initiative, 2018).

### **The State of the Black Male in America**

One who has glanced at the President occupying the White House in the United States between 2009 and 2016 might be inclined to say that the success of Black men in America is at an all-time high. However, Black men in America are still marginalized, criticized, and criminalized more than any other racial or gender group in the nation (Alexander, 2010; A. L. Brown, 2017; Fitzgerald, 2015). It is estimated that Black males in America make up roughly 6% of the nation’s population, with 73% being 18 years of

age or older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The success of Black males operates on an individualized basis, though systematically, laws and policies at the federal, state, and local levels negatively affect Black males at rates comparable to the days of slavery and Jim Crow laws (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2011). There is a history of Black males being mistreated and mislabeled, being killed unlawfully by police, being held to stricter prison sentencing standards, and being considered a threat to others in society (Alexander, 2010; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2011). This dynamic affects not only Black males specifically, but also the society in which Black males reside. This section briefly highlights the relevant education data, employment data, and legal system data of Black males in America.

### ***Education***

Historically, Black males were excluded from schooling and receiving an education in a formal setting, given that schooling was a means to preserve the social wealth of White identity (B. E. Cross, 2005; Hayes & Juarez, 2012). However, through churches and trade schools, formal schooling for Blacks came into existence and has evolved over time. Many practices in American schools were designed with social control in mind and some critical scholars believe Blacks were introduced to formal education to enhance White Americans' social control (i.e., "Whiteness;" Hayes & Juarez, 2012). An educated Black was a liberated soul and such liberation would question the order set and taught by Whites in America. Transition to roughly 150 years later, and schools in America look drastically different, yet operate under the same ideology instilled into the American education system by those who wrote the nation's

constitution. Most Black male students are found in urban spaces due to the mobility and housing patterns in the nation. Although school integration began in the late 1950s, today's schools have become segregated again due to both suburbanization and gentrification (Stroub & Richards, 2017). The environments created within schools and the structures under which schools operate are not welcoming to all Black male students. Black males in public K–12 schools are over-disciplined, overrepresented in special education programs, and underrepresented in gifted and talented courses (Snyder et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The current education practices in K–12 schools continue to oppress Black males and enforce social norms that promote White superiority.

Snyder et al. (2018) indicated that of the 18- to 24-year-old Black males in the United States, 93% completed high school during the 2014–2015 school year. The generational impact of excluding Blacks and the embedded White social control in American education can be felt in the current decade. In the year 2013, Black students represented 15% of all students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools. In the same year, Black males represented 7% of the 3.1 million high school graduates from public high schools. Additionally, a 6% dropout rate existed for Black high school students in 2016 (Snyder et al., 2018). An abysmal finding in the public K–12 school data is that Black male students are assigned out-of-school suspensions more than any other racial/ethnic group (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). These findings at the elementary and secondary levels may have a causal impact on the achievement and success of Black males at the postsecondary level.

The historical exclusion of Blacks in education has influenced the current state of Black males at postsecondary institutions. In the year 2017, 33% of Black males (aged 18–24 years) were enrolled at a postsecondary institution (Snyder et al., 2019b). However, researchers have noted the retention rates for Black males on college campuses is low (Harper, 2012). Even more notable are the lower than average graduation rates for Black male student-athletes, although Black males tend to be overrepresented in football and basketball programs on college campuses (Harper, 2018). The lack of retention and graduation tends to be higher at historically White institutions (HWIs) compared to HBCUs (Brooms, 2019; Harper, 2012). The number of programs and initiatives to support Black males on college campuses has increased over time and have been found to support Black male student retention, sense of belonging, and college graduation rates (Brooms, 2019; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Harper, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education revealed the 6-year degree completion rate for Black males seeking a bachelor's degree was 34% in public postsecondary institutions. Additional data showed 22% of Black males (age 25 and older) have completed a bachelor's degree or higher as of 2016 (Snyder et al., 2018). Although degree attainment generally leads to stable employment and financial security, there are mental health concerns that Black males labor through to receive college degrees (W. A. Smith et al., 2011). Specifically, racial battle fatigue is the term used to label the emotional, psychological, and physiological stress responses related to the oppressive practices that are prevalent for Black males within postsecondary education and society's institutions (W. A. Smith et al., 2011).

## ***Employment and Workforce***

Black reformer and educator Booker T. Washington believed an industrial education and labor knowledge was the pathway for Black greatness. This belief was not an isolated belief as Washington received support for his views on educating Blacks in vocational tasks rather than the humanities. Washington expressed this belief in 1895 when labor jobs were plentiful. Fast forward to the present and Black Americans account for nearly one out of every eight people in the U.S. labor force (Rolen & Toossi, 2018). The employment rate for Black males has been on a tumultuous decline for the past 40 years (Levine, 2012). Black males can be found in higher concentrations in urban metropolitan areas where manufacturing and labor jobs were plentiful during the late 1960s to early 1990s (Levine, 2012). The rise of deindustrialization and suburbanization in these urban areas has contributed to the less than average employment rate for Black males (of working age) in the nation. Levine (2012) analyzed the employment rates of Black males in metropolitan areas and found that fewer than 55% of working-age Black males were employed in 2010. Furthermore, the employment rate for Black males in these areas dropped by almost 20% from 1970 to 2010. Other researchers highlighted similar findings and attributed the decline to the more recent Great Recession that began in 2007 and ended in 2009 (Cox, 2010). Regardless, the employment rate for Black males has declined over the years at rates that are incomparable to those for other racial and gender groups.

Black males in the U.S. workforce can be found in all employment industries. However, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) revealed Black males can be found in the following industries at higher rates: education and health services, transportation

and utilities, and manufacturing. Military participation for Black males accounts for roughly 17% of the 1.3 million active-duty enlisted men and women (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Though the literature does not highlight the overrepresentation of Black males in the labor market, the next section briefly discusses the overrepresentation of incarcerated Black males.

### ***Mass Incarceration***

The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery in 1865, though one exception still existed—slavery remained legal if it were a punishment for a crime (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). This exception opened up the opportunity for White Americans to continue to systemically control Blacks as well as control the narrative of Black representation in the United States. Stringent and oppressive laws were proposed and passed during the Jim Crow era to continue to promote White superiority. Alexander (2010) posited that the birth of mass incarceration occurred in the 1950s when “law and order” rhetoric was used by Whites to oppose the civil rights movement. Segregationist Whites used language to sway others into thinking and believing integration would bring about a crime wave from Blacks in urban spaces (Alexander, 2010; Cole, 2011; Cooper, 2013). During the Nixon presidency of the 1970s, the administration declared drug abuse as “public enemy number one” through the passage of the Controlled Substance Act (Alexander, 2010; Cole, 2011; Gottschalk, 2011). The 1980s brought about the Reagan Administration that refocused on combating drugs through legislation such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. These laws called for an increase in the criminalization of nonviolent drug crimes. It was during this period that the possession of a small amount of crack cocaine resulted in substantially more jail time than a large amount of powder cocaine.

Such an excessive punishment affected Black males more than others due to the prevalence of drugs being more centered in Black communities than in White communities. Stricter sentencing efforts through legislation affected Black males at higher rates than males of other races (Alexander, 2010; Cole, 2011; Cooper, 2013; Gottschalk, 2011; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2011).

The U.S. prison system has been and continues to be racially disproportionate. Cole (2011) noted one in three Black male babies can expect to spend time in prison (throughout their lifetime). Furthermore, the rate at which Black males are incarcerated is more than five times greater than the rate for White males (Carson, 2021; Cole, 2011; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2011). Although newer legislation during the Obama Administration has aided in decreasing the number of individuals in prison, Black males still represent the prison system's majority. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics showed Black males represent 34% of the male prison population in the United States (Carson, 2021). These statistics are aligned to the oppressive intentionality created in the United States to benefit White Americans. Historically, Black males have been subjected to oppressive systems and the more recent data discussed above show the state of Black males in the United States have changed only slightly.

### **Brief Overview of Black Teachers in the United States**

The focus of this research was to highlight the experiences of Black male teachers, a population that is greatly underrepresented in the educational workforce. The K-12 education workforce in the United States is excessively female and White, a dynamic that is said to be deep-rooted in the historical marginalization of Blacks. The

sections below capture the historical nature of Black teachers in the United States and are separated into the pre-*Brown* era and the post-*Brown* era. Both *Brown* and *Brown v. Board of Education* are used interchangeably to discuss the monumental decision that overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine that existed after slavery.

### ***Black Teachers Prior to Brown***

During the period of slavery, educating slaves in a formal manner was illegal and a punishable offense in most Southern states (Johnson, 2019). With laws in place to prohibit the formal education of Blacks, education in the Southern states was primarily a White establishment. Regardless, Black educators found ways to teach Black children how to read and write. In 1808, educator John Chavis taught Black and White children in a private school in Raleigh, North Carolina (Simkin, 2016). Initially, students were taught in an integrated classroom. However, White parents protested the idea of Blacks being educated. Rather than stop altogether, Chavis began to educate White children during the day and Black children at night through a secret night school (Simkin, 2016; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Although the experiences in the Northern U.S. states were slightly different, some individuals in the North were opposed to the education of Blacks as well. Additionally, the demand for slave labor was not as high as was the demand in Southern states. The Southern region had restrictive laws in most states prohibiting Blacks from receiving an education. Records indicate schools educated children of both enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals (Simkin, 2016; Wilder, 2013). These records also show the first African Free School opened in New York City in 1787 and received public funding (along with six other freed persons’ schools) in 1824 (Wilder, 2013). Nonetheless, Southern ideology infiltrated the North and laws targeting the education of

Blacks were implemented at the local level in some areas. Much like John Chavis, this did not stop those who believed in educating all children, as education for enslaved and freed Blacks continued mostly through churches.

Following the abolishment of slavery in the United States, schools existed separately for Blacks and Whites throughout most states. Leaders of a school district in Pennsylvania voted to integrate schools in December of 1876 (Doane, n.d.). This district was one of few that enacted school desegregation prior to desegregation being enacted by law in 1954. Prior to law enacted school desegregation was the period where “separate but equal” spaces were the norm via the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, which upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation via the “separate but equal” doctrine (163 U.S. 537). Black students were enrolled in all-Black schools and White students were enrolled in all-White schools. Integration was a radical thought for most Whites, as Blacks, and their schools, were considered to be inferior (Caldas & Bankston, 2015; Kelly, 2010).

The number of Black teachers within U.S. schools reached close to 80,000 prior to the *Brown* ruling (Milner & Howard, 2004). Teaching within Black communities meant a great deal to teachers, students, and parents. The narrative of Black schools being inferior during this time was challenged by Kelly (2010), who used the oral histories of former teachers in North Carolina pre-*Brown*. Kelly’s research countered the dominant discourse of inferior Black schools through narratives of persistence, community, and pride. Teachers were seen as community leaders, counselors, and confidants. To be a Black educator during this time meant an individual was much more than an educator (Peters, 2019). During this period, Black male and female teachers were employed in

equal numbers; by 1910, “women were two-thirds of the African American teaching force” (Randolph, 2009, p. 26). Black teachers had the support of each other, their school leaders, and their communities during this period (Kelly, 2010; Milner & Howard, 2004; Peters, 2019; Tillman, 2004).

### ***The Brown Decision***

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision came in 1954, a period of time during which the nation experienced post-World War II growth through birth rates, the economy, and suburban development. However, tensions were high as the inequality and injustice experienced by Black Americans garnered mainstream attention. Between 1950 and 1954, five cases related to the inadequate structures, facilities, and resources of Black schools were heard at the lower courts in Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Each case, although unsuccessful in the lower courts, would collectively merge to become the popular *Brown v. Board of Education* case in which the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that it was unconstitutional to separate children in public schools based on race (Caldas & Bankston, 2015). The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling. Following this ruling, however, there was a lack of direction and action by states to implement the ruling issued by the Supreme Court. An entire year would pass before the Supreme Court would inform states on how to proceed with desegregation (“*Brown II*”). Even still, some states, such as Arkansas and Louisiana, needed brute force to implement integration after both rulings.

### ***Black Teachers After Brown***

Today's Black teachers are standing on the shoulders of educational giants—the Black teachers who fought relentlessly for the educational rights of Black students in the pre-*Brown* era (Farinde-Wu, 2018). Many wanted greater funding and equal education for their Black students. The *Brown* decision in its entirety focused on integration efforts for students—Black students in particular. This singular focus of attention on students resulted in the dismissal of more than 35,000 Black teachers in the 10-year span after the *Brown* decision (Milner & Howard, 2004; Oakley et al., 2009; Tillman, 2004). Thompson (2022) highlighted that in 1960, “41% of southern African Americans who had completed any postsecondary education reported ‘teacher’ as their occupation” (p. 962).

Losing Black teachers after *Brown* hurt Black communities and the wealth of Blacks. Most Black teachers who were dismissed attempted to find employment elsewhere and were unsuccessful; the rapidly changing state of the economy in the years following the ruling resulted in many Black teachers being unemployed (Thompson, 2022). Roughly 10 years post-*Brown*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law and provided more career opportunities for Black Americans. White teachers (whether qualified or unqualified) were seen as more knowledgeable and suitable to teach in integrated schools, even though they were among the population that strongly opposed school desegregation (Kelly, 2010; Peters, 2019). This idea of Black inferiority was most notably exemplified in a legal case involving a school district in Moberly, Missouri, in which 11 certified Black teachers (one teacher held a doctorate) were dismissed without cause and replaced by White teachers (Detweiler, 1967). The decision was in favor of the district (hiring White teachers only) and would be used in future cases. The post-*Brown*

years brought about teacher reform that benefited White teachers (Castro et al., 2019). This reform was disguised under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and called for increased teacher quality.

Consequently, it has been argued that Black teachers suffered the most due to the *Brown* decision and both teachers and students of today are forced to deal with the aftermath (Castro et al., 2019). Sixty years after *Brown*, the U.S. education system has seen an influx of teachers from ACPs, an overabundance of school choice through magnet and charter schools in urban areas, and high stakes standardized testing for both teachers and students (Castro et al., 2019). Moreover, schools have seen a decrease in the number of teachers and school leaders of color (Peters, 2019).

### **Black Male Teachers in K–12 Education**

Although the teacher workforce is disproportionately White, researchers have posited that Black teachers have a more positive influence on students than do White teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Moreover, when Black students are taught by Black teachers, Black students' development is greatly enhanced (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). Such literature highlights the importance of a diversified teacher workforce in U.S. public schools. However, the present reality is that 2% of the teacher workforce identifies as Black males (Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

Black males have a longstanding history as educators within the nation. Educators such as Booker T. Washington, Edmund Gordon, and Charles Hamilton Houston were instrumental individuals whose commitments toward education paved the way for Black male educators today. A review of the literature on Black male teachers revealed Black male teachers (educators) face barriers at both the pre-service and in-service levels. The

literature also revealed Black male teachers are seen as cultural capital in schools. Last, the literature highlights the pipelines in existence to attract, recruit, and retain Black male teachers.

### ***Barriers for Black Male Teachers***

Discourse surrounding both teacher recruitment and attrition places focus on the need for more Black male teachers in the classroom. However, the discourse positions Black male teachers in the middle of debates surrounding why Black male teachers are needed in K–12 classrooms. Arne Duncan (2009) made the call during his tenure as Secretary of Education for more Black male teachers in K–12 classrooms on numerous occasions. Most notably, Duncan stated, “It is especially troubling that less than two percent of our nation’s teachers are African American males” (para. 23) during a policy address on teacher preparation. Though the 2% statistic has not changed, A. L. Brown (2012) focused a great deal of attention on the 2% discourse and used the voices of four Black male teachers to draw attention to the “pedagogical kind” construction that has been ascribed to Black male teachers. The idea of “pedagogical kind” conceptualizes Black male teachers as fixers of Black male students. This construction also classifies Black male teachers as a monolithic kind to work specifically with Black boys. A. L. Brown and Thomas (2020), in more recent literature, completed a critical essay exploring the implicit and explicit discourses for more Black male teachers in the classroom. A. L. Brown and Thomas called attention to the discourses used for Black male teacher recruitment and posited they are “shrouded by the past” (p. 457). Additionally, A. L. Brown and Thomas concluded that much of the current Black male teacher discourse is undergirded by past social science imaginings of Black males, the Black family, and

community. The authors also argued that the discourse fails to consider Black male teachers on an individualized basis and groups all Black male teachers as the same. The “2%” discourse lent itself to the theme of barriers for Black male teachers. Teacher preparation programs and stereotype threat emerged in the literature as other barriers for Black male teachers.

**Teacher Education Programs.** American schools are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of ethnicity and race. However, the teacher workforce does not reflect the student diversity seen in K–12 schools. Moreover, professors (of all ranks) in postsecondary teacher education programs fail to reflect the student diversity that is present in all levels (P–16). During the 2017–2018 academic year, non-White undergraduate students were underrepresented by faculty at alarming rates (faculty: 24%, students: 45%; Snyder et al., 2019b). Conversely, White undergraduate students were overrepresented by faculty (faculty: 76%, students: 55%), highlighting the racial disparities in academia (Snyder et al., 2019b). Similar to the K–12 student to teacher dynamic, college students of diverse backgrounds are learning from a mostly White faculty. In addition to an overrepresentation of White faculty, students in teacher education programs progress through years of coursework with a curriculum that has been recognized as “White-centered” (Ndemanu, 2014). The research on Black males in teacher education programs at predominantly White postsecondary institutions revealed the hurtful and problematic experiences Black male students faced (Green & Martin, 2018; Maylor, 2018; Ndemanu, 2014).

Black males are disproportionately found in teacher educator programs at U.S. colleges and universities and have described experiences that expose teacher education

programs as barriers to increasing the number of Black male teachers in K–12 schools. Teacher education programs at postsecondary institutions (predominantly White) struggle to enroll Black males at high rates (Green & Martin, 2018), connect with the Black males enrolled in their programs (Ndemanu, 2014; Walker, 2020), and support the growth and development of Black male pre-service teachers (Ndemanu, 2014). Scholars Green and Martin (2018), in their comparative research study, provided a discussion focused on Black male pre-service teachers from predominantly White institutions and predominantly Black institutions. The authors wanted to explore the perceptions and experiences of Black male pre-service teachers at their respective institutions. The themes of bias, isolation, and culturally responsive teaching emerged from all participants regardless of the institutional type. All participants experienced bias from either faculty or cooperating teachers in partnering schools or districts. The one participant from the predominantly Black institution mentioned “the look” from a White elementary teacher that expressed a sense of inadequacy (Green & Martin, 2018). This same participant mentioned feeling family support (fictive kinship) in his classes on campus, but noticed he was the only Black male, and there were similar revelations from the other three participants who expressed feelings of isolation around majority White peers. An interesting finding from the study was that three of the four participants mentioned that faculty engaged in and supported culturally responsive teaching, given teacher education faculty are majority White middle-class females (Green & Martin, 2018). Three additional themes emerged from the experiences of the Black male pre-service teachers that were centered around navigating White spaces. Participants spoke of feeling compelled to act a certain way around White peers, faculty, and cooperating teachers

through cultural assimilation (“playing the game” and “code switching”; Green & Martin, 2018, p. 11). Role modeling for the younger generation was also discussed by the participants. Similar to the work by Green and Martin (2018), Ndemanu (2014) described the experiences of one Black male enrolled in a teacher education program at a large PWI in the Midwest. The student, Shaun, discussed feelings of apathy, social isolation, and self-censorship in his teacher educator program (Ndemanu, 2014). Feelings of apathy emerged for the pre-service teacher because his needs and knowledge base were not considered in the curriculum. Ndemanu (2014) suggested the issue with most teacher education programs is that the curriculum is White-centered. As the only Black male in his class, Shaun did not feel included by his peers or professors. Through observation notes, the researcher attributed the silence of the participant in both small and large group class settings to his identity as the “lone African American in the class” (Ndemanu, 2014, p. 70).

Like Ndemanu (2014), other scholars also studied Black male pre-service teachers and their experiences in teacher education programs. Walker (2020) conducted a literature review focused specifically on Black male pre-service teachers in rural settings. Emphasis has been placed on rural settings due to the increased proximity to resources and educational institutions. Walker discovered Black male pre-service teachers in rural areas struggle to locate Black mentors and encounter stereotypes. Additionally, Walker offered suggestions for both teacher education programs and rural school administrators. Of note, Walker suggested leaders of teacher education programs evaluate whether the needs of Black male students are being met. The author added that rural school administrators should ensure staff members engage in racial bias training (Walker, 2020).

What Walker missed in his research were the actual voices of Black male teachers in rural areas, a component that I designed my study to illuminate. However, Walker did suggest that “traditional teacher education programs must do more to support Black male educators” (p. 513).

Other scholars studying Black male pre-service teachers provided additional support for the struggles Black males face in teacher education programs (Bristol et al., 2020; K. D. Brown, 2018; Maylor, 2018; Yates et al., 2015). K. D. Brown (2018) not only highlighted the experiences of Black male pre-service teachers, he intersected race and gender with generational identity (Gen Y/Millennials). This is worth noting given that the millennial generation represented the majority of the global workforce in 2020 and is predicted to maintain majority until 2035 (Lettink, 2019). Race and racism, within this study, were important factors the participants could not deny noticing in their teacher education programs. Race and racism were even more prevalent for this generation of pre-service teachers due to the advancement of technology via social media (K. D. Brown, 2018). Black male pre-service teachers have had to deal with instances involving microaggressions and racism, and often will not receive support in their quest to become classroom teachers (Maylor, 2018). Although the focus in the current study was on Black male teachers in the United States, Maylor (2018) illuminated the voices of four Black male pre-service teachers abroad in the United Kingdom. None of the participants within the Maylor study reported positive experiences in their teacher education programs.

Black male pre-service teacher experiences are challenging regardless of institutional type. One group of scholars analyzed the grit of Black male pre-service teachers of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund in a mixed methods study and results

revealed grit and resiliency are taught or acquired (Yates et al., 2015). The themes of family support, life experiences, and spirituality all emerged as means for acquiring grit. Black male teachers are positioned in schools to help all students succeed and they themselves are expected to succeed with minimal support. A different team of researchers identified a way to support Black male pre-service teachers through the use of mentoring and an affinity group via an ACP (Bristol et al., 2020). Contrary to the feelings expressed by Black males in traditional teacher education programs, participants felt at ease with their peers, facilitators, and the overall process. Feelings of empowerment, solidarity, and support were mentioned by the participants and the research team concluded that mentorship, affinity groups, and cultural likeness for Black male pre-service teachers “can prove advantageous in addressing the oppressive conditions in teacher education programs defined by ideologies of Whiteness” (p. 494). Black male teachers face a multitude of challenges in their work and are often siloed due to the lack of Black males serving as K–12 teachers. In addition to being siloed and often times silenced, Black males also have to deal with the societal stereotypes that have been placed on them.

**Stereotype Threat.** From being labeled as monsters, lazy, and sexually promiscuous, to having the first Black U.S. President prove his citizenship via birth certificate, the history of Black males in America is a tumultuous one. Moreover, the negative perceptions of Black males have penetrated and damaged the experiences of Black males in K–12 schools. In the fields of psychology and sociology, researchers have examined the experiences of Black males in schools and have noted the impact of stereotype threat (Walzer & Czopp, 2011). Stereotype threat, in short, reflects a sense of a worry of negative stereotypes influencing one’s identity (Spencer et al., 2016; Steele,

2011). To have to constantly worry and navigate spaces without a sense of belonging can be damaging to one's health, both mentally and physically. Scott and Rodriguez (2015) used stereotype threat in a phenomenological study to investigate the experiences of Black male pre-service teachers. Participants in their study described experiences where they were forced to grapple with the perceptions of their White peers and professors, and their constant use of microaggressions. One participant of the study encapsulated what Black males face on a regular basis:

You have to be super observant of how people come across; the questions people ask you, how people want to discredit you, disqualify you. Like for example my favorite is--- "oh, you went to college? What sport did you play" So they say that because they want to disqualify me in terms of you probably were for sports. No, I'm all academics. (Scott & Rodriguez, 2015, p. 700)

Black males are positioned in difficult settings and are forced to navigate these toxic spaces without adequate support. Black male teachers are expected to succumb to Whiteness and "react in more transformative ways to change negative perceptions" (Scott & Rodriguez, 2015, p. 704).

Bristol and Goings (2019) also highlighted the barrier of stereotype threat in their research on the boundary heightening experiences of Black male teachers. Participants expressed a fear of perpetuating the negative stereotypes of Black men and having White peers perceive them as either underqualified or overqualified (Bristol & Goings, 2019). White Americans have demonstrated feelings of superiority over Black Americans since the institution of slavery and some still hold this belief today. Ferguson, a participant of the study, described the inferiority complex projected by a White female peer when a

disagreement occurred about content matter (Honors Calculus). Ferguson, having graduated from a prestigious technical university, served as the content leader and began to use coping strategies and “build some kind of relationship” (Bristol & Goings, 2019, p. 59) to make his peer feel comfortable with his presence. However, Ferguson was still dismissed from his position at the end of the year, underscoring his belief that the White peer had an inferiority complex. Black males do not hold the privilege ascribed to their White peers and other researchers have highlighted that stereotype threat exists during the job search process as well (Bell, 2017).

Other scholars studying Black male pre-service teachers, such as Bell (2017), provided additional literature on the difficulties Black males face in teacher education programs. Bell highlighted the journey of a Black male pre-service teacher seeking employment in North Carolina. The participant engaged in eight job interviews (teacher positions) and received only one offer. The participant “realized that he was part of a system that didn’t really want Black male teachers, despite indications to the contrary” (p. 1143). The participant of the study, Daylen, was overlooked for a teaching position seven times and found White females had been hired for most positions. Such actions on the behalf of school administrators makes one wonder, “does the system really want more Black males, or is it just talk” (Bell, 2017, p. 1144). The interview journey of the participant began with high hopes and anticipation as he was constantly reminded by both faculty and principals that he was “a Black male with a Master’s degree” (Bell, 2017, p. 1144) and that he would land a job quickly. Ultimately, the participant secured a teaching position in a school with a Black campus principal. Though this study focused on the experience of one Black male aspiring to teach, the 2% statistic remains as Black male

teachers are not widely visible in K–12 classrooms. Unfortunately, race is a factor in K–12 hiring practices (Bell, 2017) and all forms of stereotype threat faced by both Black male pre-service and in-service teachers force Black males to navigate rigid terrain—the American school system.

### ***Black Male Teachers as Cultural Capital***

With the Black male teacher population accounting for 2% of the teacher population, recent literature indicates Black male teachers are cultural capital (i.e., assets) within K–12 schools (A. L. Brown, 2012). Black male teachers bring their experiences and authentic selves into the classrooms with their students and use their gifts to make an impact on their students in and out of the classroom. Black male teachers as cultural capital indicates Black male teachers are culturally relevant pedagogues and serve as role models and otherfathers (Brooms, 2020; Milner, 2015; Robinson, 2020).

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogues.** Ladson-Billings (1994) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as one that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 16–17). Black male teachers serve as curriculum texts within their respective schools (Milner, 2015). The curriculum not only focuses on the what but also the who. Milner (2015) contended that Black teachers create culturally relevant curriculum and recognize students’ cultures as assets rather than obstacles. Furthermore, Milner posited that schools contribute to the null curriculum (i.e., what students do not have the opportunity to learn) within the classroom when they fail to expose students to Black teachers. Bryan and Milton Williams (2017) conducted a review of literature focused on retaining culturally relevant Black male teachers in early childhood education. Within this review,

the authors discussed the need for and the benefits of culturally relevant Black male teachers (Bryan & Milton Williams, 2017). Bryan and Milton Williams highlighted the scholarly works of Lynn (2006), A. L. Brown (2009), Bryan (2016), Broughton (2016), and Milner (2016) who all studied the culturally relevant practices of Black male teachers. Critical and racial consciousness (Lynn, 2006), pedagogical performance styles (A. L. Brown, 2009), community collaboration (Bryan, 2016), teacher as a learner (Broughton, 2016), and constructivist methods (Milner, 2016) were the thematic takeaways from the respective studies that indicated Black male teachers are culturally relevant pedagogues. Bryan and Milton Williams (2017) mentioned that more than Black male teachers are needed, as “we need Black male teachers who are culturally relevant pedagogues” (p. 218). The authors also discussed barriers for Black male teachers that were noted in a previous section.

Through narrative storytelling and a teaching as healing framework, Robinson (2020) united the voices of Black male teachers and their experiences as former students and current teachers within the racialized context of public schools. Of the 10 participants in the study, seven revealed they had at least one Black male teacher throughout their P-12 experience. This piece of data is worth acknowledging because several of the participants shared the same Black male teacher who mentored and encouraged them to pursue a career as a teacher. Black male teachers not only have teaching styles tailored to the needs of their students and their cultures, they also build lasting relationships with their students (Robinson, 2020). Not only that, but “Black male teachers validate Black student experiences” (Robinson, 2020, p. 542). Three themes emerged from this narrative of Black male teachers of the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern regions of the United States:

quality connections (common cultural experiences), personalized insights, and challenging perceptions (Robinson, 2020). The theme of quality connections within this study supports the literature and findings that show Black male teachers are found more in urban settings than suburban and rural settings (Aragon, 2016; Walker, 2020). Furthermore, “Black male teachers are attracted to schools they attended” (Robinson, 2020, p. 544). Robinson (2020) argued that Black males are generally found in urban school as students, which gives districts access to a pipeline of students who could become Black male teachers. What Robinson posited has been supported by other researchers (Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Jones et al., 2019). The theme of quality connections was also asserted through participants’ intent to ensure Black students were successful holistically. Researchers such as Brockenbrough (2015), Brooms (2017), A. L. Brown (2012), and Pabon (2016) also asserted this theme through role modeling and otherfathering. A more thorough analysis of role modeling and otherfathering is presented later in this section as it emerged as a theme in the literature. Robinson (2020) concluded by asserting that Black male teachers make Black male teachers. All three themes discussed by Robinson show Black male teachers are engaged in culturally relevant pedagogical practices within their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Brooms’s (2020) research on Black male teachers presented the journeys of three teachers and their commitment toward teaching at an all-Black male school. Though all participants taught at the same school, two participants entered the profession through ACPs after careers in other fields. Regardless of their journey, each participant spoke to being “called” to teach and to “effectuate positive change” (Brooms, 2020, p. 528). Brooms’s use of Black education as a conceptual framework was connected to the belief

that Black male teachers influence Black male students and provide a “whole” education (p. 529). Providing a holistic education, one that goes beyond mandated curriculum and classroom space, situates these Black males as culturally relevant pedagogues. This study also provided a connection to role modeling and otherfathering for Black male students (Brooms, 2020), which are discussed next.

**Role Modeling and Otherfathering.** Black male teachers use their gifts and their identities both in and out of classrooms to influence the lives of children across the nation. Furthermore, Black male teachers position themselves as role models and otherfathers for not only Black male students, but for all students with whom they interact. “Otherfathering is a response to racism and gendered oppression . . . to actively assist young people as they traverse the racist, classist, sexist byways of life in America” (Hicks Tafari, 2018, p. 798). In doing so (i.e., otherfathering), Black male teachers replicate what Black male teachers were prior to the *Brown* decision—community liaisons (Kelly, 2010; Peters, 2019). Hicks Tafari (2018) provided the academy with two categories of otherfathering: somatic and cerebral otherfathering. Somatic otherfathering is the “mentoring and supportive guidance that happens by the hands of someone who is physically present” (Hicks Tafari, 2018, p. 799), whereas cerebral otherfathering is the “mentoring and guidance that occurs through the use of media like music, videos, and literature” (Hicks Tafari, 2018, p. 800). Particular to Hicks Tafari’s research was the focus on Black male teachers in the elementary school setting as the author highlighted the positive discourse of Black male teachers as hip-hop otherfathers from a critical race theory lens. Hicks Tafari posited that Black male teachers engage in somatic (physical) otherfathering and encourage cerebral otherfathering through the use of hip-hop artists,

television characters, and other media influences with which students have developed connections.

Brockenbrough (2012, 2015) and Brooms (2020) both highlighted the idea of otherfathering in their research, but in different ways. Early research by Brockenbrough (2012) presented findings of extra-pedagogical responsibilities and student resistance for and toward Black male teachers. Resistance to Black male teachers generally emerged in situations of teacher authority (discipline power struggles) and operated under the notion of “you ain’t my daddy” (Brockenbrough, 2012, p. 366) for students of Black male teachers. Brockenbrough (2012, 2015) highlighted the hegemonic masculinity concern for Black male teachers that considers the assumptions layered in the stereotype threat mentioned previously. In later research, Brockenbrough (2015) investigated how Black male teachers were positioned as disciplinarians through their classroom practices. Using a qualitative research methodology, Brockenbrough suggested the participants struggled to adopt an authoritarian approach (one that was expected of them) and that Black male teachers are given disproportionate responsibilities for discipline matters. Several participants of the study received “dual messages that Black male teachers needed to be strong patriarchs in the classroom” (Brockenbrough, 2015, pp. 508–509) and were patronized by colleagues, students, and administrators if they used any other style or approach in their classrooms. Brockenbrough noted five men in the study “felt pressured to control student conduct by performing a very particular construction of Black masculinity” (p. 529) that brought about stress and anxiety. Uniquely, other participants discussed that they felt that because they succumbed to the authoritarian persona, they became the “discipline stop” (p. 513) for other teachers who struggled with discipline

within their own classrooms. Though this literature speaks to otherfathering, it also highlights the stereotype threat Black male teachers experience in schools. Though Brockenbrough's (2012, 2015) work highlighted otherfathering and role modeling as concerns for Black male teachers, his literature minimally recognized that Black males want to serve as role models and otherfathers for the students under their care.

Conversely, Brooms (2020) highlighted in his study that Black male teachers "saw teaching as a critical opportunity to engage with and contribute to Black communities" (p. 524). Additionally, Brooms mentioned that participants "were enticed by . . . contributing to Black boys' writing and achievement" (p. 524) and a "collective consciousness" (p. 524). This focus of attention on the betterment and growth of Black male students indicates Black male teachers view their positions as role models for the younger generation. Black male teachers build and sustain relationships with younger males to support their development and to show young males that they matter (Brooms, 2020). The research by both Brockenbrough (2012, 2015) and Brooms (2020) supports literature by A. L. Brown (2012) and Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010) who also highlighted Black male teachers as role models and otherfathers. Literature by Martino and Rezai-Rashti is presented using a lens of queer, feminist, and postcolonial frameworks and focuses on the Black male teacher shortage in Canada through the perspectives of a Black male teacher and a Black female teacher (both African Caribbean). Martino and Rezai-Rashti stated, "Black male teachers are considered to wield a power, in their capacity as role models, which is not available to black female teachers" (p. 255), highlighting the positive and negative perception dichotomy of Black male teachers. The female participant of the study described the privilege associated with

being a male teacher in the elementary grades and used examples of “rough-housing” to validate the normative masculinity beliefs associated with gender matching. The male participant of the study advocated for gender and racial matching among students and teachers and was aware of the privilege he accrued in the school as a Black male teacher. Moreover, he recognized the privilege he had as a Black male teacher may be limited to racially diverse and economically disadvantaged schools rather than middle-class predominantly White schools. Additional literature by Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) illuminated the voice of one male participant through case study methodology for furthering the knowledge on the impact of teacher gender on pedagogical relationships with students (of the same gender). Notably, Brockenbrough (2012, 2015), Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010), and Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) examined masculinity and gendered expressions related to role modeling and otherfathering. Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) concluded that the role modeling and otherfathering discourse should be separated from the discourse calling for greater representation of minority teachers.

Brooms (2017) and McKinney de Royston et al. (2017) highlighted otherfathering and otherbrothering through the view of Black male students taught, coached, counseled, and led by Black male educators. Brooms’s (2017) research setting was an all-male urban high school in the Midwest region of the United States that enrolled mostly Black male students. Findings from this research revealed students attributed self-awareness and resilience to their otherfathers (i.e., Black male educators as father figures; Brooms, 2017). Many of the participants (80%) were from female-led households and appreciated being able to see diversity among the Black male educators on their campus. The student perspective of otherfathering connected Black male teachers to culturally relevant

pedagogy as students recalled the moments when teachers intentionally incorporated relevant stories/situations into classroom learning, engaged in cultural field experiences (e.g., the presidential inauguration of Barack Obama), and expressed care in and out of the classroom. Students in the study also revealed their personal development was increased because their intersecting identities of race and gender were central in daily learning practices used by Black male educators (Brooms, 2017). McKinney de Royston et al. (2017) incorporated the voices of both students and teachers in their research on politicized caring (synonymous with otherfathering/brothering). Similar to the research from Brooms (2017), McKinney de Royston et al. (2017) conducted research in a setting where all students identified as Black males (secondary level). The participants of this case study highlighted the importance of student–teacher relationships for both students and teachers (Black males). Both students and teachers revealed that care was an essential component of their intentional interactions and “instructors see themselves as advocates for their Black male students, their students, in turn, recognize the way their instructors position themselves as allies, mentors, and protectors” (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017, p. 30). The care mentioned was both “bidirectional and circular” (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017, p. 32) and “rooted in a political and cultural agenda” (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017, p. 32) among Black male teachers and their Black male students. Although Brooms (2017) and McKinney de Royston et al. (2017) added significant literature to the topic of otherfathering, the settings of their studies placed particular attention on urban schools, where most students and faculty identify as people of color (Aragon, 2016; Bristol, 2018; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2014; Walker, 2020). Moreover, the settings and nature of the research did not capture the

essence of identity for Black male educators. However, both studies can be viewed as literature focusing on the positive and humane schooling experiences of Black male students.

### ***Pipelines for Black Male Teachers***

Though the literature indicates more Black male teachers are needed, educational leaders across the nation continue to struggle with hiring Black males for K–12 classrooms (Jones & Jenkins, 2012). As a result, programs have been created to attract, retain, and support Black male teachers in K–12 schools. One notable program is the Call Me MiSTER (CMM) program that was originally developed to address the shortage of Black males teaching in K–8 public schools (Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Jones et al., 2019). CMM was originally a collaboration among three historically Black postsecondary institutions and has expanded to 23 institutions within the State of South Carolina and nine institutions in other states (Jones et al., 2019). To attract Black males, CMM offers partial tuition assistance through scholarships, loan forgiveness, book allowances, and other monetary supports. Those who graduate are expected to serve as teachers in public K–8 schools for the same number of years they received assistance from CMM. Currently, CMM is housed at Clemson University, a predominantly White postsecondary institution in South Carolina. The CMM program prides itself on selecting from the “underserved, socioeconomically, disadvantaged and educationally at-risk communities” (Jones et al., 2019, p. 56) rather than the “so-called best and brightest” (Jones et al., 2019, p. 56). The tenets of “ambassadorship, brother’s keeper, personal growth, teacher efficacy, and servant leadership” (Jones et al., 2019, p. 59) are meant to develop each CMM graduate. Ambassadorship refers to representing the mission and vision of CMM,

brother's keeper reflects collective advancement, and personal growth means understanding self in and out of society. Both teacher efficacy and servant leadership serve as foundational principles to ensure participants are developed to serve as teachers and leaders upon graduation. Through a trilateral mentoring intervention model, CMM men receive mentoring and serve as mentors to peers and youth (Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Jones et al., 2019). Rather than operate through punitive practices, CMM men are coached throughout the entire process. Since being founded in 2000, CMM men continue to make an impact in schools as K–12 teachers, coaches, administrators, and university-level researchers and practitioners (Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Jones et al., 2019).

Profound Gentlemen (PG), a male teacher of color mentoring network established in 2015, has a similar goal and mission centered on the development of male teachers of color. PG places both aspiring and current male teachers of color in regional cohorts to engage in year-long professional development with the intent of developing character, pedagogical knowledge, and community impact. PG strives to build a network of male teachers to ensure male students of color are supported. Co-founder of PG, Mario Shaw, stated the “focus on wellness, well-being, and holistic support” (M. Shaw, personal communication, May 4, 2021) is what sets PG apart from other Black male teacher recruitment and retention initiatives. Though PG does focus on supporting teachers with classroom content through curriculum sessions, PG's retreats support the tenets of adult social and emotional learning while providing a space for male teachers of color to feel safe and supported. Through “intrapersonal development and interpersonal development, PG showcases who our scholars are as people first” (M. Shaw, personal communication, May 4, 2021). PG helps participants meet goals attached to three focus areas: character

development, content development, and community impact. With over 600 PG scholars nationwide, PG uses a “hub and spoke model” (M. Shaw, personal communication, May 4, 2021) where Georgia, North Carolina, and Illinois serve as state hubs for regional clusters.

Like CMM and PG, leaders in cities and districts across the nation have also implemented programs to recruit and retain male teachers of color. Programs like the Boston Teacher Residency Male Teachers of Color Network through Boston Public Schools and NYC Men Teach (in collaboration with the NYC Department of Education) work with prospective and current male teachers of color to assist with their development and retention as teachers. However, notably, CMM has an intentional focus specifically on Black/African American male teacher recruitment, whereas the other previously mentioned programs focus on male teachers of color.

Attracting new teachers to the profession, especially Black male teachers, is a difficult task in America. An even greater challenge is retaining quality teachers in the nation’s schools (Devos, 2010; Ingersoll et al., 2017). School leaders have caught notice of this difficulty and are developing an array of systems and processes to combat teacher turnover. On a larger scale, the federal government and certain state governments have seen the need for teacher longevity and have petitioned to have funds allocated toward teacher retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2017). In turn, districts, with these funds, are implementing induction programs as a means to attract and retain teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2017).

## **Teacher Mentoring Programs**

Teacher turnover in America is a costly dilemma. In addition to the monetary risk, there is also the risk of student underperformance (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). According to LoCascio et al. (2016), “A high rate of teacher attrition translates to inadequate student instruction” (p. 104). Teachers strengthen their craft as an instructional expert every year they teach—this is typically in conjunction with professional development sessions, coaching cycles from administrators, and self-reflection. Leaders have recognized this and have created induction programs to assist the new teachers in their districts (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). These induction programs are generally unique to the district and their respective schools due to funding, student demographics, and community support. However unique these induction programs are, many have a mentoring program component (Long et al., 2012).

### ***Mentoring as a Determinant of Retention***

Teacher mentoring programs have a history in American schools and are said to have gained popularity in the late 20th century when education reform was on the rise (Zembytska, 2016). More specifically, in the early 2000s when No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law by then President, George W. Bush, the mandate for high-quality teachers in every classroom prompted leaders to consider different methods to attract and retain quality teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Over the years, NCLB was succeeded by newer legislation such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); however, the focus on teacher quality never left. Devos (2010) suggested teacher quality is affected by teacher mentoring programs.

Teacher retention has impacts on the American education system. Employing high-quality teachers in schools has benefits to student achievement and enhances the quality of learning. However, new teachers, both traditionally and alternatively certified, tend to map out their exit strategies early on (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Recent literature on teacher mentoring programs revealed the recurring theme of mentoring programs adding to teacher retention in the nation's schools (Gordon & Lowrey, 2017; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Several components of the teaching profession are strengthened through hands-on experience. Through mentoring, new teachers are paired with experienced teachers who can share tried and tested methods that have worked previously to lessen the learning curve for new teachers. According to Lambeth (2012), "Teacher mentoring programs developed in an attempt to reduce the rate of teacher attrition" (p. 3). Research conducted by Sparks et al. (2017) revealed participants credited mentoring as a reason to stay in their school as teachers for consecutive years. The phrase "quality teacher," as used repeatedly in NCLB legislation, mandates certification standards for classroom teachers. Quality teachers transition through traditional or alternative certification routes and because of their experiences as pre-service teachers, support from more experienced teachers proves to be valuable (Zembytska, 2016).

Being a novice teacher in a school can bring about a great amount of stress as one tries to navigate the inner workings of instructional content, classroom management, and the hidden norms of the school. When paired with a veteran teacher, new teachers instantly have a connection on their campus to assist with their transition. According to Zembytska (2016), "Novices should be provided with an adequate administrative and collegial support" (p. 67). Other findings in the literature show mentoring programs help

combat burnout in the profession, reduce isolation in schools, and add to the overall sense of belonging for new teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). From working in isolation to being members of a professional learning community, the teaching profession has evolved over time. New teachers who report feelings of isolation and burnout perceive mentoring as beneficial to having a sense of belonging and wanting to return the following year (D. L. Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Luft et al., 2011). This finding in the literature also led to the theme of the mentor and mentee relationship.

### ***Mentor and Mentee Relationship***

Question and answer sessions, observation cycles, and learning walks are a few examples of opportunities provided to new teachers to assist them in developing their craft as teachers. In addition to the previously mentioned examples, when new teachers receive mentoring from veteran teachers, new teachers become connected to their campuses in ways that allow for extended growth. New teacher development is also strengthened through the mentor and mentee relationship (S. T. Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Long et al. (2012) conducted an analysis of the induction and mentoring literature and found that the mentor and mentee relationship had an impact on the identity development of new teachers.

Through an additional analysis of the literature, shared planning time and conference periods were found to be advantageous to mentor and mentee relationship development (Kent et al., 2012). This set time provides an opportunity for the mentor to check in with the mentee to address concerns, questions, and other issues. In addition to problem solving, this time together allows for pedagogical support through lesson modeling, content review, and weekly to monthly lesson planning. Clark and Byrnes

(2012) analyzed the perceptions of new elementary teachers on the mentoring support they received their first year of teaching and reported “beginning teachers who received both common planning time with a mentor and release time to observe other teachers rated the mentoring experiences they had as significantly more helpful than beginning teachers who were not provided these mentoring supports” (p. 1). Within this study, 136 teachers were surveyed and additional findings revealed a common planning period with their mentor and release time to observe other classrooms also proved helpful to first-year teachers and their professional growth (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Release time for classroom observations exposes new teachers to the various styles of classroom management practices present in a school while providing novice teachers the opportunity to see the different forms of questioning strategies used by veteran teachers and the relationships veteran teachers have with the students of that campus.

The importance of mentor and mentee pairings was identified in the literature and varies by school and district. Some mentoring programs partner teachers based on the same grade level, same content area, or proximity (within a school) as the determining factor (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Jimerson et al. (2015) supported pairings where the mentor and mentee are matched in as many similar ways as possible. Moreover, Langdon et al. (2014), from their analysis on induction and mentoring, claimed that “consideration should be given to the way mentors are appointed if the intention is to create mentor/mentee relationships committed to high quality learning” (p. 103). The importance of pairings has been expressed repeatedly throughout the induction and mentoring literature (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Jimerson et al., 2015; Lambeth, 2012; Langdon et al., 2014).

Complementary to mentor and mentee pairings is personal and professional reflection. Mentoring programs in which mentees are provided time to self-reflect on their personal and professional experiences are worth noticing (Bērziņa, 2011; Devos, 2010; Heikkinen, 2017). A 2-year study conducted by Bērziņa (2011) revealed mentors and mentees valued the “time alone to reflect on Nyborg’s concept teaching strategy” (p. 77). This particular strategy was the highlight of the mentoring program. Devos (2010) summarized the importance of reflection in their research on new teachers’ formation of personal identity: “Mentoring may produce changes in one’s work and work practices but also necessarily produces new ways of understanding and positioning oneself in discourse, in this case, the discursive environment created through the mentoring program” (p. 1221). Heikkinen (2017), in discussing the transition from teacher education programs in college to working as teachers in schools, highlighted that “the education element of teacher induction, in contrast, involves teachers and other educational professionals in reflection and discussion” (p. 818). This focus on mentor and mentee relationships brought about the theme of structure and culture of mentoring programs in the literature.

### ***Structure and Culture of Mentoring Programs***

Through mentoring, new teachers are able to interact with veteran teachers as a way to ease their transition into the classroom. Though there are components of mentoring that most programs share, there are some differences. New teachers, whether certified through the traditional route or the alternative route, bring different experiences with them into their classrooms. As such, teacher mentoring programs should vary in design and the literature supports providing teachers with diverse offerings. D. L.

Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) conducted a study of the effectiveness of mentoring program components by comparing two middle schools in the same school district and found that when mentoring programs were implemented as planned, all participant groups perceived mentoring as effective in supporting new teachers. The researchers also investigated the principal's role during mentoring and the impact principals have on mentoring programs. D. L. Bickmore and Bickmore stated:

All three participant groups cited the principals as equally important to the mentor in meeting new teachers' personal needs. The personal needs met through administrators tended to coalesce around concepts of competence, autonomy, respect, whereas mentors served more to support emotional needs such as stress reduction and belonging. (p. 1011)

This supports that what teachers need and experience in mentoring does vary. Gordon and Lowrey (2017) also placed emphasis on the mentoring web. The mentoring web highlights the various components of a teacher mentoring program that work together to empower teachers (Gordon & Lowrey, 2017). Principals are viewed as the instructional leaders on most campuses today; an open line of communication to the principal and principal visibility are viewed as beneficial to teachers (Wilcher, 2014).

Literature on the principal role also brought awareness to local and state mandates (i.e., whether teacher mentoring directives came from the state or district) and the funding supporting these mentoring programs. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) stated "induction programs also vary in their financial costs, and along with the question of which kinds and amounts of assistance are most-effective is the question of which kinds and amounts of assistance are most cost-effective" (p. 228). Mandates and funding were key

components of the research conducted by Kent et al. (2012), which highlighted the Alabama Teacher Mentoring Program (ATM), a state-wide initiative to meet the needs of new teachers. Although the focus of the research was on the development of veteran teachers as mentor teachers, the authors captured the importance of state mandates and the distribution of funds for mentoring programs. Highlighting additional literature focusing on funding, Potemski and Matlach (2014) found instructional improvements, growth in student achievement, and greater teacher retention when funds were properly allocated for mentor stipends and training.

Diverse representation was not in abundance in the literature highlighting teacher mentoring programs. Most studies centered around female mentors and mentees who identified as White in either rural or suburban settings. This narrowing of representation in the literature was not expected. Emphasis has been placed on recruiting teachers of color to the profession but there is a lack of literature exploring their perceptions and feelings related to mentoring in predominantly White schools, which supports the need for the current study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I designed this study to analyze both the personal and professional development of Black male teachers in a predominantly White K–12 school setting. To conduct such an analysis, consideration needed to be given to the racial identity of the participants. Additionally, I designed the study to focus on the mentoring experiences of Black male teachers. Given the emphasis on racial identity and mentoring, I used two theories to create the theoretical framework of this study. The theories, nigrescence theory (W. E. Cross, 1971) and mentoring theory (Kram, 1983), are discussed below.

## *Nigrescence Theory*

In response to a call for more psychologists to explore and understand living within Black America, W. E. Cross (1971) developed the Negro to Black conversion experience (referred to as nigrescence theory and Black identity development) that has been used as a foundational model for other race and ethnicity based theories (Helms, 1984; Phinney, 1989). W. E. Cross's (1971) work came after work by Erikson (1950) and Marcia (1966) that focused on identity development models for children and adolescents. Nigrescence theory was developed during a time in America where the country was still facing turmoil over civil rights, the Vietnam War, and school integration efforts. The political and societal context of the time period helped to inform W. E. Cross's work.

Nigrescence theory, used interchangeably with Black identity development theory, helps with illuminating the ways in which Black Americans understand themselves, the world in which they live, and the perceptions of others around them. W. E. Cross et al. (2002) stated:

We conceive of Black identity as the passing down from one generation to another the learned experiences and identity activities that facilitate Black adjustment and humanity under conditions often framed by race, racism, and the proactive dimensions of Black culture. (p. 94)

The term nigrescence refers to “the process of becoming Black” (W. E. Cross, 1994, p. 120) in the French language and takes into consideration the historical context of being Black in America. Nigrescence theory focuses on both individual and collective development and does not void out the experiences of racism, discrimination, and oppression (W. E. Cross, 1971). W. E. Cross's background in psychology is important to

note as nigrescence theory has a focus on self-esteem, a psychological and social perspective that has consequential impacts on human development.

Nigrescence theory was first proposed by William Cross in 1971 and was framed as having five stages for Black Americans. Over the course of 50 years, the theory has been critiqued, revisited, and revised, though the focus remains on helping Black individuals make sense of themselves as social beings rather than on personality traits (W. E. Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Nigrescence theory (W. E. Cross, 1971) is a five-stage model that includes the following stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. A description of the five stages is presented in this section.

**Pre-Encounter.** In the pre-encounter stage, Black Americans are described as having a low salience toward identity. Individuals in the pre-encounter phase identify and subscribe to White culture and associate little to none with Black culture and identity. Pro-White and anti-Black stances are held by individuals in this stage. Within the pre-encounter stage, W. E. Cross (1971) contended that self-hatred and low self-esteem affect Black individuals. Additionally, Black Americans at the pre-encounter stage have an “extreme dependency on White leadership and the assimilation-integration paradigm is thought to be the only model for cohesive race relations” (W. E. Cross, 1971, p. 16). Black Americans in this stage place emphasis on personal gain instead of collective gain. When an individual has a racialized interaction or encounter in this stage, the individual is said to transition to the next stage.

**Encounter.** This stage is marked by the realization of discrimination, racism, and other oppressive forces. Black Americans at the encounter stage question their beliefs about race in America and this stage is motivated by “some experience that manages to slip by or even shatters the person’s current feeling about himself and his interpretation . . . of Blacks in America” (W. E. Cross, 1971, p. 17). After an experience with an encounter, Black Americans begin to reinterpret the world through a new lens (W. E. Cross, 1971). “Have I been unaware of the Black experience or was I programmed to be disgusted by it” (W. E. Cross, 1971, p. 17) is a personal question a Black American may ask of themselves in the encounter stage. Feelings of wanting to immerse the self in all forms of Blackness transitions Black Americans to the next stage.

**Immersion-Emersion.** Black individuals in this stage begin by immersing the self into the world of all things Blackness. Value is added and given to all things Black or relevant to Blackness (W. E. Cross, 1971). Feelings of Black rage, guilt, and then pride energize individuals at this stage to focus on collective advancement. This stage consists of a second half where individuals emerge from the immersion half of this stage. The emersion from “over-simplified aspects of the immersion” (W. E. Cross, 1971, p. 20) allows Black Americans to have control over their awareness of Black liberation and White humanity. This stage of nigrescence is important as it can lead to continued evolution or result in non-productive behavior (W. E. Cross, 1971). Some individuals face disappointments and rejection, which can regress Black Americans to believing in “the White man’s magic and the Black man’s inferiority” (W. E. Cross, 1971, p. 21). Contrary to this is the overwhelming hate a Black American can have toward White

Americans. However, others internalize their experiences into greater self-worth (W. E. Cross, 1971).

**Internalization.** Black Americans at this stage have achieved a feeling of security with their inner self and have satisfaction with who they are (W. E. Cross, 1971). At the internalization stage, Black Americans are receptive to discussions, plans, and calls to action, but lack the commitment to a plan. Individuals attach themselves to Black things, Black culture, and the “Black and beautiful” (W. E. Cross, 1971, p. 22) mantra, but still subscribe to the Western (White American) lifestyle. Black Americans internalize high self-worth and create inner peace and calmness to interact with individuals from other cultures at this stage. This stage includes embracing Black identity while lessening “Weusi Anxiety” (anxiety over Blackness; W. E. Cross, 1971, p. 22). According to W. E. Cross (1971), “The degree of experienced Weusi Anxiety varies as a function of the internalization of positive Black attitudes” (p. 22). Black Americans at the internalization stage are significantly different human forms of self, both psychologically and spiritually. The internalization stage is one of greater positive self-worth, self-acceptance, and a new perception on life and world.

**Internalization-Commitment.** W. E. Cross (1971), in his original work, provided the distinction between internalization and internalization-commitment: “The individual functioning at the fifth stage differs from the person in the fourth stage in that he or she is committed to a plan” (p. 23). A new self-image and a new identity define Black Americans at this stage. Less reliance on the views and perceptions of others is combined with an intent to dismantle the oppressive and racist systems in existence. Black Americans at this stage commit to a call to action for social change and are

concerned with greatness for all Black Americans. Individuals at this stage also hold the capacity to exhibit compassion to other Black Americans who are navigating through the various stages of nigrescence. Taking on the role of mentor and guide, individuals in stage five assist others in their journeys toward Black liberation. W. E. Cross (1971) recognized that Black liberation should involve “the discovery, eruption, embracement, and incorporation of affect . . . the synthesis of affect with reason” (p. 24) and “exposure to non-Western thought” (p. 24). The collective betterment of all Black Americans is a focus for individuals operating at stage five.

The original work of W. E. Cross (1971) has been used by other scholars to develop additional understandings and research. Four stages of nigrescence theory were operationalized by researchers Parham and Helms (1985) through the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS). Revisions to the original nigrescence theory model were made in 1991 (W. E. Cross, 1991), and a critique by Stokes et al. (1998) concluded that stages four (internalization) and five (internalization-commitment) were merged into one stage. However, W. E. Cross (1998) dispelled that myth in a response:

In a minor but related note, Stokes et al., suggested that I have flipped-flopped on whether there were four or five stages to my model. Let’s see, the original model, as published in *Black World* had five stages, in beyond *Black or White*, by Vernon Dixon and Badi Foster, we find five stages, in my 1978 *Journal of Black Psychology* on the Thomas and Cross Models, the model had five stages, in any reference for which I was the sole or first author that was published in the 1980s, five stages are referenced, and in the 1991 revision, there are five stages. Enough said. (p. 162)

A focus on attitudes within the stages brought about an emphasis on race salience (assimilation or anti-Black; anti-White or pro-Black; Black nationalists, biculturalists, or multiculturalist; W. E. Cross, 1991). An expanded nigrescence theory model was developed by W. E. Cross and Vandiver (2001) and was operationalized with the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). This expanded model still operated as a five-stage model but placed more emphasis on attitudes (W. E. Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Worrell et al., 2004). Black Americans have diverse experiences, perspectives, and attitudes (W. E. Cross, 1971, 1991). Through all revisions and expansions, Black liberation has always been the end goal.

W. E. Cross (1971) developed his model during a time of racial strife, which contributed to the Black Power movement. The Black Power movement, akin to nigrescence theory, focused on Black liberation. It is worth noting the previous due to the Black Lives Matter movement of today resembling the efforts of the Black Power movement in the 1970s. Race relations of the past influence race relations of today, especially in our schools. Black identity development depends upon an individual and their experiences, illustrating that nigrescence operates on a continuum. Using nigrescence theory as a component of the theoretical framework for this study informed the understanding of how Black male educators make sense of their racialized identity experiences within the racial contexts of predominantly White K–12 schools.

### ***Mentoring Theory***

The adult development research is attributed to the work of scholars like Malcolm Knowles and Daniel Levinson, and has been advanced over time to reflect the ever-changing ways of life. Within adult development and education, the focus is centered on

the experiences and growth opportunities adults can engage with both personally and professionally. Recognizing that growth and development should happen throughout adulthood and with the assistance of others, Kram (1983) derived a conceptual model of mentoring that has assisted researchers, scholars, and industry professionals with career transitions and relationships.

Kram (1983), in her initial research, studied 18 professional pairings in a corporate setting and used the findings to emphasize the phases of a mentoring relationship. Shortly after her initial research, Kram (1985) published additional work on mentoring relationships and expanded on the findings from the initial article. The findings included the four phases of the mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1983, 1985). Additionally, Kram (1983, 1985), in her research findings, revealed the two types of functions associated with a mentor relationship: career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions are facilitated through coaching, protection, and exposure and highlight the new knowledge and growth a mentee has in the organizational structure. Moreover, career functions “enhance career advancement” (Kram, 1985, p. 23). Psychosocial functions are demonstrated through role modeling, counseling, and acceptance and highlight the trust and enhanced identity of the mentor–mentee relationship. Additionally, psychosocial functions “enhance the sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role” (Kram, 1985, p. 25).

Kram (1983, 1985) posited that a mentoring relationship is an evolutionary process, with time being a major contributor to the process. Kram also argued that the mentor relationship consists of four predictable phases. The relationship is usually pushed into the next phase by time. A description of the phases follows.

**Initiation.** The initial phase of the relationship occurs during the first 6 to 12 months and is marked by strong positive feelings held by both toward one another (Kram 1983, 1985). The positive feelings and attitudes toward each other are described as creating a fantasy in which the mentor is admired and the mentee (protégé) feels safe, secure, and cared for (Kram, 1985). In the initiation phase, the mentee represents an individual with potential, one who can adopt the “values and perspectives on the world” (Kram, 1985, p. 52) of the mentor. Initial interactions that help strengthen positive expectations can include common work tasks, a direct reporting relationship, or peer recommendations. Prior to transitioning to the next phase, the fantasy becomes concrete through positive events.

**Cultivation.** The cultivation phase of a mentor relationship occurs for 2 to 5 years. According to Kram (1983), “As the relationship continues to unfold, each individual discovers the real value of relating to the other” (p. 53). As the mentor and mentee interact more, both career and psychosocial functions emerge for the development of the mentee. The mentor during this phase provides “coaching, exposure-and-visibility, protection, and/or sponsorship” (Kram, 1985, p. 53) for the mentee to assist with competence and role/position mastery. Depending on the depth and intimacy of the mentor relationship, the mentor can provide counseling and friendship for the mentee. Though still considered a positive phase, the cultivation phase marks change for both the mentor and mentee. The fantasies from the initiation phase are tested against concrete realities. Additionally, role/position changes, organizational restructuring, and new employment elsewhere can influence activities within the cultivation stage.

**Separation.** The separation phase brings about a sense of loss. Typically occurring after about 2 to 5 years of a mentor relationship, changes within the relationship occur and can bring about “turmoil, anxiety, and feelings of loss” (Kram, 1985, p. 56). During this phase, a mentee can experience independence and autonomy. However, if separation comes too fast or too slow, the mentee can experience anxiety and abandonment, or anger and resentment. The mentor during this stage experiences a feeling of great pride if their mentee is making strides toward success within the organization. Opposite of this feeling is disappointment if the mentee does not reflect the mentor positively. This phase is a “transitional period in the relationship” (Kram, 1985, p. 59) and “individual needs and organizational circumstances” (Kram, 1985, p. 59) inform both the mentor and mentee that the relationship is ready to evolve into something different.

**Redefinition.** The last phase is one in which a friendship evolves between the mentor and mentee. Of the 18 pairings in Kram’s (1983, 1985) research, eight pairings reached the redefinition phase. Informal communication replaces the fantasies in phase one and the mentor reliance in phase two. At this phase, the mentor is a supporter rather than the ultimate knowledge holder. The redefinition phase is “evidence of changes that occurred in both individuals” (Kram, 1985, p. 62). Additionally, new relationships are formed as the mentor can take on new mentees to continue to influence the culture of the organization. The former mentee now has the ability to step into the mentor role with newer individuals in the organization.

Though Kram’s (1983, 1985) model is used most in the management field, the mentor relationship easily connects to the mentoring systems in the education field.

Within her work, Kram did not address race, but did factor in gender to include male and female pairings. In additional research on mentoring, Kram considered the diverse identities among mentors and mentees (Kram & Hall, 1996). More recently, Kram and Higgins (2008) highlighted mentoring through a developmental network. Using mentoring theory (Kram 1983, 1985) as a component of the theoretical framework for this the current study informed the understanding of how Black male educators make sense of their professional experiences within the racial contexts of predominantly White K–12 schools.

### **Summary**

An analysis and review of previous literature centered around Black male teachers was presented in this chapter. Various scholars and researchers discussed the barriers limiting Black male teacher representation, Black male teachers as assets to the teacher workforce, and some of the pipelines in existence to attract more Black male teachers. Teacher mentoring program literature was also analyzed in this chapter. Mentoring as a determinant of retention emerged as a theme from the literature but did not reflect the experiences of Black male teachers in predominantly White schools. The gap in the literature on Black male teachers in predominantly White settings was highlighted in this chapter as well. Last, a review of literature on nigrescence theory and mentoring theory was conducted to support the theoretical framework of this study.

### III. METHODOLOGY

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame . . . We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (Hughes, 1985, p. 4)

The purpose of this research study was to describe and examine the mentoring experiences of Black males teaching in predominantly White K–12 public schools to understand whether and how mentoring influenced their persistence, personal development, and career development while taking into consideration the role of Black identity development throughout these experiences. This chapter describes the qualitative methodology I used for this research and highlights the rationale and justification for the choice to use phenomenology to answer the following question: What are the lived experiences of Black male teachers who have engaged in teacher mentoring programs at White K–12 schools? The following secondary research questions also guided the study:

1. How do Black male teachers use mentoring to persist in predominantly White K–12 schools?
2. How have mentoring experiences influenced the personal development of Black male teachers?
3. How have mentoring experiences influenced the career development (and retention) of Black male teachers?

This chapter includes a discussion of the research design, the selection of participants, informed consent, data collection, data analysis methods, and trustworthiness. A summary of the sections previously listed concludes the chapter.

## **Research Design**

I used a phenomenological research methodology to understand the experiences of Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 public schools. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach used to study the lived experiences of individuals within the world. Creswell and Poth (2017) asserted that the focus in a phenomenological study is on the understanding of the lived experiences of individuals around a phenomenon. Such research involves the study of individuals to discover, understand, and illuminate the experiences of others to highlight a phenomenon. Phenomenological research is used to describe the essence of a phenomenon through exploring such phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological researchers attempt to describe the meaning of the experience and highlight what was experienced and how it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1990). The examinations of lived experiences uncover new meanings and understandings of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology is rooted in the writings and understandings of Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician, and philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1990). Though newer approaches to phenomenology have been developed over time, the two traditional approaches of descriptive (transcendental) and interpretive (hermeneutical) phenomenology remain the most notable. I used phenomenological research to ascribe common significance to the lived experiences of Black male teachers who all had experience with a phenomenon through participant descriptions. More

specifically, hermeneutical phenomenology was the qualitative approach best positioned to support this study.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, also referred to as interpretive phenomenology, is credited to Martin Heidegger, who combined the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Finlay, 2009; Lavery, 2003; Slattery, 2013). Heidegger, with a foundation in theology, became a student of philosophy and initially aligned with Edmund Husserl, who is credited as an originator of phenomenology (Peoples, 2020). For Husserl, phenomenology was rooted in an epistemological focus and was descriptive. Husserl's approach is referred to as transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology and situates phenomenological researchers as objective researchers who can achieve the state of transcendental I—a state where researchers can suspend all biases, expectations, assumptions, and hypotheses to a study (Lavery, 2003). Opposite of Husserl is Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, which is rooted in interpretation. Rather than suspend all aspects of one's background, hermeneutic phenomenology involves the recognition that one cannot rid themselves of their lifeworld (Lavery, 2003). Lifeworld, according to Heidegger (1927/1962), refers to the idea that "individuals' realities are invariably influenced by the world in which they live" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). Through this idea of lifeworld, an individual's background influences their way of understanding their lived experiences and the world in which these experiences are situated. Heidegger (1927/1962) also developed the concept of situated freedom in hermeneutic phenomenology. Individuals have situated freedom in that they are "free to make choices, but their freedom is not absolute; it is circumscribed by the specific conditions of their daily lives" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). According to Heidegger

(1927/1962), all experiences are interpreted through the lens of an individual's background. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires the researcher to interpret the shared narratives of research participants in relation to their individual contexts (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Meaning is thus a partnership between an individual and the world.

Research conducted using a phenomenological methodology generally has the following characteristics: a focus on a singular concept to be explored, shared experiences of individual participants with a researcher, the setting aside of the researcher's experiences (bracketing), strong reliance on interviews, and detailed descriptions of participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019; van Manen, 1990, 2014). In this study, I used a form of interpretive inquiry known as hermeneutic phenomenology (Crotty, 1998). Van Manen (1990) explained the hermeneutic phenomenological approach as involving six activities:

1. Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30–31)

Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for this study allowed me to answer the following:

What is the meaning, structure, and essence, of the lived experiences of this phenomenon for this person or group of people . . . how they perceive it, describe

it, feel it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others.

(Patton, 2002, p. 104)

## **Bracketing**

Bracketing is more of a phenomenological component than a hermeneutic component. Bracketing requires researchers to detect and bring to light their own perceptions, biases, prejudices, and experiences so these items are set aside and not used within the analysis process. Bad (or negative) experiences, thoughts, and feelings, as well as good (or positive) experiences, thoughts, and feelings held by a researcher are bracketed to avoid confusion with the experiences of the participants. However, this study included my own assumptions, prejudices, and perceptions around racial identity and mentorship for first-year Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 schools. I was able to do this through the keeping of a researcher’s journal where I recorded any identified assumptions, perceptions, and prejudices. Researchers should acknowledge their preconceptions and reflect on how their subjectivity is integral to the data analysis process (Moran, 2000). This intended source of data helped with researcher reflexivity and assisted me with constructing the interpretation of the lived experiences through the lens of the participants.

## **Participants and Recruitment**

To carry out this study, I recruited 11 Black male full-time teachers who have previously taught or are currently teaching in a predominantly White K–12 public school in the United States. To achieve such a sample, I used a purposive criterion sampling technique in this process given my intent to focus on the experiences of Black male teachers. Participants brought with them diverse experiences due to geography, campus

and district culture, and personal life backgrounds. For an individual to serve as a participant of this study, they needed to meet the following essential requirements: (a) self-identified as a Black/African American male, (b) resided in the United States, (c) participated in a mentoring program during their first year of teaching at a predominantly White K–12 school, and (d) were willing to share experiences and reflect on their personal and professional paths.

The study required participants to come from two specific identities: identify as Black/African American and identify as a male. Research cited in previous chapters of this study confirmed that research on this population is scarce and required intentionality in recruitment. As such, I composed an email and created advertising to solicit participants for the study (see Appendix A and Appendix B). Various groups on social media platforms for Black educators are in existence and served as a means to recruit participants. Additionally, I used personal contacts of current school leaders to seek out participants meeting the essential requirements. Once participants were secured, each completed the informed consent form (see Appendix C). I followed Texas State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to ensure the study was ethical.

### **Data Collection**

Merriam (2009) stated qualitative researchers focus on the meanings people make from their experiences and how those meanings customize their worlds. To highlight those experiences, I used semi-structured open-ended interviews, pictorial representation (artifact), and a researcher’s journal to accurately capture participants’ experiences.

## *Interviews*

Personal one-on-one interviews served as the primary method for data collection (see Appendix D and Appendix E). I used semi-structured interviews to attempt to “understand the world from the subjects’ points of view and to unfold the meaning of their lived world” (Kvale, 2006, p. 481). According to Kvale (2006), “Interviews give voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words, and open for a close personal interaction between the researchers and their subjects” (p. 481). The interviews contained structured interview questions that focused on background information and semi-structured interview questions that focused on the experiences of the participants.

Seidman (2013) recommended a three interview approach in qualitative research and considered this approach to be the most effective for conducting in-depth phenomenology interviewing. Specifically, Seidman articulated that people’s behaviors become meaningful and understandable when put in the context of their lives and those lives around them. In the first interview, a focused life history is sought as interview questions are used to place participants’ experiences in the context of the topic by asking them to share as much current information as possible about themselves (Seidman, 2013). Interview two allows the participant and researcher to reconstruct the details of the participant’s lived experiences (Seidman, 2013). In the third interview, research participants are to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. Interview questions are crafted to guide participants to make connections between the participants’ work and life (Seidman, 2013).

In this study, to eliminate infringing on the time of busy teachers, I employed a modified approach to the recommended three interview series. In an effort to be considerate of participants' time and workloads, I collapsed interviews one and two, as suggested by Seidman (2013), into one longer interview to help with building context and establishing rapport. Therefore, instead of three interviews, I conducted two semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 60–90 minutes each with four participants in mutually agreed upon places and times that allowed participants to be free from distractions. The remaining participants each suggested one combined interview due to scheduling issues. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted via videoconferencing platforms (Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams). All interviews were audio-recorded through audio-recording applications with access being restricted to the primary researcher. All recordings of the interviews were kept confidential and are stored in a secure location in accordance with Texas State University's IRB procedures.

### ***Pictorial Representation (Artifact)***

To build rapport with participants of the study, I asked each participant to submit a picture of a Black male educator/teacher with whom the participant was familiar in their life journey, whether that be through media (e.g., TV, internet, radio) or in-person interactions (former teacher). We discussed the picture each participant brought during the interview. Additionally, I asked the participants specific questions about the educator in the photo centered around the participant's knowledge of the educator and their personal likeness to the educator. Through these questions, I attempted to engage each participant in the interview process, encourage each participant to be open with their experiences, and provide a sense of safety while interacting with participants.

### ***Researcher's Journal***

I used a researcher's journal throughout the study. Through the researcher's journal, I documented any feelings, observations, thoughts, and questions that arose during and after the interview sessions with research participants. This journal afforded me the opportunity to have a transparent research process (Ortlipp, 2008).

### **Data Analysis**

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a qualitative research design, assists researchers with making meaning and providing rich descriptions of the phenomenon at hand; in this case, being a Black male teacher in a predominantly White K–12 school. To aid in the process, I used the hermeneutic circle to gain an understanding of the themes that emerged within the study. Through the use of the hermeneutic circle, I moved back and forth between the parts (all forms of data) and the whole (an understanding of the phenomenon being studied) through interpretations of texts. Additionally, I remained open to what emerged from the data and joined in with the participants of the study to co-construct the lived experience being studied.

According to Merriam (2009), “Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 176). To fully capture the lived experiences of the participants and turn the raw data into meaningful interpretation, I used the data analysis process introduced by Lichtman (2013) that focuses on the three Cs of analysis: coding, categorizing, and concepts. Lichtman suggested a six-step process that guided the data analysis process of this study:

Step One: Initial Coding. Going from responses to summary ideas of the responses.

Step Two: Revisiting initial Coding

Step Three: Developing an initial list of categories

Step Four: Modifying initial list based on additional rereading

Step Five: Revisiting your categories and subcategories

Step Six: Moving from categories to concepts. (Lichtman, 2013, p. 252)

The data analysis process of this study began immediately with the data collection process.

To carry out the aim of this study, I conducted various interviews with the participants. The interview questions and sub-questions were aligned with the research questions and formatted in a manner that the participants could easily understand (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I remained grounded in the data while simultaneously remembering thoughts, feelings, and reactions during the interviews (Gibbs, 2008). I transcribed the interviews as soon as possible to remain as accurate as possible.

According to Creswell and Poth (2017), it is important to “read the transcripts in their entirety several times” and “immerse yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it up into parts” (p. 187). Transcripts were read repeatedly, and short descriptions were noted by me to “describe what they see” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 189). Reading the transcripts and any observation notes allowed me to look for common themes that emerged through the coding process. I also ensured confidentiality by anonymizing the names of the participants, a safety measure for both the participants and myself as the researcher (Gibbs, 2008).

## **Trustworthiness**

The standards by which qualitative scholars determine the rigor of qualitative research rest upon the four categories of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A brief discussion of how I designed this study to meet the standards for rigorous qualitative research follows.

### ***Credibility***

Internal validity or credibility depends on the relationship between the researcher's conclusions and reality. Using qualitative approaches requires a researcher to "identify the specific threat in question and to develop ways to attempt to rule out that particular threat" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 123). As such, I engaged in respondent validation (i.e., member checking) to allow the participants of the study to review their transcripts. Maxwell (2013) stated this is the "single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do" (p. 126). I used member checks to ensure credibility. I asked the participants to suggest any edits or corrections necessary to ensure the accuracy of transcripts and validity of my interpretations of the data.

I recognize and understand that my own identities affected the study and may have had an impact on the participants. I brought to this study several years of teaching experience in a traditional public-school setting and experience as a department chair, a team leader, a coach, and a mentor. Additionally, I shared common identities with the participants, and I have taught for several years in a setting where I was the only male of color on faculty. I acknowledge that these experiences brought about interest in the research topic and had me vested in the stories and experiences of the participants. Due to

my role, I also acknowledged my insider positionality due to the identities and experiences I brought to the research (Chavez, 2008).

### ***Dependability***

It is important for participants of the study to trust the researcher, the intentionality of the research, and the findings from the study. As such, I served as the sole researcher and was the only individual responsible for interacting with the participants. However, I had the option to have an audit trail conducted by the chair of my dissertation committee to ensure dependability of the study. In qualitative research, an audit trail “consists of a thorough collection of documentation regarding all aspects of the research” (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993, p. 219). During the study, I documented every component of the study. Additionally, I was always honest with the participants and provided them with their transcripts. Doing so increased the trustworthiness of the study and allowed the participants to still be involved with the study well after the interviews had been conducted.

### ***Transferability***

External validity or transferability deals with attempting to apply the findings from one study to other situations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Peoples, 2020). To meet the standards for transferability, I used verbatim quotes from the participants to provide “rich data” and thick descriptions of all experiences (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Additionally, variation within the sample of participants for this study served as a strategy to enhance transferability (Merriam, 2009). By engaging in maximum variation and by providing “rich data,” I actively attempted to increase the rigor of this qualitative study.

### ***Confirmability***

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) suggested collecting data of various forms for triangulation purposes. To gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in this study, I used multiple sources of data. Audio-recorded interviews, pictorial representations, and a researcher's journal helped establish confirmability through triangulation. These multiple sources of data served as the audit trail linkages to validate the findings that emerged from the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

### **Ethical Considerations**

In this study, I adhered to all policies and procedures in place by Texas State University's IRB. Once given approval, I submitted an IRB application to my dissertation chair and committee for review. Upon approval, the completed application was entered into the online system to begin the IRB review process. Once approved by the IRB, I was notified via electronic letter from the IRB chair. This letter granted formal approval to conduct data collection and data analysis for the study. Prior to approval, data collection and analysis were prohibited.

Prior to beginning the interviews, each participant viewed and signed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C). This form explained the purpose, benefits, risks, and other relevant details associated with the study. Participants had the opportunity to articulate questions or concerns regarding the study before participating and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. To protect the safety of each participant of the study, I explained to participants that pseudonyms, instead of their names, would be used throughout the study to guarantee confidentiality. One last

safeguard worth mentioning relates to the storage of secured data. Participants were informed that the data gathered would be stored on the university's secure server, digitally protected by password, and only accessible by the primary researcher.

### **Limitations**

Weaknesses and limitations of this study may have affected the findings. Participants in this study were recruited from various schools and grade levels, across class lines, and in different parts of the nation. As such, they brought with them a wide range of experiences. This research was susceptible to researcher bias in that I, the researcher, identify as a male of color who was significantly influenced by several professional mentors during the early years of my teaching career. These identities and experiences served as both limitations and strengths. I hold the belief that there is a connection between mentoring and retention, but I did not design my study to focus on that specifically. This study was limited to understanding the diverse and complex experiences of mentoring along with the feelings and perspectives of Black male teachers given their identities.

### **Summary**

I used hermeneutic phenomenology to illuminate the experiences of Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 schools. Hermeneutic phenomenology served as the chosen research approach due to the approach being rooted in the underpinnings of phenomenology and hermeneutics, which allowed me to engage in the hermeneutic circle. Data analysis involved the use of the hermeneutic circle and enabled me to continuously move between parts (text/transcribed interviews/researcher's journal) and whole (an understanding of the phenomenon being studied). The research design,

participants, data collection, data analysis procedures, and the trustworthiness of data were described in this chapter. Last, this chapter included the essential ethical considerations I incorporated to maintain integrity throughout the study.

#### IV. FINDINGS

There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become. (Obama, 2018, p. 421)

This chapter presents the findings of this research study obtained from participant interviews, participant artifacts, and the researcher's journal. The purpose of the study was to describe and examine the mentoring experiences of Black males teaching in predominantly White K–12 public schools to understand whether and how mentoring influenced their persistence, personal development, and career development, while taking into consideration the role of Black identity development throughout these experiences. I used a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of Black male teachers who have engaged in teacher mentoring programs at White K–12 schools? The analysis of the findings illuminated the experiences of Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 public schools. Additionally, the findings presented in this study add to the body of literature focused on Black male teachers to assist with both recruiting and retaining Black male teachers in public-school settings.

This chapter describes the participants' profiles and the emergent themes derived from the analysis of data collected from participants through interviews and artifacts. All participants identified as Black males and currently taught in predominantly White K–12 schools across the nation. Through storytelling and artifacts, participant narratives were captured. These personal narratives broadly represent Black identity, mentorship, and persistence (i.e., retention as a teacher). The themes that emerged were as follows:

- Navigating the Desire to Rearticulate Black Identity (Blackness)
- Navigating the Significance of Black Male Teacher Representation
- Navigating Whiteness and White Spaces
- Navigating Meaningful Mentorship for Black Male Teachers

Of the 11 participants, four each had two long interviews and the remaining seven participants each participated in one long interview, during which all questions were asked in one sitting via Zoom. This was done due to scheduling concerns, future availability, and the easiness of the conversations that occurred with the participants.

Another modification to the research design occurred when several participants revealed they had taught in other schools prior to teaching in a predominantly White K–12 school. This modification is worth noting as these experienced teachers were still assigned mentors at the predominantly White schools, and some of the mentors had significantly less teaching experience than the participants.

### **Participant Profiles**

The participants in this study consisted of 11 Black male teachers who met the following criteria: (a) taught in a predominantly White K–12 public school, (b) were assigned a mentor during their first year of teaching at a predominantly White K–12 public school, (c) self-identified as a Black/African American male, and (d) resided in the United States. The 11 participants had a collective average of 13 years of teaching experience and resided in either the Southeastern or Southwestern regions of the nation. For the purposes of confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in reporting the findings. The order in which the narratives are presented corresponds to the interview order for participants. See Table 1 for the demographics of the participants.

**Table 1. Participant Demographics.**

Pseudonym	Age range and region	Certification type	Teaching years	Mentor's race and gender	Coach
Doc	35–40; SE	Traditional	10	White female	Yes
JJ	40–45; SE	Traditional	20	Black male	No
JB	46–50; SW	Traditional	13	White male/ White female	No
J2	35–40; SW	Alternative	8	Persian female	No
CP	30–35; SW	Traditional	9	White male	Yes
TC	35–40; SW	Traditional	12	Latina female	No
GP	50–55; SW	Alternative	13	Black female	No
TK	35–40; SW	Alternative	6	White female	Yes
TJ	46–50; SW	Traditional	26	Black female	No
Mikey	35–40; SW	Alternative	13	White male	Yes

*Note.* SE = Southeastern region, SW = Southwestern region.

### ***Doc Lane – Doc***

Doc Lane is an English as a second language (ESL) teacher in the Southeastern region of the United States. Doc has taught for a total of 10 years in the Southeast region and received his teaching certificate through a traditional educator preparation program. Doc completed his undergraduate and graduate coursework at a PWI in the Southeast region of the nation. He recalls being the only Black male in most of his classes and Doc is currently enrolled in doctoral coursework. Doc credits a hiring freeze for his interest in pursuing a career as a teacher. Additionally, his dual language acquisition assists him with his passion for working with children.

In reflecting on a Black male teacher who held significance in Doc's life, he quickly mentioned his high school track coach, Coach Smith. Doc's former track coach, Coach Smith, has kept in contact throughout the years via track meets, graduations, and

frequent check-ins. Doc appreciates the direct and straight forward approach Coach Smith embraced back then and even now. Doc has incorporated Coach Smith's teaching style into his own teaching style with a more modern approach. Doc's first-year teaching journey was different than that of others around him as he was assigned multiple mentors due to his ESL placement. Doc credits this mentoring web of all women as a reason for his ability to persist in education.

***James Jenkins – JJ***

James Jenkins, a Black male teacher from the Southeast region of the nation, has been teaching various art classes in K–12 public schools for 20 years. James originally started his teaching career in an inner-city school district where the student population resembled his racial identity. Most of the educational spaces James navigated as a student were predominantly Black spaces. A few years in a nontraditional middle school for fine arts created a time period during which James identified as one of three Black students in the school. College life for James existed at an HBCU in the Southeastern region of the nation. During this time, James had a mentor who encouraged him to think about teaching art and graphic design as he would be “guaranteed a job when you graduate.” Professor Scott, James's mentor in college, was “like a second dad to me and . . . he would talk to me about life . . . he was just always open, and he took to me.” James's style of teaching is resembled after his mentor's “laid back style” and he always embeds his culture into lessons because “I'm going to stop, you know, kinda, shying away from who I really am.”

Although James had over 10 years of teacher experience prior to teaching at a predominantly White high school, he was given a mentor during his first year on staff.

His assigned mentor identified as a Black male who “helped me navigate the space and not feel so much alone.” A relationship between the two formed both in and out of the school as James would receive invites “to the gatherings to get to know people.” The culture shift and the engagement with parents took time for James to get used to, but his mentor would “give advice on how to approach situations dealing with White students using the ‘n-word’ and diffusing situations.”

***Joshua Brown – JB***

Joshua Brown grew up in a rural community in the Southwest part of the nation. His love and passion for agriculture were molded by his family’s agricultural roots that consisted of “raising chickens, hogs, and other livestock animals.” Joshua has been teaching several agriculture classes for 13 years at the high school level. Throughout the course of his teaching career, he has taught at only two schools, both in rural communities. When asked to reflect on a Black male teacher in his lifetime, Joshua had to pull from the media as he did not have any Black male teachers throughout his educational journey. Joshua referenced the character Mark Thackeray, played by Sidney Poitier, as a Black male teacher who had an influence on his life because “he had to endure, he had to portray integrity at all times and take the high road.” An additional Black male from the media, Morgan Freeman as Joe Clark, was mentioned because “his heart was also in the right place and helped students understand their sense of worth . . . he treated everyone the same.” Joshua’s style of teaching is a “happy medium of the two.”

Joshua’s teaching career in rural high schools either made him the only Black male on campus or one of two Black males on campus. This dynamic informed his

practice and engagement with students and staff. Mr. Brown has worked with two mentors in his time as a teacher, and both have identified as White. One was a White male new to teaching the same time as Joshua and the other was a White female who had less teaching experience than him. The mentoring relationships between Joshua and his mentors, although chaotic, caused Joshua to “grow and want to learn more about education on his own.” JB has his principal certification but chooses to remain in the classroom to “teach kids from a different perspective . . . and to provide students with knowledge that they need to be successful.”

### ***Jason Joshua – J2***

Jason Joshua migrated from the Eastern region of the nation to the Southwestern region during his formative years. Career opportunities for his parents within the aerospace sector led to the relocation and provided a basis for Jason’s interest in education. For most of his K–12 education journey, Jason was in suburban area schools and was often the “only person of my color, either in a class or in the entire grade . . . out of 2,000 high school students, maybe 50 of us were Black.” Jason’s parents were intentional with providing him opportunities to engage with individuals of the same racial identity via church functions and other cultural engagements. Jason’s college career brought him to a space with greater diversity, a Hispanic serving institution (HSI), where the Black student enrollment was not on par with that of other racial identities. J2 credits his college mentor, Mr. Fells, with changing his life. Mr. Fells “pulled me aside to encourage me, check on my grades . . . keep me connected, plugged into the community, and accountable.” Mr. Fells was a student advisor on J2’s college campus, and although he had membership in a historically White fraternity, he identified as a Black male and

gravitated toward ensuring the success of Black students on campus. Jason has found that he has adopted many of the same techniques and concerns for Black students as his college mentor, stating “I intentionally and purposely engage Black students on my campus.”

J2 became involved in education as a profession when the sound recording industry faced significant challenges with the introduction of personal recording software. With a degree in sound recording technology, J2 joined an ACP to gain teacher certification. ACPs are often self-paced and offered in digital format, so J2 did not connect with others who were completing certification at the same time. Mentorship was provided on campus for J2 as he was assigned to a veteran teacher of 17 years. J2 and his assigned mentor, Mrs. Jam, a woman of color, were able to connect on “navigating White spaces as people of color.”

### ***Caleb Paul – CP***

Caleb migrated to the United States with his family from Haiti at the age of 2 years old. His family initially settled on the East Coast and then transitioned to the Southeast region of the nation. Growing up in two different regions provided CP with the opportunity to go “through a rough poor area and a nice poor area, and it gave me the support to help me as a teacher today.” Caleb originally navigated toward a career in education during his high school years when he served as a volunteer at the local Boys and Girls Club of America. It was initially “a way for me to earn community service hours for playing basketball.” It was during this volunteer experience that CP formed a bond with a student who had been written off by other volunteers and staff members. CP made a bet with the student one day:

If I play you and I beat you, you gotta do your homework tomorrow. And I beat him because he's a kid. So next day he comes, and he's already got the homework done. And I'm like, whaaat, okay! He said, "Can we go play basketball again?" And so it became a thing where every day when I showed up whether or not he was done or not, he was willing to do his homework because there was compensation for him or a reward at the end of it to go play basketball . . . he went from Fs to Cs, passing all his classes . . . my thought was I got to play basketball, he got to play basketball, we were all cool. But at the end of the year banquet, he was like, "I want to give a shout to . . ." he said my name and everything. I just remember going like something wrong with my eyes and I ran into the bathroom.

A significant Black male teacher to CP was Mr. Harvey, who served as Caleb's high school history teacher. CP immediately knew Mr. Harvey would be "my favorite teacher . . . he had a fresh suit on, he played basketball in college. I was like I want to be him when I grow up." Although CP dropped Mr. Harvey's class, he still engaged with Mr. Harvey at tutorials and open gym and they maintained a relationship even after high school. To CP, Mr. Harvey was "the first person that was a Black male teacher and he looked like success." CP credits his love for history to Mr. Harvey.

Caleb's journey in college started at a junior college, but he later transferred to a 4-year college where he went through a traditional teacher preparation program. CP identified as the only Black male in his program, stating it was "me, it was me. I didn't see any teachers. I didn't see any other students. Just me." CP persisted in college and was offered a job at a predominantly White middle school in the Southwestern region of

the nation. CP was assigned a mentor in his first year of teaching. His mentor, Coach Collins, was a former history teacher who transitioned to a physical education teacher. Coach Collins and CP both coach and this was the basis of their mentoring relationship as much of their conversation was situated around coaching, rather than classroom instruction and management. Coach Collins, a White male in his mid 40s, was “your prototypical football coach who believe in God, football, and family . . . in that order.” Due to this mentoring dynamic, CP navigated toward others for his growth and development as a history teacher.

***Tom Carr – TC***

With 13 years of classroom experience as a band director, Tom Carr identifies as a Black male from the Southwest region of the nation. Although he grew up in a single-parent household, his mother was intentional with always having family around for TC’s development. TC grew fond of music at an early age and became an All-State player, section leader, and drum major in high school. This love for music helped TC realize music is his passion. TC’s formative years were mostly situated in diverse suburban areas and his mother was “really adamant about keeping me in the same school system” for structure. Tom’s college career led him to a large and diverse research university in an urban area where he would teach private music lessons to earn money for living expenses. In working with students, he was disappointed in their lack of music fundamentals, which “interested me in trying to help set kids up to be successful pedagogically.” The location of his university helped with diversifying the demographics of his peers in his traditional teacher preparation program as TC was “not the only Black male student in the program . . . I was always in multicultural, multiethnic environments

from elementary school all the way through college.” However, throughout TC’s educational journey, he “never had any Black male teachers . . . there were some around, but I never personally had any of them.” To TC, “this is indicative of a shortcoming in our pipeline for Black male teachers.”

Mr. Carr’s 13 years of teaching experience has led him to several campuses and districts within the region. Upon starting at a predominantly White campus, he already had 10 years of teaching experience. However, he was assigned a mentor as if he were brand new to the profession. His mentor, Mrs. Jay, identified as Puerto Rican female who had fewer years of teaching experience than TC. At the time, she had been teaching for 3 years. Regardless of this dynamic, TC appreciated his mentor as it was “very nuts and bolts, kind of just like how to navigate the school . . . which was helpful just because, you know, you don’t want to be the new Black band director making all these mistakes.”

### ***George Polk – GP***

After 17 years of working in corporate finance and banking, George Polk decided teaching what he knew about finance and banking to the next generation would become his passion and purpose in life. Originating from the Midwest region of the nation, George Polk has been teaching various finance and accounting courses to high school students for the past 13 years. George’s formative years were influenced by teachers who took the time to celebrate and encourage George through parent notes, mentorship, and leadership roles. GP’s Midwest upbringing was also filled with Black male teachers in the secondary grades. George credits his sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Yale, and his high school wrestling coach, Coach Anderson, with being “the ones that I could say that kept me humble, kept me grounded, kept me on the right path of being considerate,

compassionate, and just forward thinking.” In high school, George found himself homeless and Coach Anderson “found out that I was staying in my car for a couple of weeks, and so he offered to bring me in.” George’s success with high school wrestling led to an athletic scholarship at a junior college. GP would later transfer to a private 4-year university after earning his associate of arts degree, and would later graduate with a degree in business administration. During college, GP would tutor other students to earn money, revealing his enjoyment of “seeing the light bulb go off for students . . . that adrenaline rush of being able to help others get it.”

Mr. Polk began his professional career in finance as a credit manager, which led to a branch manager position at the age of 24 years. The Midwest winters took a toll on GP, so he sought out positions in the Southwest region. GP continued to move up in the ranks, but realized “the higher I went up, the less I enjoyed it . . . I missed the light bulb moments.” GP eventually pursued alternative teacher certification and started teaching in 2009 (during the recession). Mr. Polk started his teaching career at a predominantly White high school and was assigned a mentor who identified as a Black female. GP referred to his mentor as a “big sister who came from the industry as well.” Mrs. Abrams served as the chair of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) department at the high school and was described as “a great observer, responsive, and vocal.” GP credits Mrs. Abrams with being his “go to person” since beginning his teaching career.

### ***Trey Knox – TK***

Trey is currently in his sixth year of teaching, but this is his first year at a predominantly White K–12 school. TK originally grew up in the Midwest region of the nation and transitioned to the Southeast region for his undergraduate studies. TK’s

undergraduate career occurred at a prominent HBCU where he double majored in psychology and history. It was during this time that Trey “experienced my first Black male teacher.” Throughout Trey’s elementary and secondary journey, he did not personally have any Black male teachers, although he navigated through mostly Black schools. TK’s history professor in college, Professor Java, became a mentor to Trey and “he showed me the, you know, the poise and intellect and everything it took to be a professor . . . he was my first introduction into the Black male teacher.” Trey’s original plan of moving forward as a history professor led him to graduate school to study history more extensively. However, Trey entered the teaching profession as a middle school history teacher on the East Coast and did so for roughly 4 years before venturing overseas to teach English to non-native learners.

Trey’s assigned mentor serves as the department chair of the history department and identifies as a White female in her 50s. According to TK, their mentoring dynamic is “more hands off” and most interactions are initiated by Trey. The scrutiny of critical race theory (CRT) in K–12 classrooms also influences their relationship and the guidance Mrs. Wiley provides Trey. Mrs. Wiley told Trey, “Make sure you don’t use any materials outside of the curriculum and when you talk about slavery, only hit these points and don’t put in your own personal views.” Mr. Knox described his experience as “we have to, like teach with handcuffs on almost, and that can be frustrating at times.” Regardless of this experience, Trey enjoys the teaching profession. He is committed to his “passion to empower students.”

### ***Terry Jones – TJ***

Terry has been teaching for 26 years and has journeyed throughout the Southwestern region of the nation for his educational career. Much credit for Terry's interest in education stemmed from a long history of Black educators in his family lineage, including his mother. Due to being deeply rooted in education, it was Terry's "choice out the gate" to specialize in elementary education upon college entry. TJ navigated through his elementary education courses at a well-known HBCU in the Southwestern region of the nation. At the time of his college enrollment, the university was known for "putting out more teachers than any other university . . . they had a strong faculty that was about helping you grow in the profession." TJ was not the only Black male in his traditional teacher preparation courses and he established a close bond with the other Black males in his courses.

Two Black male educators from Terry's K–12 journey, Coach Neal and Mr. Leon, were pivotal reflections of Black male educators and hold significance in Terry's education career. Both Mr. Leon and Coach Neal showed Terry "the importance of connecting with students and building rapport with parents." Terry models his demeanor and teaching style after both Coach Neal and Mr. Leon, and "gives and expects respect . . . they did not yell in the classroom, and neither do I . . . the relationship with the student paves the way." TJ's teaching career occurred mostly in schools with a higher percentage of Black and Latino/a students. However, he journeyed to a suburban district roughly 10 years ago where majority of the students identified as White. Although Terry had 16 years of teaching experience and a graduate degree in educational leadership, he was assigned a mentor at the campus like traditional first-year teachers. His assigned mentor

was new to the campus as well and had fewer years of teaching experience. Ultimately, TJ and his mentor “just made our way. We figured it out. We were already experienced teachers.” However, Terry’s journey in education has allowed him to glean from strong and talented teachers “that were more than willing to share and give me a better understanding of what it means to be an educator.”

***Michael Law – Mike/Mikey***

“Haitian raised, American born” is how Michael Law characterizes himself and his educational journey from the Midwest to the Southwestern region of the nation. Athleticism and a strong focus on academics paved the way for Mikey to excel in school throughout his P–16 journey. Accelerated courses placed Mikey on course to graduate early, though his love for football kept him in school for the traditional 4-year experience. College life for Mike consisted of football as a scholarship athlete at two different Division I universities. Although technology and creative arts are passions of Mike, he graduated with a bachelor of science in kinesiology. Mikey entered the teaching profession “out of desperation” due to the economy and other factors. However, working with kids has always been something he has done. Mikey completed his ACP and was hired a few weeks later at a middle school as a video production elective teacher. Mike was impressed with the school dynamic because “I was highly blessed to be on a campus with six Black male teachers . . . I naturally gravitated toward them. We were the Black Caucus.” These men served as unofficial mentors for Mikey at this campus, as he was assigned an official mentor by the campus principal. Though the school had a high enrollment of White students, this student demographic was not the largest.

Due to family and personal commitments, Mike transferred to a different district and began a new role as a physical education (PE) teacher. This school was “about 96% White and this was my first experience being in a White K–12 school.” With 5 years of teaching experience and a graduate degree in educational technology, Mikey was assigned a mentor on his new campus. Like the other participants of this study, Mike had more years of experience than the mentor assigned to him at this predominantly White school. Mr. Law was celebrated as teacher of the year several times on this campus and felt he was mentoring his assigned mentor rather than the reverse. Mike described this dynamic as taxing because “you’re sending this guy who knows nothing to mentor me . . . no clue what he was doing, and messed up the athletic department.”

Mr. Law credited his teaching knowledge and style to the six Black men of the “Black Caucus” at his first school and Black male educators from the media. Mikey mentioned his first introduction to Black male educators came through media in characters like Mr. Cooper (from *Hangin’ with Mr. Cooper*) and Steve Hightower (from *The Steve Harvey Show*). Additionally, the portrayal of Joe Clark in the film *Lean on Me* showed Mikey that Black male teachers are more than disciplinarians and coaches.

### ***DeVaughn Smith – Dee***

DeVaughn has been teaching for 17 years and has journeyed through both public and private K–12 schools. With a major in kinesiology, DeVaughn completed teacher certification through his undergraduate coursework. Dee’s initial interest in becoming a teacher was fostered during a volunteer experience at a K–12 school connected to his college campus where he tutored and coached the basketball team. This volunteer experience led to a full-time teaching role once DeVaughn graduated with his

undergraduate degree. Prior to college, Dee navigated through the public school system of his hometown, a large metropolitan city in the Southwestern region of the nation. DeVaughn described his upbringing as “pretty tough neighborhood. Single-parent household . . . we actually lived next door to my grandmother.” Although Dee grew up in a predominantly Black community and city, Dee had only two Black male teachers throughout his K–12 experience.

During DeVaughn’s first year as a teacher in a public K–12 school, he was assigned a mentor to assist him with his teaching abilities. Dee did not describe his mentor as a strong resource and he “decided to gravitate to leaders, good people, because there’s something that I can learn.” Dee considered himself to be a “sponge” and “always trying to get better.” During our conversation, Dee recounted instances of microaggressions by students, parents, and teachers during his teaching journey. Particularly, Dee recalled a situation in which parents perceived him a certain way:

They asked the school leaders like “why do you have that thug out there teaching our girls,” you know, so just me dressing a certain way, having, you know, cargo pants on and rolling them up. If you know anything about the hood, like rolling your pants leg up, that don’t make you a thug, but that was the perceived notion at that time.

Regardless of situations and experiences like the one described above, DeVaughn loves teaching and said it “allows me to be myself . . . I have to be the bright sunshine because you never know what they’re (students) dealing with.”

## **Theme 1: Navigating the Desire to Rearticulate Black Identity (Blackness)**

Black identity, as defined by W. E. Cross et al. (2002), is the passing down of learned experiences and identity activities that facilitate Black adjustment and humanity framed by race and racism. W. E. Cross (1971) contended that Black Americans make sense of themselves through five stages. Black identity (Blackness) is a process, and environment is a contributing factor. The Black male participants of this study were questioned about their identity and how they made sense of that identity in a predominantly White setting. With many of the participants having been employed during the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration, experiences with microaggressions, cultural stereotypes, and racial bias were mentioned as moments of frustration, confusion, and disbelief. As such, the participants all discussed how they embedded their Black identity in the classroom with students and in their interactions with their peers (White teachers). Rearticulating Black identity for the participants occurred in a multitude of ways based on identity, geographical location, and comfortability.

Doc Lane referred to his identity rearticulation with students and classroom practices. Specifically, he said, “They don’t get a chance to engage with many Blacks, like Black male teachers. Especially outside of the gym. Our Black students respond to me differently. There’s an unspoken kinship.” Doc Lane described a scenario in which his identity as a Black man in a White setting caused him to become vocal about who he is and what he brings with him daily:

I’m like, yeah, let’s have this conversation . . . I’m older and bolder now. I was attending a ministry in the mornings with other coaches, around the time of

Trump, and comments and things related to Jackie Robinson arose, and many of the coaches were like “I don’t see color.” That kind of conversation. I was like, you see color, I see color, that’s important to me and it’s important to other people of color . . . they’re comfortable, whereas we are having to juggle double consciousness.

Doc Lane also spoke on being unapologetic with his identity in White schools because “the students, all students, need to see us [Black male teachers].”

Doc Lane was not alone in his thoughts on rearticulating Black identity. James Jenkins (JJ) echoed this theme as well:

I don’t even know how to explain it. Sometimes I feel like I have to be extra nice. You know what I mean? I’m sure a lot of Black guys feel that way, so they won’t feel as a threat. And I think by us doing that, you end up being a yes man a lot when you really need to speak up and be assertive in certain spaces. But I think we’ve been programmed so much to be non-confrontational, non-threatening . . . I used to shy away from being me, but it’s like, I’m going to stop hiding from who I am. If I like hip-hop, I play it. Sometimes the way I dress, I put my Nikes on and, you know, bump it. So, I make it a purpose to put African American artists up and talk about them . . . I’ve purposely did that. I’m not shying away from this anymore.

James Jenkins explained that his teaching journey has been rewarding, yet conflicting, as he thought he had to hide his Black identity (Blackness) when he began teaching in a predominantly White school. JJ emphasized that he would no longer “shy away from his true self.”

Jason Joshua (J2) entered a predominantly White high school that had a mascot with derogatory significance. According to J2, “That would automatically just shoo away any African American teacher because it allowed for the space for people to just be ridiculously ignorant.” The mascot has since changed but J2 highlighted that,

When I came here, I purposefully, not like I came in here with a doggone dashiki, but I certainly came in here with the perception of I’m 6’4, 250 pounds. It’s not like you’re going to miss me, but I am about to shatter your expectations.

Additionally, J2 made a connection to a recent show on television to describe his rearticulation of Blackness:

Side note, parallelism, I’m so glad for *Abbott Elementary*, for example, to highlight not only just education, because we don’t have a good educational show, but Black education in America. Because some teachers can be like Greg, where he just doesn’t like to put himself out there, doesn’t like to expose himself. And that’s tough to do because all they see is my skin on purpose. And so, I have to address elephants in the room before they address me.

Jason Joshua knows the hypervisibility that exists for Black male teachers in these spaces and referred to a balancing act to survive and thrive in these environments. He contended that “there are days that I have to step away, I have to breathe.”

Both Caleb Paul (CP) and George Polk (GP) approached rearticulating Blackness through a more playful approach with the students they engaged with daily. Caleb Paul contended, “They tell me that I’m old and Black all the time. I think jokingly [laughs]. I’m a playful person, and I am a big celebratory person. But I make sure they know I’m Black.” Similarly, George Polk mentioned,

I talk about my Blackness all the time. I'm married to a Mexican woman, and I talk about my experiences all the time . . . one day, I stood up and started shaking my body in front of the class and told them I was a chocolate shake.

Though lighthearted, GP has “no problem talking about race or who I am with them [students].”

Trey Knox and Terry Jones, both history teachers, referred to historical figures and HBCUs as ways in which they rearticulated their Black identity within White schools. Trey Knox, a middle school history teacher, mentioned:

I try not to like talk about my political views, but you know, I have a poster of Malcolm X in my classroom. And, you know, my aunt was like “oh, they might think that's threatening” or you know, she was concerned. I'm like, I'm a history teacher. He's a historical figure. Like I'm not taking that down. I'm saying, these are people that I can identify with, I'm going to leave them on my wall for the students and for me.

As mentioned in his participant profile, Trey Knox referred to the history curriculum as “teaching with handcuffs” and he strives to make sure students know more than what is printed in textbooks. Terry Jones, an elementary social studies teacher, stated:

I identify myself as a Black man all the time, wherever I am, you know, people know it. My daughter says I wear a dashiki just to prove I'm Black and let people know I'm Black, or I'll put on my [university] gear, you know, just so folks know. But I'm very proud of my Blackness. Like I said, I teach history. And I want the kids to know about all of us, not just the happy White parts of how this country was built, but how Brown and Black people contributed in a very large

way. As a Black man, I teach . . . I teach history and I teach true history. You know, I can talk about the Black experience, the Native American experience, and I'm speaking from [for] my people.

Terry Jones also referred to the legacy and stories of the Black women honored in the film *Hidden Figures* and emphasized that “it is important to tell, tell the whole story, not just what mainstream wants us to know.”

Michael Law and DeV Vaughn Smith both mentioned the phrase “what you see, is what you get” when asked about Black identity at predominantly White schools. Specifically, Michael Law stated, “I definitely embed my Black culture. So, I'll do a lot of things that have to do with Black life.” He also discussed how open and honest he is with students about Black identity:

So, I embed, like basically anything that I feel is Black culture, I try to incorporate it into all that we do. I talk about it, not CRT [critical race theory] or anything like that, which is the hot word, but I make it known that yes, I am a Black man. Yes, I do Black things. I live a Black life. Yes, I've been stopped by police unjustly. Yes, I've been accused of stealing or being rude or whatever it is, you know, like I relate real life to them.

Similarly, DeV Vaughn Smith discussed being one's true self as he reflected on Black identity rearticulation, stating, “because I'm going to be my true self. I know exactly who I am.” Dee also used a quote from famous hip-hop lyricist Jay-Z that ultimately captured the essence of the Black identity rearticulation theme: “I'm good from Brooklyn to Rome or any Martin Luther.”

Though the stories of the participants were varied and insightful, they shared a common theme. The participants of this study navigated predominantly White schools, and from their experiences, they rearticulated Black identity (Blackness) within their respective spaces. Within each of their respective experiences, the participants also navigated Black identity development stages (W. E. Cross, 1971) and appeared to be in either the internalization or internalization-commitment stages of W. E. Cross's (1971) nigrescence theory. Their experiences with identity rearticulation allowed them to persist in spaces filled with microaggressions and racial bias.

### **Theme 2: Navigating the Significance of Black Male Teacher Representation**

For Black males, a teaching career was once a highly sought-after career path. It placed many Black males in the middle class and afforded many the opportunity to not only teach but serve their communities. However, Black males represent roughly 2% of all public K–12 teachers in America (Lewis & Toldson, 2013). The participants of this study expressed concerns about the 2% statistic, but also about Black male teacher representation as a whole. Additionally, participants mentioned that varied recruitment efforts such as loan forgiveness and graduate degree completion assistance have been implemented across the nation, yet Black males still lack representation as public-school teachers. It is worth noting that five of the 11 participants in this study identified as being the only Black male teacher on their campus at the time of their interview. Three participants identified as being “one of two” Black males on their respective campuses. Though this study particularly placed the focus on current Black male teachers, four of the 11 participants mentioned that they identified as the only Black male in their

traditional teacher preparation program (only seven participants received traditional certification through a teacher preparation program).

Doc Lane identified as being the only Black male in his traditional teacher preparation program. However, he was fortunate to experience Black male teachers during his high school career. The Black male teachers at Doc Lane's high school were coaches but had an impact on Doc's educational journey and his present-day career as Doc stays in regular communication with his former coaches. Doc referred to one of his coaches in this regard:

He's a very upstanding male and just the kind of men that he brought with him, that was the first time I saw men outside of my family that were cool, that was real, that weren't churchy, you know. I'm not saying that's a negative, but they were just real, down to earth, and I saw myself in them. I had my father, I had my uncles, I had my granddad—so I've always had men. But to see that, in that setting, that did kind of plant a seed. And I believe the way that I teach now, the way that I interact with young people, I modeled after one of the coaches because he was very inspirational for me.

Visibility and representation for Black male teachers are scarce in predominantly White schools. Though some participants attended schools with high concentrations of Black and Latino students, their engagement and interactions with Black male teachers were limited. This was the case for James Jenkins (JJ), who grew up in an inner-city community and navigated through schools that served the community. According to JJ, "I didn't play sports, wasn't all that great. Arts and creativity was always my thing, so I didn't have many Black male teachers." When asked about the 2% statistic, James

mentioned that teaching “doesn’t pay as much. Men consider themselves as the breadwinner, you know, they want to go somewhere where they’re going to make the most bread, and education is not one.” Other participants mentioned teacher pay as a reason for the 2% statistic as well. Caleb Paul, who migrated to America from Haiti, mentioned:

For you to go through that much school and not make a lot of money, I could see it not being very attractive to African Americans and especially if you think about it from the perspective of, for a lot of kids, going to college is expensive, period. And you throw in the fact that a lot of us are in low socioeconomic upbringings, the last thing we’d want to do is incur debt in order for us to go get a job where we never could take care of that debt. But you need to see more people who look like you who do it in order for you to want to do it as well. Which is why I try my best to try to make sure that I’m as positive as possible to every student I run across.

Terry Jones, a veteran teacher with 26 years of experience, discussed that he was “blessed to have several Black male teachers while growing up.” Terry is currently the only Black male teacher at his predominantly White elementary school and also discussed money in connection with Black male teacher representation:

Teaching isn’t the, you know, it’s not the best looking gig, I guess you could say. Like I said, people want to go where the money is. And even though there’s a lot of gratification in what I do, you know, seeing the light bulb go on in a kid’s head, some people want green [money]. And I am happy with just seeing that these kids know that I love them. They’re learning from me.

Terry also discussed that he gleaned a lot of knowledge and wisdom from other Black male teachers he was able to interact with prior to joining a predominantly White campus.

Three other participants of the study also highlighted Black male teacher representation but did so from the lens of debunking the stereotype that Black male teachers are only coaches and disciplinarians. Joshua Brown's experiences with Black male teachers were limited as he did not have any during his K–12 journey, and he identified as the only Black male in his traditional teacher certification program. At his current campus, he is “one of two” Black male teachers. Black male teacher representation for Joshua has a focus on being able to “move past just being a coach.” According to Joshua, Black male teacher representation:

Needs to be from a place of nurture and we need to move past, you know, just being a coach, we have more value in work outside of athletics. We have to expand outside of that, show folk what our gifts are and help others think outside of the box about our gifts. It truly makes a difference. Some people would probably argue with me, but it does make a difference as far as ability to learn [from a Black male teacher]. We have to teach that it's okay to be a Black male teacher.

Another participant, George Paul, who served as a wrestling coach and business teacher, is “one of three” Black male teachers on his predominantly White high school campus. During his formative years, he experienced Black male teachers and one of his coaches took him in during a period of homelessness in high school. According to George, “As a Black male in today's education environment, you're afraid to tell your stories because

parents will cry CRT [critical race theory] and say you aren't sharing their story." George wrestled with the duality of coach and teacher, and discussed the coaching stereotype associated with Black male teachers:

When they see a Black male teaching—the first word, and I may be exaggerating a little bit, but the first thought is “that’s a coach.” And this is not a knock to education or those coaches, me included, but coaches had a bad rap of passing everybody and not really educating, but preparing for the next game, the next meet, or preparing for the next season. And I didn’t want to be a part of that stereotype. I did whatever I could to be known as a teacher instead of being a coach.

Michael Law is the only Black male teacher on his predominantly White middle school campus. During his K–12 journey, he only had one Black male teacher. Michael naturally excelled in athletics and earned scholarships for several notable colleges. His love for athletics is still strong, but his passion for creative arts is greater. Although Mike coaches, he mentioned that he is a teacher first and wants other teachers to “stop looking at Black male teachers as disciplinarians.” According to Mike, Black male teacher representation is “more than the discipline stereotype.” He stated:

When I got there [predominantly White middle school campus], the majority of them assumed “he’s a coach, he’s a jock, that’s all he knows.” Not knowing that I’m certified to teach any class in the school, any core content class. I can also teach other electives. I can do like pretty much anything. Like blow teachers out the water in there. Not being conceited but being real. They never understood, and

I think that's the problem—is that they don't understand that we, as Black men, know what our level has to be.

Mike also discussed the difference between teaching at a minority-majority middle school and a predominantly White middle school. He summed up his thoughts by stating that “the stigmas need to change as if like Black male teachers can only do one thing.”

The remaining four participants of the study discussed reverence for Black male teachers and strengthening the pipeline for Black male teachers. Jason Joshua identified as being “one of two” Black male teachers at his predominantly White high school. While navigating through the K–12 grades, Jason did not experience having a Black male teacher. According to Jason, the 2% statistic representing Black male teacher representation is in existence because:

Our culture doesn't celebrate education the way it once did. There was a time when we grew up almost similar to what we hear from our Nigerian brothers—is that you're either going to be a doctor or a lawyer or a teacher. That was something that was very prominent in our communities many years past. And so, within our community, we have lost the reverence for education, the reverence for those who provide that education. Gone are the days where the schoolteacher was just as much your second father as your dad, or they had just as much a right to discipline you or talk the truth about you because they knew about you.

Tom Carr, who identified as the only Black male teacher at his predominantly White middle school campus, mentioned that he did not have any Black male teachers during his K–12 school experiences. The current statistic for Black male teacher representation

to Tom Carr is “indicative of a shortcoming in our pipeline for Black male teachers.”

Tom went on to add:

I think it’s unfortunate. I think a lot of Black people and Black teachers outperform their peers when they have access to similar resources. I think the research shows that pretty clearly—on our campus every Black teacher at our campus, which we don’t have many, but every Black teacher on our campus has won teacher of the year. And I think that anyone who recognizes the reality of being Black in this country, you know, Black people achieving is indicative of overcoming obstacles that other people aren’t having to overcome. And so, I think it kind of gives us a wellspring to be able to be successful with a diverse group of students.

DeVaughn Smith is the only Black male teacher at his predominantly White high school campus. DeVaughn’s formative years in a large metropolitan city provided him the opportunity to experience two Black male teachers during his K–12 school experience. However, he was the only Black male in his traditional teacher preparation program on his college campus. DeVaughn’s background as a basketball player launched his love for coaching but serving as a coach at a predominantly White high school has been a difficult journey. DeVaughn stated:

I have been there, you know. I am the only Black male on my campus. Most predominantly White schools don’t have Black male teachers. I mean it’s sad. It is the reality of things. And what’s crazy about it, we have so much control in the classroom with kids. Kids are naturally gravitating towards us. We need more people [Black males] willing to take the sacrifice and step into the classroom. We

have to get on the college campuses. We have to have troops on the ground within the colleges. We need to be able to attract more Black males because we need them. It's not many of us.

Trey Knox also identified as the only Black male teacher at his predominantly White middle school campus and did not experience his first Black male teacher until his undergraduate career. Black male teacher representation for Trey is important and helps counter the narrative of the current teacher workforce. Trey stated:

The teaching profession is predominantly women, and not just women, but, you know, White women. The majority of my life, I just had White female teachers. I feel like with inner city kids and you have a lot of these Black schools . . . that we have to figure out how to train and empower more Black males in the classroom. I feel like if you have a movement of Black male teachers, you're going to see like a shift in detentions and suspensions and all these negative parameters that are associated with Black male students.

Trey added that it is “vital to increase Black male teachers” as it will help with student learning and achievement.

The participants of this study each have their unique paths in education and with Black male teacher representation. For many of the participants, they are the first Black male teacher in their families. The teaching profession holds a lot of significance for these participants and for the students they reach in the classrooms daily. The stories and experiences shared by the participants highlight the significance of Black male teachers in public schools and the importance of ensuring that Black males continue to reach a diverse population of students. Although five participants identified as coaches, all

participants expressed the importance of not only having more Black male teachers, but also being a Black male teacher in predominantly White public schools. These expressions and stories connect to the null curriculum (i.e., what students do not have the opportunity to learn) within the classroom when schools fail to expose students to Black teachers (Milner, 2015). The theme of Whiteness and White spaces is discussed next.

### **Theme 3: Navigating Whiteness and White Spaces**

Organizational politics refer to the informal and unofficial efforts to influence an organization or increase power (Brandon & Seldman, 2004). Whiteness, according to Carter et al. (2007), is the “hegemonic system that perpetuates certain dominant ideologies about who receives power and privilege” (p. 152). Whiteness is maintained through power dynamics and is often described using the terms inferiority and superiority. For the Black male teachers in this study, who teach in predominantly White schools, the theme of navigating Whiteness and White spaces emerged as they shared their specific stories and experiences. The participants discussed racial bias, feelings of being guarded around peers, and balancing doubleness.

Implicit racial bias refers to the unconscious beliefs, attitudes, and actions one has toward another individual of a different race (Maryfield, 2018). Five participants discussed experiences with racial bias in their respective schools. Doc Lane, an ESL teacher, must interact daily with core content teachers to discuss supports for English language learners. He specifically described a situation in which a core content teacher acted with racial bias. He stated:

So I’m a resource to our students as well as teachers, so I meet with our teachers and help them out with making sure the material is friendly and suitable for

English language learners. And I went to this particular class, it was a history teacher and basically her disposition was very like—mind you this is my first year and I’m a Black male coming into the classroom of a White female and asking her to do x y z. And—she sat back in her chair, popped those feet on the desk, and ignored me while I was talking to her about ways to implement strategies . . . it was completely disrespectful.

This experience, in Doc Lane’s view, held “racial connotation” and caused him to “question how to navigate White spaces.” Another participant, Tom Carr, a middle school band director, discussed racial bias from the lens of being seen as intimidating by his peers. Tom mentioned:

And so I think it can be a novel experience for a lot of people because it’s the first time they’ve interacted with a Black person. But you know, I’ve dealt with things that are indicative of racial biases. You know, I had people tell me—I’ve been told I’m intimidating and things of that nature. Things that I think would not be levied against colleagues of a different color.

He continued with his thoughts and stated that “learning to navigate White spaces for what they are is a skill that’s really important, especially when there is a culture of White supremacy.” Tom’s position as a band director in his district is significant because he is the only Black male at his school, and he is the only Black band director in his district of 20,000 students. Similar thoughts about White spaces were mentioned by George Paul, whose predominantly White high school is roughly 10 miles from the school in which Tom Carr teaches. Around the time of George’s interview, a White school board member in a neighboring district made racial remarks about a large urban district in Texas. The

board member attempted to correlate the district's dropout rate to the percentage of Black teachers employed by the district. George Polk sated:

So let me validate a point, Pine Oak ISD [a pseudonym] had a board member who talked about they didn't want to be like Rosewood ISD [a pseudonym] with hiring the number of Black teachers, and so that there by itself kind of just hits the nail on the head as to what [White] people think about Black teachers. And you know the old saying, you have to work twice as hard as White people in order to get the respect . . . it's a true statement because there's so much stigma out there from White people that we aren't as good or are inferior.

George initially began his teaching career in the district where the board member made the remarks. George discussed that the thoughts shared by the board member were rampant throughout the district at the teacher level well before the public remarks.

Implicit racial bias is often layered with the terms inferiority and superiority, and the belief that members of one racial identity are better than those with a different racial identity. Michael Law mentioned this layering of inferiority when he discussed navigating Whiteness and White spaces. Michael shared that “you have to be here [uses hand to show high level], because the moment you mess up—it's ‘oh he's a problem’ or ‘he's defiant’ or ‘I knew he wouldn't be a great teacher.’ It's rooted in their belief that they're better than us.” Rooted and layered in oppression, racial bias is taught and learned over time. Parents tend to pass their beliefs on to their children and these biases show up in our schools. DeVaughn Smith shared his experience (rooted in Whiteness) with a parent of one of his students:

I think back to this one female student I had in Alabama, who was raised by her grandmother. So you know, old, White, and in Alabama. She had the mentality of a rural Southern White lady, and this lady would never speak to me. Her granddaughter loved me and loved my class, but grandma would never speak. It was very awkward, you know. She never opened her mouth to disrespect me, but I understood.

These beliefs and thoughts weighed heavily on the Black male participants of this study. Further probing of the experiences led to participants discussing safety and guarding oneself in White spaces.

After discussing his experience with the teacher showing racial bias, Doc Lane went on to discuss the need to stay safe and guard himself around his peers. Doc stated:

Me walking down the hallway, interacting with my peers, I'm not fully me. There's parts of me that's suppressed, I'm more just sterile. That's the best way that I can state that. They don't get the creative me. However, I give it to the students. But when I'm walking down the hallway amongst my colleagues, I'm sterile, and I'm trying to get to where I'm going.

Doc shared that a Black male teacher that used to work with him at his predominantly White high school was dismissed for email etiquette and email timeliness. Guarding yourself for Doc means "you have to be excellent at all times." Participant James Jenkins echoed this as well. In discussing White spaces, JJ stated, "They're thinking is he good enough to be here, can he teach like us, so I have to protect myself." Protection for JJ is "sometimes shrinking" and at other times "avoiding them [White peers] and tapping into

the other Black males.” JJ added that “having to prove yourself over and over gets tiring, so sometimes I stay in my zone and just work with the students.”

For Joshua Brown, his experiences as an agriculture teacher at a rural predominantly White high school positioned him in uncomfortable situations with his White peers. Joshua also discussed guarding self and stated, “You’re never really your true self in these spaces.” He added that “they [White peers/leaders] will use tactics such as avoidance and deflection to make points or isolate you.” Additionally, JB referenced politics in these spaces and stated, “the politics are there, but the politics will take care of itself when they see you as an asset.” Feeling safe and appreciated in predominantly White spaces was mentioned by Jason Joshua as well. Jason’s experience at his predominantly White high school provided him with thoughts on being safe as a Black male teacher:

There’s a foundation of safety that you need to have as a Black male in this profession. You can’t always go in as “I’m Blackity Blackity Black and I’m Black.” Sometimes it has to be, I’m a professional, I’m intelligent, I add value. And then, you hit them with the, oh yeah, I’m Black. With that perspective and mindset, you’ve done everything you need to do appropriately and never give them a reason to look at you, other than anything that is positive. Never try to do too much that draws negative attention to you.

Jason reemphasized school culture when sharing his experiences and reflections on being safe and discussed how his mentor truly helped him with being grounded as he navigated White spaces.

Another participant, Caleb Paul, middle school teacher and coach, shared thoughts on staying safe and guarded in predominantly White schools. Caleb stated, “You have to watch everything twice before you speak . . . be careful to your surroundings and try to learn a lot more than you try to share, because it’s not welcomed.” He added, “I had to prove to them [White peers] I was decent at my job.” Michael Law also echoed guarding and safety:

Guard yourself at all times. And it sounds, it sounds kind of crazy, but I feel like no matter who you think is your friend, who you think has your best interests, I cannot say with 100% confidence that they do. There are a lot of snakes in the grass you don’t see. They might appear as sheep, but they’re really wolves. And they’ll try to get you at any point. So, guarding yourself, protecting yourself, document everything.

Michael reflected on stories he experienced within two predominantly White public schools a few miles apart from each other. He also revealed the struggles with guarding self when he discussed that he did not publicize winning teacher of the year.

Other participants also discussed being guarded and safe through the language of double consciousness, doubleness, the veil, and being pulled in different directions to articulate their experience with teaching in predominantly White schools. Double consciousness, as articulated by Du Bois (1903), is “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 45). Doc Lane discussed being filled with emotions as he felt like he was always being watched closely by his peers. Doc stated, “It feels like dancing, like straddling two lines.” He also referenced race relations among his peers: “I

didn't create the problem. You cannot put all of that on my shoulders." The thoughts expressed by Doc were echoed by Tom Carr. Tom mentioned "in these environments you should not succumb to the hegemony of the school or act White to fit in, but it may be beneficial to do so." Tom did not discuss that he acted White in this environment but did share that he had heard of other Black male teachers doing so to feel safe. Another participant, Trey Knox, discussed "being pulled in different directions" at his predominantly White middle school. He added, "I know a significant amount of history. I'm impactful. But I'm the only one, and they tap into me for diversity stuff. But are they just using me?"

The participants of this study all shared their individual experiences with navigating Whiteness and White spaces as Black male teachers in predominantly White K-12 public schools. Situations embedded with racial biases, microaggressions, and stereotypes were mentioned by the participants. To combat dealing with the prevalent racial biases, participants shed light on guarding themselves and playing it safe. For some participants, this meant being aware of double consciousness and choosing how to engage and interact with their White peers. Connections to racial battle fatigue (W. A. Smith et al., 2011) were made by participants through the sharing of their stories. Participants discussed the help they received from others as a support structure for these spaces. The theme of meaningful mentoring is discussed next.

#### **Theme 4: Navigating Meaningful Mentorship for Black Male Teachers**

Teacher retention is a major focus for leaders of schools and districts across the nation. The teaching profession has evolved over time and with the influx of new schools, there is a massive shortage of teachers in the profession. Though efforts are being made

to reduce the teacher shortage, the impact is felt worldwide. This study's focus on Black male teachers and their experiences with mentoring at predominantly White K–12 schools is significant due to the theme that emerged around meaningful mentoring. The participants were asked about their respective experiences with a district- or school-assigned mentor during their first year of teaching at a predominantly White school. The participants shared experiences, described mentor characteristics, and discussed the impact of mentoring on their teaching career. Each is discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

Of the 11 participants in this study, five participants specifically identified that their assigned mentor added to their persistence and retention regardless of the mentoring experience being positive or negative. During his first year of teaching, Doc Lane was assigned two mentors, one at the campus level and one at the district level. His mentor at the district level identified as a White female and Doc described her as impactful through her daily check-ins. Doc described the experience as follows:

I spent ample time with her. We would touch base throughout the week, throughout the day, you know. School days with an email here, and a phone call here. We would collaborate on things associated with lesson planning, and we also had district meetings of course, which were other opportunities to learn and connect.

Doc's campus mentor was not as impactful as his district mentor. In his words, he stated, "It wasn't beneficial. I'm not saying they were horrible, but I gained what I needed from my district mentor on a daily." James Jenkins had a positive experience with his assigned mentor as well. His mentor identified as a Black male and helped James get the position

at his predominantly White high school. James highlighted that his mentor helped him feel connected to the campus. He stated:

You know, he helped me deal with certain issues, especially centered around racism in the school. Certain students would say the N-word and all this stuff happened. I learned by watching him deal with it. I was able to get advice from him, especially with me coming from a predominantly Black school setting. He modeled for me how to interact and move through these spaces.

In addition to connectedness, James discussed that his mentor added to his persistence and retention by stating, “Had I been somewhere else with someone else, I probably would have quit.” Jason Joshua was assigned a campus mentor of Persian descent at his predominantly White high school. Jason felt safe around his mentor who also taught in the same content area. His mentor identified as a female and she had roughly 17 years of teaching experience when Jason arrived. Jason mentioned that “she was great, gracious to share with me her content and curriculum, because we were on the same team.” George Polk also had a positive experience with his mentor who identified as a Black female with over 15 years of teaching experience. George described his mentor as very helpful and knowledgeable because she came from the business industry as well. His mentor advised him on “teacher legs and teacher rhythm being something you achieve around year three” and encouraged him to pursue his mid-management certification. George gleaned much from his mentor directly, but also learned from how his mentor was treated because she was vocal. George stated:

She was a hard worker, sometimes she worked harder and sometimes she didn't work smarter. I think some of that had to do with her being passed over, possibly

for becoming administrator. But she was vocal and again being a vocal Black person, whether you're male or female, sometimes that hurts you, especially when you're dissenting with the majority.

However, George considers his mentor as family and continues to learn from her although they are now in separate districts. Converse to the experiences of the four previously mentioned participants, Joshua Brown did not have a positive experience with the two mentors he was assigned. However, he stated these experiences "fueled me to stay in the profession and serve as a great mentor to others . . . I wanted others to have a better experience than what I had." Both of Joshua's mentors identified as White, one being a male and the other a female. Joshua went on to make a justification for similar racial identity in a mentoring pairing. Joshua stated:

So, I think mentoring programs could maybe consider something different. So, yes, you need to have a mentor in the content area. Yes, I agree 100%. But then you also need to have a mentor that you can relate to in different ways. So let me be candid, I think some of the experiences that I've encountered was because I didn't have an African American mentor that I could actually talk to a bit on campus.

Joshua was not alone in his thinking as other participants of this study brought up their mentor's racial identity within the mentoring pairing.

Within a mentoring pairing, the mentor plays a pivotal role in the development and advancement of the mentee. Kram's (1985) mentoring theory focuses greatly on time and the phases a pairing navigates. However, the participants of this study focused particularly on the racial identity of their mentors. Three participants of the study were

assigned mentors who identified as Black (James Jenkins, George Polk, and Terry Jones), two participants were assigned mentors of a different minority race (Jason Joshua and Tom Carr), and the remaining six participants were assigned mentors who identified as White (Doc Lane, Joshua Brown, Caleb Paul, Trey Knox, Michael Law, and DeV Vaughn Smith). Of the participants assigned a White mentor, only one participant (Doc Lane) expressed having a positive experience. Doc Lane stated:

So I had two mentors, my ESL mentor and a traditional mentor. My ESL mentor, she kind of showed me the ropes of what needs to happen beginning of year, midyear, testing, paperwork, and so on. The relationship was good. She had a love for the students. I understood what I was getting myself into when I interacted with her. She had a heart to serve.

James Jenkins, who had a Black male mentor, discussed the positive experience he had with his mentor and shared:

I am appreciative of my mentor, and our interactions. I wouldn't be here if he hadn't told me about the opening in the district. And I think also one of the biggest things would be just working in a predominantly White school. It was just learning how to—this might be a bad word, but maneuver the situation. Especially when you're going up to gather in the night kind of thing—just watching how he dealt with things in a mostly White space.

James added that he learned a lot from his mentor both in and out of the school. A different experience happened for Joshua Brown as he credited the racial identity of his mentors for the struggles he had with them. Though Joshua used the phrase “personality differences,” he also discussed the need for a Black mentor to show him how to navigate

White spaces. Conversely, Jason Joshua had a “gem” of a mentor who was able to “relate to the teaching of me being an ethnic minority.” Jason stated:

She is of Persian descent and she’s—but she’s White passing. And oftentimes, we were able to have good conversations of what it meant to be, not of the majority culture that was at our school. And so she did an amazing job to help me understand this is what you need to be successful. This is what you should avoid. These are the people you should avoid. And this is the system that we’re in, but I hope that it changes.

Jason Joshua expressed appreciation for his mentor and connected it to his purpose of “being the me I needed when I was in school.” Caleb Paul also iterated a purpose of “I needed me as a teacher when I was in middle school” but did not have a positive experience with his White male mentor. Caleb Paul stated, “I was excited at first . . . I was like this is awesome. However, we talked maybe twice during the first 6 weeks of school. He was more of a coworker than a mentor.” To Caleb, the pairing made sense as his mentor was a former history teacher and coached athletics as well, but “I didn’t get to see him other than coaching time.” Tom Carr was assigned a Latina female mentor at his predominantly White middle school. His experience with his mentor was favorable due to her identity as a Latina female. Tom stated:

She’s actually Latina, so she’s a woman of color. And so we have that connection as minorities. And so the relationship was good. I actually had more years of teaching experience than her, but she was able to help me navigate the school logistically. I think that was really helpful to me. You know as a Black person in a White space, there’s a level of invisibility and hypervisibility. I think the

mentoring relationship helped because I didn't want to be the new Black band director making all these mistakes anyway.

Trey Knox had a different experience with his White female mentor. Trey described his mentor as being “reactive and not proactive” with her mentoring support. Trey discussed negotiating being the only Black male teacher on campus with the lack of support his mentor provided. Trey stated, “She’s supposed to be my mentor, but I feel like she hasn’t done a good job of sitting me down and showing me the ropes.” He added that he always has to “take initiative first and seek her out.” Similarly, both Michael Law and DeV Vaughn Smith were assigned White male mentors who were there “because of nepotism.” Both participants discussed that their mentors were ineffective in terms of connecting with them. Michael felt as though he was the mentor in his pairing due to the age and knowledge held by his mentor. DeV Vaughn felt that the identity of his mentor and the setting prohibited his mentor from being effective and impactful. George Polk discussed his positive mentoring experience with his mentor who identified as a Black female. He used fictive kinship when discussing his mentor by referring to her as a “big sister.” Fictive kinship was also discussed by other participants but was done so in connection with seeking out support and guidance from individuals who were not their assigned mentors.

Six participants of the study highlighted the creation of their own identity web (Gordon & Lowrey, 2017) as a component of their experience with mentoring at predominantly White K–12 schools. Rather than depend solely on their assigned mentor, these participants gleaned knowledge and expertise from other individuals on their campuses or on previous campuses. Doc Lane engaged with his dual language director to

supplement the subpar support he received from his campus mentor. He stated, “Her guidance has been huge. She supported me then and still to this day. My name has been brought up multiple times [positively] at the district level because of her.” Her identity as a Black female was also discussed as a benefit: “I think it was an important factor because the way I would speak with them would be different from others. Just the kinship, the culture, they were fam.” Joshua Brown also discussed connecting with other teachers to support his development as a teacher. Joshua stated that “when I first started, I connected with five or six other Black agriculture teachers at a conference. I gravitated towards them because they could relate to my struggle.” He added that having a mentor of the same racial identity matters “because they’ve encountered or are encountering the same things . . . the sense of commonality has a role.” Michael Law maintained connection with a group of Black male teachers from his previous school due to the environment and culture at his predominantly White middle school. Mike referred to this group of five Black male teachers as “The Black Caucus” and attributed his growth and persistence to these men. Many served as groomsmen in his wedding as well. DeV Vaughn Smith stated,

I’ve always gravitated to leaders . . . they gave me a mentor that was weak, so I’ve had a lot of Black mother figures in education. Black women are natural caretakers, so they took care of me and gave guidance.

Two additional participants also discussed venturing elsewhere for support. However, their support came from individuals who identified as White males. Both Caleb Paul and Trey Knox mentioned that they connected with other coaches at their campuses. These were older White men with whom the participants interacted daily due to the long hours

associated with coaching during practices and games. These coaches became familiar faces for the participants and allowed them to discuss navigating the school. However, both participants mentioned being reserved in conversations.

Navigating meaningful mentoring emerged as a theme for all participants in the study. All 11 Black male teachers described their experiences with their assigned mentors during their first year at a predominantly White school. The stories and thoughts of the participants, along with notes from my researcher's journal, focused specifically on the identities of the mentors, the impact of mentoring, and persistence within the teaching profession. This theme connects to the literature in existence focused on a mentoring web (Gordon & Lowrey, 2017), mentoring being beneficial to retention (Luft et al., 2011; Zembytska, 2016), and the importance of mentoring pairs (Jimerson et al., 2015; Lambeth, 2012; Langdon et al., 2014). The men of this study shared openly and honestly their experiences, and many thanked me as the researcher for highlighting a topic that needed to be discussed.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I included the four emergent themes derived from the experiences of the 11 participants. This chapter began with an introduction of the participants through a demographic table (Table 1) and continued with in-depth participant profiles to provide context of the participants' lived experiences. The four themes that emerged were (a) navigating the desire to rearticulate Black identity, (b) navigating the significance of Black male teacher representation, (c) navigating Whiteness and White spaces, and (d) navigating meaningful mentorship for Black male teachers. These themes captured the essence of navigating both identity and persistence for Black male teachers in

predominantly White K–12 schools. The lived experiences powerfully illuminated the daily encounters the 11 participants faced at their respective schools.

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Children learn more from what you are than what you teach.

– W. E. B Du Bois

Diversity and cultural representation within public K–12 schools are important for both students and the teachers responsible for influencing the learning of generations of students. Across the nation, school enrollments have become increasingly diverse, leading to the need for students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and within the teacher workforce. However, the current reality of Black male teachers only making up roughly 2% of the teacher population in the nation representing shortcomings with diversifying the teacher population (Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Additionally, those Black male teachers who do make it into the classroom are leaving the profession for a variety of reasons, furthering the lack of Black male teachers.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the mentoring experiences of Black males teaching in predominantly White K–12 public schools. The focus was on the lived experiences of full-time Black male teachers who participated in a teacher mentoring program during their first year of teaching in a predominantly White public K–12 school, specifically their racial identity formation and career persistence. I asked participants about the impact of mentoring, the quality of mentoring received, and their overall experiences as Black males in predominantly White K–12 schools. A review of the literature on Black male teachers and teacher mentoring programs served as a foundation for this study. Moreover, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to understand and interpret the participants' experiences to answer the primary research question: What are the lived experiences of Black male teachers who

have engaged in teacher mentoring programs at White K–12 schools? Additional secondary research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. How do Black male teachers use mentoring to persist in White K–12 schools?
2. How have mentoring experiences influenced the personal development of Black male teachers?
3. How have mentoring experiences influenced the career development (and retention) of Black male teachers?

The research questions were foundational to the study and assisted with contributing to the body of literature centered on attracting, developing, and retaining Black male teachers. Through this study, I was able to provide rich descriptions of the lived experiences of Black male teachers at predominantly White K–12 schools. I employed W. E. Cross's (1971) Nigrescence theory and Kram's (1985) mentoring theory to frame the exploration of the racial identities and career identities of the participants and interpret their experiences as Black males teaching in White schools.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The history of Black Americans in the United States is filled with a plethora of both positive and negative experiences, including pain due to the hegemonic beliefs and ideals of others and joy from the strides and accomplishments made amidst adversity. Black Americans are resilient people and the findings of this study help bring awareness to the strength and zeal that exist among Black Americans. Through interviews and my researcher's journal, the participants and I engaged in a cycle of understanding our experiences as Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 public schools. Our stories brought us together and, from our experiences, four prominent themes emerged:

- Navigating the Desire to Rearticulate Black Identity (Blackness)
- Navigating the Significance of Black Male Teacher Representation
- Navigating Whiteness and White Spaces
- Navigating Meaningful Mentorship for Black Male Teachers

A discussion of the findings as they connect to the literature and the research questions is presented below.

***Navigating the Desire to Rearticulate Black Identity (Blackness)***

The participants of this study all connected their experiences to their identities as Black Americans in the United States. The participants shared how they embed their culture and identity as Black men into their work via classroom lessons, personal talks with their students, and in the ways they present themselves to their students. Every participant agreed with and acknowledged that their students see them as a Black male, and that their identity cannot and should not be hidden. This theme specifically connected to one theory used as this study's theoretical framework, W. E. Cross's (1971) Nigrescence theory. W. E. Cross (1971) presented a theory of the stages of Black identity development and called it a quest for liberation. The participants of this study spoke to the acceptance of their identity but shared how sometimes they felt as though they had to hide that identity. Over time, participants began to be more vocal and more comfortable within their environments, highlighting the progression of their identity development within White spaces. Unique to this feeling was the fact that this progression of racial identity development applied specifically in settings with White peers and not the student population. The participants highlighted their desire to rearticulate their Black identity the most with their students. The comfortability and appreciation from students made the

most impact for the participants. Additionally, this theme connected to the primary research question of this study. Navigating the desire to rearticulate Black identity (Blackness) was a component of the lived experiences of the participants. Each participant spoke to their identity within their predominantly White school settings, but also in their interactions with students, parents, and peers/school leadership.

There is a scarcity of literature on Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 public schools. However, previous literature on Black male teachers connected to this theme reflected Black male teachers as cultural capital. As the participants rearticulated their Black identity, they were demonstrating their capacity as culturally relevant pedagogues (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In their classroom practices, the participants served as “curriculum texts” (Milner, 2015, p. 219) and showed that culture and identity are assets rather than obstacles. Additionally, the participants spoke implicitly and explicitly about connecting with and serving as an exemplar for their Black students. Researchers Hicks Tafari (2018), Brockenbrough (2015), and Brooms (2020) highlighted the concept of otherfathering in their literature focused on Black males serving as role models to their students. Although the current study was situated in predominantly White schools, the participants still focused on connecting with the younger Black generation. This is worth noting as previous studies were situated in urban school settings with greater Black and Latino populations (Brockenbrough, 2015; Brooms, 2020; Hicks Tafari, 2018; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017). Last, Robinson (2020) connected to the theme of identity rearticulation. Robinson’s work on Black male teachers revealed a “quality connection” theme for Black male teachers and their

students. The participants of the current study encapsulated this connection as they discussed connecting with their students based on their identity.

### ***Navigating the Significance of Black Male Teacher Representation***

It is difficult to deny and ignore the lack of Black male teachers in the nation's public schools. Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the nation has experienced the decline of Black teachers in classrooms. It can be argued that this decision has had causal impacts on education for Black Americans today. The participants of this study each talked about Black male teacher representation from their perspectives both as students and teachers. Though some of the participants experienced a Black male teacher during their formative years, most did not. These experiences translated into passion and purpose for the participants of this study. The phrase "I needed me" resonated with several participants of this study, regardless of whether they had a Black male teacher or not during their K–12 experience. The participants also highlighted grappling with Black male teacher representation at their respective schools due to their status as the only Black male teacher or being one of two or three. This theme connected to the primary research question of this study. Black male teacher representation was embedded throughout the experiences of the participants, and they were constantly reminded of representation in their respective schools. Every interaction on campus served as a reminder to the participants of the lack of representation of Black male teachers in K–12 schools.

The literature that relates to this finding comes from researchers such as Milner (2015), who connected Black male teacher representation to the "null curriculum." When students and other teachers see and feel the absence of Black male teachers, a message is

indirectly implied about Black males. The participants of the current study echoed this connection from their educational journeys and their teaching careers. For some participants, Black male teachers only existed in the media until they started their careers as teachers. Participants JB, TC, and Mike all felt the absence of Black male teachers and relied on the media for Black male teacher representation. Additional literature that connects to this theme surrounds the expectations associated with Black male teachers. Brockenbrough (2015) specifically addressed the additional duties and expectations for Black male teachers to be strong disciplinarians and authoritative in their classroom practices. Participant JJ specifically highlighted this when he mentioned that his peers expected him to handle their discipline problems, in what Brockenbrough referred to as the “discipline stop” (p. 529).

Previous literature on Black male teacher pipelines connected to the theme of navigating Black male teacher representation. Jones and Jenkins (2012) highlighted the CMM pipeline for strengthening Black male teacher representation. Attracting and retaining Black male teachers is not easy work and the participants of the current study discussed money as a major way to increase representation. The CMM program recognizes the importance of financial assistance and uses this as a component of its pipeline program. However, CMM has a focus on pre-service teachers instead of current classroom teachers. The participants did discuss their pre-service experiences with me and highlighted commonalities between then and now. More than half of the participants who went the traditional certification route were the only Black males in their program. This theme of Black male teacher representation is of great importance due to the stretch of time captured by the lived experiences of the participants. This theme incorporates

childhood years, adulthood years, and everything in between. There is importance in seeing yourself reflected in daily life and this theme reflects the awareness of representation for the participants.

### *Navigating Whiteness and White Spaces*

Many of our nation's schools, both K–12 and postsecondary, relegate Black males to inequitable and disenfranchised practices and have done so since colonial times. Inferior, isolated, and inadequate are some of the feelings and actions associated with being Black in White schools. To be a Black American in our nation is to deal with what Du Bois (1903) described as “two-ness” or “double consciousness.” Du Bois posited Black Americans grapple with being Black, with no major connection to their African ancestors, and being American, a history paved with injustice and hostility. The theme of navigating Whiteness and White spaces connected to the thoughts of Du Bois and was highlighted by each participant of this study. Though I originally designed this study with a focus on persistence as a teacher (i.e., consecutive year retention), the participants' lived experiences highlighted persistence in White spaces and against Whiteness. This finding connects to both the primary research question (What are the lived experiences of Black male teachers?) and the secondary research question: How do Black male teachers use mentoring to persist? The Black male teachers of this study mentioned that their mentors affected their ability to persist, regardless of whether they had a positive or negative mentoring experience. Those participants with negative mentoring experiences tapped into other educators and supports to persist as teachers and to persist in White spaces. The participants with positive mentoring experiences shared how their cultural

connection with their mentors assisted with their persistence as a teacher and with navigating White spaces.

Previous literature by Walker (2020) connects to this theme of White spaces and Whiteness. Walker specifically looked at previous literature highlighting the experiences of Black male pre-service teachers in rural spaces and determined school leaders should implement specific strategies. The Black male teachers in the current study shared their experiences of being alone and unappreciated. Additional literature by Ndemanu (2014) captured the essence of Black male teachers in White spaces. Within his study, not only did the participant have to navigate White spaces, he was also forced to adhere to a curriculum that was White centered. Ndemanu's sole participant served as the prequel for the participants of this study. The pre-service teacher in Ndemanu's study described feelings of social isolation and self-censorship, both of which were discussed by the participants of the current study. More than half of the 11 participants discussed feelings of being alone and navigating Whiteness with silence or modified behavior/actions. The study by Scott and Rodriguez (2015) focusing on stereotype threat for pre-service teachers also relates to this finding. The participants of the current study had to grapple with the multitude of microaggressions spoken by their White peers, unrealistic double standards, and the constant internal struggle of stereotype threat (Bristol & Goings, 2019). One final literature connection came from Bell (2017), who highlighted navigating Whiteness during the hiring process. Participant TC of the current study spotlighted this as he described his experience with not being able to hire another Black male band director, who was the most qualified candidate. He credited this to his predominantly White school not being able to navigate having two Black male teachers. Participant

Mike also shared his experience with Whiteness in hiring practices when the most qualified candidate for athletic director (a Black male) was overlooked for a White male counterpart with zero experience. Both Whiteness and White spaces have lasting impacts on the holistic well-being of Black male teachers serving in these spaces. High-quality mentoring and support aided the participants of this study with navigating their experiences.

### ***Navigating Meaningful Mentorship for Black Male Teachers***

Given the issue of teacher attrition within the nation's schools, mentorship programs for teachers have gained traction. The teaching profession takes a certain level of passion and patience to navigate the daily work associated with child development, mandated state assessments, and the variety of home conditions in which today's students reside. Teachers wear multiple hats within a school day, and usually after school is dismissed as well. The demands of teachers are steadily increasing, making teacher support a necessity for new teachers. This study specifically looked at the experiences of Black male teachers during their first year of teaching at predominantly White K-12 schools. During their first year, the participants were all assigned mentors and had varied experiences with their mentors due to race and culture, school schedules, and content assignments. Unique to some participants with negative mentoring experiences was the positive impact on their retention. For instance, participant JB discussed that his White mentor was not beneficial with their mentoring, but because of this, JB was motivated to grow and develop as a teacher on his own through conferences, articles, and videos. Other participants, such as CP and TK, also tapped into intrinsic motivation for their development and retention. This theme of meaningful mentorship addressed two of the

secondary research questions of this study about how mentoring experiences influenced personal development and how mentoring experiences influenced career development. Study participants used their mentoring experiences to navigate their development as Black men and as teachers. Many have served as mentors to others after their experiences and used their experiences to shape how they mentored and supported new teachers.

Previous literature associated with teacher mentoring programs revealed mentors and mentees should be matched or connected in as many ways as possible (Jimerson et al., 2015; Long et al., 2012). Study participants were matched with mentors in a variety of ways. Many of the participants were assigned mentors of the same content area, a finding supported by previous literature from Kent et al. (2012). However, study participants were limited on race and culture matching, mainly due to the setting being predominantly White schools. Previous literature lacked a focus on culture and racial identity matching and its importance on sense of belonging in these spaces. Research conducted by Sparks et al. (2017) was connected to the study participants crediting mentoring to their retention as teachers. Participant Doc Lane credited his district mentor with showing him the ropes and aiding with his retention as a teacher (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010a). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), mentors can assist with eliminating mentee burnout and increasing their sense of belonging. Participants J2, TC, and GP all shared how their mentors (women of color) assisted them with feeling connected to the campus and operating within the school's culture. Additional literature on Black male teacher mentoring by Walker (2020) and Bristol et al. (2020) revealed the importance of Black males being supported by other Black males. Only one of the 11 study participants was assigned another Black male as a mentor at their respective

campus. However, many participants shared how they developed or continued their own relationships with other Black male teachers for support. This theme showcases the importance of meaningful and supportive mentoring strategies for Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 schools. This theme revealed the significance of pairings and how mentors assist with belonging, retention, and teacher development.

### **Study's Significance**

This study contributes to the literature and research already in existence on Black male teachers and teacher mentoring in several ways. Most specific is the setting in which this study took place. Previous studies on Black male teachers mostly took place in urban settings and settings where the majority of students and teachers identified as Black or Latino (Aragon, 2016; Bristol, 2018; Brooms, 2017; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Moore & Lewis, 2014; Robinson, 2020; Walker, 2020). As a parameter of this study, the Black male teachers who served as study participants either previously taught or were currently teaching in predominantly White K–12 public schools. Some participants started at their campuses when the student population was majority White and had experienced a shift in student demographics. The settings in which the participants worked were either in the Southeastern or Southwestern regions of the nation. These regions were the most resistant to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and many districts within these states had the government intervene to implement integration. This study's focus on Black males in predominantly White schools was intended to enable researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to gain an understanding of the participants' lived experiences in an effort to change practices and policies. The setting of this study is also important due to the mobility patterns occurring

within the nation. Americans are torn among living in urban, suburban, or rural areas, as each area has its own pros and cons. From gentrification to the developments of master-planned communities, housing trends and developments all have an impact on schools and the students and teachers within them. This study also contributes to the literature given the focus on Black male teacher mentoring. There is a scarcity of literature focused specifically on mentoring for Black male teachers in White schools. Mentoring for Black male teachers within these settings has not been explored prior to this study. Last, this study serves as a contribution to the existing literature on Black identity development. Although the foundational work of W. E. Cross (1971) has been built upon since its inception, this study further builds on the rephrasing that is said to occur within Black identity development.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The Trump Administration and the racial turmoil that reemerged during the 2020 election cycle are clear indicators that America still struggles with its race issue. With the unjust killings of Black Americans and the hateful rhetoric spewed by many White Americans, one may question which century we are living in. Given these tensions, the results of this study can be used to inform the practices of current school and district leaders who are seeking to recruit and retain Black male teachers. Additionally, results of this study can be used to inform the practices of leaders of educator preparation programs, both traditional and alternative, as they prepare Black males and their peers for the teacher workforce. The previous literature in conjunction with the findings of this study can aid with addressing the nation's lack of Black male teacher representation.

School and district leaders across the nation should use the findings from this study to revisit their mentoring program structures. The emergent theme of navigating meaningful mentoring can be helpful with changing the mentoring structure. The current mentoring structure used within most districts is one where one mentor (a veteran teacher) is paired with one mentee (a novice teacher) and is reflective of a hierarchy. Results of the current study showed Black male teachers need a support system rather than a sole individual. Kram and Higgins (2008) discussed developmental networks and suggested the traditional one-to-one pairing may be outdated. Additionally, providing mentors who have a shared cultural connection with Black male teachers within mentoring systems may add to their success and sense of belonging within predominantly White K–12 schools. The current practice of having a mentor within the same content area or grade level was studied by Ingersoll and Strong (2011), and the continuation of this as a component of the mentoring web (Gordon & Lowrey, 2017) was suggested. Educator preparation programs should begin implementing a mentoring web while pre-service teachers progress through their education courses and modules to help support their growth and development.

In conjunction with the implementation of mentoring webs, school and district leaders should formalize their mentoring programs via mentor training, additional pay, required check-ins, and observations. The findings from this study revealed many of the participants had mentors who “ghosted” them. The participants were left on their own to figure out structures, policies, and practices. By attaching additional pay, required check-in meetings, training, and observations to mentoring systems, mentors will be better equipped and incentivized to fulfill their mentoring obligations. With teacher attrition

being a point of focus in our nation, school and district leaders must prioritize retaining a diverse teacher workforce—one that includes and values Black male teachers.

One final recommendation based on the results of this study is the creation and support (via finances and personnel) of an affinity group for Black male educators in their respective districts to make space for Black male teachers to gather, connect, and support one another in their professional journeys. Limitations should not be placed on role, as Black male school leaders within the district should participate as well. Affinity groups are employee resource groups where employees are linked by commonalities. Affinity groups assist with the creation of inclusive working environments and help support empowerment. Additionally, affinity groups can partner with outside organizations such as local chapters of traditional Black fraternities, local HBCUs and their alumni chapters, and predominantly Black religious spaces. The implementation of affinity groups connects back to the recommendation of developing a mentoring web through informal mentorship.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study's focus on Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 schools can be used to develop future research centered around Black male teachers. The geographic setting of this study was the Southern region of the nation. The Southern region has had a tumultuous time with Black and White race relations well before the present. As such, a recommendation for future research is to replicate this study with participants from different geographical regions. Future research should consider the experiences of Black male teachers in White schools located in the West, the Midwest, and the Northeastern regions of the nation. In conducting this study with participants in

different regions, new themes and connections may emerge that reflect the lived experiences of Black male teachers. For instance, a researcher could discover whether the experiences of a Black male teacher in Portland, Oregon, are similar to or different than those of a Black male teacher in Burlington, Vermont.

I used W. E. Cross's (1971) Nigrescence theory as a component of the theoretical framework for my study to focus on the racial identity and racial experiences of Black male teachers. I did not look at the intersecting identities of the participants. A future recommendation for research centered on the experiences of Black male teachers is to use intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) as a theoretical framework. As revealed in the findings, Black men are not monolithic and have intersecting identities. Race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and other identities intersect and shape, guide, and influence the ways in which Black men present themselves to the world.

An additional consideration for future research is to explore the lived experiences of Black male school administrators in predominantly White K–12 schools. As discussed in the literature review and earlier in this chapter, Black educators have been historically excluded since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The Black educator workforce dwindled substantially, and schools are still experiencing the impact today. I imagine the experiences of Black male administrators (i.e., principals and superintendents) in White K–12 schools and districts have experiences that warrant illumination given the polarizing racial climate in our nation. Black male administrators are in positions of power and authority—positions that may bring about hate and racism from community members, peers, and others serving in predominantly White schools and districts.

Research questions centered on their persistence and their identities in these spaces could reveal important implications for graduate schools preparing school leaders.

One final recommendation for future research centers around the thoughts, narratives, and experiences of Black male students of Black male teachers in predominantly White K–12 schools. This suggestion stems from the lack of representation of Black male teachers in the nation’s public schools. To experience a Black male teacher in a predominantly White K–12 setting as a student is priceless. Participants of this study mentioned giving their all to their students day in and day out, both in and out of the classroom. As such, these experiences, as told from the student perspective, would bring about new ideas, concepts, and themes centered on Black male teachers. It is my hope that this study makes way for other researchers and practitioners to contribute, support, and enhance the literature on Black male teachers and teacher mentoring programs.

### **Researcher’s Reflection**

I never imagined my experience as a Black male teacher in a predominantly White K–12 school would turn into the focus of my dissertation study. Upon entering the School Improvement doctoral program in 2018, I knew I wanted to serve as a change agent and focus on teacher development and growth. Being surrounded by 11 other dynamic practitioners (Cohort 18), a sense of excitement, vigor, and determination permeated throughout my studies. For anyone who knows me well, they know this study was supposed to be quantitative from beginning to end. However, the phrase “never say never” emerged aggressively, and now, here we are—reflecting on a qualitative dissertation study. As a Black male teacher in a predominantly White school, I faced

much of what the participants of this study faced: microaggressions, racism, and being viewed as inferior to my White peers. However, I also experienced the positives of rearticulating my Blackness, supporting my students holistically, and being the first Black male teacher for many of my students. The joy I felt in getting students to understand math, the joy I felt when running into an old student who remembered the mental math tricks I taught, and the joy I felt when I found out a former student became a teacher because of me—all were priceless and a component of my experience. The participants of this study shared similar sentiments and invited me via their stories and their truths. We collectively engaged in a powerful journey and transformative experience that cannot be destroyed.

This study illuminates the experiences of Black male teachers in spaces where they have been historically excluded and marginalized. I am forever grateful for the “Elite Eleven” who willingly shared their experiences with me. Many of these Black male teachers saw their participation as an opportunity to support, connect with, and engage with another likeminded Black male who is interested in uplifting the community and culture. These interviews/conversations occurred during a time of isolation on my end, as I was the only Black male at my job. Not only that, I was the only Black male in my doctoral cohort. The various notes in my researcher’s journal reflect my feelings associated with being the only Black male in these educational spaces. However, supportive spaces with individuals living through similar situations aided us all in our respective journeys. Being able to talk and connect with the participants supported me in unimaginable ways.

Through this study, I was able to spotlight the experiences of Black male teachers in the hope of offering school and district leaders, developers of educator preparation programs, and teacher development researchers ways to support this teacher population. To conclude, this study and this journey emphasize the experiences of Black male teacher in the Southern region of the nation. We encounter resistance and racism daily. However, we collectively come together to rejuvenate and reinvigorate ourselves for the betterment of our personal selves, our communities, and our teaching practices. Although at times we may be in isolation, we are never alone, as our connections run deep and our love for each other never fails. As integral members of society, our communities, and our culture, we transform the lives of others daily. One love.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A

#### RECRUITMENT EMAIL MESSAGE TEMPLATE

To: **Travis Jack [tjj18@txstate.edu](mailto:tjj18@txstate.edu)**  
From: Travis Jack [tjj18@txstate.edu](mailto:tjj18@txstate.edu)  
BCC: Potential Research Participants  
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Examining the Lived Experiences of Black Male Teachers in Predominantly White K-12 Schools

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Howdy, Prospective Research Participant!

My name is Travis Jack, and I am a Doctoral Student in the School Improvement Program at Texas State University. I am conducting research under the guidance of Dr. James Koschoreck, a Faculty member in the Department of Counseling, Leadership, Adult Education, and School Psychology at Texas State University. As such, I am recruiting Black male teachers in predominantly White K-12 public schools who were assigned district and/or campus mentors during their first year of teaching. The purpose of my study is to examine the lived experiences of Black male teachers and the impact and perceptions that mentoring has on them. The interview will inquire as to the mentoring experience of Black male teachers, the perceived advantages and disadvantages, and the impact to which mentoring has on their personal and professional development. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in two brief interviews: one initial interview (60-90 minutes) and one follow-up interview (60-90 minutes). During the interviews, you will be asked questions about your mentoring experience at your respective campus, your experience as a Black male teacher at a predominantly White school, and your opinions on the impact of mentoring. The interview will be both video and audio recorded (via Zoom), and the researcher may take notes as well.

To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact me at Travis Jack, 713-806-7590 or [tjj18@txstate.edu](mailto:tjj18@txstate.edu).

This project XXXX was approved by the Texas State IRB on XXXXX. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – ([dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - ([meg201@txstate.edu](mailto:meg201@txstate.edu)).

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FLIER

Are you a

# BLACK MALE TEACHER...

SEEKING BLACK MALE  
TEACHERS FOR A STUDY  
ON THEIR LIVED  
EXPERIENCES TEACHING  
IN A PREDOMINANTLY  
WHITE K-12 SCHOOL.



## ELIGIBILITY

- Identify as a Black/ African American
- Identify as male
- Work(ed) at a predominantly White K-12 school during first year of teaching
- Assigned a district/campus mentor
- Be willing to share experiences

IF INTERESTED IN THIS STUDY, SCAN THE  
QR CODE BELOW OR VISIT: "INSERT  
LINK"

**QR CODE WILL BE IN THIS SPACE**

**IRB APPROVAL # XXXX CONTACT: TJJ18@TXSTATE.EDU**

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM



INFORMED CONSENT

**Study Title: Examining the Lived Experiences of Black Male Teachers in Predominantly White K-12 Schools**

**Principal Investigator: Travis Jack**

**Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: James W. Koschoreck, PhD**

**Email: [tjj18@txstate.edu](mailto:tjj18@txstate.edu)**

**Email:**

**[jwkoschoreck@txstate.edu](mailto:jwkoschoreck@txstate.edu)**

**Phone: 713-806-7590**

**Phone: 512-245-3759**

**Sponsor: Not Applicable**

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, your consent will be given through the answering of interview questions.

**PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about the lived experiences of Black male teachers in White K-12 schools. Additionally, this study seeks to examine the impact and perceptions that mentoring has on Black male teachers. The information gathered will be used to publish to scholarly articles in an attempt to identify characteristics and experiences of mentees (first year Black male teachers) who might be at particular risk for leaving the teaching profession, and to identify supportive mechanisms that school leaders can provide. You are being asked to participate because you identify as a Black male teacher who has taught in a predominantly White K-12 school. Moreover, you identify as having an assigned mentor during your first year of teaching.

**PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in two brief interviews: one initial interview (60-90 minutes) and one follow-up interview (60-90 minutes) within

a two-week timeframe. During the initial interview, you will be asked questions about your background and what led you to choose a career in education. The follow up interview will consist of clarification questions from the first interview, your experience with mentoring during your first year of teaching, your experience as a Black male at a predominantly White K-12 school, challenges for new teachers, and your opinions on the impact of mentoring. The interviews will be both video and audio recorded (via Zoom), and the researcher may take notes as well. The researcher may reach out to conduct a follow up meeting after the second interview. However, this may not be necessary as it is intended to only clarify responses from the second interview. No additional set of questions will be needed for the follow-up interview.

### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

It is possible that some participants may feel uncomfortable discussing their feelings around their first year of teaching and their relationship with their mentor, particularly if the year and relationship is perceived as negative. However, the risks are unlikely since the survey questions have been designed in a sensitive manner. As such, we do not anticipate that the questions would have a major impact on the participants. In the event that some of the interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating please inform the researcher who can provide you with specific support resources catered to your county location.

### **BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide help us to identify characteristics and experiences of mentees (first year Black male teachers) who might be at particular risk for leaving the teaching profession, and to identify supportive mechanisms that school leaders can provide. Although participants may not benefit directly, it is likely that you will feel satisfied in helping us to conduct research that may help other Black male teachers.

### **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

### **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

## **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

## **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Travis Jack: 713-806-7590 or [tjj18@txstate.edu](mailto:tjj18@txstate.edu).

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on XXXX. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – ([dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - ([meg201@txstate.edu](mailto:meg201@txstate.edu)).

## **DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT**

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio and video recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio and video recording. By continuing with this interview, you are agreeing to the consent and the recording will serve as proof of consent.

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you understand what was said to you?

Do you give permission for me to video/audio record this interview?

Do you want to be in the study?

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW ONE

#### Interview One: Introduction Questions and Identity Based Questions

1. Please state your name.
2. How many months (years) total have you worked in the teaching profession.
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
4. Please provide me with a brief understanding of your upbringing.
5. How did you come into the teaching profession?
  - a. Probe: Describe your experience with your teacher certification/teacher preparation program.
  - b. Probe: Who or what inspired you to become an educator?
  - c. Probe: What was the representation of Black males in your program?
6. Talk to me about the artifact you brought today (refer to picture of Black male teacher).
  - a. Probe: What significance does this Black male teacher hold in your life?
  - b. Probe: Do you consider yourself to be similar to (name of Black male teacher artifact)? How so?
7. Research informs us that Black males make up roughly 2% of the teacher population. What thoughts do you have on this statistic?
  - a. Probe: What changes do you feel need to be made within the teacher population?
8. Do you believe your race and gender influence how other teachers, administrators, and students perceive you?

9. Tell me about an experience that highlighted your identity as a Black male teaching in a White school.
  - a. Probe: How has this experience impacted your personal identity?
10. How do you embed your identity in your classroom dynamic and practice?
  - a. Probe: Would you say that your students are aware of your identity as a Black male?

## APPENDIX E

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW TWO

#### Interview Two: Member Check Questions and Mentoring Experience Questions

11. Is there anything you read in the transcript from Interview One that you would like to adjust?
12. Are there any additional reflections you have after reading the transcript?
13. Tell me about the relationship you have with your assigned mentor.
  - a. Probe: How did you go about building a relationship with your mentor?
  - b. Probe: Have other individuals mentored you?
14. Describe your mentor and their mentoring style for me.
  - a. Probe: Do you think your mentor's characteristics (age, years of experience (at school, in district, and total teaching years), race, and gender) impacted their effectiveness as a mentor to you?
15. Can you describe or tell a story about an experience you had with your mentor?
16. What impact has your mentoring relationship had on your personal development?
17. What impact has your mentoring relationship had on your professional development?
18. What challenges did you face with your mentoring relationship?
  - a. Probe: Would you credit your retention as a teacher to your mentor and their mentoring skillset?
19. How do you think your mentoring experience would have been different in a predominantly Black K-12 environment?
20. Why do you stay in the teaching profession?

21. What advice would you give to other Black male teachers planning to (or currently teaching) in predominantly White K-12 schools?

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