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Black Male Educators Matter: Modeling and Expectations in K-12 Settings

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Abstract

In light of the teacher shortage and increased emphasis on diversifying the educator workforce, the recruitment and retention of Black male educators is critical. The researchers focused on how these educators perceive their impact as role models and what others expect from them in K-12 contexts. The researchers administered questionnaires (N=38) and conducted interviews (N=11). Most educators considered themselves to be positive role models, especially for Black students. Expectations about their responsibilities as disciplinarians were positive unless imposed by race or at the expense of perceived academic skills. They needed to prove themselves with respect to academic qualifications. Interpersonal relationships were curtailed by their need for social distance, self-preservation, and dispelling stereotypes. Finally, educators described inequities, lack of support, and underrepresentation of Black males in their schools.
Keywords: *Black males, K-12 educators, expectations, role models, recruitment, retention*

Introduction

Though research findings conflict regarding the impact of ethnicity and gender on the academic success of diverse student populations, it is evident that the lack of cultural competency has proven to be a barrier in meeting the academic, emotional, and social development needs of a diverse student population (Easton-Brooks, 2019; Noel, 2018). Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in gifted education and STEM programs, but overrepresented in suspension and expulsion rates (Ford, 2014; Ford & Russo, 2016; Woolard et al., 2018). Additionally, research shows negative perceptions of Black males continue to serve as a barrier for positive student-teacher relationships, culturally relevant instructional classroom practices, and academic success (Woodward, 2018). Within America's public-school divisions, Black males are not only suspended at a higher rate across the board, but law enforcement is called in more readily by school administrators when dealing with disciplinary infractions involving Black males on school grounds (Sparks & Klein, 2018). "Society is so socialized to believe in the criminality of our Black and Brown students that educators spend more time watching boys of color, unconsciously expecting them to be troublemakers" (Cottrell-Williams, 2018, p. 10). Goings and Bianco (2016) found that Black male high school students were painfully aware of the low expectations for academic achievement teachers had for them and how much more severely they were disciplined than their White peers.

Students in K-12 classrooms across the United States can complete their entire compulsory education without having a single teacher of color due to a teacher population that is predominantly White, Christian, middle-class, and female (Hart, 2020). African American male educators only comprise about 2% of the current K-12 educator population (Hanford, 2017). Research supports that having someone provide instruction that looks like them and understands their struggle with discrimination, stereotyping, and racial profiling is a major benefit for academic achievement, cultural and gender identity development, and healthy self-image among African American male students (Henfield, 2012; Noel, 2018). Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) found that racial stereotypes are the driving force behind the negative responses of teachers to the behaviors of Black students. Race influences how behaviors are perceived in the classroom. A better understanding of and a reduction in stereotypical mindsets involving Black males is hindered without the voices of Black male educators providing a different cultural lens through which decisions can be made and discussions can be had around equity, access, and equality (Wallace & Gagen, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black male educators in K-12 settings. The researchers utilized surveys and structured interviews with K-12 Black male educators in public schools throughout a Southeastern state to explore their experiences in schools and the role model aspect of their position. The responses from the participants revealed the blessings and burdens of being a Black male educator in a field dominated by White females. More specifically, we address the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Black male educators in K-12 settings perceive their impact as a role model?
2. How do these Black male educators describe others' expectations of them in K-12 settings?

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

Schools Need Black Male Educators

   For Black males, the disconnect between academic potential and academic performance is worthy of further examination and scrutiny. "It has been documented that the educational outlook for Black males has been systematically more devastating than the outcomes for other racial or ethnic groups or females; therefore, the work of education in a democracy should be to provide opportunities for this population of males to participate fully in the political, social and economic ideals of society" (Rolland, 2011, p. 3).

   While not all the blame for Black male underachievement can be placed squarely on the educational system, racism, discriminatory practices, and negative societal perceptions must be considered. Starck et al. (2020) found the racial attitudes of teachers mirror the attitudes of society. Schools can become prejudiced places with prejudiced leaders implementing policies created by prejudiced policymakers (Murphy et al., 2018). Similarly in one study, Bol and Berry (2005) reported that teachers had lower academic expectations for African American students in mathematics beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school. Thus, teachers play a major role in perpetuating societal beliefs about Black inferiority and White excellence. Bianco et al. (2011) state, "the history and experiences of discrimination, segregation, and exclusion of many Black males in public schools helps provide context for understanding their potential resistance to enter the teaching field and, therefore, may create one more challenge for teacher recruitment" (p. 369).

Black Male Educators and the Role Model Factor

   The importance of children seeing individuals that look like them depicted in a positive light cannot be overstated (Edelman, 2015). Black educators, coaches, and mentors not only serve as role models, but provide positive academic and social support due to their keen understanding of the cultural and societal challenges facing them. Research supports the urgent need for Black male educators throughout the K-12 school environment that do not see Black male students through the same tainted lenses used by society, which label them as violent sub humans with criminal tendencies in need of controlled environments and harsh discipline (Burrell, 2010). A Black male teacher in the upper elementary grades reduces the dropout rate and increases college attendance among Black male students. Black male educators provide an opportunity for Black male students to experience a more positive compulsory education, increasing the likelihood of postsecondary education and strengthening the notion that the field of education is a place for Black males (Graham & Erwin, 2011; Pollard, 2020).

Black Male Educators and Expectations Factor

   For current practitioners, Black male educators recognize the importance of their position as role model and seek to develop positive student-teacher relationships that promote academic achievement. Black male educators realize that a lack of cultural understanding often leads to students of color disproportionately receiving disciplinary referrals or being overlooked for advanced academic opportunities (Allen, 2019)**.** Though Black male educators may embrace the concept of serving as role models, Black teachers, particularly males, often voice concerns about the imposed roles and expectations placed upon them by their colleagues and supervisors. Many Black male educators find themselves being called upon as the disciplinarian far too often, which negatively impacts building these role models and mentoring relationships with students

(Paterson, 2019). The voices of Black male educators need to be heard in order to increase the success of recruitment, induction, and retention efforts for this teacher population.

Method

Design

To address these research questions, the researchers employed a non-experimental, mixed-methods design. More specifically, an explanatory sequential design was conducted. This design allowed the researchers to gather data relevant to the topic of study without predetermination or limitations (Houser, 2020). In the first phase of the study the researchers administered a questionnaire to Black male educators working in K-12 settings within the state of Virginia. In the second phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of the questionnaire participants.

Participants

Questionnaire

A sample of Black male educators from across Virginia were recruited to participate in this study through contacts within professional networks, such as the Virginia Education Association (VEA), Virginia School Counselor Association (VSCA) and university internship placement directors working with cooperating teachers for student teaching candidates, as well as onsite supervisors working with school counseling and administration interns. In selecting participants, criterion sampling was implemented to ensure participants were educators in the state of Virginia who identified as Black. Participants were entered in a raffle to win one of five $25 Amazon gift cards for completing the questionnaire.

A total of 38 Black male educators completed the questionnaire. We excluded responses from individuals who failed to complete 80% or more of the rating scale items (N=14). In terms of demographic characteristics, nearly 60% of respondents were K-12 teachers. Another 24% were equally dispersed among principal, assistant principal, and school counselor roles. Just over 34% of these educators were in middle schools with 26% in high schools and 21% in elementary schools. Educators served in schools or districts with primarily Black (66%) or a mix of ethnic groups (16%). They tended to work in urban districts (66%) where most students received free or reduced lunch; 90% of educators reported that nearly all or at least half of students enrolled received these benefits. Disciplinary infractions were common with reported prevalence of incidents ranging from excessive (34%) to average (50%).

Interview

Educators who completed the questionnaire were invited to participate in the interviews. The last item on the questionnaire asked participants if they would volunteer for the follow-up interview and receive a $15 Panera gift card. From this convenience sampling procedure, 11 participants were selected and interviewed. In terms of demographics, 45% of participants were K-12 teachers. The remaining were employed as principals, assistant principals, and school counselors. The interviewees were evenly distributed among elementary, middle, and high school positions that primarily serve predominantly Black institutions (55%). The remaining educators serve mixed (16%), primarily Latinx (9%), and primarily White institutions (9%). They mainly worked in urban school districts (73%), where at least half of students are receiving

free or reduced lunch (82%). Disciplinary infractions were mainly rated as average (55%) with others reporting prevalence of incidents as excessive (27%), or rare to low (18%).

Measures

Questionnaire

The initial items were demographic or background questions. The first questions asked participants to identify the type of position held in K-12 settings. If the participant was employed in a K-12 school, the next items targeted the grades levels served (i.e., elementary, middle, high, other), number of students enrolled, the school demographics in terms of race and socio-economic status, the region of the state (urban, suburban, rural), and the extent of disciplinary infractions. If the participant was employed at the district level, these same questions were asked with respect to the demographics of the district.

The next items assessed perceptions about being a role model and others' expectations with respect to academics, discipline, and interpersonal relations. A blueprint representing six different scales on the questionnaire is presented in Table 1. For each quantitative scale, we display the number of items, sample items, reliability coefficients, and how low or high scores on the scales should be interpreted. The three open-ended items aligned with the scales are also presented. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from a low of .62 to a high of .71, indicating moderate levels of consistency by scale. The low number of responses and items by scale likely contributed to these lower reliability values.

There was a total of 26 Likert-type rating scale items. Participants were asked the extent to which they agree with the statements on 5-pt scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." There were three open-ended questions targeting any other perceptions about being a role model and expectations in the three domains. The last item on the questionnaire included an invitation to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Interview

The interview format was semi-structured. That is, a standard set of questions was developed to be asked in the same way and in the same order. However, probes such as clarification, elaboration, examples, and other follow-up questions were posed (Houser, 2020). The same blueprint used to guide the development of the questionnaire items was also used for the interview questions. There was a total of ten questions, not including the probes and follow-ups. Beyond using the blueprint to enhance content validity, a pilot interview was conducted with one Black male educator who agreed to provide feedback on the questions posed and an estimate of the interview duration. Because he made only minor changes to wording in one of the questions, his responses were retained as part of the sample data. Additionally, these pilot responses helped us to develop a set of initial codes for data analyses.

Table 1
Questionnaire Blueprint: Perceptions of K-12 educators

Construct/Scale	Role Model	Expectations
Discipline	5 items (e.g., "Students see me as a disciplinarian in the school.") Alpha = .71 High scores positive	4 items (e.g., "My colleagues rely on me to discipline students.") Alpha = .65 High scores positive
Discipline open ended question: What else can you tell me about your role and the expectations regarding discipline at your school?		
Academics	4 items (e.g., "I represent a Black male who is academically successful.") Alpha = .62 High scores positive	4 items (e.g., "I am seen as more qualified to teach physical education than core content areas.") Alpha = .77 Low scores positive
Academics open-ended item: What else can you tell me about your role and the expectations as an academic at your school?		
Interpersonal Relationships	5 items (e.g., "My interactions with colleagues dispel negative stereotypes.") Alpha = .72 High scores positive	4 items (e.g.,"My professional opinion is undervalued by my colleagues.") Alpha = .75 Low scores positive
Interpersonal relationships open ended question: What else can you tell me about your role and the expectations regarding your interpersonal relationships at your school?		

Procedure

      Approval from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university was obtained prior to initiating the study. If any demographic information could potentially identify a participant, it was omitted.

Questionnaire

      The researchers initially contacted members of the professional organizations and provided postcards with the Qualtrics link to the survey, which could be shared with attendees at regional meetings. As noted, participants were recruited at virtual annual conferences and quarterly meetings held across the state via electronic message boards. The questionnaire was anonymous. A cover letter served as a notification letter. The letter informed participants of the purpose, requirements, potential benefits or risks, the voluntary nature of the study, and anonymity assurances.

Interview

      The last item on the questionnaire included an invitation to participate in semi-structured interviews that were conducted virtually via Zoom, phone, or Blackboard Collaborate. Volunteers provided their e-mail addresses and were contacted by the researcher to schedule a date and time. The interview took from 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Each participant received a $15 Panera gift card for their participation. The interviews were confidential. A notification letter was read to participants informing them of their rights including any potential risks or benefits, confidentiality, and that the interview was completely voluntary; they could decline to answer certain questions or stop the interview at any time.

Findings

      The findings are organized by data source. We first describe the descriptive findings for the quantitative items on the questionnaire. This is followed by our qualitative findings for the open-ended items on the questionnaire and the interviews.

Quantitative Results

      Scale scores were computed as mean values across rating scale items. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for each scale score. The first two scales reflected educators' perceptions of themselves as role models and expectations of others as it related to discipline. We found agreement or strong agreement on most items pertaining to serving as a role model. The overall mean for this scale was 4.13 on the 5-point agreement scale. For example, respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they modeled professional behavior (76% strongly agreed), and that parents were pleased with their presence at school to help discipline their children (87% agreed or strongly agreed). In contrast, there was somewhat less agreement on items about expectations (M=3.30). At the individual item level, only 8% of educators agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "teachers and staff don't necessarily see me as a disciplinarian." Similarly, only 40% agreed or strongly agreed that they were expected to communicate with Black parents on discipline issues.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Scale Scores (N=38)

Scale	Mean	Std. Deviation
Discipline: Role Model	4.13	.636
Discipline: Expectations	3.30	.450
Academics: Role Model	4.09	.661
Academics: Expectations*	2.07	.872
Interpersonal: Role Model	4.12**	.631
Interpersonal: Expectations*	3.33	.400

*Reversed scale; negatively worded
**n=37

The next two scales pertained to role modeling and expectations about academics. Respondents largely agreed that they served as a positive role model in terms of academic success. The mean value was 4.09 on the 5-point scale, indicating agreement or strong agreement on most items. There was nearly unanimous agreement (97%) with the statement, "I represent a Black male who is academically successful." There was also strong endorsement of the statement that they exemplify someone committed to academic success (84% agreement). Less agreement was observed on the item about administrators calling on them to lead academic tutoring sessions (50% agreement). The items on expectations related to academics was reversed in the sense that the items were negatively worded. Lower scores represented more positive views about expectations others had of them in terms of their academic qualifications. The mean scale score was 2.07, indicating disagreement with most statements. For instance, 68% disagreed that they were seen as more qualified to teach physical education rather than core content areas. Similarly, 68% also disagreed their educational background was viewed as inferior as those of their colleagues. However, a noteworthy trend was the somewhat large percentages of respondents who "neither agreed or disagreed" with items on this scale. On three of the four items comprising this scale, these values exceeded 20%.

The final two scales addressed modeling and expectations centered on interpersonal relationships. The pattern of positive ratings continued on the role model scale (*M*= 4.12). There was substantial agreement on items like "I am careful to model professional behavior around my colleagues" (70% agreement), and "Because Black students look up to me, they seek me out for

advice and praise" (78% agreement). Ratings on expectations about interpersonal relationships was also reversed in that most items were negatively worded. The mean value for this scale was 3.33, indicative of a "neither agree or disagree" rating. At the item level, we found that just over 50% disagreed with "Sometimes female staff seem wary of me"; 27% agreed with this statement and 16% of ratings fell in the middle category. Whereas half of educators disagreed with the statement "I feel separate from the rest of my colleagues"; 30% agreed and another 22% neither agreed or disagreed. These patterns account for the somewhat high mean rating on this negatively worded overall scale.

Qualitative Results
Analysis

The codes and themes for the qualitative analysis were developed in a two-phase process. The constant comparative analysis allowed for an iterative and inductive process to reduce the data to core categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process began with open coding for the first round of data reduction and provided an inventory of categories for the second cycle of coding and subsequent themes. The codes that were developed from the interview data were subsequently used to code the open-ended questionnaire data. Interview responses and questionnaire responses were independently coded by two pairs of members from the research team. Each team of coders compared results and a consensus was reached through discussion for each discrepancy. To access stability of responses from multiple coders, reliability checks were conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inter-rater reliability for the interview and questionnaire analysis was 0.85 and 0.83, respectively.

During analysis, 12 initial codes were identified; however, two were excluded due to relevance and low frequency, including entry influences and administrative support. Also due to low frequency of occurrence, questionnaire analysis excluded an additional code, misconceived role. After coding the data, themes were determined. Several codes represented overlapping concepts and were collapsed into a single theme. Both questionnaire and interview data revealed these five themes: Imposed Disciplinary Roles, Experiencing Stereotypes, Self-Preservation, Role Model and Impact, and Underrepresentation. The resulting themes from the qualitative analysis are described in the following subsections. Table 3 summarizes these themes and codes with supporting quotes.

Imposed Disciplinary Responsibilities. One common theme that emerged from the qualitative data was that of imposed disciplinary responsibilities from colleagues, which was supported by data coded as *authority figure* and *colleague expectations/imposed roles*. Participants described expectations by peers to take on extra disciplinary responsibilities, particularly among black male students.

Questionnaire. Open-ended questionnaire responses illustrated that Black male educators are expected to address discipline issues that their colleagues aren't comfortable or able to deal with themselves. For example, one participant stated, "I have had experiences with teachers wanting me specifically to handle the disciplinary infractions with Black males because I have built relationships with them." Another educator responded, "When White women teachers cannot handle black male students, they would put the Black male student in my class."

Table 3
Open-Ended Results

Themes	Description of Theme	Representative Quotes
Imposed Disciplinary Responsibilities	Black male educators are often expected by peers to take on extra disciplinary responsibilities regarding black male students	"I do believe sometimes other teachers expect me to handle the black male kids automatically" "Another assumption I think is that we can handle discipline and teach all students of color."
Role Model Impact	Black male educators have strong relationships, offer their students additional guidance, and act as a positive example and students.	"I expect the same from all my students but I think I subconsciously push the black students a little bit more" "I show them one time that I can relate to what their situation is. That I understand where they are coming from and even that I have been there before."
Experiencing Stereotypes	Black male educators express that they have experienced a stereotype or microaggression (such as that they are unintelligent or violent) or been misunderstood	"My input is often seen as coming across harsh." "I think with my color comes a perception of the way that I talk. I think with my race there comes a perception of what I can and cannot do."
Under-representation and Inequities	Black male educators express a lack of representation or support and being treated unfairly in the workplace	"I too, do NOT have a voice in the daily business of the school, yet I am the only one on the Administrative staff with a Doctorate." "And I am the only African American male teacher at my school"
Self-Preservation	Black male educators are distant from their colleagues or mindful of actions as a protection of their professional stature due to others' assumptions.	"I remain strictly professional when with my colleagues which leaves very little room for error." "I am a Black male in really a White female dominated profession and their opinions, their assumptions, their feelings I only get one time to mess it up and that can mess up my entire career. So, I have to make sure that I am proceeding with caution"

Interview. Interview respondents described being called "lots of times" and "often" for disciplinary behaviors like a fight when compared to other colleagues. A participant stated, "If there is a Black male there, they are going to expect him to be the de-facto disciplinarian." Participants also described an expectation that Black teachers can relate to all Black students. Although some Black educators take issue with being "pigeonholed" as someone who relates to all Black students, they take on that responsibility. When discussing their experience of this expectation, a participant stated, "I actually embraced that because if I don't do it, who will do it?"

Role Model and Impact. Another recurrent theme present in both qualitative questionnaire and interview responses concerned the strong relationships that Black male educators build with their students, often serving as mentors and role models. These types of responses were coded as *role model/mentor* and *student-teacher relationships*. Participants expressed guiding, encouraging, challenging, and providing quality instruction to all their students regardless of race. Beyond instruction, discipline, and other job duties, participants also offer students more personal guidance and mentoring. Several participants commented on unique relationships with Black students.

Questionnaire. Participants described that Black students "trust" and "relate" to them. Participants often described these relationships in the context of discipline. They explained that they are able to talk with, de-escalate, and redirect students when needed because of these solid relationships. One educator expressed "holding students to high behavioral standards without being a 'yeller' or 'screamer' or 'the crazy, mean teacher.' Another expressed how their unique relationship with Black students impacted discipline, stating "I treat all students equally the same. However, there have been times when I have to speak with the Black students and use more life lessons in my discipline."

Interview. Participants described their ability to develop unique relationships with students to foster a better school environment, promote parental cooperation, and encourage increased academic performance. Another participant elaborated on this theme but in reference to Black male students in particular:

> "Male students can come to me a lot easier than their female teachers, especially my Black guys. And I think I'm relatable or I look like them so they just automatically feel comfortable with me I would… I'm assuming. So that definitely helps, especially when they don't feel safe or they're scared."

The images regarding Black males in American society are often negative, but Black male educators embrace their position as role model as a means to change the narrative surrounding Black males. One educator described the appreciation he receives from parents regarding his impact on the students, noting that "a lot of the students need a Black male figure in their life because they don't have it at home."

Experiencing Stereotypes. Stereotyping of Black male educators by colleagues was another salient theme coded as *dispelling stereotypes*. In both questionnaire and interview data, participants described how their colleagues hold negative stereotypical beliefs about them, impose culturally biased expectations, and assume weaker academic content knowledge.

Questionnaire. Participants described how other staff do not understand them and how the Black male educators are stereotyped as aggressive. This was exemplified by responses such as, "My input is often seen as coming across harsh," and "Any action out of the norm can be considered threatening by my female colleagues." They also expressed that other educators scrutinize them more closely than their peers, even testing them in different contexts to judge their capabilities. For example, one said, "Feel like I am misunderstood at times or always under the microscope," while another similarly stated that when asked to tutor "It's like a trial and error situation. They'll test you to see if you really know the content."

Interview. In addition to *dispelling stereotypes,* interview data also included the *misconceived roles* code. Similar to questionnaire responses, participants described how their content knowledge is questioned or second guessed. A participant stated that as a Black male, others "assume that I don't know what I am talking about." Participants who had coaching and teaching responsibilities said they have to remind others that they are "not just a PE teacher." A participant even described how in his job interview; the staff was more concerned with his coaching abilities than "teaching about Macbeth." Participants also discussed microaggressions regarding how they speak, what they wear, and their physical stature. As in the questionnaire responses, participants discussed how they could be perceived as aggressive just by their tone or their physical presence. A participant stated, "I have been told because I am 6 feet 1 and am a couple of hundred pounds and ex-military …. I look threatening." Another discussed several stereotypes that occur on a regular basis such as, "We can't talk, write, think, follow directions, show up on time." One Black teacher even noted that a parent asked to observe his classroom because she thought his "first language was Ebonics."

Self-Preservation. Another consistent theme was how Black male educators felt the need to protect and sometimes distance themselves due to others' assumptions (coded as *self-preservation)*. Responses from both the questionnaires and interviews highlighted how Black male educators have to act extremely professional rather than be themselves to ensure their intentions are not misconstrued. They purposefully maintain shallow, professional relationships with peers.

Questionnaire. Participants illustrated *self-preservation* with responses such as, "I remain strictly professional with my colleagues which leaves very little room for error." Not only are respondents expected to always be professional but make everyone comfortable. The pressure diminishes any desire to have personal relationships outside of school with other staff. This is exemplified by responses such as, "I don't really interact with other teachers outside of school hours," and "I try my best to go out of my way to be humble and non-threatening."

Interview. Participants described feeling the need to "flip a switch" when in their professional environments. A participant commented, "It's not that I am wearing a mask or anything like that, but I don't have the opportunity to not be on. And so it…those assumptions influence my professional decisions a lot." They also described keeping interactions with colleagues "short and sweet", so certain things are not held against them. One participant noted, "you really have to guard who you communicate with and how you communicate with others." Participants also described feeling that they have to go the extra mile to prove their

professionalism. A participant stated, "Feeling like you have to be double good in terms of things. Even when it comes to writing an email you don't want to leave off a word. You want grammar to be good."

Underrepresentation and Inequities. The final theme drawn from open-ended and interview responses concerned the underrepresentation and unfair treatment of Black male teachers and administrators, which was supported by responses coded as *lack of support* and *school demographics*. Responses from both the questionnaire and interview emphasized the lack of Black male educators and how this exacerbated bias and a lack of opportunity.

Questionnaire. Participants described a lack of Black male educators at their school or in their specific domain, such as "self-contained" teachers. Other educators expressed this in the context of student representation, noting that the staff demographics did not align with the demographics of the student population, such as one response that stated, "My school's teacher to student ratio is highly 'non-representative.' Eighty-five percent (85%) of the teaching staff is White, while 64% of our student body is Black." As an exception, one educator did describe being at a school with a majority of African American teachers. Other responses illustrate the unfair treatment of Black educators. Some describe not being given the proper recognition or rewards for their work, such as one respondent stating, "As a Black teacher, stakeholders hold us to the highest standards . . . however, the incentives (promotion, recognition, etc.) almost, always go unnoticed (given to white counterparts who eventually get promoted)." Another expressed the presence of "systemic racism" at their school and provided an example, stating "I too, do NOT have a voice in the daily business of the school, yet I am the only one on the administrative staff with a Doctorate."

Interview. Similarly, participants emphasized how the limited number of Black male educators is quite evident in public school districts throughout the United States. Several participants described being "the only African American male teacher" at their respective schools. The Black male educators also expressed a lack of support from administration and colleagues as a result of the underrepresentation. A participant stated,
> "What I'm getting to is just the barriers, or the challenges, is the fraternity is very far and few between, and the support groups are very few and therefore, being a Black administrator, who are you going to go to? I mean, I was the one Black male in the building with four other females."

Another participant expressed the difficulty of being a Black male in this environment, "I would say a challenge that I have faced before is the support and the understanding of being a Black male."

Discussion
Black Male Educators and the Role Model Factor

Findings across data sources point to Black male educators' positive perceptions of themselves as role models for students. Questionnaire results showed high mean values on items pertaining to modeling professional behavior and being someone who is academically successful. Additionally, being a positive role model in these domains were viewed as particularly important

for Black students, especially Black males. Some educators in our sample, expressed the influence of these Black role models in their own lives and career trajectories.

As we face increasing teacher shortages and a lack of diversity among our teaching staff, we hope that Black male students will be more likely to remain in school and aspire to college and careers in education as a result of having positive Black male role models in K-12 settings. Easton-Brooks' (2019) research supports the argument that Black male students who have a Black male teacher in upper elementary grades reduces the risk of dropping out of school and increases college attendance. However, Black male educators only comprise 2% of the current P-12 educator population (Hanford, 2017). Some students in the United States may not have a single teacher of color throughout their years of schooling, since most teachers in our nation are White and female (Hart, 2020). The need for change is clear.

Being perceived as a role model often goes hand in hand with mentorship and positive student-teacher relationships. Our findings reinforce the importance of Black male mentors who foster caring relationships with their Black students. The quantitative and qualitative findings illuminate the kinds of relationships that promote academic success among Black students. Questionnaire ratings revealed that nearly 80% of respondents agreed with the statement that "Because Black students look up to me, they seek me out for advice and praise." Our qualitative themes expanded upon these results. Black male educators described mentoring, advising, and encouraging their Black students, sometimes filling a gap not met in their lives outside of school. This seemed particularly true for Black male students who were more receptive to Black male educators. Positive interactions with Black students extended to relationships with Black parents who entrust their children to these educators. The expectations for their students' professional conduct and achievement are consistently high. High expectations combined with positive modeling contribute to a climate of professionalism and academic success.

Theory and findings from the literature support the confluence of modeling, positive relationships, and high expectations as predictors of academic success among Black students (Jackson, 2011). We know that Black students who have warm, encouraging relationships with educators are more likely to have positive attitudes toward school and be more academically motivated (Hart, 2020). Similarly, the research on self-fulfilling prophecies indicates that expectations have a powerful influence on behaviors (Easton-Brooks, 2019; Fergus et al., 2014). If we set high expectations for our Black students, it is more likely they will live up to these expectations. In contrast, negative perceptions of Black males may be the norm and serve as a barrier to positive student-teacher relationships (Woodward, 2018). Negative expectations and perceptions of Black male students also plague Black male educators, a troubling yet consistent theme that emerged in our data.

Black Male Educators and the Expectations Factor

As noted, expectations and stereotypes affect not only Black male K-12 students but may be even more pervasive when it pertains to adult Black males, especially if they are viewed as physically large and threatening (Rolland, 2011). These perceptions fuel the stereotype that Black male educators are more effective as disciplinarians, particularly for Black male students. Our quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that respondents do view themselves as responsible for discipline and believe that others also view them in a disciplinary role. However, our respondents did not necessarily consider the role as negative because they want to promote their students' success, and enforcing norms for respectful, professional conduct is an ingredient

of that success. What they do seem to resent is being pigeon-holed as only disciplinarians and the only ones who can handle conduct issues among Black male students. This recurring theme of frustration with the disciplinarian-only status has been expressed routinely by Black males (Paterson, 2019; Sekou, 2020). The segregation of disciplinary practices by race was viewed as problematic because, ideally, they should be everyone's responsibility. Harsh discipline due to implicit bias sets the trajectory for major negative life outcomes such as expulsion and incarceration for Black students (Okonofua et al., 2020). On the other hand, Black male educators may be better equipped to handle behavioral problems exhibited by Black male students because they are role models and perceived as more accessible to these students (Allen, 2019). Overall, the findings related to Black male educators' role as disciplinarians was more nuanced than anticipated and precluded obvious practical implications.

The perception that Black male educators are not as academically qualified as their White counterparts is a persistent stereotype that emerged in our data and is also reported in the literature (Starck et al., 2020). Our participants described feeling as if their academic credentials were often questioned, and they needed to "prove themselves" to their colleagues. They were thought of as coaches or physical education teachers rather than teachers in core subject areas. These expectations of Black males were reminiscent of those reported by Underwood (2019).

Stereotypes of Black male educators also exerted a strain on interpersonal relationships with other colleagues in the school. This was evidenced by responses coded as *self-preservation,* reflecting a need to remain guarded and be on their best professional behavior in an attempt to dispel these stereotypes. For many of our respondents, it was easier to simply not interact with or avoid others rather than to risk behaving in ways that would reinforce preconceived notions. Whereas "code-switching" is a term used to depict how one's behavior changes depending on the environment and individuals present (Underwood et al., 2019). In the context of K-12 schools our participants described the need to engage code-switching as pressured or tense.

Strained interpersonal relationships appeared to spill over into perceived lack of support and agency in the schools. Black male educators were often in the minority, even when the students enrolled were primarily Black. Being in the minority created a sense of isolation with little support in terms or decision-making or promotions (Samuels, 2021). Their experiences were viewed as institutionalized racism in K-12 schools, a pervasive problem grounded in Critical Race Theory and research (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

Limitations and Delimitations

There were some notable limitations associated with this study. The first pertained to the measures. Because the constructs of role models, expectations, and stereotypes are inextricably linked, there was some overlap in the researchers' attempts to measure the constructs and code the data. Reliability estimates were somewhat low for a few of their quantitative rating scales on the questionnaire. Validity evidence was also limited beyond blueprints supported by theory. On the other hand, there were high reliability coefficients in coding the qualitative data and the researchers were able to triangulate findings across quantitative rating scale, open-ended questionnaire, and interview data. A related limitation was their reliance on self-report data, which is always subject to self-report bias. However, based on the responses obtained, the researchers would argue that the participants were remarkably forthcoming. Their candor was revealing and reflected their trust.

15

The small and convenient sample diminished the external validity of our results. However, there are not that many Black educators that could be accessed in K-12 schools. As previously reported less than 2% of the national teacher population in the United States identify as Black and male (Hanford, 2017). Originally, the researchers had planned to make comparisons among responses as a function of variables such as school size, student demographics, and Title 1 status (Bol & Berry, 2005), yet there simply was not enough statistical power. Fortunately, they obtained revealing, in-depth qualitative data to inform our research questions.

There are several research directions to extend this line of inquiry. The first is to obtain a larger national sample that affords statistical comparisons on survey responses by demographic variables to better understand the effects of modeling and expectations across different types of schools. A related direction is to survey not only Black male educators but their female and White colleagues. Observations conducted in schools and classrooms would provide additional insights, particularly with respect to interpersonal interactions and disciplinary practices. Finally, an investigation of the impact of interventions to combat stereotypes and prejudice in K-12 schools promises practical solutions.

Implications for Practice

Introducing promising recruitment programs and other interventions in school settings represent important implications for practice. Attracting and retaining Black male educators in K-12 schools is vital in order to provide positive role models for other educators and students alike. Recruitment efforts should extend beyond high school and college contexts to more informal venues such as churches and other neighborhood community centers (Valenzuela, 2017). Student loan forgiveness, college career switcher programs with reduced tuition as well as other financial incentives might be considered. Employing more Black male educators increases the likelihood of their interactions with females and persons of other racial identities, which in turn can promote familiarity, understanding, collegiality, and even friendships (Sekou, 2020).

Induction programs offered to new teachers in their provisional years could address the uniqueness of Black male educators and the inherent stereotype biases they face (Underwood et al., 2019). Induction programs could include Black male mentors to explore professional-social components of their work in a psychologically safe space. If there are no other Black males to serve as mentors in a particular school, they might be recruited from neighboring schools.

Broader professional development efforts for all educators would entail candidly addressing white fragility and institutionalized racism (Underwood, 2019). One way to address microaggressions toward Black males would be to present scenarios for discussion and even role playing. Topics would include dispelling stereotypes related to academic qualifications, discipline obligations, athletic abilities, and perceived threatening behaviors. Despite the sensitive nature of these topics, these professional development efforts reflect initial, critical steps for promoting a more inclusive and equitable climate (Okonofua et al., 2020).

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