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Black, Male and Teaching: Exploring the Experiences, Perspectives and Teaching
Practices of Black Male Teachers

by

Tyrie Lavyal Fant

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies
(Teaching, Curriculum and Learning)

Under the Supervision of Associate Professor John Raible

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2017

Black, Male and Teaching: Exploring the Experiences, Perspectives and Teaching
Practices of Black Male Teachers

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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As America's K-12 student population continues to become more diverse, it is important that the ethnic background of the teacher population reflect this change. A crucial aspect of this diversification effort includes black male teachers.

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the experiences and perspectives of African American male K-12 teachers. In doing so, this study would help to tell us more about their identities, teachings and relationships with other educational staff and students. Other secondary focus areas include black male teacher experiences within their educational settings and how black male teachers describe their relationships with minority students-especially males.

In conducting the study one-on-one face-to-face interviews were conducted along with participant observations. Emergent themes that surfaced were: lack of black male teachers, being the only black male teacher, being a role model, being a disciplinarian, and teaching being a gendered and ethnic dominated profession. The participants highlighted issues that questioned notions of gender matching teachers and students along with debating the assurance of acceptance of black male teachers from minority students

solely on the basis of their ethnic background. Additionally, participants described issues of ascribed and self-defined identities as black male teachers.

Findings in this study can be used by teacher preparation programs, educational policy makers and administrators to facilitate positive change in the continued diversification of America's teacher workforce for the purpose of improving academic achievement for K-12 students.

Dedication

This is dedicated to my mother, Rochelle Annette Fant, where I get my fighting spirit and sense of perseverance. We have endured many highs and lows both individually and together, but these experiences have shaped us to who we are to this very day. I love you!

This is also dedicated to my grandsons (Jamorion and Carter), niece (Gianna) and nephews (Preston and Herbert, Jr.). Being a black man who strives to be a positive role model is an active and ongoing process that never ends. I, as many have done for me, only hope that I have provided you an example, guidance, and counsel on how to do the same for those that will look to you for the same leadership in their lives.

Lastly, this is dedicated to the living memory of my brother, Herbert Fant, Sr. There is NO ONE who I have ever been closer to and respected as much as you. Your willingness to provide shelter for me until I could protect myself helped shape my sense of courage, identity and self confidence that I have today was treasured. I will always take pride in being your “little brother” and my love for you is timeless.

Acknowledgements

Thank you goes out to:

- Dr. John Raible for your relentless and unwavering guidance on this journey. Your focus on challenging me to be a better researcher and writer is invaluable. And, to the rest of my committee, Dr. Elaine Chan, Dr. Marilyn Grady and Dr. Jenelle Reeves, thank you for being accessible and for your input.
- Dr. Eva Bachman and Karen Kassebaum for pushing me to keep writing and for your everlasting energy. You never let me quit and always reminded me of why I chose to go down this path! Our many conversations were more beneficial to me than you may realize!
- My family. My wife Jamie thanks for being steady. My daughters ShanNiqua and Ava, thank you for allowing me to be your dad. There is no other role I take more pride in carrying out in this world. My son Will, keep being true to yourself and being a great young man of character.
- Relatives. Nana, you are the bedrock for our family. You are truly a blessing. Uncle Glen, our one-on-one conversations are “timeless” - you remind me of my brother and that is very touching to me. Aunt Lisa, thank you for being a very caring aunt. Uncle Willie and Aunt Kathy . . . I can’t mention one without the other! Your presence in my life cannot be described in words and I cannot thank you enough. All of my cousins, I am very proud to be among you. I do my best to bring honor to our family and last name and I am always here to assist you in any humanly way possible. I love all of you. My God-mom, Pam, thank you for the decades of unconditional love, support, keeping me grounded and laughter!
- Lastly, to all the students and teachers whose paths I come across. It is a pleasure to associate with you as I seek to improve the lives of youth through education and athletics. In saying this, please understand that I do this unapologetically for the sole purpose of improving the realities of students so that they can reach their potential.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the issues and circumstances concerning black male teachers. Additionally, I outline the purpose and importance of the research study along with establishing the central research and sub-questions that direct the research project. A list of terms and their definitions are provided for clarification and context. Finally, I provide a broad focus of the study including and the limitations of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Existing along a long historical continuum in America, black males have been considered maladjusted, mis-understood and devalued. Nonfictional intellectuals and scholars such as Kunjufu (2002, 2011, 2012, 2013), Neal (2005), hooks (2004), Reese (2004) and others have detailed the lives and challenges in various aspects in life that many black men bear and continue to face here in America. These writers have attempted to be both descriptive and prescriptive in their examinations of the matters that concern the state of black men in America. The status of black men in America has come a long way since the days of American slavery, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement where the troubles and anxieties of black men have gotten better in many ways. However, the strivings of black males concerning their identities, position and worth, as well as abilities continues to be a source of constant dispute and skepticism.

Although Black men in America have historically been both the blame for many social ills and at the same time branded as a pariah in having had their voices and viewpoints placed in the margins when it comes to the issues of K-12 education as well

as other areas of human activity. When W.E.B. Dubois posed the question, “How does it feel to be a problem?” he was speaking to the unique existence that black people faced here in America (1995, p. 43). This deep personal, social and existential question can be applied to black males whose lives and experiences are considered to provide no substantive contribution to humanity and have been rendered all but meaningless.

More recently, research and writing have also tried to describe, convey, and unpack the function, purpose, and meaning(s) of black teachers and their importance in K-12 education (King, 1993; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mitchell, 1998; Noguera, 2008). Although necessary and important, this research fails to draw attention to the challenges and contributions that black males offer to the practice of K-12 education and the lives of African American students. This same research has focused on the need for black teachers to add balance, perspective and an ethnic minority presence to the field of K-12 education, but this research’s weakness is that it focuses overwhelmingly on black female teachers and largely elementary education.

A decade ago very little research had not focused on the reality and perspectives of black male teachers. However, scholars (many of them black males) have begun to recognize the need for investigating and telling the stories of black male teachers in particular (Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Bridges, 2009; Brown, 2009a, 2009b; Brockenbrough, 2008; Shabazz, 2006; Lynn, 2001, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Lewis 2006; James 2002). While this emerging body of research is relatively new in the dialogue concerning black male teachers, it is indeed very timely, rich, and transformative when

compared to the current standard of care in highlighting the lives and perspectives of today's K-12 educators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative case study is to explore and examine the specific experiences, perspectives, and classroom practices of six African American male K-12 teachers. Much of the research until recently has focused largely on African American teachers in general with the vast majority of attention afforded to females. Although this literature is both informative and useful it does not highlight the specificity that is needed to examine K-12 education through the gendered and cultured lens of black male educational practitioners. Secondly, this study will examine the relationships between African American K-12 male educators and their students, especially black male students. At this point in the research, "African American" and "black" educators will be defined as those educators who self-identify themselves as having African ancestry and currently teach in K-12 classrooms. Education paraprofessionals, administrators and clerical/supportive staff are not considered educators in this study.

Significance of the Study

The value of conducting a study of this regard is irreplaceable. Black male teachers in America are, unfortunately, statistically rare. Of the nation's 3,385,200 public school teachers black people make up only 6.8% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011-2012). Within this limited number of black teachers black males represent less than 2% of all K-12 school teachers in the United States (Pabon, 2013; Brockenbrough, 2008). Compared to the number of black students in public education in

the United States of 7,800,000 this disparity highlights an incongruence in how K-12 students are taught as well as the perspectives and relevancy with which they are taught (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

This study has significance in three particular areas. This study will help provide a counter-narrative to the dominating story of education told through the guise of a female and white perspective. Because most school buildings are their own specific communities with a majority vs minority culture this study provides input on how to serve a segment of their workers whose voice(s) and concerns go largely ignored or unseen. Additionally, this study is important because it also provides guidance in the form of seeing educational practice from the often muted and invisible vantage point of K-12 black male teachers. Further, as more research on K-12 black male teachers emerges this study aims to posture itself in multiple ways. First, it will add to the national scholarly discussion regarding black male teachers. Second, this study will serve as a way to move from debate to practice with an emphasis on informing policies and procedures, teacher education programs and instructional practices. Lastly, this study can be a mechanism for change in bringing about social justice as it pertains to minority students, especially black boys, as a means to closing the achievement gap in K-12 schooling.

Central Research Question

The study of black male teachers is open to be examined in many different ways. As mentioned earlier, it is a phenomenon that is relatively new in terms of specifically

narrowing in on black males in k-12 education. Having said this, the question central to this research project is as follows:

What do the stories of black male educators tell us about their identities, pedagogy, and relationships with other educational staff and students?

Given this central research question, several ancillary questions help provide further guidance and traction in an effort to dig into the realities of black male teachers and bear witness to the authenticity of their understandings.

Research sub-questions.

1. How do black male teachers explain their life experiences and influences that prompted them to go into education?
2. How do black male teachers describe their perspectives on education and being a black male teacher?
3. How do black male teachers explain their teaching practices?
4. How do black male teachers describe their relationships with colleagues and students, especially minorities and male students?

Definitions and Terms

Some of the terms listed below were used while reviewing the literature covering black male teachers. Language that is specific to the field of K-12 education can be foreign to those outside of that discipline. Many people of African ancestry here in the United States self-identify themselves in many categories (i.e., Negro, Afro-American, African American, Black). Because of this sense of agency of identity and diversity within the African diaspora (people of African descent) I have provided two terms, Black

and African American, to identify and simplify this group of people. The two terms will be used interchangeably throughout this study. Lastly, some terms (culture, minority, and role model) are commonly used in a variety of disciplines with different applications and meanings, such as sociology, gender/ethnic/minority studies, and political science for example. Working definitions are provided to understand how they are being applied specifically to this study of black male teachers

Black/African-American—people of African descent here in America recognized both by culture and physical appearance.

Teacher/Educator—a person that has been certified to teach in K-12 schools and teaches K-12 students.

Minority—a person of an ethnic group or that is part of a group that is the numerical minority of a larger group of people.

Pedagogy—how a teacher/educator teaches their students . . . how they instruct . . . their strategies for educating students.

Culture—a set of beliefs, behaviors, values, foods, music, and religious beliefs/practices of a specific group of people.

Role Model—a person that is perceived to be or considers themselves to be an exemplar in their behavior, interactions, and relationships with others, and serves as a guide by which they can help others.

Limitations

This study focuses specifically on black male K-12 teachers. I recognize the need for research involving male teachers broadly and even ethnic minority male teachers

more precisely. These are areas of great concern to the practice of K-12 education as well, but are outside the scope of this study. Moreover, this study does not focus on the beliefs and practices of K-12 black male educational administrators. While these narratives could produce rich data that has relevance to this study those narratives could potentially be diluted for certain reasons or skewed with biases and yield distorted interpretations.

As a male who is black and a teacher I have a natural bias. However, this bias should not be considered a bias or limitation, but more as an advantage in being able to more deeply understand the nuanced realities and views of the participants. The participants in this study will all be practicing classroom African-American educators from a single urban school district in a medium sized metropolitan city in a mid-western state. It does not include participants from other school districts within the state, region, or nation. This could impact the participants' perspectives and views towards their educational practice, the students they teach, and how they view themselves as educators and how they are viewed by their colleagues to be biased towards one perspective than another. Some of the participants contacted by District Headquarters could choose to voluntarily participate in the study or not to participate, thus possibly contributing to an uneven distribution of age and place of birth among participants.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter several key details were explained. I outlined the problem this study intends to address along with the purposefulness of conducting research on K-12 black male teachers. The importance of this study is highlighted by the need to not only

inform, but to improve and reform educational policy and practice as it relates to urban education where it impacts ethnic minorities, especially black males, in addition to influencing how future teachers are taught in teacher preparation programs. Further, I established the framework of the study by stating the central research question and sub-questions that drive the study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In this chapter I review the literature that surrounds both African American teachers and black male teachers. It is important to note that this literature review does not emphasize the work of male teachers, non-ethnic minority (i.e., white), or other ethnic minority teachers to include, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, or Asians. A review of the literature did not yield very much data on these other groups although each group has its own importance. Considering the focus of this project being primarily aimed at black male teachers the two factors of being both black and a black male sets themselves apart from all sub-groupings due to the unique circumstances black males face in America. Similarly, this study does not seek to compare and contrast the lives, roles, and impact of female and/or white teachers with black male teachers in major way. Because K-12 education is so understood to be female and white, to continue to highlight those voices and viewpoints would be somewhat redundant and speaks to the very nature of why studies focusing solely on black male teachers are so critical. Lastly, the literature does not commit itself to the perspectives of black students or students as a whole. Such literature lends itself to research focused solely on that of students' voices. While beneficial it is outside the scope of this study concentrating on K-12 black male educators.

Although these topics may surface, they are not the central theme of the study, but peripheral and complimentary matters nevertheless. On a similar note, this study does not seek to review and address the issue of urban education in an overall sense, although one

can make the claim that lives and practices of black male teachers can be situated within this very large sphere of urban education. Much of the literature focused on four primary areas: culture, role modeling, pedagogy/instruction, and gender-matching. First, I discuss the literature on African American teachers. Next, I discuss the major works focusing on African American male teachers. Third, I discuss the literature on both black teachers and black male teachers through the prism of the four themes listed above. Lastly, I provide a discussion summarizing the literature's major points of emphasis.

African American Teachers

With regard to African American teachers an extensive amount of research exists. More specifically, the concept of black teachers serving as role models for black students exists along a historical continuum dating back to at least the civil rights movement. During this time frame, because black teachers (like all blacks in general) were considered to be inferior, they were not allowed to teach white students, and therefore were relegated to teaching in only all black schools (Foster, 1993, 1997; Milner, 2006). Additionally, being a teacher has long been an extremely well respected role in many black communities, although one could make the argument that this sentiment has waned to some extent in some segments of black life here in America.

While teachers in general play a vital role in the lives of their students, it is argued that black teachers play an important role particularly for black students (Irvine, 1989; King, 1993; Maylor, 2009; Ware, 2006). This concept of ethnic matching is discussed due to many issues but largely because of the commonly held notion that many black

students are missing parents in their lives (often their fathers). Matching teachers and students by ethnicity is not a guaranteed strategy for achieving academic success.

This way of thinking can be considered controversial (James, 2002; Maylor, 2009; Shreffler, 1998). Using a qualitative research design, Maylor highlighted the flaws in the assumptions that only black teachers are the most appropriate role models for black students, and that black students will readily accept black teachers as role models. In conducting focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews consisting of 57 black teachers of different grades, 10 female and 47 male educators the findings of the study show that ethnicity is not the determining factor in being accepted as a role model, especially for black male teachers. Several key findings suggested that socio-economic status can be a disrupting factor in establishing positive relationships between black students and black male teachers and black teachers as a whole. Additionally, the study revealed that some of the teacher participants did not consider themselves teachers strictly for black students; rather they saw being a role model as a “by-product” of simply being a teacher (Maylor, 2009, p. 13).

However, as Irvine (1989) discusses, the dialogue concerning ethnic matching pertaining to student-teacher relationships must consider the distinct differences between role modeling and mentoring. Hall (2006b) defines a mentor as “a professional helper or role model, providing the mentee with the necessary information and skills needed for successful living” (p. 10). This definition is a serviceable definition, but is limited because it does not address the high level of emotional attachment and kinship truly required for high-level mentorship. Carrington and Skelton (2003) as well as Irvine

(1989) highlight the need for role models as well as a more expansive understanding of who role models are and the added complexity of ethnic matching of teachers to students. To this point Irvine (1989) emphasizes her position that just because a teacher is a role model doesn't mean they are going to be considered a mentor, but "mentors are always role models" (p. 53). Irvine goes on to assert that mentors can do much in the way of being able to assist black students in ways that regular teachers (no matter their color) will not or cannot, primarily because of cultural incongruence.

Much of the research involving African American teachers contends that black teachers share cultural knowledge and practices that allow them to connect with black students and thus enable them to be successful in both school and life. This practice of culturally relevant pedagogy is referred to by Ware (2006) as warm demander pedagogy and by Irvine (2003) as having a cultural eye. African American teachers who demonstrate their awareness of their students' experience(s) and how they can use this understanding in their classroom do so in designing their classroom instruction and management, accordingly. McCray, Sindelar, Kilgore, and Neal (2002) brings this point to focus in her study where she showed that many black teachers were strict and demanding when it came to classroom management and high student expectations. In this regard, teacher reprimands and respect for the teacher are necessary because they are recognized as part of the process of black teachers establishing a climate of success and caring for their students.

Monroe and Obidah's (2004) case study of an eighth-grade classroom of 22 students (1 white student) and an African American teacher found that the cultural

synchronization between students and teacher has an impact on student discipline. Their findings suggest that black teachers who drew on the cultural mannerisms, body language, speaking tones and nonverbal communication practices of black students effectively reduced disciplinary incidents among their students. The study found that behaviors such as humor, feelings and emotions were effective ways to keep black students on task and reduce inappropriate behavior. Such practices considered to be more traditional methods of classroom management would commonly be considered “nonresponsive” by black students and students of color in general due to cultural incongruence (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). Knowing how to apply and interpret behaviors that are to be considered to be culturally specific to African Americans enables black teachers to assist black students to navigate the daily trials of K-12 education.

While interviewing participants in her qualitative study (Mitchell, 1998), details how black teachers understood the non-classroom issues that impact many black students such as hunger, socio-economic status, rest, and familial/living arrangements. Such interest and sensitivity black teachers demonstrate highlights the high degree of cultural congruency that exists between them and many black students. Teachers who possessed such insider knowledge and comprehension of these influences on student learning communicated a willingness and ability to match the realities of students’ real needs with high expectations of classroom curriculum and instruction to foster student achievement.

Concerning relationships between teachers and students, several authors have highlighted the complex and nuanced workings of capital-both cultural and social (Carter, 2005; Dance, 2002; Lareau, 2003). Cultural capital, a concept made famous by Pierre

Bourdieu, speaks to experience, exposure, knowledge and educational advantages over others who have not acquired, had transmitted to, or had it handed down to them. In the K-12 setting, this means that black students can have the ability to have many of their voices, viewpoints, and worldviews affirmed by black teachers who may be able to relate to and share many of their same experiences and understandings. Carter (2005) refers to teachers' role as the dominant force on what rewards and sanctions are doled out and what is permissible and accepted as cultural gatekeepers. This process is often times contrasted with a sense of cultural incongruence when some white teachers may not have the same or similar orientation as the black students they teach. Their (white teachers) cultural orientations may be more geared towards those of the white students they teach- whether this is intentional or unintentional.

Social capital, a related concept advanced by James Coleman, emphasizes the relationships that are built between individuals, but more importantly the gains that are derived from having those connections. More specifically, as it relates to K-12 student-teacher relationships, this involves regular and meaningful interaction with their parents and relatives, but also with teachers, coaches, and other educational staff. As Dance (2002) states, information and trust are cornerstones that play an irreplaceable role in student-teacher relationships (p. 83). Sharing a certain degree of cultural synchronization is a great tool for some, but not all, black educators. These two components of cultural information and trust built from interaction and shared/similar experiences does sometimes facilitate ease and comfort between black students and their black teachers,

which in turn, can facilitate positive bonds that transcend the traditional student-teacher relationships.

Located within the discussion concerning black student-teacher relationships is the contention that ethnic matching possesses a more culturally informed connection than those of black student-white/other ethnic minority teacher relationships where there is a relationship or dynamic of cultural displacement (Milner, 2006). Possessing similar experiences and interactions as their black students allows many African American teachers to create cultures of understanding and purpose that generates academic success among black students. Additionally, it should be noted that black teachers not only foster ways of understanding for ethnic minority students, but for all students. Having black teachers with whom to interact and to teach students of all ethnicities serves the purpose of creating multiple ways of processing reality and limits ethnocentric worldviews where a certain group(s) is always superior (Foster, 1990).

Black teachers also bring a socio-political element to the practice of education. Within the confines of the school-building, politically-minded black teachers can aid in highlighting and combating a hidden curriculum that serves the purpose of maintaining a Eurocentric educational model and rendering ethnic minority students as second class learners (Foster, 1990, 1993; Mitchell, 1998). Because education is such an ethnically-gendered profession dominated largely by white females, black teachers can serve as advocates for black students who are frequently silenced. Within the larger societal framework, black teachers often function as agents of change by providing insight

regarding structures and institutions that significantly impact people's lives, particularly black students (Foster, 1990).

Black Male Teachers

Lynn, perhaps the leading voice on black male teachers, offers a variety of examinations of black male teachers. Most of his works are qualitative in nature while using critical race theory as a means to explore narratives about the experiences and practices of black male teachers (Lynn, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Lynn & Hassan, 1999). One of the central themes that surfaces within Lynn and Hassan's (1999) research is the ability to understand street culture. Dance (2002) posits that being able to grasp the language, meanings, and values of street culture enables black teachers to relate to and thus provide effective and culturally relevant pedagogy to black students. Further, black male teachers position themselves as agents of change for the students and respective communities- but share their thoughts that they were "not always optimistic about the possibilities for real change" (p. 125).

James' (2002) study focuses on the narrative of a Craig, a Caribbean immigrant male elementary school teacher, who examines his journey, role and identity as a teacher as they have been influenced by his life's experiences. Using life history as a method for examination James' study points out the tension that exists for some black male teachers and how they construct their educational identities in relation to their educational practice. Although most of study focuses on the influences of Craig's life experiences versus actual experiences and meanings as a black male teacher this narrative does reveal a counter argument to the master narrative of racial and gender essentialism. James

posits that Craig's narrative "reveals the contradictions that are inherent in how he understood the needs of minority students, specifically black students, the relationship he was able to establish with them, and the realities of his thinking that he could make a contribution to them and advocate on their behalf" (p. 181). Particularly, Craig articulates the counter essentialist stance that the mere fact that he is black does not guarantee that his black students will accept him. Craig intentionally does not mention himself as a role model during their interviews as this supports his fundamental understanding that there is more to being a role model than being black (p. 181). The fact that Craig, as a (Black) Caribbean male teacher, recognizes that he does not get automatic entrée into the trust of his black students gives further credence to contest the argument of whether black male teachers are the answer to African American students' educational problems (p. 181).

Brown's studies (2009a, 2009b), like much of the research on black male teachers, uses qualitative-ethnographic and instrumental case study – methods to focus on the performance of black male teachers and their approach(s) to social justice as a means to inform their pedagogical practice with black boys. Citing several primary modes of performance: enforcer, playful, and negotiator Brown (2009a) deems these methods as evidence to the multiple ways in which black male teachers "perform" their pedagogy for the main purpose of addressing the needs of black male students (p. 424, Table 1.). The first of these three ways in which black males perform in education is the "enforcer", a rigid teacher who demands that students adhere to the rules and code of conduct of the classroom. "Negotiators" center around student motivation, listening and utilizing the

question and answer mode of learning. Lastly, the “playful” style of performance focuses on the teacher sharing their personal experiences, laughing and joking with students and interacting with them in informal settings within the school building, but not in the classroom.

Consistent with some of the existing literature on black male teachers Brown (2009a) provides analysis on the argument of gender-ethnicity matching. In doing so he suggests that being black and male are characteristics that are involved in the performance of black male teachers and that relationships between black male teachers and students, especially black and male, are “just as messy and multifaceted as any relationship might be between a teacher and a student” (p.433).

In addition, contrary to the dominant perspective of African American male students requiring a singular approach to remedy their educational woes the participants in his study demonstrate a multifaceted approach to addressing the educational needs of black male students (Brown, 2009a, p. 432). These findings are not particular only to black male teachers, all teachers possess and practice same or similar techniques. What is important to point out is that the practices of these black male teachers whose voices and contributions to K-12 education are often hidden are now visible and they, “constantly pursued new and innovative strategies to meet the diverse and complex needs of their African American male students” (p. 433). Brown (2009a) puts forth an understanding that the use of black male teachers as part of a, not stand alone, solution to educational change in urban areas is more intricate and involved than what the present discourse asserts.

Brown (2009b) also illustrates how black male teachers situate their diverse stances of social justice impact their educational practice to bring about academic success for students, especially black and male. In employing the theoretical framework of “nation language”-a way to make sense of a groups’ realities (social, political, educational, etc.) - used by Glaude (as cited in Brown, 2009b) Brown suggests that being familiar with black male teachers’ black political ideologies (i.e., functionalist, liberalist, nationalist, critical, etc.) within a local context is essential to capturing a true understanding of their educational practices (p. 476). What he finds is that black male teachers use a variety of political ideologies as a way to address the wide range of academic needs of their African American students (p. 489). As a result Brown (2009b) suggests that the common approach of viewing teachers who advocate for change with social justice orientations as monolithic be revisited as revised to be viewed through a more pluralistic lens.

Shabazz’s (2006) dissertation involving grounded theory qualitatively methodology attempts to unpack the questions surrounding the lack of K-12 African American male teachers. Utilizing eight participant personal narratives both descriptive and prescriptive factors are analyzed with regards to the lack of and potential increase of black male teachers. Several key themes emerged regarding the benefits of having an increased number of black male teachers: debunking stereotypes, decreased disciplinary issues, more role models, and increased African American student identity formation due to stronger cultural connections (p. 117). Shabazz addresses issues that concern role modeling and gender/ethnic matching. What is more is that he draws attention to the

question of shared culture between black male students and black male teachers. One participant, Ward, captures the angst of many of the participants that white teachers are not able or willing to relate to black students by maintaining,

“White people just don’t get it. They don’t understand what is going on with our kids. They think they do and they have a bit of arrogance about that. I think typically Blacks that are brought up in the urban environment may struggle with problems and issues like that. They have a unique understanding about that and if they can learn the skills that they need to successfully manage classrooms and teach in the different subject areas then those are the best teachers in the world to me” (p. 128).

All eight of the participants in the study asserted a strong belief that due to having similar/shared experiences and understandings of African American students allowed them to recognize and address their academic and social-political needs. As stated by another participant, Parnell,

The African American students . . . gravitate to me because they know I’ve been through what they are going through and I think they come for advice. I think it can increase African American student success but it’s not a guarantee. Having a representative is good for African American students all the way round. (p. 130)

Affirming this sentiment Adam, declares,

We understand that experience that we have gone through. We understand in spite of what they say that this is still a racist world out there. We (black male teachers)

are the ones who are ready and are best able to prepare African American students for what they will face in the future. (p. 130)

The aspect of culture sharing is positioned here as paramount in proving to be a mechanism through which younger African American students, especially males, can garner visions of success from and use to demystify stereotypes and biases promoted and carried out by media and white teachers.

Brockenbrough (2008) provides a very sound examination of the lives and educational practices of black male teachers. One of the few qualitative studies that employ phenomenology as its primary research method, along with life history, his study uncovers the complexities that exist in the discourse on black male teachers.

Additionally, he contests the master narrative that is presented in much of the literature where black male teachers are either role models, father figures, and that they (we) bring cultural similarities that facilitate stronger student connectivity.

Unique to the national discourse is that Brockenbrough strongly examines masculinity by adding the voice of black queer male (BQM) teachers to the discussion. In providing a more nuanced understanding of black male teacher identity politics he enables a broader view of the realities of black male educators' "racial, gender, and sexual identities - in light of the different historical relationships of those identities to schooling, work, culture, and power -shape their professional experiences in schools" (p. 219).

By cross examining the master narrative Brockenbrough reveals a major and grossly overlooked aspect of the master narrative in "the challenges that may emerge

when patriarchal expectations come to bear on pedagogical responsibilities” (p. 252). Not only are black male teachers seen as father figures and disciplinarians, but they also have to wrestle with the realities of how to negotiate their identities with females in a female and ethnic dominated space. In examining the different patriarchal, authoritarian, and disciplinarian tropes that black male teachers are pigeon-holed into his study lays bare the conflicts, criticisms, and consternations that are involved as it relates to how black males perform their pedagogy in the classroom. Brockenbrough’s research calls into question the master narrative’s call for black male teachers and their much needed masculinity in classrooms, but what happens when masculinity challenges long standing matriarchal behavior and culture, not only in the classroom, but also in the school as a whole? Much in the same way that black men have varying experiences and identities so too are their disciplinary styles which can range from laid back to very strict and rigid.

The concept of African American male teachers serving as role models for African American students is a theme that resonates loudly in a review of the literature (Brown, 2009a, 2009b; James, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Lynn, 2001, 2006a, 2006b; Lynn & Hassan, 1999; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009; Shreffler, 1998). Black male teachers are said to offer a sort of esoteric affiliation in being able to negotiate and relate to the gender- and race-specific complexities of black male identity of the students that they interact with on a daily basis (Brown, 2009b; Lynn, 2002).

Further, it has to be noted that not all black male teachers go beyond the traditional role as educator while others do recognize the need to function in such capacities. Assigning black male teachers to fixed spaces in which to operate invites the

argument that they are naturally a cure-all for black students. Black male teachers who choose to perform in more expanded familial and social roles often fulfill patriarchal functions. These actions and behaviors often help to meet the unmet needs students require in certain aspects of their students' lives-to include fostering more expansive identities beyond the narrow and stereotypical black male identities that exist in various forms of media (Brown, 2009a; Lewis, 2006; Lynn, 2001, 2006b).

This role model/mentor ideal is essential to the discussion involving black male teachers, black males, and black students in general. Often times black students speak of their feelings of being neglected by educators, family, and others who are perceived to lack interest in their well-being (Hall, 2006; Struchen & Porta, 1997). In K-12 education, especially the secondary school level, black males have a disproportionate rate of dropping out, truancy, being placed in "special education" programs and facing disciplinary action (Noguera, 2003; Schott Foundation, 2005). For many, not all, black students black male teachers also serve, as extended father figures. Black male teachers are commonly considered to have the innate ability(s), experiences and understanding to relate to black males. This ability to function as fatherly figures is something researchers have regarded as "otherfathering." (Lynn, 2006b, p. 2617) This point is significant it speaks to ability for black male teachers to be able to connect with black students, especially males, on both the challenges and vulnerabilities of some black male students, which contribute to their disengagement from school settings and learning as a whole. These roles signify relationships that go beyond the traditional student-teacher relationship that is narrowly concerned with just issues in the classroom or school setting.

While the issue of role modeling is quite evident in the literature, there is a large debate concerning the limited perspective of role modeling among some authors. Shreffler (1998), James (2002), and Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2009) highlight the assumption that just because a teacher is black and male that he will be accepted and successful in practicing his pedagogy and relating to black students. In his case study of Craig, an African American male teacher teaching in an urban school district, James (2002) asks Craig why he didn't say he was a role model in their initial interview but, in a follow up interview Craig responded:

To a certain extent. But I want to make it clear that at no point and even now, I believe that one can be an excellent role model simply being black. There is a lot more to it than that. (p. 181)

This quote by Craig highlights the complexity of identity in role modeling. Operating in such fixed and constricting ideologies puts undue pressure on black male teachers as only serving as role models and nothing else as well as limiting the amount of support and attention that black students can potentially benefit from in their academic and social lives (Brown 2009a). Additionally, doing so greatly diminishes the extensive amount of work and dedication that individuals who are not black or female have given to students of color. Along the same lines, solely focusing on black male teachers to act as role models for black students would absolve those who are not black and male from the opportunity and responsibility of helping black male students.

This concept of "gender-matching" posited by Carrington (as cited in Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009) does nothing to secure and improve the academic realities of boys who are "underachieving or disengaged" in schools (p. 41). Moreover, to

function within this reductionist framework of limited role modeling based on gender and ethnicity hinders the possibilities of advancing larger discussions concerning urban education that are just as important to include culturally relevant pedagogy, teacher professional development, and the need for more minority educators. Similarly, Shreffler's (1998), James' (2002) and Rezai-Rashti and Martino's (2009) research demonstrates the challenge of being able to offer more expansive views of potential role models for black students outside of black male teachers and the inability to look forward to the kaleidoscope of views and experiences of black lived reality.

Black male teachers are not the only potential role models for black students and all students in general. This narrow frame of thought overlooks the past and current contributions that other teachers from (whites and other ethnic minority groups) have had on black students. Allowing children, especially African American, to have teachers from all ethnic backgrounds expands their cultural knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, such a mindset of having only black male teachers falls into a racist ideology that black students can only learn from and interact with a limited group of people. And, by extension, that black male teachers can only teach a limited group of students. This thinking would infer that blacks are limited cognitively and intellectually which is not the truth.

Pedagogy/Instruction

In reviewing the literature on black male teachers the questions of culture and instructional delivery are overarching themes (Brown, 2009a; James, 2002; Lynn, 2006b; Lynn & Hassan, 1999). Inside the issue of culture the topic of black male teacher's

culturally relevant pedagogy and practice is discussed at length. In his research where he observed and interviewed black male teachers, Brown (2009a) discusses the teaching practices and methods of instructional delivery of several black male teachers through the prism of “performance.” Here he uses Foster (1987) and Irvine (1990) to define performance in two ways: (a) “physical demonstrations such as facial expressions, speech, emotions and social interactions manifest during school-wide interactions” and (b) pedagogy – “how teachers’ talk to students, including the day-to-day decision-making they employ to address any number of academic and/or school related issues” (p. 418). Brown locates black male teacher’s practices in three forms: enforcer, negotiator and playful. Enforcers maintain order and discipline in their classroom so that instruction and content mastery can occur with minimum disruption. Drawing on his observations of one of his participants, he suggests that this method helps reinforce expectations and accountability for black students.

Lynn (2006b) in his qualitative study using portraiture as a research method also highlights this “teacher-centered” classroom management style where students were well-behaved (p. 2505). Although this style may seem rigid, it demonstrates a focus on high standards, teacher attentiveness, and genuine concern for the academic and social well-being of students. Black male teachers who emphasize playfulness used different approaches and subjects to engage their students in discussion and debating regarding subject matter. The point regarding this approach is that it not only prompted an exchange of ideas, but it was done with the purpose of developing critical thinking and analytical skill. Negotiating enabled black male teachers to adjust to their students,

especially black males, so as not to present themselves in a confrontational manner (p. 430). Doing so encouraged their students to feel more confident in approaching black male teachers and getting them to see themselves as empowered participants in their academic pursuits, but socially as well. These pedagogical practices in the classroom and school setting assist in demystifying the limited vision and stereotypical trope of black male teachers as just “disciplinarians or role models”, but also includes their abilities to serve as highly effective appreciated classroom educators.

Black male teachers also use culture as a way to enable their students to relate and master subject matter (Brown, 2009a; Lynn, 2001, 2006b; Lynn & Hassan, 1999). Of course this is not always the case, as reflected in the previously mentioned life history of Craig, a black male teacher in Toronto, Canada (James, 2002). Although Craig sought to help black students by becoming a teacher, he admitted that he questioned his ability to relate to many of his black students because he doesn't share many of their experiences. This crucial point here illuminates the deep ongoing debate involving gender and race as well as how they operate when it comes to issues surrounding teacher effectiveness, professional development, and teachers' overall commitment to student achievement.

Does having the same gender and/or race of the teacher give some students a better understanding of subject matter or higher level of comfort in the classroom resulting in improved learning outcomes? Can teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds of a certain gender possess esoteric knowledge and understanding into how their ethnic minority students feel, behave, learn, etc.? In possessing these unique tools does this make ethnic minority teachers more apt to be concerned with their ethnic

minority students more so than white teachers? Of late the conversation regarding the importance of gender and gender equity in education—specifically the importance and legitimacy of ethnic gender matching for teachers and students—has garnered increased attention (Delpit, 2006; Kunjufu, 2002, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Noguera, 2003, 2008). In light of the K-12 teaching force being so overwhelmingly female some others investigate if this dynamic helps females and hinders boys' abilities to be as successful in school (Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Sadker, 2002). Conversely, the same argument could be made for males. These are all valid questions to which I feel can be answered, although not definitively, but with a great deal of belief and conviction.

One of the more plausible arguments made within the literature was that of cultural congruence of black male teachers to black students and the advantages that arise from this connection. Within this discussion two major, but distinctive strands exist: culture and community and culture and pedagogical practice. The literature highlights the experiences of black male teachers in the same or similar surroundings as their students being a cornerstone for understanding how to teach them in the classroom (Brown, 2009a, 2009 b; Lynn, 2001, 2006a, 2006b; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009). In conducting his research one of Lynn's (2002) participants feels that black men have a "pedagogical advantage" over other teachers (female and non-white) in that they can obtain "mutual respect" from black students (p. 126). Such research further highlights the sentiment of black males having special skills and insight necessary to remedy the failings of black male student academic success. Within this cultural thread is the fact that black male identity is under constant scrutiny and attack from both the external

society at large, but the school society more specifically. To this point Brown (2009b) offers the idea that black male students have to be able to function in multiple realities in order to be successful.

Matters of cultural congruency and social class, as they relate to educational achievement, are dependent on context, setting, and other circumstances. Kunjufu (2002) argues that for many white students from varied socio-economic classes issues of culture and gender congruency do not matter as much for whites as it does for students from ethnic minority and lower socio-economic families. For many white students culture and gender congruency doesn't matter as much as it does for ethnic minority students (Lewis & Toldson, 2013). To say that these issues matter more for one particular group more than another group, some would argue, would be irresponsible and short-sighted when it comes to addressing issues of academic achievement. On the other hand, the fact that much of the K-12 teacher population is white and/or female does reflect an ethnic-gender imbalance as it relates to the K-12 student population (Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

In the United States our K-12 education system is geared towards white and or female cultures. This is evidenced by the fact that in 2011 most k-12 public school teachers were white (81.9%) and teachers of color filling in the remaining 18% - blacks representing 6.7%. Additionally, females are 76.3% of the same public school teaching force with males being 23.7%, not to include the k-12 educational administrators being 80% white and principals of color being 20% - blacks being 10%. (NCES 2011-12) It can be argued that because of these statistics represent a reality that k-12 education is heavily centered on the cultural and behavioral practices of whites. In lieu of these

circumstances one can make the legitimate argument that whites, as the dominant/majority group, have fewer of the challenges associated with adjusting to cultural norms, learning styles, teaching styles, and other ways of viewing the world because many of their teachers share the same cultural values, orientations and experiences (Kunjufu 2013, 2002; Toldson 2013; Noguera 2008, 2003). These norms manifest themselves in k-12 educational practice, curriculum and overall school behavior. Ethnic minority children, especially those from urban, inner-city and poor backgrounds often times find themselves paired with teachers (overwhelmingly white) that cannot or do not have the ability, knowledge, or desire to relate to their experiences and cultural frames of reference (Kunjufu, 2002; Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

Examining the aspect of black male teachers and shared cultural compatibility cannot be done without highlighting the issue of essentialism whereby there is a set of defined characteristics or ways to address specific circumstances. To think that there is a monolithic cultural group and set of values that can effectively teach K-12 children is inherently ethnocentric, borders on racist, and is unquestionably irresponsible. There are two concerns that must be addressed: (a) essentialist notions of who can teach K-12 students and be effective, and (b) understanding that black male educators have multiple identities-both in how they are perceived at their school-buildings and having individual identities and philosophies among themselves as educators.

K-12 schools are spaces where the dynamics of culture, politics and subcultures impact both student and teacher identities. Males and males of color are not heavily represented in K-12 education and therefore are not, generally speaking, places that have

a dominant male culture. Black male educators are juxtaposed to the normalized presence of female and white teachers. The majority of K-12 schools possess a culture of bias, stereotypes, and dispositions that are controlled by and overwhelmingly benefit both white and/or female staff and students (Kunjufu 2002; Toldson, 2013). This dynamic may be due, in part, to the disproportionate number of females and whites in K-12 education in general. Whatever the cause, this contrast can be a source of alienation and dejection for black male teachers. More importantly, it demonstrates a posture by many, often white and/or female, who are responsible for hiring and selecting educators that black males are incapable, unwanted, or even necessary in the process of educating K-12 children (Lynn, 2001; Williams, 2011).

Often times black male teachers are pigeon-holed into roles other than teacher such as disciplinarians and role models. By having these ascribed functions without also acknowledging the achieved responsibilities of that of an educator communicates a lack of trust and confidence of black male teachers in their ability to do carry out their duties. Restrictive outlooks that often stem from stereotypes disrupt the process by which black male educators can be seen as capable teachers and not as a dilemma to the education of children (Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013). The white homogenization of the K-12 teaching force prompts many African American male teachers, as Lynn (as cited by Jackson et al., 2013) states, to “operate on a continuum between resistance and accommodation to White patriarchal norms and practices as a way in which to survive the profession” (p. 124).

The identities of black male teachers do not operate within a fixed space as to their identities. However, much of the body of work on black male teachers does reflect monolithic and obtrusive examinations on their roles, purpose, and identities. As Brockenbrough (2008) illustrates, the challenge of essentialist constructions of black male teachers limits their potential to be effective (p. 56). Brockenbrough's study highlights the challenges that black male teachers face in negotiating their identities with regards to limits of identity politics involving race, gender, and class. His research reveals the challenges of dominant notions of black male teachers to include possessing "culturally mediated connectedness" perceiving themselves as role models and father figures (p. 215). By framing the differences as ways to cross the borders of identity politics between his participants Brockenbrough demonstrates both the similarities and juxtapositions that exists among black male educators. Being able to understand the variety of experiences and perspectives fosters the ability to posture black male teachers in multiple fashions across pedagogical, cultural, ethic, and social realities thus countering the master narrative on black male teachers.

On the other hand, some black male teachers do not always see themselves as being a congruent fit with the students they teach. Where many would assert that black males serve as otherfathers and positive role models for African American students, some black male teachers oppose these commonly held assumptions. Contesting these ascribed identities enables black male educators to be more effective teachers by not having the pressure of being *race men* (Brockenbrough, 2008). Yon (2000) highlights the day to day lives of students of color in secondary school and how they negotiate their identities at

school. In doing so he captures the complexities and overlapping issues of race, gender, culture, and identity in educational spaces. Black male teachers are not excused from being exposed to these same circumstances. There is more than one way to be a black, male, and a teacher. All black males do not share the same cultural, socio-economic, gendered, or political experiences. Like all peoples blacks exist and, in large part, are products of varying experiences and communities.

Although when it comes to gendered and racialized identities of black male teachers we see the potential for them to be able to relate to students of all ethnicities in a more diverse manner than their white counterparts. However, this stance speaks to essentialist notions that only black males can serve as positive models of manhood. Does this mean that white teachers cannot relate to students of color, especially black males? Shreffler (1998) discusses this plausibility of white male teachers being able to serve as outstanding role models for black male students. Building on the “it takes a village to raise a child” concept he argues that children of multiple genders and ethnicities can benefit from positive male role models. In light of the fact that there are very few minority male teachers of color white males can also fill the void(s) in the lives of black males students if they are genuine, willing to take risks by exposing themselves to their students’ lives farther than the classroom, and “transcend their fears and become real constructive force and constructive force and advocate for their students” (p. 93).

Nevertheless, this focus on community awareness and cultural understanding is interrogated and scrutinized by Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2009). Although possessing the various forms of capital that are gained by sharing similar surroundings and

experiences can help provide a more informed understanding this does not guarantee that black male teachers are going to be more effective than their female or non-black counterparts (p. 53). However, as posited by participants in Brown's (2009b) qualitative case study of several black male teachers, this very knowledge, skill, and practice is precisely the tools that allow black male teachers to be as effective as or better than other teachers. The advantage is that they can help black students understand the dynamics of power, gender, race, social class and other issues that they deal with on daily basis (p. 486). Because of issues of culture and power dynamics in society and K-12 schools, brought to bear due to the overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of white and/or female teachers compared to teachers of color, many whites are the holder, recipients and often times the givers of power. Occupying these positions of influence and authority provide many, not all, whites the luxury, unknowingly or otherwise, of not having to pay attention to the inequities and predicaments of those outside the mainstream or middle-class (Delpit 2006; Delpit & Dowdy 2002). Delpit (1988) identifies multiple forms of power in the classroom and, by extension, k-12 school buildings whereby students of color are without or denied access to the codes and culture of power that many of their white peers have rendering them more likely to have less academic success. With regards to children of color many black male teachers have an increased knowledge of culture, shared/similar experiences, as well as racial and gendered identities when dealing with black and Latino/Hispanic students (Kunjufu, 2002; Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

It can be argued that black male teachers engender the necessary dispositions, awareness and experiences that black students, especially black males, need in order to

resist and combat the stereotypes that are imposed and practiced against them on a daily basis. Cultural understanding for black male teachers tends to be a mechanism by which they enable to black males students to liberate themselves from the oppressive, debilitating, and self-loathing elements that pervade K-12 schools dominated by female and non-black educators. This focus on the concepts of emancipation and social justice that black male teachers bring speaks to reproduction of negative stereotypes, social hierarchy, and negative self-fulfilling prophecies that K-12 curricula typically reinforce (Brown, 2009b). Being able to act as change agents may enable black educators to not only serve as “race men,” but also to change the politics of gender and society in their communities and the country as a whole (Lynn, 2002).

What is often unspoken is the tension and degree of alienation that both black male teachers and students of color feel in K-12 educational environments. For black students, having a teacher to ease their apprehensions and address their curiosities about alleged unfair teachers and providing them with perspective and encouragement on career aspirations is priceless. More importantly, black male teachers affirm the identities of black male students. While many students feel like they are in foreign spaces at their schools the presence of black male teachers shed light and cast away clouds of doubt that exist in the psyche of students of color. This is where race-matching, and in some ways gender, plays such a vital role. The attitude, approach, and relationship that black students have towards education are the essential elements that are at play in this discussion.

Nihilistic and self-defeating mindsets have been part of the black student psyche for decades now in American education, especially black boys. Black students feel empowered and have increased amount of hope, enthusiasm, and courage in knowing that they too have positive role models in people who look just like themselves. In a study by Will (2015) students, especially blacks, preferred teachers of color more so than white teachers, particularly when it comes to rating teachers as being more positive towards them (students). Similarly, Evans and Leonard (2013) assert that black students benefit from teachers who look like them and are able to help guide them through the challenges of how to deal with rigors of schoolwork and social issues in educational environments where they may otherwise feel abandoned. In Wilder's (2000) study examining the voices of black students and their positive self-efficacy as a result of having had the experience(s) of having a black teacher Sarah, a participant in the study, communicated instances of "...feeling relaxed", and "...feeling confident."(p. 213) Timon, an African American boy shares his thoughts in stating, "We need teachers who can understand the times that we are in...we need more Black teachers in the school system. I had mostly White teachers. It is a difference when you are living on the outside and teaching on the inside. (p. 216) These accounts and more like them underscore a desire and need for black educators.

Black students having black teachers allow them to feel welcomed and not marginalized in educational spaces. Black students often speak to feeling like their white teachers don't understand them or don't like them. To this point perceptions and stereotypes of white teachers towards black students often become a point of concern.

Studies (Kunesh & Noltemeyer 2015; Kunjufu 2013, 2012; James 2012; Fenning & Rose 2007; Ferguson 2001) commonly reveal cases whereby many (not all) white teachers carry out their pedagogy and behavior in schools with deficit thinking towards black students. These behaviors negatively impact African American students and contribute to their marginality manifesting in situations black students feel they do not belong in educational spaces, low self-efficacy, disproportionately being given detentions, suspensions and expulsions, disparities in being assigned to special education, tracking to lower classes and not being considered for gifted and talented programs.

Discussion

Locating literature that both highlights and examines the experiences and pedagogical practices of black male teachers requires patience and resourcefulness because the amount of research examining this issue remains slight. This study is aimed at mining the experiences of black male teachers for meaning. Because black male teachers operate in a field that is extremely gendered and racially dominated by females and whites examining their stories will highlight and provide a counter-narrative to a system that appears to be opposed to their cultural sense of being and ability to improve their standing in society. Further, this study positions itself in a manner that is designed to combat the forces of supremacy and patriarchy that negatively impacts black students, especially boys. The added value that comes from unshackling black male teachers' voices and having them contribute to the national exchange of ideas concerning urban education is priceless. Not only does it emancipate us from the narrow views of how we currently examine and practice k-12 education but it invites us embrace different

perspectives that diversify and inform our understandings of the complexities that exist in the education of ethnic minority students.

A select number of researchers and their works Brown (2009a, 2009b), Bridges (2009), Lynn (2001, 2002, 2006a, 2006b), Lynn and Hassan (1999), Shabazz (2002), James (2002) and Brockenbrough (1998) stand out as exemplars of qualitative research focused on black male teachers. These exemplars along with other literature highlight the issues of social and familial upbringing, support networks involving school, cultural and social aspects of daily life, and an expressed commitment to cultural relevance and communal connection as factors that have shaped the lives of black male educational practitioners. Of particular note, in reviewing the literature on black male teachers' lives and educational practice I recognized an important weakness that undergirds much of the literature. There is an overwhelming assumption that black teachers, black male educators more specifically, are the best and only sources of effective educators and role models for black students. Although the primary purpose of this study is to explore and examine the experiences and perspectives of black male teachers. I will briefly explore and discuss smaller subthemes in which this viewpoint of black male essentialism may be flawed and therefore a more expansive discussion involving role modeling deserves more attention. Several sources (Brockenbrough, 2008; James, 2002; Maylor, 2009; Shreffler, 1998) make light of this weakness and provide some commentary on its lack of merit. Echoing these authors' positions, it would be negligent and naive to suggest that simply because a teacher is black and a male (or any other combination of ethnicity and gender or orientation) that he would naturally have the capacity to improve the academic and

social development of black students. Nevertheless, because of the social and institutional factors that impact blacks on a daily basis having exemplars, role models and mentors that are in your same image, along with others, should be something that is championed because of the obvious influences of hope and inspiration that can be derived from these relationships. Additionally, one does not hear of such an argument in our suburban school districts where both the teacher and student body are overwhelmingly white.

The research shows that many factors are involved in teachers serving as effective role models and mentors. To rule out ethnicity would be naïve, but to the extent that ethnicity plays a part in relationship-building is a phenomenon that deserves further study. Black students and teachers (especially males) can have dissonance between one another due to misconstrued understandings of identity involving socio-economic status, gender (issues of hyper-masculinity) and assigned morays and folkways based on ethnicity and (sub) culture. In the black community there has long been a code of what a black male is supposed to be. Fearless, outspoken (even if it is disrespectful and rude), heterosexual (denouncing and at times physically assaulting members of the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer communities), anti-academic, and disrespectful towards females (Cose, 2002; Hutchinson, 1996; Majors & Billson, 1992; Noguera, 2008). These contrasting constructions of identity can prove to be barriers when black students, especially males, and black male teachers strive to establish student-teacher and role model relationships with one another.

Other social and cultural factors need to be considered as opposed to simplistic strategies of ethnic/gender matching. In today's society therefore to think that there are

monolithic ways of acting black or any other specific ethnic group would be short-sighted. Establishing such a posture renders critical elements of teaching such as caring relationships (Noddings, 2005), setting high expectations and teacher quality (i.e., academic subject mastery, instructional knowledge and experience, organization, etc.) as insignificant when compared to ethnicity and even social-economic status. Of course, these factors have an impact on student educational outcomes, but are not the largest factors that attributed to student success.

Literature on black male teachers overwhelmingly suggests that, when provided the opportunity, black male teachers enlighten and strengthen the K-12 education landscape in a variety of ways. Their contributions extend past the classroom and into society as a whole in helping to give hope and direction to many students who haven't had many positive examples to model themselves after. Additionally, black male educators serve as testimony that black males can be successful professionals. Likewise, black male teachers function as instruments through which younger black males can use as exemplars in modeling how to navigate their way through the inequities, injustices, and myriad emotions that come with being black, male, and in America.

Black male educators, therefore, should have a definite place at the table when it comes to the discourse K-12 education practice, policy and research it is vital. The teaching profession is overwhelmingly white and/or female and thus much of the practice of k-12 education is implemented from a strongly gendered and racialized perspective. Similarly, the research k-12 education is conducted by and filtered through a largely Eurocentric and/or female lens. As this is not an indictment on either of those two groups

this does, however raise valid questions about how this restricts the ability to understand the k-12 teaching profession in a wider more comprehensive framework. Examining the perspectives of black male teachers serves as one way to offer depth in understanding to not only a workforce that is very limited in terms of gender and ethnicity, but also in how to go about improving overall student academic performance. Black male teachers as a very small group of the teaching profession face uphill battles of: 1. operating in a highly female gendered spaces whereby their (our) pedagogical practice ways of doing things are questioned as being wrong or misguided due to being males; 2. How we interact and resolve student and/or staff conflicts are construed as improper; 3. Having our professional and personal expertise dismissed; and 4. Being pigeonholed into limited or fixed roles within the school buildings that limit our opportunities to positively impact all students, not just those of color.

At the same time in an effort to generate a more nuanced understanding of school teachers by harvesting the competence and proficiencies of black male educators, K-12 education can simultaneously benefit in becoming more informed and open-minded in the larger goals of improving pedagogical practices that aim to improve educational outcomes for all students, particularly those in areas high poverty, crime, loss of hope, homelessness, etc. Many areas are populated by students of color, especially African Americans display symptoms of chronic poor overall academic performance. Among the concerns in many of these areas are: failing classes, low test scores, disproportionate drop-out rates and black males as needing “special education”, low academic self-efficacy, no sense of belonging at their schools, low or negative teacher-student support,

and low levels of hope in their outlook to be successful in life. As there is an increase in students of color in public schools coupled with the continued underperformance of many urban school students need for black male teachers will increase. Many of these noted situations necessitate the further inquiry, recruitment, and retention of black male teachers as a way to aid in the overall effort of raising academic achievement, particularly when it comes to students of color.

Considering the current discourse on African American male teachers a very strong and highly contested question remains, “Do/Can black male teachers have a better and more effective impact on black students, especially males?” If one were to answer this question as is, it would be a pensive and reserved yes. Consequently, if the question were, “How do the traits of being black and male assist black male teachers in attending to the academic, societal, and cultural needs of students, particularly black students?” The response could/would then yield a more balanced reply. The deeper and more pressing challenge is to determine to what extent do these unique attributes help black male teachers in improving these same academic and social outcomes for black students and students in general? Some black male teachers have some resources at their disposal that their non-black colleagues do not possess. All teachers have a tool-box that they can reach into as we strive to improve the academic and social well-being of our students. The reality is that while we may have some similar and even some of the same tools at our disposal, we do not have all of the same tools. It’s about how our tools are equipped to fit the need of the challenges that needs fixing. This should not be seen as an

essentialist stance. Rather it should be regarded as an extremely informed, coherent, and common sense position.

In lieu of the challenges facing black males and education, why shouldn't we, as Pabon (2013) calls it, expect a Black Superman, "a homogeneous cohort of soldiers who will use their blackness and maleness to lead Black male youth to academic success?" (p. 3). My study will not only build on the current literature and understandings of black male teacher's lives, but will attempt to delve further into their experiences and points of view and to what bearing those have on their educational praxis. Injecting the often shunned point of view of black male teachers into the discussion of curriculum and instruction is an act of activism that challenges traditional pedagogy. Additionally, my study will help lessen the discord within the current literature by allowing a more fertile and nuanced understandings when it comes to matters of race and gender matching in relation to black male teachers and students. Moving in this direction will not be the "cure-all" for these conditions, but serves as a critical and necessary component of school reform by including black male teachers in the project of rewriting the dominant narrative when it comes to K-12 education and teacher identities.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the current literature on African American and African American male teachers. I further breakdown the major themes that emerged in reviewing the literature along with how and why the literature provided purpose and direction to conducting this research project.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter outlines the methods used in the study including data collection and analysis. I discuss the qualitative research methods I used as well as issues concerning author reflexivity, theoretical framework and ethical considerations. Keeping with qualitative research designs I outline the steps I took to conduct one on one interviews, classroom observations, and field reflections. Additionally, I outline my coding procedures, validation techniques, field issues, sampling/recruiting procedures and describing the setting of the study.

Research Design

This study seeks to reveal and explore details and themes regarding a portion of the teaching force that hasn't been researched in great detail to this point. When seeking to document the lived realities and perspectives of subordinated groups of people whose existence has been minimized and suppressed it is imperative that research facilitates the ability for those groups to be empowered. A qualitative research strategy will be used for this study. Qualitative research is the best strategy to use for this study because it allows for data collection in natural settings and it is more considerate than quantitative research towards the subject matter being studied, while demanding a call for action (Creswell, 2007). It is not enough to just deal with figures and numbers in examining the nuances that exist when seeking to fashion meaningful understandings from the fertile and overflowing stories of black male teacher's realities. Quantitative study I'm sure would

provide some useful data, but would leave so much of the fields of knowledge bare in attempting to expand the bountiful terrain covering black male teacher's stories.

As I will discuss, narrative inquiry will be used as a method for this project that involves persons from an ethnic minority group that also operates in a gender and ethnically dominated space where they are again the "minority". Using a design and method that allows for stories of those that are not often told is a powerful tool. In using narrative inquiry and multiculturalism as a lens to research democratic life Connelly, Phillion and He (2005) discuss the possibilities of using these two methods to further understand the lives of those in an inner city Canadian school. In doing so they argue that although multicultural education and narrative inquiry have the ability to enhance understandings, they do however assert that "...much work in multiculturalism is not compatible with narrative inquiry." (p. 251) I recognize the merit in their stance in that multiculturalism is more of an "academic study" and is recognized more as a way of looking at things or a "set of ideas." (253) Narrative inquiry's focus is examining individual experience(s). Nonetheless, I do see the benefit of using narrative inquiry as a way of bringing out the nuances and details when it comes to storying the lives of people who are positioned at the head of the line as they stand to be excluded at the intersections of so-called race, gender, power. Additionally, although they have different aims, narrative inquiry and multiculturalism, I see the two as having a great deal of mutual purpose in that they both have the capacity to empower and develop agency amongst many who would have a harder time or not otherwise have the capacity to do so left to their own efforts. A narrative approach is an appropriate way of learning about the

nuances and complexities of experiences of black male teachers, which is a topic of interest to multicultural education.

Case studies focus on providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, unit of study, or “case” to be studied. Case study research currently is often used in the practice and disciplines of law, sociology, psychology, political science and even medicine, although it has been applied recently to fields such as education, business, and economics (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1984). Moreover, case studies are bounded by similar characteristics (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984). Of all case study methodologists, Yin (1984) provides perhaps the most coherent definition and outline for case study research, in that it “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13).

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that can be characterized as gathering the stories and experiences of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). In locating this method within the framework of education, Clandinin and Connelly (2002) arguably provide some of the most textured and definitive explanations on this methodology. Their process of inquiry, borrowing from John Dewey’s emphasis on experience as having three dimensions (interaction-personal and social; continuity-past, present and future; and place-situation) and multiple directions of inquiry, enables researchers to cover phenomena in a comprehensive manner (pp. 49-50).

The choice to fuse narrative inquiry with critical race theory is one that makes sense given that we are examining the experiences of black male teachers. In that this

group hasn't been shown much attention in the past when it comes to seeking what can be gained from their experiences, a CRT/narrative based approach can establish connections that provide a level of "empathy and compassion" that affirms black male teachers' existence. (Phillion & He 2004, p 6) These connections are not just for the reader, but also have the ability to facilitate a more cooperative relationship between researcher and the participants. Drawing from the knowledge and experiences of black male teachers is extremely vital to pursuing practical and well informed pedagogical practices that can serve the growing number of students of color not only in inner cities but suburban areas as well.

For the purposes of this study, teacher knowledge is said to grow not only from mere experiences. What produces teacher knowledge is the ability to reflect on those experiences, mine them for occurrences that can be scrutinized for positive gains and then construct knowledge and understandings that can advance the awareness and practice of education. In the narrative approach taken in this study the emphasis placed on recovery, reconstruction and reading highlights the points that have not always been clear or present for black males, a group that has not been historically present in the discourse on education. (Clandinin et al., 2000) Being able to emphasize one of the three aforementioned areas is of great benefit to the narrative approach used here for examining the experiences of black male teachers as it provides latitude to be flexible according to voice(s) and signature(s) of both the researcher and participants alike. In explaining this adaptable strategy Clandinin, Connelly and Chan (2002) outline how in examining experience from narratives in a class exercise, Elaine Chan a doctoral student

at the time, chose to focus on reconstruction of meaning and reading at the boundaries more than her classmates who chose to focus more on recovery of meaning. By being able to highlight various aspects embedded in narratives Chan was able to use different points of emphasis about experience that is particular to her understanding of how she, as the researcher, is able to construct knowledge and meaning. This, along with black male teachers' experiences being invisible for so long, allows for narrative inquiry to be the correct conduit by which black male teacher experience can be converted into knowledge for informing and developing others.

Detailing the experience of being with narrative inquiry means that researchers are never separate from their research phenomenon. In other words, a "researcher's experience is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself" (Clandinin et al., 2000, p. 81). Using narrative inquiry both promotes a level of trust between the researcher and black male teachers to where black males can confide more intimate input regarding their experiences about teaching. With regard to this study narrative inquiry serves two distinct purposes: (a) to empower black males to tell their particular stories, and (b) it serves as a way to allow the data to be interpreted in a multidimensional manner. More specifically, narrative inquiry offers the potential for bringing about social justice for this particular group of people. Black males have historically been marginalized, considered an object and not a subject, in addition to being viewed and characterized in very negative forms (Cose, 2002; Majors & Billson, 1992; Noguera, 2008). In utilizing narrative inquiry that details the lived realities of black male teachers, we have the opportunity to view them in ways that are

self-described rather than through ascribed and provide counter stories of dominant western practices which allows others to observe the landscape of K-12 education through the prism of black male teacher's realities. These methodologies provide a powerful tool that will assist in not only broadening the scope of the dialogue surrounding K-12 education reform, but also in improving academic achievement. Considering the fact that education, especially primary/intermediate grades (pre-K through 6th grade), is characterized as distinctively white and/or female, the proposed study focuses on a frequently silenced and overlooked group of teachers that is not only timely and necessary, but crucial to promoting and advancing a more pluralistic examination of the landscape of K-12 education.

Being able to story the lives and practices of black male teachers also provides a much-needed point of view in the extremely gendered and racialized world of K-12 education. Such an endeavor helps to infuse a social justice temperament and course of action that is sorely missing. The focus on storytelling enables readers to connect and become absorbed into participant's particularized accounts that authenticate their experiences. Furthermore, gathering and analyzing such alternative narratives supports a social justice framework that seeks to not only liberate silenced voices and highlight realities that have been systematically oppressed through various discriminatory social and cultural practices, but also advocates for possible ways to improve student-teacher relationships, culturally relevant curriculum and instruction, as well as overall student success.

Drawing from case study and narrative inquiry will enable me to enter the classroom sites where black male teachers assert their voice and teaching practices. This will help to develop individual cases that will be drawn from data collection techniques of narrative inquiry and case study research methods. Using case study methodology as a way to present the written report will provide a structured and orderly way for me to present the overall research. Additionally, the benefits of using case study formatting are extended to the readers who will view the final written report as well as the researcher. Moreover, case study arrangement facilitates an organized and user friendly format for participants, readers and the researcher to process and understand the data, findings (data analysis) and discussion chapters of my future research project. Through multiple forms of data collection, the proposed study served to gain a better understanding of black male teachers that can provide useful insight from which researchers, policy makers, education professionals and community entities can draw in efforts to improve teacher preparation programs, along with educational policies and practice.

Researcher Reflexivity

Conducting qualitative research is always a subjective undertaking because of the researcher's role in conducting the study. As humans we have biases based on our experiences, understandings, and value systems. However, having experiences in the areas we study help to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena. In conducting qualitative research and dealing with the human element personal bias is never totally eliminated when it comes to analyzing and interpreting data. As researchers we interpret things on the basis of our personal experiences, socioeconomic status, gender identity(s),

and other things. According to Creswell (2007), “All writing is ‘positioned’ and within a stance” (p. 179). In conducting this study I recognize the argument that exists concerning subjectivity. However, being able to have a level of intimacy with not only the subject matter, but the participants as well is a benefit. What is more, being able to relate and connect with the participants in the field while also having the ability to slip back out and make sense of the subject matter and participant’s views strengthens the ability to both have a deeper appreciation for the data and scrutinize data with a more informed understanding. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) Slipping in and out of the intimacy of being in the field with participants presented issues of voice and tension.

I tried to stay true to the stories and perspectives of the participants while also trying to provide my own analysis and position my own voice as well. Similarly I was careful to navigate the tensions or potential points of conflict or divergence between my stance as a researcher and that of my participants. In conducting this study I have two distinct biases: 1. As a black male educator who is certified to teach 7-12 Social Sciences I work in the school district in which my participants work. I have been working in the capacities of student teacher, teaching assistant, high school boys’ basketball coach, and substitute teacher since August, 2007. In these “insider” roles I have had the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge and experiences that relate to black males who are teachers.

2. Working in the same district as all of the participants, I have previously come into contact with all of them through professional development engagements or sheer coincidence. Although I recognize my biases with regard to the subject matter I was able to be objective, as humanly possible, in the interpretation and analysis of the data. These

two biases assist in my deep and fraternal understanding of the data and thus being able to produce thicker and more meaningful findings.

Balancing the element of subjectivity in any research project is a challenge, but is a tension that can be very beneficial. As a researcher who is both a black male k-12 educator and one who works in the same district as my participants I have first-hand knowledge and details that could be dismissed as not relevant or useful in interpreting data on other black male teachers. All of which helps in understanding their stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss this tension regarding subjectivity utilizing what they refer to as “voice” and “signature”. Voice involves the researcher being able to write a report that allows them to provoke their own voice while simultaneously storying the experiences of the participants without overshadowing that of the participant. Signature has to deal with able to write a report that has balance when it comes to presenting both the contexts of the researcher and the participants. Neither should be canceled out by the other. (p. 147) Being attached to my participants fosters an enhanced understanding and familiarity with their voice and viewpoint. Narrative inquiry and its ability to empower participants as they story their experiences and perspectives affirms the reality that there are multiple ways of knowing, especially when it comes to highlighting teachers whose voices haven’t been captured in great detail in a meaningful way. (Lyons and LaBoskey 2002)

Theoretical Framework

In examining the multilayered lives and pedagogical practices of black male teachers this study will use the theoretical framework of critical race theory. Critical race theory (CRT) concerns itself with “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, CRT also examines the intersections of gender and identity in addition to the dimensions mentioned earlier. Clearly, critical race theory postures itself as an ally in the practice and project of empowering black male teachers to speak truth to their realities and rerouting the discourse on K-12 education from white-female hegemony to a more inclusionary dialogue involving both genders and all ethnicities. Among the small, yet growing body of work on black male teachers Lynn (2002, 2004, 2006; Lynn & Hassan, 1999) has established a concrete justification for CRT to be used as the theoretical framework by which to provide context and perspective in researching black male teachers. Considering that black males in general are disregarded in society and an anomaly in the K-12 setting in particular, using research methods that account for the socio-cultural aspects of race and gender is paramount. In doing so, using critical race theory for its ability to provide context in examining their experiences, attitudes and beliefs while peeling back the layers of complexity is central to producing research results that are profound, timely and worthy of future research. By focusing on seeing people through their own particular cultural lens a more contextual understanding of a group’s behaviors can be understood.

Chan, Flanagan, Hermann and Barnes (2015) and Chan (2010) demonstrate the ability of narrative inquiry in unearthing the layers of complexity by taking note of the tensions that arise in storying lives of teachers and how this further informs issues of curriculum, teacher practice and student-teacher relationships. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest certain groups, in this case black male teachers, are dealing with tensions that deal with power. These complexities that surface in interrogating the nuanced experiences of participants provide opportunities to delve deeper into their experiences. The difficulty in using narrative inquiry however, is in making sure there is balance in voice and signature between both the researchers themselves(s) and the participant(s). (p. 45) The value of narrative inquiry as a means to examine the nuanced experiences of black male teachers is that it provides a degree of agency in being able to empower these marginalized voices when it comes to exploring their experiences for "challenges and complexities, harmonies and tensions" involving intersections of culture, gender, ethnicity and power. (Chan 2010, p. 116)

Ethical Considerations/Informed Consent

The nature of qualitative research can be extremely personal as it can really delve into many aspects of people's lives. With this being said it was of the utmost importance that I considered the privacy and potentially sensitive nature of the participants. Being a black male educator, I recognized the rights of the participants and their vulnerabilities in participating in this study. As a marginalized group in the K-12 setting as well as society in general, I took important steps to protect their rights.

My relationships and conversations with the participants were as important as the interviews themselves. I approached my participants as a black male teacher wanting to listen to the voice and viewpoints of other professional black male teachers as well as having them serve as models of those that I wish to learn from and be able to access in the future when I encounter certain situations and need to seek counsel. These approaches empowered the participants to open up and share stories with great depth and substance.

Being a black male myself in the field of k-12 education my thoughts and actions are often guarded when it comes to sharing with others. This is due to the frequent misinterpretations or ignorance when it comes to understanding black male behavior and realities in a career field dominated by females and whites. I made sure that I did not question the truthfulness or authenticity of my participants' words. Doing so could be seen as not accepting or not enabling these black males to speak to "their" truths and perspectives from their own vantage point. My questions, essentially my follow-up questions, would frequently begin with me asking them if I am understanding their words and thoughts correctly and allowing them to either validate my understanding or provide more detail and clarity so that their input is not misunderstood. I did not approach any area of interest unless the participants identified certain areas as things they did not want to discuss. Nevertheless, they stated that they were all open to discuss anything I was willing to ask.

As a researcher a level of professionalism was maintained. My participants were pretty casual in their demeanors, but highly engaged with the subject matter and their

chance to contribute to the study. Given this was able to remain authentic and true to my natural mannerisms and behaviors that could be largely associated with black male and even urban culture. I felt that if I didn't reciprocate the same disposition and approach my participants would not be as forthcoming or willing to participate in general.

Safety measures that were taken were as follows: (a) participants were briefed on the nature of the study before participating, (b) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured, (c) approval was requested from the participants' school district, (d) participants' signatures were collected on university consent forms before participating, (e) participants' signatures were collected on their school district's consent forms before participating, (f) participants received written and/or audio transcripts of their interviews for accuracy in validation/member checking, and (g) participants' identities were kept confidential in the study by using pseudonyms.

Ethics and Power

Being a member of the group involved in this research study provided a great deal of proximity to the subject matter as well as the participants. Understanding that black males, like anyone else, can be guarded when it comes to their thoughts and feelings was an important thing for me to respect. What is more, I had to realize that they could be speaking very openly about their workplace environment and/or colleagues in ways that could leave them vulnerable to criticism. In developing, or continuing to develop and nurture in some cases, relationships I tried to create a spirit of comradery and brotherhood in our conversations. Our conversations would sometimes venture off into issues that were unrelated to their educational practice, but did speak to their experiences

as black men in American society. We shared stories of our upbringings, our interactions with other educational professionals, experiences of what we considered acts of both prejudice and discrimination, shared mutual levels of respect we had for people in the community and school districts. Along those similar lines we exchanged parallel and divergent views in areas of educational reform, politics and interestingly, different ways in which we grew up with regards to socio-economic status, geographical regions, parental involvement and much more.

Out of these conversations of which we shared time, a sense of bonding, brotherhood and fellowship emerged among many of the participants. This kinship allowed for the ending of our conversations in a kind of black male cultural show of kinship and respect resulting in an embrace involving a hand grasp and allowing one another to come in close enough to hug the other's shoulder with the other arm. These interactions not only served a purpose of allowing both participants and researcher to learn one another, but also fashioned an innate awareness amongst the participants that I not only respected their thoughts, but understood the sanctity of them sharing with me things that they consider sensitive in nature. Being able to let them drive the direction of those conversations fostered an atmosphere whereby these black male teachers felt empowered, but comfortable enough with me as someone doing an interview(s) who can ask questions that may challenge their comfort levels and allow me access to vulnerable thoughts and feelings that may not otherwise share with others. This trust in my professionalism and desire to acknowledge and honor their voices and viewpoints made it easier for our interviews to take place.

Sampling/Case Selection

The sampling method used for this study was purposeful sampling. Purposeful convenient sampling takes place when the researcher “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Black male educators from one school district, the largest and most diverse school district in a medium size city in a mid-western state, were chosen in an effort to gain access to participants who teach in an urban area. Because of the size of the school district it was anticipated that the participants will have varying backgrounds in terms of where they were born, raised, educated, etc. Participant had to be strictly black male educators that are classroom educators at the time of the study. No paraprofessional, administrators, or non-certified educational personnel were part of the study. Participants were chosen to participate based on if they self-identified themselves as black and male in addition to their potential availability for observations and interviews, perceived enthusiasm in participating in the study, and likelihood to be able to contribute towards the goal of my particular study without trying to change the study’s direction. Those that demonstrated the propensity to change the direction of the study were excluded from contention.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by first having the school district send out a notice that the study was being conducted along with information about the study and who to contact. Those participants who contacted the researcher were invited to participate in the study. Permission was then gained from the participant’s building principal to

observe the individual participants in their classrooms. Additionally, I anticipated that some participants would be referred by administrators, other potential participants in the study, other educational personnel, and by community members as exemplary teachers who would be good candidates for the study. Those potential participants were contacted and went through the same protocol as the other participants notified by the district. No monetary benefits were given for participation in this study. One interview was conducted outside of the classroom at a coffee shop. I did pay for this participant's parking meter and beverage after they voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Setting

The school district in located is located in a large city/metropolitan area in the Midwestern part of the United States. The school district is the largest and most ethnically diverse district in the state and serves over 51,000 students, of which 32% are Hispanic, 31% White, 25% African American, and the remaining population classified as multi-racial, Asian, and Native American. There are over 3,320 employees in the district with only 132 being African American. Over 73% of the student population qualifies for free and reduced lunch. The four year district graduation rate is over 80% (District website).

Data Collection

Multiple methods of data collection was used in this study. The purpose behind using multiple forms of data is that using a single form of data can produce flaws. Triangulation, as this is called, "involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). The methods of data

collection in this study were audio recorded semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and researcher reflective journal entries. All participants signed consent forms that inform them interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed before the interview started. Participants received an audio and/or written transcription of their interview. Interviews were scheduled based on the availability of the participants and lasted approximately 45 minutes to 3 hours depending on the responses the participants provided. Follow up questions were generated based on participants' responses.

Interview Questions

1. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
3. In your opinion, what skills to teachers need to have in teaching today's students?
4. Do we need more males and teachers of color in education? Why or why not?
5. As a black male teacher do you think you have any advantages or pressures because of your gender and ethnicity?
6. Do your life experiences influence the way you teach?
7. Do you think you have to communicate or teach differently to your white students and students of color?
8. What are your views on teaching students of color, especially males?

Observations

Classroom observations were scheduled and conducted based on the availability of the participants and permission of the building principals. These observations usually,

took place an hour before the interviews took place. I would ask the participant if there was a certain place they would like me to sit. Most of the time I was able to choose a spot in the back of the class away from the daily activities of the lesson(s), but in position to observe interactions and behaviors. Other times the participant had me sit at their desk. I recorded my data using an observational protocol. My observational data included times, body language, language, voice pitch, student-teacher and student-student interaction, classroom climate, behavior, class management, lighting, decorations, frequency of behaviors, etc.

Field Issues

No major challenges were encountered while conducting my observations or interviews. However, I did find myself wondering how my participants felt as I sat across from them. I wondered if they considered me as a “safe” person that they could trust with their professional and private thoughts. Additionally, I distinctly recall wondering if they see me as a peer and not some “outsider” who was just collecting information for no significant reason. These issues were my own personal “issues” that had nothing to do with being able to approach my participants and have them share their time, space, and perspectives.

Field Access

In the beginning of participant recruitment process I came across the challenge of being able to actively go out and solicit potential participants. I had asked for a list of all the black males in the school district who are classroom teachers. The school district was not willing to provide me this information. They did however; communicate to potential

participants who met the sampling criteria that a study of black male teachers was taking place, information about the study, and contact information if they were interested. The school district instructed me to wait to hear from potential participants and follow up with those who expressed interest. Once news about my study began to circulate I received notification from potential participants as well as recommendations from other educational personnel. Because I am a certified teacher in the school district I had no problems gaining access to school buildings to meet with participants. My name and credibility was sufficient to not garner any resistance.

Journal Reflections

After each observation and interview I wrote written reflections. These reflections centered on things that I observed, but failed to catch during the observation, emotions that I had, memories, relationships to my own previous teaching or personal experiences, and other reflective thoughts.

Validation

Validation strategies in qualitative research are often very specific to the different research methods being used. According to Creswell (2007), validation is more of a process whereby writers should apply at least several methods for their research to be authentic and trustworthy. Multiple forms of data to include interviews, field notes, and researcher reflections were used. By triangulating these forms of data we create rigor in data collection and analysis allowing the forms of data to corroborate one another. All participants were given an audio and written transcript of their interviews to perform member checking of their accounts. If there were any discrepancies found participants

were allowed the opportunity to provide clarity of their words. Rich and thick descriptions were given in the findings to give others a chance to formulate their own opinion of whether there is transferability of findings to different settings.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data was an on-going process throughout the analysis and report writing stages of the study. All six audio recorded interviews were transcribed manually. Each interview was analyzed for repeated words, phrases, and patterns. These single words and phrases were then collapsed into larger themes. Interview transcriptions were also coded using MAXQDA, an electronic software program. Both the manual and software coded data were used in addition to the observations and journal reflections when comparing the data against one another. The codes that appeared the most were kept. Each participant represents a particular case and therefore has its own specific themes. Additionally, Cross case analyses were conducted to highlight similarities and differences. Five distinct themes with subthemes emerged: (a) Black, male, and a Teacher; (b) I was the only black male; (c) I don't take no mess; (d) Role models; and (e) Female dominated and mostly white.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on outlining the research methods used in conducting this study. Procedures for data collection, purposeful sampling, and data analysis were provided. An explanation of the different research methods to be used was given while detailing my experiences navigating field and ethics issues, validation strategies, and

explaining the setting for the study. Last but not least, I highlighted the themes that emerged through coding for patterns and unexpected themes.

Chapter 4

Case by Case Analysis Results

Chapter Overview

This study was conducted to explore and examine the perspectives, experiences, and practices of black male teachers. Using purposeful sampling and having the school district send out a notification of my study to potential black male teachers I was able to identify possible participants. Using semi-structured one on one interviews I gathered and analyzed data for codes and themes. In this chapter I introduce each participant as a case with their own vignette and discuss their specific themes.

Table 1

Participant Demographics (at time of interview)

Pseudonym	Age	Endorsement Area	Teaching Level	Birthplace/ Raised	Years of Teaching
Mr. Grand	37	Elementary K-6	Elementary	Omaha, NE	4
Mr. Jones	34	Elementary K-6	Elementary	Omaha, NE	10
Mr. Patton	37	Social Sciences 7-12	Middle/Jr. High	Omaha, NE	8
Mr. Dillon	40	Math/Learning Disabilities 7-12	Middle/Jr. High	New Orleans, LA	11
Mr. London	33	English Language Arts	High School	Omaha, NE	2
Mr. Jackson	52	History/ Psychology/ Sociology	High School	Omaha, NE	18

Table 2

Individual Case Themes

Name	Themes
Mr. Grand	Being an exemplar Validation
Mr. Jones	Cultivation Accountability Support
Mr. Patton	Exclusion/Inclusion
Mr. Dillon	Called to teach
Mr. London	Making an impact I care Accountability
Mr. Jackson	Cultural relevance Valuing education Understanding

In the following pages I present a portrait of each individual participant followed by an analysis of the themes from their interviews.

Mr. Grand. Mr. Grand met me at a coffee house downtown to conduct our interview. I greatly anticipated our interview because we have had some previous interaction. To be candid he and I had taken education classes together at a local university. Mr. Grand is not the tallest individual in height, but his grasp of education and urban education specifically made him such a large and commanding individual, in my opinion. He stands but 5’6” or 5’7” and has a medium to heavy build. Always well-

groomed with a short brush cut and his mustache neatly trimmed, Mr. Grand speaks with great diction, poise, and thoughtfulness.

When it came to finding black male educators at the elementary level within the city my task was hard due to more black male teachers seemingly teaching at the middle high (7-8) and high school (9-12) levels. As word of my research study circulated throughout the teaching ranks I had many people tell me that I need to interview Mr. Grand. Upon meeting him for the interview I found myself in great anticipation for what he had to say. Both of Mr. Grand's parents were educators, very well known among African American folks, which had some influence on his desire to go into education. Both have their Doctorate in Education. Mr. Grand has undergraduate degrees in Black Studies and Elementary Education along with a Master's degree in Educational Administration.

In interviewing and observing Mr. Grand, a 6th grade teacher, several themes were specific to his perspectives on education and his pedagogical practice: being an exemplar, respect, making an impact, and limitations.

Being an exemplar. In American society black males have long had, among other things, the stigma of not possessing the ability to lead or manage without scandal, controversy, or otherwise. Now, there are generally the exceptions to the rule, athletes, entertainers, etc., but the average working black male is still largely perceived as being inept. However, in educational classrooms black male teachers provide models of exceptional ability with regards to instructional delivery, curriculum development,

classroom management, and overall educational leadership. Mr. Grand speaks to this truth:

I don't consider myself a Master Teacher because I can still learn so many things, but as far as an elementary classroom teacher I have always welcomed colleagues to come in. I don't withhold anything. I'm not writing a book, hiding secrets, not a hoarder . . . my room is your room. I take it as a leadership thing and I'm being a help to someone who doesn't have a mentor, things of that nature. I've had university students come in. I've never been asked to have a student teacher, but the principal would send students my way when University supervisors would ask to have them observe a class with good classroom management. I have prided myself on that. For a principal to recognize you as an example of a practitioner who has that, that's huge. It says you have mastered the concept of what makes a classroom successful and that's management.

Many African American male teachers serve not only as models for students, black and male in particular, but also for other teachers. In this regard, black male teachers provide examples of nurturing people, the kind of people that whose parents want to send their children students to in developing the whole child. They recognize the ability to not only provide effective instruction that leads to learning, but also realize the necessity of relating to the student(s) and provide emotional refuge to students who are in such need. This need is really heightened when it comes to groups of students who have historically been marginalized in society as a whole, but also in the micro-societies that exist in K-12 schools where ethnic minorities, especially blacks, have been treated, made to feel like or find themselves to be outcasts in foreign spaces where their voices, well-beings, and existence are not valued. Mr. Grand begins to discuss this circumstance in the following:

I attribute this to the way I have been treated as a youngster in church. Deacons or just people . . . you get to know somebody by talking to them. I want to get to know who you are because you look like me and vice versa. I want to be able to communicate with you. For me it's easy, where some teachers are just focused on

those in their classroom. For me, I made it a point to know every single black kid in that school. I had a lot of teachers who kind of looked down on me because I left Echo Elementary School. They said we need more black male teachers here at Echo Elementary School; there were paraprofessionals and many others. My daughter goes there, I truly love Echo Elementary School. It's just that presence was different from the others who also looked like me there, their approach and interaction was not like mine. I'm interpersonal. While they are African American they had the same effectiveness, it was something about the way I conducted myself at that school. The school community were already asking what grade does he teach and can I get my kid in Mr. Grand's room?! It was a matter of they need that so they can be successful and I got that . . . I understood that. Structure, building relationships . . . they just don't get that. We are talking older, middle, young ones they get eaten up and spit out!

Continuing within that same thread of exemplary practice exists the concept of universality. Black male teachers are human beings first. Therefore, our realities have commonalities with all people. Concepts of struggle, death, mourning, joy, hunger, etc. are experienced by all and impact all people in the same and similar fashions. As it applies to K-12 education, when students from different backgrounds sense genuine care and concern from someone, a teacher, they will affix themselves to that teacher who shares a particular experience that examines the universality that cuts across ethnic lines in educational classrooms:

This kid is white and is here and their mentor suggested that they transfer to my class. This kid had the best rest of the school year with me! It's nothing that I did . . . it was the relationship. When I see them in town they say, I was the best teacher for him and needed that structure you gave. This white female teacher took it negatively and not looking at it in the light of what is the best for the student. Not for your own ego. She didn't get that. Even now, she doesn't resent me, we still laugh, but I am faced with another colleague who can't handle one of our students and I now have that student. Now I have more kids than I should have because we are supposed to have an equal number of students. But I look at it as my principal values me and what I do. I don't need any accolades or anything. Accepting that leadership role has been helpful to me in validating what I am doing and I take pride in that. I've had minimal calls or texts from other staff when I was gone from the school and my students were acting inappropriately.

Validation. Feeling valued and having one's efforts affirmed is one of the best rewards one can receive. American history is replete with instances whereby blacks have not been given their just due when it comes to our involvement in all areas of human activity (medicine, legal system, housing, education, etc.). Nevertheless, K-12 education practice has been an area of practice where blacks have long served and have had their abilities celebrated. To this point, Mr. Grand provides an illustration of this affirmation:

I thought the principal I had with Mr. Cross, but Mr. Smith really forged who I am as a teacher today. The leadership and mentoring from Mr. Cross was incomparable, but the forging of Mr. Smith on me as a teacher right now he gave all of us the ability, freedoms of teaching to our strengths and Gallup this . . . what your core strengths what makes you who you are. He gave us that. The weirdest thing or oddest thing I am the only person of color at this school. There are male teachers, but I'm the only person of color. So within the constructs of male to female ratios of teacher and staff there are no people of color at this school. And yet I am respected and valued as much Mr. Smith and that something that speaks values of the culture of the school and the inclusive. That makes me that more comfortable to allow me to do what I am here to do which is teach, inspire and do those kinds of things.

Similarly, much of the most valued acknowledgement of teacher's contributions do not come peers or administrators . . . they come from students. Although they may not voice it at times in certain terms, but some will, students validate the efforts of many of their teachers on a daily basis. This validation is universal, but because of the unique position that black males are situated and situate themselves in America this confirmation, in many ways, is deeper and its meaning more substantive. Withstanding centuries of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse along with dealing with systems and structures of inequality while maintaining a belief and optimism in democratic practice, ideals, and a faith in one's fellow man only make the endorsement

black males receive in a professional sense even sweeter. Mr. Grand puts the appreciation in plain words:

It's something they can go from negative to positive in a matter of seconds by you just giving them your time. When they are sharing a bad situation and you just talk with them and their eye contact is on me . . . they are listening but they are looking at, Mr. Grand's hair just got cut, he has a tie on! They can tell you that, even though they were observing. It's something about the respect factor about you giving them your time.

Consistent with the unfortunate history and cultural practices of American society black males have had to endure the devaluation of their contributions as well as their existence. Although we have reached historical milestones to include those of former President Barak Obama and others we still find ourselves having to prove our abilities. However, for some that will never be enough. The constant attempts to cheapen and reduce our accomplishments in spite of great accomplishments are a testament to some of the ignorance that still plagues the American psyche. Mr. Grand captures this ugly truth in the following story:

Let me give you the bad. The first year we opened, I had a student that was affluent and they were of Lima School District and came to this school because it was the buzz around the neighborhood-at that time we were a Lima School District school. At open house, I was dressed up . . . the parents come in and they are asking me, "What is the curriculum?" I tell them it's Westside curriculum, etc. The mom says to me, "what are your credentials?" I said, "I beg your pardon?" because I had an African American parents who were a couple of feet away who I coached their son. I glanced out of the corner of my eyes the mom's expression like "no she didn't!" I said to the mom my credentials are that I am a 4th grade teacher here and this is my classroom, I was hired by Midwestern School District I'm not gonna tell you that I have two degrees. I have no idea as to what her intent was. Me being the nice person I am I was giving her the benefit of the doubt. She asked me how many years I have been teaching and I told her. Tyrie I was baffled! That incident circulated to all the other teachers! I didn't put stock into over reacting. I just said they are not used to African American male teaching . . . putting it in that perspective to my colleagues gave it more stock . . . We are still trying to prove ourselves that we belong here.

What Mr. Grand discusses here is the reality of what many black males have to face in having to constantly prove that they are capable in their efforts. Regardless of their credentials and experience many black males in general express frustration in trying to prove that they belong while often times being rejected.

Mr. Jackson. Mr. Jackson is 50 at the time of our interview. He was currently rehabbing from an Achilles tendon tear that he suffered while playing basketball. Standing 5'7" with a slim medium, but athletic build Mr. Jackson has been teaching for years. His age is exemplified by the grey in his hair and beard, but he moves with the energy of a man much younger. Of all the participants that I would interview for this study he was the one I was intrigued about the most. Not because he had done some miraculous things, rather due to his previous experience as one of the few black men who had been a boys high school basketball coach in the area and because he was the oldest interviewee in the study. He seemed to me to be the most eager and accessible of the six participants. I'm sure part of this was because of my longing to get to know about him. As a flawed human being and being guilty of prejudging others at times, I have apprehensions about being judged by older African American males who do not acknowledge the perspectives and lived realities of younger black males. I had always wanted to know what Mr. Jackson was about as I have seen him over the years. Seeing very few black male teachers had always caused me to wonder what each black male teacher I come across was like. Their individual stories, challenges, individuality, sense of purpose, identity, among other things.

As a married man and father of 3 children Mr. Jackson's entire journey into education began later in life than traditional educators. He played football at Upper Midwestern University from 1978-1981 and graduated in 1983. Mr. Jackson earned his credential in education from High Midwest University in 1998. Although educated in he is born and raised in Omaha and speaks with great pride in being so, particularly when speaking of his parents and their constant discussions about Omaha and the history of "black" Omaha specifically.

In interviewing and observing Mr. Jackson he exhibited several distinct themes that were unique to him: cultural relevance, valuing education, and understanding.

Cultural relevance. Being able to relate the curriculum to the students' frame of reference is a vital ingredient when it comes to student success. For African American students K-12 education has arguably left them on the margins of any discussion when it comes to highlighting the realities of their people. As a black teacher this is even more necessary. Mr. Jackson captures this sentiment in the following:

So, it's really different and we need, generationally, we need more people like us to tell those stories so kids can latch on to them a little bit better than if it were someone else!. Cause we are gonna talk about things in class that some other teachers aren't gonna talk about. I'm gonna talk about Claudette Colvin nine months from being pregnant she was Rosa Parks before Rosa Parks, but a lot of teachers and kids are captivated by that something that is important and we can make it important.

He goes on to discuss the need to have culturally relevant curriculum:

I think it's important from my perspective as an African American, a teacher I am going to tell the whole story. Not everybody looks at it that way. Some peers or students may think like that. Some may ask why is your teaching so race-based? I'm talking about the Civil War in a district that is 98% majority and here is a student who is uncomfortable with hearing about things that he had no prior knowledge about. Versus a 65% minority school here and you have kids who are

ready to listen to that same stuff! That difference /distinction sometimes is obvious. It's not a detriment or not something a positive it is something that is part and partial to the classroom environment every day.

Valuing education. Black folk have long known the value of education. Not that other groups do not, however, black slaves were forbidden by law to learn how to read in America. Black communities have long considered education to be the great equalizer when it came to making a better life for one's self and upward social mobility. For black male teachers it is crucial to promote a love and zest for learning and education as well as instilling the capability and desire to think critically. Many African Americans who came of age during the 1950s through the 1980s firmly grasped the weight of earning college degrees and more importantly, the necessity of passing this understanding on to the next generations of young black folk. Mr. Jackson draws attention to this point in the following:

My grandmother was an educator. Again, we need to impress upon young people today that being educated should be valued. A lot of our young people don't look at education at the K-12 level as being something. . . . THIS IS YOURS! This is something you have earned, that no one can take from you. They don't look at it like that. Once you go to college and get a college degree. That's something for your life so it has value. They don't give us degrees. I had to jump through a lot of hoops, a lot of people don't have to jump through hoops. Midwestern School District. We did. That's why I value it.

Continuing in the same frame of thought:

K-12 I was always a high achiever. My grandmother got her college degree, my paternal grandmother the same year my dad graduated from high school. So education from the Deep South dictionaries it was important to them for us to be education because neither my parents were educated beyond high school. For my grandparents, being educated was important.

Understanding. As an educator it is necessary to have a perspective towards students that is healthy, affirming, and uplifting. These teacher dispositions are crucial as

they set the framework for how we, as educators, work with students-especially in urban and low income settings. Being able to respond to the needs of today's students is a task that many cannot or choose not to undertake. Coming to understand and adapt instructional styles to students for the purpose of reaching all students is essential. Mr. Jackson speaks to this point:

I think we can find ways where everybody can learn. Most kids are not literate, they are not readers so I can't expect . . . I'm the mad scientists-trying to figure out how all of them can learn. It's my job to make sure all of them do. That's one of the things, I've seen about public education in the last 5-7 years a lot of teachers get fatigued so every kid can learn, and that's a sin in our industry. To teach in a manner that excludes a group of students is wrong. It shouldn't happen and it does. We live in a digital nation and world now and if a 14-18 year old kid can figure out how to function and operate a lot of the digital devices we have, they can learn. They can learn by watching a PowerPoint, by doing a worksheet. It's easy and convenient for people in education to say kids only learn in a certain way. To say they can't learn in a traditional fashion is not right.

Continuing on this point he illustrates:

I've always believe that every person has the capacity for expansive knowledge. No matter how much a kid reads how well a kid reads, the more that we are up in our classroom and we show the, we look them in the eyes and impress upon them that this is important to you, you should know this, we can make a difference in a kids' life, one kid at a time. We work with some kids that have some rough edges, but they never been in your classroom or your team and that's my opportunity as an education or adult to impress upon them that they have value and worth and they can learn and that's every day.

A key point to remember is that teachers are supposed to teach all students. Far too often teachers have a tendency to focus their efforts and energy on that "good" students, the ones that don't challenge authority, give no resistance to the teacher in any way, raise their hands all the time, etc. We teachers need to understand that all students' realities and lived experiences are not the same. Therefore, we have to extend ourselves, mentally, emotionally, and in terms of getting outside of our comfort zones to those

students who need our attention as well, arguably more than the “good” students. As a teacher in an urban school district, Mr. Jackson recognizes this need all too well as he addresses:

There is a criminal element in Main City and some of that is in our schools. I think sometimes when people feel threatened and know this kid or sibling . . . them saying something about them is a release. It doesn't make it right, but I think we need to understand and should understand that every kid has the potential to be a better student. It's up to us to sift through all garbage and get them to be successful.

He goes on to explain the outcome of a teacher providing care and outreach:

subtly I don't want to say people have concerns, but wonder why I can have the impact on a kid and they don't! Why is that kid compliant for you? Why does that kid turn in their assignments for you? Why does that kid like your class and may not like my class? So subtly it's there. Doesn't matter what the background of the kid is, but I think people scratch the side of their head and wonder what it is. What is it about you or me that have an effect and they don't have that same impact.

Mr. Grand identifies a dark, but realistic issue in k-12 education that some groups of kids do not receive the same attention and support from teachers. This challenge demonstrates the need to have a variety of teachers, not just those from one particular background. In having a diverse teaching force all students are more able to be served from multiple perspectives. Having different connections with different teachers enables students to be more successful.

Mr. London. I first encountered Mr. London by seeing him in the school where I did my student teaching. Mr. London is about 6'1", darker skinned, and of a slim build. His dreads and beard are always well maintained and groomed. He is always in a suit and tie, dress shirt and slacks, and/or a good sweater. In first hearing him speak he is extremely intellectual and calm in his demeanor. Mr. London is in his fourth year of

teaching. Being a married father of several children Mr. London comes from a strong background in education in that many in his family are educators. He has a brother in education and his mother is an extremely accomplished and well respected teacher/administrators, not to mention sometimes feared-but for all of the right reasons! I must admit I regard his mother as an exemplar when it comes to being a teacher/administrative leader and one of color.

Mr. London was born and raised in Main City and graduated high school from a private all male Catholic high school. Both parents being extremely educated, mom with her Doctorate in Education/Educational Administration and father with an advanced degree and certification(s) as well. Mr. London graduated from a private university in the midwest and earned his Master's degree in education from a private college in the same state. Being that Mr. London and I are in the same age range, mid to late 30s, both are members of black fraternities, as well as other connections, we have a great deal of intersection and overlapping perspectives when it comes to education, urban issues and circumstances concerning the realities of black men and boys.

While observing Mr. London several themes emerged: making an impact, I care, and accountability.

Making an impact. Particular to Mr. London's experience was the concept of making an impact on students. Consistent with many of the participants in other studies concerning black male teachers the idea of having an impact on student's lives really surfaced with Mr. London. Being able to connect with students in different ways that

enables students to connect with education and be successful beyond classroom walls

resonates loudly as he explains in great detail:

I have a kid in my class who really doesn't do much . . . he didn't do much. He got kicked out of another English teachers' class. His parents, he lived with his brother, relationship with his brother is not good, he makes him pay a substantial amount of rent like half to be there. This kid has to work all night and comes to school. When he comes to class he doesn't give a dam about class. It wasn't planned out, but one day I'm teaching and what was exchanged between him and myself in words I ended up moving him around the class in the front middle of the class. One day I said, "you know what I do is actually not easy, I put planning into it." I said "maybe it would help you to understand what your teachers have to go through for a day." He said, "hell yeah, I'd love to teach for a day." So here you go now a kid who doesn't give a damn about school, enthusiastically jumping up at an opportunity to teach. I sat there and stopped the class. I showed him the lesson plans the objectives. I said by the end of class this time you have to teach these kids the concepts. So I said, "now, class begins." That boy taught class, he taught class! And he taught class well, and he has been completely different. He has been coming to class and is completely different. I'm thinking to myself that is going to stick with him for life. I know it! This is why I work in education by the way, the impact right there, the kids. How you turn your back to that, you know?

Mr. London, as with many other teachers not just black male teachers, highlights the practice of paying forward one's willingness to help and be a positive influence on others. Being largely influenced by others Mr. London speaks very passionately of being impacted by previous black male teachers. In doing so he draws attention to the ability and position that black male teachers and administrators find themselves in by being able to leave lasting impressions on not just students, but also other African American education professionals. He cites a story surrounding the interview process when he started his career as an educator:

I remember when I got interviewed by the position, I was interviewed by my elementary school principal. James Fandon. Walked into the room to have an interview by Mr. Fandon. Knowing that I was interviewed by that man. I promised him you gonna stir some shit up! I got you. I wanna be just like him, quote me on that. Real talk, you talk about influences that black males have. Maybe I'm sitting here in this seat because he had such an impact on me! He was my principal when I was in elementary school. I have so much respect for that man. Even if it didn't click in back then. That period of innocence. The head man in charge is a black man. Maybe that influenced me a little bit. Man, I got so much respect for that man. I will never forget walking into that room at DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS and doing mass interviews. When you prepare for a big interview like that. For me interviewing for a job in education of course because my mother's in education. Like real talk, I prepared for this interview more than I interviewed for any other position. There were some people, don't worry you're gonna get the job . . . your mom . . . you will get the job because you're a black male, because your mom is who your mom is. I'm a tell you now, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart. You couldn't convince me of that. The night before, I was up so late studying interview question. I knew what I was wearing, I was so clean when I walked in for the interview. I was so fresh it was stupid. I walked in and James Fandon interviewed me. It was like all the stress just dropped off and we just got to stuff. The interview had the same vibe we have right now! That was amazing. I really think that subconsciously that had a huge impact on my decision to go into education. And I'm wondering if in many ways I am subconsciously paying it forward.

I Care. Teachers need to be able to be open enough to have very candid, honest, and direct communication with their students so that they can learn from, but also with their teachers. Black male teachers offer a unique set of realities and perspectives due to our similar and often shared experiences in teaching circles, but also in society as a whole when it speaking about daily life in the United States. Black male teachers are not the only teachers that care about their students, this is not my point. More so my point is that black male teachers offer ways of being that counter the plethora of stereotypical perceptions about black males in general. To have a black male teacher that demonstrates caring, holding students accountable, being able to nurture and discipline when necessary at the same time provide counter narratives to such negative thoughts

about black males. Additionally, offering these dispositions helps students, especially black and Latino, to feel included in K-12 educational settings. By expanding the frame of black reality, black male teachers serve the function of increasing the options of what black youth can strive to achieve rather than accepting the limitations that are attempted to be assigned to us. Mr. London underscores these circumstances:

I share my experiences. I had students ask me all types of things. That would blow you out of the park. I've been asked . . . not only am I a black male, let's be real-a black male with dreadlocks-think about what comes with that! Mr. London you high right now!? NO, I'm not high right now. "Mr. London, you gonna smoke when you get home?!" No, I'm not gonna smoke when I get home! "Mr. London you ever smoke weed?" I say to kids, let's be real -do you think it would be best if I smoked a blunt and then tried to come in here and teach you? You can't be scared to address real life issues with students. I'm not scared to do that. As a matter of fact I look forward to addressing real life issues with students because I know that they benefit from having a real life discussion with me versus having that real life discussion with some knuckle head who is a real life member of the Sorenos gang or MS 13. Because trust me. Those gang members out there, they are dying to have those real life conversations with those kids. Those kids need to talk to somebody. So, am I gonna say I'm not gonna talk to you about real life stuff or am I going to say we are going to address it? In my class we talk about real life stuff. I've had people misunderstand about what's been talked about in my class. I've had petty people, say hey you can't talk about this or that. Well, I'm gonna tell you right now, so long as I'm in education I'm gonna talk about whatever I choose to talk about. Parents entrust me to raise their child to be the best man and woman they can be, I'm gonna talk about what I want to talk about in my class. I treat each one of my students like they were my children, I really do. I want the best for each one of these students, whether they are black white Puerto Rican or Asian. I want the best for them. And it's those conversations, one on one conversations that they grow from . . . I've seen the growth occur. You have to give the kids what they want. Motivate them. I'm that teacher. They would be some kids distraught if I left Bravo High School! Of course I want to teach in Second City. It would make it easier for me, but these are my kids. I can't just leave.

Accountability. Ensuring students understand that they will be treated fairly is something that is important. Students, especially talking about ethnic minorities, really respect the fact that they will be treated just as anyone else whether or not they have

better or worse home conditions. To be on a level playing field and given the opportunity to produce just as everyone is something that many blacks have been suspicious of in society as a whole. Mr. London stresses his commitment to this concept in his grading practices and overall pedagogy. This life lesson is far reaching because it transcends the school-building as it follows students from his classroom throughout life. He maintains:

I pride myself in not treating one student a certain way. I don't do that. I don't treat black students differently than I treat the white students or Hispanic students. I don't do that. I know that there are other teachers who do. They will never fess up to that. But I know that they do. I do weird things as far as how I grade to ensure that I don't do that.

He goes on to further describe his stance:

I don't treat anybody differently. For example, there is this kid who I have a great relationship with. There's two kids I'm thinking about. They went from skipping school all the time doing the wrong thing. I just tell them that if you just come to school and do the right thing you can pass a class, but when it comes down to it, hell if you didn't earn it and didn't pass the class then you fail. So what am I supposed to do? If you don't come to class you fail. You still fail. Take this as a lesson. Now next semester you are in my class you need to step your game up. I failed two students who just knew they were going to pass my class. And it hurt my heart to say "hey, but you an F. You didn't do what it took to pass." What am I supposed to do? Behind closed doors say, "here's a little something extra for you. There you go." I've heard of numerous teachers, some said, "just pass'em Mr. London just pass him." That's not gonna be me. I'm be a by-the-book kind of person. When people talk about my mom and how she act. They say one thing about her is she by-the-book, by-the-book. I'll ask, what am I supposed do about this situation? She'll say "Mr. London, why are you even asking? What's the handbook say?" It doesn't matter what kind of relationship we have, if the handbook says that if you bring a knife to school you get expelled. You have earned yourself an expulsion. What's there to talk about? Love you like a play cousin, but this is what the rule says. And that's what the rules are in my classroom. You get the grade that you earn. All I do is document your performance. We can be cool, but at the end of the day I'm gonna do my job.

Mr. London expresses his stance on being objective and student accountability in a very matter of fact manner. His approach demonstrates his commitment to being a good educator because of his integrity rather than if he is accepted or liked by his students and/or colleagues.

Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones is a veteran teacher of ten (10) years. Born and raised in Main City he grew up in a low income neighborhood in one of the city's housing projects. While growing up he was raised by his mother and his grandmother who were very strict. I was visiting my Godmother one day at a local elementary school during the process of considering participants for my study. As we talked one day during one of her smoke breaks she had told me that there was a black male that taught elementary grades there where she works. I promptly hurried to the main office to politely ask the secretary if they had any men of color that teach at the school. The secretary said that there was with a great deal of pride, that they did indeed have a black man at their school who teaches! As she gave me his name and room number I began to picture what this teacher would like. Tall, deep voice, suit and tie, older gentlemen with glasses was my perceived vision. To my surprise Mr. Jones was almost nothing like my prejudgment. He was a shorter man of normal build about 5'5", mid-thirties, a hint of balding in his hair, very low cut beard, blue slacks, blue dress shirt with a tie, and a dark blue sweater. I introduced myself with a sense of happiness and surprise in that I had found at least one other black male who taught elementary school. However, what was peculiar in this greeting was the fact that I had seen Mr. Jones before at the school, but did not consider

him to be a teacher when I saw him with a class of students playing outside for recess. I had always subconsciously thought of him as a paraprofessional rather than a certified teacher.

After formally introducing myself and explaining my project to him he was eager to participate. I got this sense of Mr. Jones to be very opinionated and not shy at all about expressing his views on education and sharing his experiences. We scheduled an interview during the day when his students spent time with another teacher. The day of the interview I arrived a little early and observed while he finished a math lesson in his classroom. His classroom management was outstanding. Children were on task, knew class procedures, and most were engaged and on-task. The ones that weren't were redirected and addressed with clarity, specificity, and with at times with a firm tone of voice. His class was neat and orderly with a very welcoming atmosphere, but with the understanding that learning and participation were the expectations and playing around would not be tolerated.

Our interview felt like a casual conversation between black men in education who shared a deep and profound desire to describe experiences and perspectives while at the same time offering possible solutions to realities that both black male teachers are confronted with and the issues surrounding teaching black students. Mr. Jones had distinct themes of cultivation, accountability, and support.

Cultivation. Mr. Jones speaks to the importance of guiding black male students as a critical aspect of his teaching in the following:

We know at 4th grade statistically they say black children particularly boys you can figure out which way they are going to go. That's the age they suddenly start

being able to make decisions, figure out things. By high school I think you either have it or you don't. Even now with the kids I have, some of these boys think I'm going to high school and get drafted by the NBA! I never crush their dreams but I ask them what if they don't make it to the NBA? Or if you do make it, you are going to know how to read/count that contract. You're gonna need some social skills if you can't sit or stand correctly and represent the face of the franchise. I think we do a disservice to our children . . . as teachers we are battling so many other obstacles. The house, media, sensationalization of sports and things like that. The last thing some of them are thinking about is education. Those behaviors get worse to the point . . . and we know if you can't read and write by 4th grade things get tougher and if not by high school you drop out because you can't sustain. Many of our black men are not finishing high school.

Building on the area of cultivation he goes on to discuss the limitations of the influence of positive cultivation:

Being consistent and loving and nurturing. Being there to talk with/to them and just being present. There's no magic bullet for that, but those are some of things. Knowing what you are up against. I realized that I can only do so much day in and day out. Because when they get home even if I have reached them, everything I did teach them if nobody is their cultivating them, backing up what I said then everything is going to be lost.

In this thought we see the importance of having both teachers and parents working in tandem to help the child.

Cultivating educators. Teachers in general have been able to gain entry into administration and other positions largely due to other educational professionals providing them support in many forms. This goes for black teachers as well. Because of the inequity in terms of power when it comes to people of color having less influence in K-12 education (in many cases) when compared to whites blacks are at a disadvantage. With regards to this specific school district there has been a rich practice and history of black teachers and administrators helping black teachers to climb the ranks in education. These efforts involved recommending them for higher positions, opportunities, providing

access to information and decision-makers, etc. Mr. Jones expressed his perspective on such historic practices:

I go to church with Dr. Benson. This man is retired and he don't have to do that. Current people in leadership positions they hardly utter a word. I don't understand that. Because they couldn't have gotten there without Alice White, Mr. Cross, and Mr. Benson. When I go for a recommendation they have never hesitated . . . they get it!

However, those practices may have dissipated in recent years for younger black teachers who aspire to move out of the classrooms into administration. Speaking to the point of experiencing a lack of mentorship from veteran black administrators he asserts:

They aren't cultivating us . . . I don't see that from our black administrators, not across the board, but I don't see it where our black administrators are helping us get to take the next step. It's funny because I see it from the other people.

He goes on in further detail:

Several reasons, 1-you don't have that black support from black administrators who are high up. When I started out at Echo Elementary School Mr. Cross he . . . before I graduated from college, he told me I was going to student teach here at Echo Elementary School! Him and Jack Jensen and those teachers Mr. Jackson Fandon. . . . They got it. They were recruited from the Bravo High School . . . they mentored and recruited those other teachers. They cultivated this generation. So that you don't have to worry about where you are gonna go . . . we already prepared your spot. I don't see them doing that anymore. I don't see that networking.

Accountability. Examining the concept of accountability was something that resonated with Mr. Jones. In my observations and our interview the idea of having students do as they are told and to not disrespect adults got my attention. Although it was not one of the more profound and booming codes or themes that emerged I could tell that this was something Mr. Jones really cared about as indicated:

Some of these parents will take their child's side, defend your child, but when you know your child is in the wrong, and its school you got to hold them accountable.

I see a lot of kids not being held accountable for their actions. And that's the challenge . . . these kids aren't used to being held accountable, when you hold them accountable they want to block that, they ready to mumble and I stay consistent, NOPE! I don't even yell at them! Sometimes you want to be liked, but at the end of the day, I figure kids want structure-like the ones who rode my butt, but those are the ones I remember.

Support. One of the more prevalent individual themes that surfaced with Mr. Jones was the matter of support. Some students have a support system at home that teaches and reinforces values that are congruent to school values. This form of cultural capital serves to enable those students to be successful in school and life in general. Often times, not exclusively, many black students lack this cultural capital entirely or to an extent that negatively impacts their ability to feel comfortable in a setting where they don't see the connection and importance of education.

As a black person working here at a predominantly black school I see the challenges, but I see the odds that are against these kids! Some of these kids are not, they don't have the support, the spiritual support. So I think to myself the odds were against me, but I had someone in the house saying, this is what you are gonna do, you aren't gonna do this and that's it. I had a mother and my grandma. My mother and grandmother worked so well together because if my mother told me to do something, I did it . . . You see sometimes if you have that family support that is your checks and balances because there is some teaching going on at home. There are some things I can't teach these kids that they have to get at home, but if you don't have that where are you going to learn it.

Equally as important, they often don't have as many cultural navigators and chaperones to assist them in understanding how to make sense of their K-12 settings where there are rules, hidden curricula, and a plethora of obstacles that they will have to learn how to deal with to be successful. This is not to say that black students' experiences are all negative or challenges. As we know there is not one monolithic black experience in any area of life. Nevertheless, black students, in addition to black male educators, lack the backing

from peers, K-12 as an institution and other entities that can serve as advocates for success. When black students do have these elements they thrive. Speaking to this point he maintains:

It's funny now that I'm a teacher in MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT I run into all my teachers all the time even though they retired. 7th and 8th at Charlie Junior High School a security guard Mr. Charles, a black man, he was nice and stood out. I had a good time at Charlie Junior High School. Then in high school I had Mrs. Downing, Mrs. Ellis my English teacher was good. I was bused all throughout I went to Zulu High School. Those three teachers and they all had different qualities. I remember Mr. Sanders because he was my first black male teacher for Black Studies. But I remember Mr. Handle from Weight Elementary School who was a black teacher he was a 6th grade . . . I never had him, but I remember it being really odd because I never seen black teachers. We had 3 at One Way Elementary School Mrs. Henderson, Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Channing. But they all stood out for different reasons. Mrs. Downing . . . always riding my butte no matter what. I had a habit of running in the hallways going to my locker and they were always on me.

Mr. Jones stories here reflect a very important point regarding the impact of having black male teachers. Although his black male teachers were not only in k-12 education, but in higher education as well he demonstrates a profound connection to those teachers. While he remembered them for different reasons their presence in his life resonated loudly in helping him through certain situations and providing guidance and counsel in both educational and matters of life in general.

Mr. Patton. I didn't know what to expect when I met Mr. Patton. It had taken me some time to locate middle school teachers who were black and male. Much like any research project word travels when you have a subject that people are interested in being involved with. An educational administrator has mentioned to me that there was a black male teacher at Charlie Junior High School. Middle School I could contact.

Consequently, this particular middle school was a school that I had respectfully declined a teaching position with due to being accepted into my doctoral program in education. Needless to say I was very intrigued in meeting with Mr. Patton up here seeing as he was the individual that was hired in lieu of my having to decline. I was sure they hired a quality educator.

Mr. Patton had agreed to meet me and conduct an interview during one of his plan periods. I arrived early and sat in the back of his class while he finished off a lesson. His class was neat and organized and the students participated. The way in which they participated in the class activities spoke to the established rules and procedures that had been in place.

Mr. Patton is about 6'2" light skinned, slim to medium build and wears a goatee. As we introduced ourselves I had asked him about his last name and some other people who had the same last name. He was related to these individuals and we continued our conversation. While we were getting set up a student had come in very disturbed about a disciplinary issue. Mr. Patton handled the situation with the ease of a veteran who knows their students. He calmed the student down while also getting them to acknowledge their role in being disciplined and that they would discuss the matter further at a later time. The student was a white female, but the ethnicity didn't matter in this case. It was strictly student-teacher.

Exclusion and inclusion. Mr. Patton's single most important theme centered on the issues of exclusion and inclusion along with ethnicity. Ethnic minority professionals in K-12 education in this school district are not well represented in terms of pure numbers

or percentage of staff. Such issues involving fear of black male teachers being around white female students and staff have been long been discussed among African American teachers and administrators in this school district, dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. Many minority professionals have aspirations of becoming administrators, but the reality of glass ceilings, nepotism, and racial hiring and promotional practices linger. Mr. Patton provides commentary on these issues:

I felt for a long time that there's been a good old boys club here at Charlie Junior High School. This goes back to when Susan was the principal and Dr. Dudley was the athletic director assistant principal. All the teachers and coaches that were around for while were part of his club and it was very, very difficult for anyone to break into that club. I think it's still that way. We have another minority teacher here he is Asian but he kind of feels the same way. He and I had talked about some of the same things that have gone on with him and with me that don't happen with other people. I don't know how you change any of that.

The concept surrounding what demographic concerning students are tracked into certain categories of classes is one of great concern. Black male overrepresentation in special education classes and a lack of representation in upper level (honors or advanced placement) courses, particularly males, has not escaped Midwest Public Schools. Furthermore, there aren't too many African American teachers teaching honors level courses. This reality is alarming as it speaks to questions of ability and student success to name a few. On this issue Mr. Patton explains:

And if you look across the district and see who is teaching honors level classes it is not African Americans . . . in almost any subject. Very few African Americans are teaching honors level sizes in any building. If you look at who is in honors classes you are seeing fewer and fewer minority students. I think if you look at this entire year all of the students that I've recommended for honors classes there are zero African American males not one and I think I have about a half a dozen black females I have a lot of Latinos but that's because our Latino population at Charlie Junior High School is growing. But we are seeing an increasing number

of African American males in special education classes and resource classes and a decrease in honors classes.

Lastly, Mr. Patton outlines one of the differences in approach when it comes to teaching and guiding children that exists between white and black parents in his experiences and opinion. What this point highlights, arguably, is the issue of discipline along with the issue of black male involvement at home or in a student's life. To this point he emphasizes:

Black parents want me to be harder on their kids than white parents. I've had black mothers tell me flat out "If you need to sign something I will sign it. If my kid steps out of line knock his ass out." I've never had a white parent say that. You tell a white student for example that they are dressed funny and they'll make a phone call!

Although Mr. Patton is very short and selective with his words he does shed some light on the issue of culture as it relates to parental guidance or child-rearing. This difference and others similar to it serve as a careful reminder of the diversity that exists not only amongst different ethnic or social groups but that there are also differences within the groups themselves. Further, as it relates to educational practice this is noteworthy as it serves as a cautionary reminder that culture should be considered, in some ways, when issues of school discipline surface and interpreting student behavior.

Mr. Dillon. I had no idea of who Mr. Dillon was, but he was one of the most recommended participants for my research study. I sent out an email to him to gauge his interest in my study, but also decided to go meet him in person. While in the hallway at his school someone pointed me in the direction to where I could find him and my eyes soon found a tall, dark-skinned black male with a groomed beard and brush cut to whom

many kids were acknowledging in some way or another as they passed him. I knew this was Mr. Dillon. We introduced ourselves and he communicated a total willingness to participate in my study. Mr. Dillon has a very composed and stature while also possessing a disposition that commands one's respect. In keeping with his appearance he projects an eminence and strong sense of integrity as exemplified by his dress of shirts and ties. Characterized by a very tempered and steady speech along with the persona of older men of wisdom Mr. Dillon could be thought of as one of the "elders of the village" that is referred to when speaking of those African descent.

Mr. Dillon has been teaching for 11 years. As 1 of 3 children, Mr. Dillon speaks highly of his parents. His father worked for decades for the city. Attending one of the respected high schools in his neighborhood he went on to attend the Deep South University to study engineering. After some challenges and refocusing on his education he graduated and eventually married his wife who would go on to earn her Ph.D. in Psychology. Earning his teaching credential at a local university Mr. Dillon teaches at a middle school where he teaches a well sought after class that impacts those that have an interest and passion to think critically and be creative. He is well respected by his peers, administrators, and students as evidenced by the passion, energy, and enthusiasm with which people speak when discussing Mr. Dillon.

Called to teach. Mr. Dillon's specific individual theme centered on having been called by God to teach. Being an educator was and is still, to some degree, regarded as a highly respected vocation among black folks. Many of these black teachers during this time frame had a strong connection with faith, religion and/or the institution of the

church-historically, one of the strongest remnants that has survived amongst blacks here in what is called America since the atrocity of American slavery. Mr. Dillon testifies to his calling in the following story:

I always tutored at Deep South University and Las Vegas. I met this guy who was retired Air Force and he had a private academy in black Las Vegas off his money! Awesome couple, he and his wife. I had an epiphany this one Saturday, his mom came in crying this one gang banger. She was thanking me for working with her son. “He made his first D, this boy had always made Fs” in math of all things, “he said he is gonna try to do better in his other classes.” He got all his grades up across the board, and I felt like this is where it’s at! I prayed on things that night . . . a Friday night. God told me he needed me to teach.

Further, he clarifies his current motivation and stance as he continues to teach:

It was a spiritual decision . . . God told me he needed me to teach. It’s the thing about spiritual and secular. I was told to teach and I’m just keeping it right there. I’m a teacher . . . I’m an educator. This is my 9th year. This is it, this is my calling. If I’m not here look for scratch marks on the wall, I’d be kicking and screaming!

In providing a very brief analysis of Mr. Dillon’s individual themes we can see that he projects a deep and strong religious connection to his vocation as an educator. He highlights the fact that many teachers, not just black and male, have their own particular reasons to why they become educators. Whatever their motivations for going into k-12 education are these inspirations help fuel their educational practices and help shape their educational identities and relationships with colleagues and their students.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I detailed each participant and their background information. Specific themes and analysis were provided to outline their particular perspectives and practices. Each case highlighted the variety in experiences, backgrounds, and viewpoints

amongst the participants. All of the participants that were interviewed shared their own particular voice and viewpoints as well as possessing their own individual lives.

Although they all self-identify as black males and share some of the same experiences that come to characterize the daily lives of black male teachers, they also have markedly different experiences that shape their teacher knowledge and pedagogical practice. Each participant has their own 'story' to tell, but at the same time each participant contributes to the collective experience and reality of black male teachers. These individual portraits help position black male teachers in a manner that is genuine to their own lived experiences. Additionally, although they may have same or similar areas of interest and experience black male teachers still stand with and apart from their colleagues because of the intersectionalities of 'race', gender and power and how these dynamics operationalize themselves on a daily basis in k-12 buildings.

Chapter 5

Cross-Case Themes

This study explores and examines the specific experiences, perspectives, and classroom practices of six African American male K-12 teachers. Whereas the previous chapter presented vignettes of the participants to provide an understanding of who they are, the following chapter unpacks the overlapping views of six participants in the study. Five different emergent themes of black male-teaching, being the only black male teacher, role models, being both a self-described and seen as a disciplinarian, and gender and cultural issues surfaced that highlight the challenges, practices, and strivings of black male teachers. I unpack and discuss the nuances of teacher knowledge and experience within these themes and subthemes using the stories provided by each participant.

Table 3
Cross Case Themes

Theme	Highlight
“Where are All The Black, Males?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lack of ✓ Filling a Void ✓ Relating/Relationships ✓ How Black Males are Seen/See Themselves
“I Was the Only Black Male”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In Teacher Preparation Programs ✓ In the school-building ✓ The first and only black male teacher in their K-12 experience
Role Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All Kids ✓ Black Kids ✓ Being black doesn’t guarantee acceptance from black kids
“I Don’t Take No Mess”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Managing the classroom ✓ Being the disciplinarian
“Female Dominated and Mostly White”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “Teaching is such a gendered profession” ✓ White Privilege and limitations ✓ Stereotypes and Biases ✓ “It’s not only racial, but it’s social”

“Where are All The Black Males?”

Lack of

All six participants clearly identified a dire need for more black males in the classrooms. In conducting the interviews they all spoke with passion and excitement in describing their experiences in getting certified to teach and how they wanted to make a difference in the lives of kids, especially young black males. Additionally, they all referenced how black kids, “don’t see enough of us in the field of education” so that these same black kids can strive to for better futures. Every participant, was shocked that the number of black males teaching locally and on a national level was so low. One participant, Mr. Jones, expressed the need for more black male teachers, but painted a very solemn forecast:

Our children need us, you’re a male so you are even more valuable to the profession. So I don’t know why that hasn’t taken shape or form yet, but there needs to be something I don’t see a lot of black males coming to education.

Another participant goes on in great detail in voicing the efforts and future attempts that need to come about in order to attract and retain more black male teachers:

When I was at MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY they had a partnership with MIDWEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS . . . the Ethnic Immersion in Education Internship Program? That program was really good because it allowed people like myself to go into the schools and work and get paid and do my craft. It was very student friendly. I do think they need more programs for black males, particularly because black males black people in general who are going to college aren’t going into education. If they are they are not focusing on elementary education or focusing staying here in Main City. I know MIDWEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS has lost so many black men and women to Texas, down South, west coast, and east coast. I don’t understand why there aren’t more programs to recruit more black male teachers. I think you need a black male program to recruit black men coming out of the college to say, Hey look at going into education.

One of the participants talked about his frustrations about the lack of representation in teaching math, a very tough to fill teaching subject:

Just from math, when I go to science curriculum days it was me another female, but she's no longer with the district she's in Chicago. Everybody else is white male or female. When I went to math curriculum days it was me this guy from Alpha High School for a while I don't know if he's still with the district. There's a brotha with Helo Junior High School and a young sista maybe at Helo Junior High School and another young sista at Juliet Junior High School . . . that might be it. No, Dedra Smith at India Junior High School. Maybe five African American teachers in math. Two brothas. Yes, we are underrepresented.

One participant in particular, Mr. Grant, whose family is very well known in the city as educators, was discouraged by lack of representation that black teachers have in acknowledging their existence in some regards:

When I look at these publications by the NESA on the back there is always a family of teachers. . . . I have yet to find one that shows an African American family of teachers. There are not a lot of black teachers, but families of black teachers do exist. They exist! Where are the people of color!? Yes black males, but where are the minorities? As a black teacher, male or female, I'm always reminded of they we are still in the minority.

Frustrations with lack of black males in the teaching field was displayed by all six participants in both the verbal exchanges during the interviews, but also in body language, gestures, and breathing noises.

Filling a Void

Every participant in the study commented on the need to step in and provide some form of mentorship or other role for kids who don't have a father figure. As stated,

for a black male teacher in that situation it's a golden opportunity to be that teacher. I'm not talking academically I'm talking about socially . . . you are the therapist, mentor, and father almost. Even if they have a dad you are the one if something happens with another student you're the one they can go to that they trust.

Of the many roles that black male teachers play in the lives of many, not all, black males is that of a father figure. Mr. Patton describes:

It's hard because I said parents (plural) and in the African-American community you have a high number of single-parent families. I read something I can't remember where but basically a man said "I would never go to a Reverend, a male lawyer, a male doctor, a male scientist, a male anybody, to teach my daughter how to be a woman because it's impossible for them to ever know so how on earth is it possible for a woman to teach a boy how to become a man? She doesn't know. She'll have her ideas of what it should be what it could be but her ideas are based on the biases that she has a lot of which have been formed because of her dealings with men. A boy can only become a man by watching a man and be a man and that is with all of his faults and failures and successes and achievements and as long as we are in this society where we have single mothers raising boys more than we have men raising boys-this will be the outcome.

In his opinion, Mr. Patton is describing how black male teachers assist black male students in understanding what it means to be a young black man.

Relate

One of the strongest subthemes that materialized was relating or relationships. All six participants spoke heavily on the relationships that they have with students, particularly African American, but also expressed their views on the relationship(s) between ethnic minority students and white teachers. In addressing these issues one participant put it very clearly by saying: "They don't see a relation between themselves and the curriculum. They don't see a relation between themselves and their teachers. Ultimately, what will help students, not just students of color, will be to have more black males in education." As a black male yes I have gone through different experiences than a white women have gone through .but often times . . . black males are going to be misunderstood and discriminated on by society in certain ways. So I have those experiences. So they (black kids) may have those same frustrations and they want to talk

about that. We can relate and that fact in the fact that we talked about those things. I'm thinking about comments that I've made to my students that come to me quite often. I'll say to my students, "Look at me, take a good look at me. I'm nothing more than an older version of you."

In addressing the issue of establishing relationships with students as a black male teacher compared to some of his white peers one participant answered very directly:

You're asking me do I have a better relationship with these students because I am a black male? I'll say this, this is what comes to mind. There are some things that I can get away with saying in the classroom because I am a black male that my colleagues, who are white women, cannot say. There are so many things that I can say or address. For example, I had kids try the same things on me that we will try the other teachers and I'll look at them and should probably say professionally, "hey, we shouldn't say that." They'll say 'Mr. London I don't appreciate what you just said, that was racist.' Professionally I should probably say I apologize. I'll look them in the eye and tell them, 'don't try that shit with me, you know?' And there is nothing else to discuss! I say all types of things to my students that maybe I probably shouldn't say, but at the end of the day, its things that students need to hear. They truthfully need to hear.

Mr. London is speaking to what he feels is a deeper connection with some students to where he can go a little further in what he is allowed to do as an educator because he has some tools in his teacher toolbox as a black man. These tools enable him to reach kids using atypical language or methods to get their attention and focus.

Other participants articulated a similar stance in discussing the ability to establish more fruitful relationships. In this sense, one participant highlights shared and/or similar experiences as a black male with some of his students that permit him the ability to go beyond standard practices in K-12 education:

As a black male yes I have gone through different experiences than a white women have gone through but often times . . . black males are aware client to be discriminated on by society in certain ways. So I have those experiences. So they

may have those same frustrations and they want to talk about that. We can relate and that fact in the fact that we talked about those things. I'm thinking about comments that I've made to my students that come to me quite often. I'll say to my students, "Look at me, take a good look at me. I'm nothing more than an older version of you."

While some participants established a strong position that being an African American male teacher facilitates them being able to establish these esoteric relationships other participants take a lighter stance. This divergent stance is one that is more neutral in terms of ethnicity and gender as Mr. Dillon explains:

Let your general love and desire to educate . . . let that be. . . You don't have to be "down" "hood." If those students see that you are genuinely concerned about their education they will love you. I can relate a little bit more . . . if she's there blonde blue eyed western Kilo and I am there interacting with them. Then there's me. They may not be able to talk to her because just looking at her they might feel that she doesn't know their situation. Where they will talk to me because I look like them and we can get started. You can tell something about people in how they presented themselves. We all have something to offer, just so long as it is sincere.

Another participants are a bit more in your face by stating emphatically, "they want black males because in many ways we offer different perspectives, we relate to the students in a COMPLETELY different way." Along the same lines one participant made a more biased comment:

A lot of teachers are hesitant to try different strategies to win over black students-male students. I think a lot of it is because of their backgrounds. I think if you come from an all-white city you can't relate to black people because you never had to. That's the reality of it. It's uncomfortable for some of our peers (whites) to come to us and say, 'I see you talking in the hallway with him and shaking hands every day . . . why?' They think they can chizzle through all of that concrete by themselves and they can't. We (black male teachers) can relate. . . .

Similarly, another participant talked about an incident with a white female colleague of his:

I'm thinking of an incident that occurred where a colleague and I had a different of opinions and there were words exchanged I'm never one to disrespect anybody . . . that's not my style. But this colleague had made it very very public that she doesn't care for me and that's based on her off own immaturities and insecurities. I found it very interesting that she approached me the other day and despite that tension between us she came to me and said, "I'm having difficulty with a student in my classroom can you give me some suggestions on what I can do?" It actually moved me in a way that she came and asked me. I kind of smiled inside and said to myself, "gees lady, you talk so bad about me behind my back, I hear the things that you say, yet you are sitting here asking me for advice. You've been teaching for 15 maybe 20 years and I'm only a second year teacher and you're asking me for advice on how to deal with a student?" A white woman who wanted advice on how to deal with a young black male. What ended up happening was she asked me if I would talk with the student. I arranged to have lunch with the student, we sat down and he explained to me what his problems were with her. And we had a heart to heart conversation and I could go into detail and explain to you what was said in that conversation, but I can say there hasn't been a problem since.

In this case the participant was viewed as an exemplar of how to deal with ethnic minority children even though, as mentioned, she and the participant had strong disagreements.

Often times it is a combination of the approach of the educator, their ethnicity, and gender that allows a great relationship to form as indicated by Mr. London:

You see people need to be so aggressive with the kids and trying to down them. You know, I got kids around here that listen to all kinds of things I don't care for . . . Webbie and Lil' Boosie and all that stuff . . . I don't care for that stuff! But that opens the door for great discussions and the type of discussions that I like to have within my classes. So we start talking about Hip-Hop and rap music and what makes good Hip-Hop music and rap music. They don't even know! But they will listen to Webbie! So I'll ask them, "have you listened to songs by Mos Def, Talib Kwali, Black Starr, Tribe Called Quest . . . have you listened to real Hip-Hop music?!" The kids don't even know what it is. So that's ok, I got you . . . I got you! So Friday when we work on our class project I am going to play Midnight Marauder- Tribe Called Quest album for you, ok. I got every kid working as productive as they can be and head nodding like, "Gee Mr. London are you kidding me!?" I'm like this is real Hip Hop music. So not only am I making you smarter in regards to the curriculum and state standards, I'm making you a better

person because I got you listening to real music and not that trash. You don't have to listen to stuff talking about I'm gonna make your white T-shirt turn red, I'm gonna shoot you in your head, blast you, and fuck your wife, nawwww man! Stop listening to that, listen to something that talks about stuff, make yourself better man, treat your woman with respect, you know. I'm working on the all-around person. And when you do that that becomes so, I can only speak for myself, it makes me feel so fulfilled as a man, educator, that's why I find it hard to leave to education.

The ability to use cultural productions, such as music, to open avenues for discussion

Mr. London shows how to connect with students in a manner where the student has some voice in the conversation and their viewpoint is acknowledged. In his opinion,

Mr. London suggests he is using their interests as tools to assist him in developing them as better young men and women.

How Black Males are Seen/See Themselves

Five of the six participants expressed a specific concern for how black male teachers are seen or how they view themselves. What is more, they also commented on why it is important for other students, particularly ethnic minority kids, to see black male teachers differently, essentially because, "We need more black teachers because we need to express and show all students and maybe specifically black students that being educated is important." Participants communicated that in the school environment providing different portrayals of black men is crucial. Participants also referenced the harmful images that students, those of color in particular, are bombarded with in the various forms of media and in real life settings. As Mr. Jackson provides:

If you ain't trappin (selling drugs) or throwing or bouncing a ball it's hard to reach them. It's almost like you have to against the grain to get their attention. If I came in here with my pants sagging and talking any old way I would get their attention. But I would be just like their cousin, uncle or someone else. But if I came in here professionally dressed and conducting

myself professionally . . . it's a slow process to change what they may normally see.

Modeling alternative ways of black manhood other than many of the negative, off-putting, or glorified criminal images that they can negatively be exposed to in their everyday lives is important because, "When you are minority teacher and you have an impact on those who look like you . . . because these children who look like you could one day replace you or go higher in other fields of achievement." Mr. Grand spoke to his developing sense of awareness and influence as a black male teacher:

I considered myself to be a teacher while there because I had this black male principal there so I didn't really say I'm a black male teacher, just a 4th grade teacher. But in the back of my mind, I knew I was rare because not a lot of black males were going into elementary education. Echo Elementary School was special. We had a lot of black teachers, 3 black male teachers, but we had male teachers altogether! I just saw myself as a teacher I didn't stand out. But I always knew that . . . they don't usually see a lot of black males and if they do it's probably not in the best light. That is not acceptable. When I started to work on my Masters in Educational Administration I started realizing how important it was . . . that I see that I am a black male teacher.

Another participant provided a very clear opinion of how they position themselves in terms of identity within the K-12 setting:

I've had the comment, that "Hey . . . you're a teacher" . . . I will say, "Yes I am, but I am a black male teacher" because that to me speaks volumes because there aren't a lot of us. We are in the minority. Yes, people can see you are a black male teacher, but to let that be known so that they can know where you are coming from. It's deeper than that, it's so much deeper.

Echoing a similar notion Mr. Patton adds, "I always thought it was kind of important, especially for young men, to see brothers teaching so that they understand it is not just for other people." These instances of black male teachers stressing the importance of being

present both in sight and participation in the classrooms and building are paramount to influencing all children. Mr. Grand, phrases it best:

I am more than just a teacher. I am not only a teacher to the students that are in my room, but a teacher to who aren't in my room in the hallways at Echo Elementary School or here (Mike Elementary School). When they see me in the hallway I am engaging them, asking them questions about themselves and they whole mindset is changing . . . they are saying to themselves, "he is caring about how I am doing." I'll ask them questions. Other teachers would just say, "What are you doing." I am asking them questions and so it's a badge of honor for me.

Being this caring role model is part of the identity of Mr. Grand and other black male teachers but they also have to practice holding kids responsible for their action as Mr. Jones comments, "We need black men to be present and step to the plate and tell these boys how to be responsible young men. Love'em when they right, but dig in they ass when they wrong." Mr. Jones is attempting to express the idea of teaching and developing the whole child in that children need to be nurtured, loved, and mentored both when they are doing things in a positive way, but when they are doing the wrong thing they need to be told what they are doing wrong and how to improve so they get better.

"I was the Only Black Male"

Teacher Preparation Programs

Another theme that surfaced was the reality of being the only African American male. This condition of isolation was mentioned both in terms of being the only black male in their teacher preparation programs as well as being the only black male in their respective school buildings. Four of the six participants reported being the only black male at their school.

Going through any program of study is hard enough while in college. Consistent with the circumstances of being singled out in American society as a whole, black males are isolated when going through their teacher preparation programs. The majority of participants echoed similar sentiments that, “No one who looked like me . . . black male or female. I was usually the only black male in the class or usually one of two males. I didn’t see a lot of males of color at all. I was the only one.” With education majors largely being female and predominantly white, it is not uncommon to have only one or even no black males in these classes. In discussing this lack of black men in one participant says:

but when you talk about minorities, but when you talk about black men there are none. You might have been the only black male in one of those classes. And so I didn’t see any black males until I was ready to graduate from the education college. Other than that there were none.

Non-traditional routes to earning a certification in education were not much different in that they mirrored the grim reality of traditional programs. Black males who took a different path to getting into the classroom found spaces of solitude, too. In finding out about these alternative routes one participant commented,

I was the only person of color in my cohort. Very awesome and diverse cohort where I would always be the go to person for multiculturalism or teaching children of different races, I would be the token where the cohort would turn to me about diversity issues. You can’t get away from these questions of diversity.

Where I Teach

Navigating the issue of gender and race in K-12 education for black male teachers is a tough and careful undertaking. One on hand they try not to bring it up because it can conjure up unsettling thoughts and feelings from them and their co-workers. Because

there is so much nuance involved people can come away from discussions with misinterpretations and skewed perspectives. One participant tells of an encounter with a colleague:

Being the only black at this school I brought that up at this meeting and one of the teachers, said I never really realized that before you said that. I was thinking ok that's good because of the atmosphere we have here, but you are color blind here. Because if you don't see that I'm the only black here and only black male here that's a problem. That's good because you see me as your equal, but you don't see me as I am. I'm a black male, period! You've accepted me, but you accepted me within this construct/building . . . you aren't inviting me to your church or movie night or your house for dinner, just this fixed space. Outside of this . . . no no no no this is as far as it goes.

Here he details his frustrations in that he is only accepted by his colleague, and possibly others, to some degree, as an equal only within their school building.

For him his colleague's inability to acknowledge his ethnicity is a failing because that is who he is. Further, this inability or unwillingness to see his "blackness" prohibits his colleague from being able to understand him in a more expanded context, not simply as a teacher, but as a black man who exists within a larger society that practices inequality and other negative practices.

The school building is a microcosm of society and, in many ways, is its own society all together. Within this society within a larger society black male teachers reported feeling like they were singled out on purpose for various reasons as stated:

There have been times when I felt like the administration singles me out not necessarily because I am African-American . . . sometimes I do feel like it's because I'm black . . . I don't know it's hard to explain. I'll say things that I know I heard other teachers say and I hear students say they have heard teachers say the same thing and I'll be the one that gets called to the carpet and other teachers won't.

Feeling separated from the people who you work with can cause black male teachers to become reclusive. Going against the practices and behaviors at on school one participant voiced his tendency “to be more of a loner because I’m not big I tend to be more of a loner because I’m not big on the gossip, chattiness, the complaining that you often find and when you have groups of teachers together. . . .”

Being the only black male teacher can be seen considered both a positive and a challenge depending upon who you ask. Black male teachers are needed in every school, not just the highly populated minority schools. In highlighting this point one participant spoke of the need for a diverse teaching population in every school:

I’ve been in north Main City schools for ten years, I think it is important that they see my face in east, Bravo High School and west, too! It’s important that they see me, I can make a difference, too. I thought how ironic that you send me five minutes down the street to Gamma Elementary School-because I was a black is the only reason! When I walked in they were like yeyyyyyy! Here I’m the only black male teacher.

In this instance the participant understands the benefits that students receive when they have teachers that represent different backgrounds, but he also expresses an unsettling fact that many black male teachers get pigeonholed into a small area of where they can be assigned mainly because they happen to be black male teachers. This practice limits both students and black male teachers alike from being able to receive a well-rounded education with different points of view and for black male teachers, the opportunities and employment rights to practice where they feel they can make a difference-regardless of skin color.

Along these same lines one participant details an experience where he feels his ethnicity was used against him in searching for employment.

I remember going to a job fair after I got my education degree. I knew I wanted to be at MIDWEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS, I will never forget stopping at Lima School District table and inquiring about applying with them. Just to see, I had a gentleman from their HR older white guy said, “Well, we’re not accepting any applications.” But I just saw a female Caucasian woman inquiring about the same thing! She was able to get her application what to do, but when I stepped up and inquired about general information and for an application the gentleman told me, “We are no longer seeking applicants.” So I went and walked around, but I saw others going to that table . . . you just told me you weren’t accepting applicants, but still giving out information. So I guess they were selective of who they wanted or the type of teachers they wanted. That was striking to me because I was like Wow this is 2005/2006 and this is still going on where you are a person of privilege and you have the right to work there because if you look at that district they are not known for promoting or hiring people of color, African American men especially. That was a life lesson that I took. I can’t say it was racism, but I will say something wasn’t right there.

Clearly, this participant’s experience demonstrates, at least in his opinion, the practices of some districts’ unwillingness to consider qualified male African American applicants.

The Only Black Male Teacher in Their K-12 Experience

One of the most glaring points that stood out was the fact that many students go through their entire K-12 experience without having a single black male teacher. Given the predominance of females in K-12 education, especially k-6, this reality is somewhat understandable-although there are some causes for concern here as well. However, when black male teachers in grades 9-12 communicate that they are the first male teacher of color or black male teacher all together, this is alarming. As one participant shares that as an 8th grade teacher, “white, black, Asian it doesn’t matter . . . you’re the first black teacher I’ve had.” These student comments highlight a deficiency in our educational system to provide students with the most effective teaching pool available. He continues:

But for this girl I mentioned earlier . . . she has never had a black male teacher, ever. To put perspective on it, they all got me Christmas cards, that’s what they feel! She said, “Of all of my teachers, you are by far are one of the best. She

explained why . . . you've taught me things that I never learned before and the way you teach makes learning fun!" When you hear things like that, it lets you know you're doing the right thing. It validates how I'm teaching. She now has a better understanding, even not setting a foot in a north Main City School.

This story underscores the benefits of having students being taught by teachers from all walks of life and illustrates the joy and pleasures of positively impacting children's lives, no matter what ethnicity the teacher or child is from.

Role Models

For All Kids

Role modeling was something that all six participants stressed. Although they all emphasized the need for role models for black students many of the participants made it clear that they serve as role models for all children, regardless of skin color.

One participant in particular, Mr. Dillon was very open and forthright in making it clear that he was a role model for all students:

So, I knew black teachers, that was the norm for me. But they tell me this and they are excited even the white kids . . . because this is something different. And I do bring something different because of who I am. No class is alike. Every classroom should reflect that teacher. It's so moot because I get white kids who don't know much about African Americans other than what they get from their peers, and that may not be the best representation. Then they see me and they are like Wow! It puts more responsibility on me, and I relish it, because these students, black male students, white students they tend to gravitate towards me especially the ones who don't have a male figure in their life. I become that father figure for them and it's a delicate line man!

Mr. Dillon establishes the understanding that it's not solely the ethnicity of a teacher that makes them a role model, but the character and actions of the teacher that all children gravitate towards.

He continues:

A few years back I had a student she was half black and Native American and had 14 brothers and sisters . . . everyone had a different dad. When she told me this I didn't want to believe it. Your mom's had 15 kids and all of them with a different daddy? None of them around. Her view of the world when she came to school was so me against the world, angry. She has no support in life, mom gives no attention because she has to look after the others. I talked with her over two months about this here and there. She said I don't trust any guy. But that's her world. She said I'm the only consistent man in her life. I know Mr. Dillon is going to be here, teach me, etc. and she thanked me for it. It wasn't a tear jerker moment just her reality. That has to hurt! She came in from Victor Junior High School had me for the second semester. I kind of put it on myself that I have to undo these 14 years of her life and let them know you can do this. Just amazing, yes if we had more African American role models. I say that straight up! Role models in the classroom, regardless of race, because a teacher is a teacher. But you have to take on that added responsibility of being more than just a teacher. A textbook can give content . . . but to take in the whole student. I tell parents I want to teach your whole child. Most parents are like ok, cool! I gladly accept that responsibility because these young African American males, have to learn have to talk to a girl like that. They guys they see around them are players so they think that's the way things go. You know you don't like that so don't be that. It makes a world of difference. But the district can add 40 black teachers next school year but if they just want to be an instructor, they will be a teacher that happens to be black.

This story by Mr. Dillon highlights the various hats that teachers wear and perform as educators. Not only that, but with being a male, the unsolicited pressure or responsibility to be a father figure to so many kids that do not have a male figure or positive male figure in their lives. In detailing his story Mr. Dillon also sheds light on the difference between just being an instructor and a teacher. Instructors seek to make sure students are grasping subject matter and tend to just teach a subject. Teachers on the other hand assume a plethora of rolls to include checking for understanding, adjusting curricula to ensure all students are obtaining mastery, understanding what is going on in their students' home lives, etc. The point that Mr. Dillon makes about black male teachers being hired by his

school district says that anyone can teach, but how much impact can they have on a student's overall life and well-being? To this line of reasoning he concludes:

We need them man, there's so much of a need because Main City ranks top 5 in the nation in poverty among African Americans. So there's a need of being more than an instructor. Not everybody is up to the task. Role models being that example. Not only people of color but those who are truly sincere and devoted to making a change in these student's lives. It would make a world of difference. At Yellow Elementary School the teacher of the year she's dedicated she's a person of color they look up to her . . . it makes a difference.

For Black Kids

All six participants placed heavy importance on the need to serve as or have strong role models for African American students. In lieu of the imagery on black males and other ways black males are seen and portrayed all six black male teachers strongly indicated the need for more role models in the school-buildings, classrooms and community at large. Mr. Jackson touched on the need for a more expansive vision of black males that goes beyond athletics:

The Michael Jordan factor, the devaluation of education and the lack of presence of black people in education. Even though there may not have been a lot of African American people in education there were people in your house or around you that were influential in you being education. That's not the case anymore.

Several participants commented on the lack of accessible role models that black students have at their disposal. These role models, in their opinion, helped shape the desires, possibilities, and worldview of many black kids.

First and foremost I try to be a role model for all kids. But I know with my black kids my minority kids that I hope that they would look up to me but I know what I'm going up against. A lot of kids don't have males at home, so when they see me they are taken aback. Just me being black and a male. They don't see a lot of black positive role models. If so they aren't touchable . . . they are on t.v. To them if you ask our black children, what does success look like? They are going to tell you what they see on TV. I probably would have said that, too. It helped that I

had some role models in place, telling me some other avenues for success, too. That's what I bring to the table when they first come in.

Mr. Grand spoke of readily accepting the role and responsibility of being a positive black role model for all students, but also accentuating the specific need and uniqueness of being a black male teacher in being a role model for kids of color:

As far as teaching and being a role model to these students, not just the ones who reflect me, but all the ones who don't have role models in their lives. At Echo Elementary School I put that task on my back and held that proud I still hold it proud and look as a teacher you look for all of your students, but when you are minority teacher and you have an impact on those who look like you it defines almost who you are and what you are trying to do because these children who look like you could one day replace you or go higher in other fields of achievement. That in itself is what drives me what makes going to work every day easy. Even when I'm sick, unless I have the flu I am at school. Missing a day is just, not because it throws the kids off, you want to be there! Maybe they don't get it at home; the time you give is valuable. It's something about the role we play in the lives of these students.

If we can redirect our energies to having more black men being involved in education, mentoring program, tutoring program it would make a difference.

The distinction of being black, male, and a teacher is something that resonated with all participants. Mr. Patton stated emphatically:

I definitely think there is a need for more African-American teachers and black male teachers. There are so many boys out there that don't have to role models or that have role models that aren't there right type of role models.

Mr. Dillon shared a reoccurring theme among his students:

And one question I always get and it always comes from African American kids—females at that. You got kids? They got your last name? Wow, you married to their mom? Wow! They are shocked, blown away. That's not their norm. It blows their minds.

Mr. Dillon's experience draws attention to the unfortunate reality that many of our African American kids think, or maybe it is their reality, that black males are separated

from their families. Additionally, it suggests that black males are not readily seen by black children as family men.

Being a Black Male Teacher Doesn't Guarantee Acceptance

An unexpected subtheme that emerged centered around the idea that being black, male, and teaching does not guarantee being regarded as or even viewing oneself as a role model for black students. This point highlights the reality that various tensions can and do exist between black male teachers and black students. Merely being black and male are not the sole criterion to being accepted by black students. Several participants expressed this sentiment. In discussing his interactions with black students Mr. Jones shared the following:

Just because I'm a black male and I see black kids they may not be receptive of me. My white students may be more receptive. Some black kids may say, he think he all that. What I've noticed is that with African American kids they look at you, the commonality is there. They understand that you look like them and they can be comfortable. But after that comfort wears off then it's like they are going to test the teacher now!

What this speaks to is the many social cultural issues that play a role in how teachers and students interact with one another. Issues such as socio-economic status, upbringing, views of how manhood is constructed, personal experiences that may impact students' abilities to positively interact with other black males, gender orientation, students' previous educational experiences with male educators or their k-12 experiences being overwhelmingly administered and practiced by white and/or female teachers. Just because there may be some ethnic and gender similarity doesn't mean that their being paired with each other will translate into a productive student-teacher relationship with the outcome being high student achievement, happy times and pleasant things to say

regarding both student and teacher. Blacks, like others, have a kaleidoscope of experiences that shape their understanding and thus inform the way they function in society. Some students may like Hip Hop culture and rap music whereas their teacher may detest those two and favor Jazz and Rock n Roll. Another example could be that a black male teacher speaks what some would refer to as very proper speech and his students may view him as “fake” or “acting white.” Scenarios like these only demonstrate the multitude of identities and ways of viewing the world among black people.

The fact that a teacher and student may share the same or similar ethnic backgrounds and gender status is not an indicator that they will accept one another and start a great friendship. As Mr. Jones mentioned, students have their own experiences and ways of thinking. Based on these factors black students may not openly welcome a black male teacher into their zone of comfort, they may have to earn their respect from them by how they relate and other things. Mr. London offered a different way of framing the question of being an automatic great fit for black male teachers:

MIDWEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS was very excited to have us. But I will say this, although there is that desire to have black males in the classroom MIDWEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS needs to, in my opinion, do the right things to make sure you keep black males in the classroom. Things aren't perfect.

Here it seems as if Mr. London hints that there is an expressed need to have black male teachers in the classroom by the district, but the actions his district takes once they do have these specific teachers in the district doesn't show that they are trying to retain them.

Lastly, Mr. Dillon discusses the notion that being black and male is not a major characteristic that matters in education as he explains:

I've been so grateful because I get some of the craziest parents and I work with those parents and get them to at least not scream, cuss, act a fool and I can at least get them to listen. Them listening to me, a person not some educator, black guy, etc. those initial barriers are there of course . . . when you first see me be open to learn about me.

He goes on to highlight another instance where ethnicity and gender were not factors:

My former assistant principal is now the head mistress at Tango Female Prep School she had me come over and speak to a large group of students about service learning. As I stood before them there were 2 black students I was just ME. From my talk to what I had to share, just ME. When it was done, they said, "those girls loved you, how you came across!" And that had nothing to do with me being black or a male. It was the content. That's no different than anything. I've never looked at myself, maybe it's because I've always been around black people, it wasn't a matter of being black. It wasn't until I got to college that I recognized that I'm the only black. When you're amongst your own everything is everything, but when you become the minority . . . that's when you start seeing the difference.

Mr. Dillon's story speaks to the universality that exists when people are dealing with other people.

"I Don't Take No Mess"

Managing a Classroom

Classroom management is a necessity of all effective educators. Five of the six participants spoke to the issue of classroom management through the prism of discipline.

Black males and discipline are connected. Whether in terms of social policing, crime and punishment, familial upbringing in their households, or being held responsible or to a standard of performance of behavior in schooling. Black male teachers then are used to the concept of discipline and this is clearly demonstrated in their educational

practices. In managing classrooms black male participants in the study articulated an understanding of the need for discipline in the classroom setting and its importance. One participant, in understanding his personal characteristics said:

I can be a very aggressive no nonsense person and I thought I was gonna have a problem dealing with a student who was eye level with me. I've had my confrontations with kids who were taller than me who were saying stuff, I didn't have any problems with that at all . . . I don't have problems with regard to behavior in my classroom. I pride myself on that. That's not because I'm a black male. Because my interests lie within that. I have tons of books up here . . . I like looking at different strategies to deal with the kids.

By understanding himself and his qualities he recognizes how to deal with students and situations that could either impact classroom learning and student-teacher relationships. Additionally, he has identified strategies that prevent and serve as interventions to potential disciplinary issues in his classroom. In commenting that he takes pride in having minimal behavior issues in his classroom this reflects a commitment to a well-managed classroom and an environment free of distractions. Establishing clear policies and procedures and being consistent in their enforcement creates a culture and expectation of what is and is not tolerated. To this point, many participants' position on discipline can be articulated best in the following:

Kids don't test me and it ends right there, period... there's nothing else to discuss. That doesn't mean that I don't have kids that don't get out of line. That happens, but all it takes is me looking you in the face and letting you know I would straighten up if I were you and I would get it done.

Many of the participants were considered exemplars or "go to" people for students with disciplinary issues or even for other teachers who wanted to observe another teacher who

has very few disciplinary cases reported from their classroom. One participant sums up his disciplinary practice and how it operates with regard to some of his colleagues:

These teachers have seen at Echo Elementary School would interrupt my classroom cause I'm the only . . . I would get the students they would have trouble with, although there was 2 other black male teachers. The majority of the behavior issues came to me. I think it was a combination of a lot of things, age and . . . it was something about Mr. Grand . . . I had animals, snakes . . . it was a temporary recess. If you have a way for them to calm down, this unique thing in this cage . . . they can't afford to go to the zoo or school doesn't have the budget to have these exotic animals. I was the guy . . . they wouldn't go to the office. Many times the administrative staff would say you need to have a hold on your classroom; they wouldn't go to the office or write a referral. I was the intervention piece that these teachers would use . . . they would say this student needs to come in here and calm down . . . when you are done can you speak with him and write a pass? As long as it didn't take away from my class. So I told my class anybody can come through these doors at all times, your focus is on me. Unless it's the principal or a visitor, but other than that don't be alarmed! Because I had that procedure in place it wasn't a problem. It helped that teacher get a break from that child, but it was a release for that child because the child doesn't want to be out of the class-but to know they can go someplace where they are not in trouble and just calm down . . . that was huge.

It is very seldom that black males are seen as the reference point on how to do something, especially in an ethnically gendered field such as K-12 education. Quite often, as many of the participants shed light on, they are largely considered not as capable in their practice of education and/or relegated to a limited space where they have a specific ability such as in assisting in athletics or other things of a physical (non-intellectual) nature. In this case, it is not clear if the participant was seen as the teacher to send other students to because he was a black male and they were or were not kids of color. What is clear in this instance is the practice of having clear instructions and procedures that are reinforced so that students know what the expectations are for their performance and behavior.

Being the Disciplinarian

All of the participants mentioned that they were viewed, at one time or another, by their peers and administration as the go to person for kids to be disciplined. Similarly, all of the participants suggested that they felt this was so because they were black males.

These viewpoints were expressed outright by one participant:

Initially, yes. I was the “BLACK MALE TEACHER.” I can tell you that without a doubt. More so, proven when a white female teacher would have a problem with a black male student, “Mr. Dillon would you talk to him?” So that proof that I’m the black male teacher. They don’t know nothing about me, but I look like him. As time went on, they get to know me and see that I’m the same whether with students or them. If you talk to me stupid I’m gonna be stupid. If you aren’t educating these students I’m gonna talk to you.

Another participant offered a similar story:

We are teamed here at Charlie Junior High School and we have one split team of 7th and 8th and we have two full eighth grade teams and two full seventh grade teams. In my observations and this is just me I don't know if you can prove it but it's always seemed to like the A-Team that the students that were really low needed extra help to be boosted up. The C-Team got the students that were extremely high gifted and talented kids for the most part and the C. team is the split team so it's small and the B. team got all of that discipline kids and every single discipline kid that's come through this building has been in my classroom, every one of them and I've tried to work with them and some of them I helped some of them I don't. I have always felt like I get the bad kids because they know I'm going to try to put these kids back in line because that's how I am. They have to sprinkle in a couple of smart kids here and there just because they can't all be in the same place at the same time but yeah I've always kind of felt that way.

Along the same lines, another participant shared a conversation with a school counselor about the students he was given to him for the school-year. He stated that, “I got all the bad kids! I went to the counselor and she read the list. The teacher next door told me they gave me all the bad students. I think it was because I was black and male.”

Although the participant didn’t mind having the “challenging kids” it does reflect a

practice of overburdening a teacher and classroom with students that require an abnormal amount of attention. Scenarios such as this can impact the learning of all the students in the classroom because of the demand that students who require or seek more attention have to be afforded. Some students can lose out on much needed one on one teaching.

Students can also perceive a teacher to be a “disciplinarian” as well. Several participants expressed how their students knew that they were no nonsense teachers who would hold them accountable for their actions.

I don't know, the kids sometimes perceive that I am mean because I'm loud and I can be very loud if I need to. But I think part of it is my coaching background and my athletics and my discipline that has been instilled in me I don't mess around I don't take a whole lot of nothing from anybody. I'm just as quick to get in somebody's face as I am to want to snatch them up by the neck and drag them down the hallway. But the kids that know me know exactly what I am about. You don't play games. Do what you're supposed to do.

Another participant explains:

I know that more of my urban kids have a harder time dealing with me because I don't take any crap and I don't let them do the same things that they let other teachers in the building at them get away with. So sometimes that causes rifts between me and some students. I try to be fair, there is not always equal but fair is fair.

This participant communicated that he was somewhat “old-school” in that he really valued education and expects that when it is time to learn kids need to focus and concentrate on their academics. This same participant had a very friendly and approachable demeanor with students and they knew they could come speak to him about serious issues. To this point, during our interview a young white girl came to his class wanting to speak with him about a disciplinary situation that involved another teacher and administrator where she felt she was being wronged. The participant, Mr. Patton,

asked to have the audio-recording of the interview stopped while he dealt with the student. In the end, the student listened to Mr. Patton and they joked on some issues. Mr. Patton didn't agree with her overall assessment of the situation, but he listened and gave her counsel and she was very thankful. This instance illustrates the concept of discipline being applied by a teacher, but explained and rationalized in a manner to where the student understands the ethical circumstances involved in the situation.

“Female Dominated and Mostly White”

Teaching is such a gendered profession

All six participants spoke to the issue of gender in education as it relates to K-12 education being heavily dominated by females. Kunjufu (2002) highlights the issues involved in the disproportionate ratio of females, especially white, to males. Though they commented on the imbalance the participants did not refer to this disparity as purely counterproductive. As one participant put it:

Because I am in a predominantly female profession. And sometimes woman have a different way of doing things and reacting to things. Fortunately I always knew that you shut your mouth . . . I pick and choose my battles with that! Number two I am in a female dominated profession and I'm a male, but I am a black male so I really have to raise the stakes. There may be times where some may not think I'm qualified. But I think coming to Gamma Elementary School has really hit home because I think in my opinion the only reason I got transferred was because I'm a black male.

Here the participant offers insight into the differences in culture between males and females in K-12 education. Quite often males and females have contrasting ways of responding to situations that can impact how students perform in classrooms. Further, him adding the factor of being a black male highlights the cultural element where he feels

that he has make sure his teaching practices are both satisfactory and worthy because his professional and/or personal abilities are often questioned by this female colleagues.

Along those same lines Mr. Grand, discusses an issue of power and gender culture and how it can operates at home and in the classroom, particularly for black boys:

None of my teachers there were male, none were African American they were all white women. Coming from a two parent home I didn't have any problems adjusting to a woman instructing or telling me how to do things. Some of our male students have trouble with that if it's a woman they are already used to that and if they have more say so at home then they are going to struggle at school where they don't, where their input is appreciated, but they aren't calling the shots. They aren't the ones saying this is what I'm going to do.

Mr. Grand makes a point to unpack the situation that exists in far too many single-parent homes where black mother are raising black boys. Many African American boys grow up being the man of the house because of the absence of a father or father-figure being present. So, at home they have a voice and freedom to assert their thoughts and actions. However, when these same boys go to school this dynamic is often incongruent to their home dynamics and they find their input devalued, having little or no say in rules or their movement not to mention, quite often, a lack of understanding of their cultural and gender norms (Kunjufu, 2002; Lewis & Toldson, 2013).

Another participant, Mr. London, bring to light more nuances involving the culture of gender in K-12 schools in great detail:

In this job, it's not the students, it's my colleagues (females). In the English department at Bravo High School, gossip is the number one problem. And around here and I don't know it's because the black male . . . we gonna call you sexual chocolate. They said Mr. London got on this today. They are always gossiping! There's some things . . . when I first got here, I thought I could trust people. I don't reveal anything in my personal life up here. I was going through a divorce . . . that's hard . . . first year teaching going through a divorce. There were some

things you could see it right here across my face. I would get pulled in by my direct boss and they would ask me what's going on. I thought it was somebody I could trust you know. I said this is what's going on . . . Not realizing not thinking that this is an all-woman environment, not even a woman thing . . . it's just different. I am the only male in this department! Stupidly, the woman I sit and talk to and tell everyone else. I just told you that and you told the whole department?! So I had the one on one talk, then next thing you know. It doesn't stop . . . gossiping to the point where it becomes a problem with other people in other schools in the district . . . hey I heard this about you. All this because I'm the only male in the department. We love to talk about Mr. London! It's the reality of my experience. You keep in mind that my brother is teaching in the same environment. Now, it's different for him because he is teaching P.E. but he's still a black male in education. Which is a predominantly white woman environment. He's been through some shit. He found himself down at DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS the other day over something they would not have sent some white person down to DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS about something that occurred. But because he's a brotha we gonna send him down to the DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS building. I've been down to DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS twice over some stuff, shit.

Mr. London's story sheds light on a variety of issues to include the sexualization of black males, the culture of gossip and how it can have negative consequences even though the accusations and such are unfounded, and the issue of confidentiality. Consistent with previous held connotations of black men in the larger society, black male teachers are still scrutinized through a lens that renders them suspects of being sexual predators or hyper-sexual. Additionally, not being able to trust colleagues or those in power who are responsible for retaining information on a need to know basis causes added tension and distrust among black male teachers at their workplace. As Mr. London mentioned having to go down to district headquarters to explain himself about something where he did nothing wrong is stressful and unjust. One of the participants surmised what several participants indicated in that, "I think I have some people who see me as a threat to their job."

White Privilege

White privilege was a sub-theme that emerged in the data analysis. Three of the six participants referred to white privilege as a factor that they see operates not only in their day to day lives as teachers, but also in their processes of becoming certified teachers. Addressing this argument Mr. Grand affirms:

I love my colleagues but the privilege they have of being where they are and where they are at is much different than mine. Their parents paid their tuition; I had to pay student loans. I think they take for granted, most Caucasian teachers don't realize, some are the grind it out types, but the privilege that you have because it's always been open invitation for you to come into this field is different from that of a minority . . . and black males were the last to be sought. It used to be women historically to be teachers, since slavery they were the ones teaching the children. That's a huge misconception among white teachers, they just assume it was easy for us to get in and it wasn't. We are still trying to prove ourselves that we belong here.

Similarly, another participant talked about more recent exclusionary practices in the teacher certification process:

It wasn't until my sophomore year that you have to take a test to get into this teacher college. My biggest obstacle was the PPST (Pre-Professional Skills Test) District . . . My family was my biggest support. The obstacle for me was how do I prepare for this test (PPST)? Boy that was one of those red tape things that . . . Assessments and tests have not always been kind to people of color. It's a way, I'll go ahead and say it, to weed out and make sure that certain professions continue to look the way they are. I didn't initially major in education when I was at my first university. I majored in education when I got to Flagship University. Then I really saw the difference in how they weed out and how they select people. It struck me, that you had some people knew there was ways around the test, but it's not information it's automatically given to you. There were some people over here say my mom and dad had to call the dean and they got me in provisionally. And I ask, they only let you take one or two classes, but after those one or two classes you've got to take this test and if you don't pass you are out there until you can. That wasn't right! Why aren't they making this equitable to all students that want to get into the field of education?

In referencing the historical limitation and challenges placed on blacks, these two participants illuminate the unjust and inequitable forces that have prohibited many blacks from being educated at all, but also acts gender exclusion that prevented black males from entering education. Although blacks, both female and male, did become teachers in great numbers from Emancipation through the Civil Rights Movement years-especially in the southern states, there were exclusionary efforts towards blacks in many areas of the United States to prevent them from working in many cities and neighborhoods (Fairclough, 2001, 2007).

Stereotypes/Biases

Five of the six participants referred to issues of stereotypes and biases. While they demonstrated the resolve to continue being educators the five participants who spoke to this area of concern did communicate the constant pressure, frustration and strain that it places on their educational practice. These stereotypes and biases ranged from qualification, abilities, and historical hyper-sexual predatory nature of black men. In sharing a story of meeting with a parent for parent-teacher conferences one participant maintained:

that woman asked me that about my credentials . . . it's public record! Go to the DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS building and you can find everything in my file. I passed my background check and got certified before you can get the job. I understand we are in the 21st century, but we still have stereotypes, 19th 20th century folk who think we are only good in trades and things of that nature. We are savages and the taboo of black men working with white girls and white women. That's always in the back of my mind, but I don't let it take from who I am and what I can offer the people I come across - classes, parents, students, etc.

In the same manner another participant, Mr. Jackson, shared:

When people ask me what I do, I tell them I teach. In a number of instances they will ask me what disciplines I teach and I tell them advanced placement psychology and their immediate reaction when I tell them that. And then I tell them I teach American Government and there is always that reaction and pause that they are surprised! I think there are still those stereotypical perceptions that people have about education and people in minority groups who teach.

Mr. London, being quite transparent and without censorship, details the sexual stereotypes that operationalize themselves in the daily lives of some black male teachers:

Like if they're really smart enough, instead of all white woman, its' gonna be all black males around here! And do you really want me to add some controversy to your study here?! And, a black male who does not give into the temptation and try to fuck all of my coworkers. Right, cause I'm gonna tell you now, please don't think for a hot second, like these women tried to give me what's in their panties. I have turned down more pussy since I have been in education than I have ever in my life. When that clicks then it goes from damn, I can't have you, to fuck I got to get you out of here type shit. Oh yeah, I told you I was gonna be truthful with you!

What all of these participants reveal are the long held perceptions about black male intellectual ability and thirst for sexual exploitation. To consistently have their abilities questioned for no legitimate reason black male teachers face professional and personal disrespect on a frequent basis. In spite of these disrespectful acts black male teachers demonstrate poise, resiliency, and integrity as both being people of character and responsible stewards of the practice of K-12 education. These black male teachers continue to teach and move forward with purpose in lieu of racial and gendered ignorance towards them, as Mr. Grand put it, "will always be an advocate for the black male (student) because the stereotype is that they (we) can't, but research says they can."

"It's not only racial, but it's social"

While analyzing the data, five of the six participants talked about the issue of culture, but in varying ways. This subtheme of culture was further broken down into

social class and urban environment. Socioeconomic status does in fact play a role in K-12 education, both for students as well as teachers and how those dynamics function in the classroom. What stands out the most is the unexpected subtheme best articulated by one of the participants, “It's not only racial but it's a social.” These simple, yet revealing words, unpack a multitude of topics that play out in various ways for not only black male teachers, but all teachers in general (Kunjufu, 2002; Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Within the area of socioeconomic status this line of reasoning is best articulated by Mr. Patton.

It's hard for someone from an upper middle class background to relate to someone from a lower social economic background. Most teachers, especially white female teachers, come from upper middle class families and they go into education . . . they have gone into education because it hasn't been as difficult of a career path. And they get to have families and spend the summers with their kids and they don't relate along the same terms. A black boy comes into the classroom who may only eat once or twice a day. Or like in the movie *The Blindside* may have to wash his clothes and the sink the night before school so he'll have something clean or semi-clean to wear to school is not going to see things the same way as she does.

Similarly, as Mr. Jackson adds, “I tell students all of the time, you don't have a monopoly on being poor! . . . those types of people can understand things.” Both participants' words speak to the universal reality that many people of every ethnic background are not rich. Both of these black male teachers are reinforcing the idea that blacks are not the only ones suffering. Although it can be argued the blacks suffer disproportionately when compared to other ethnic groups here in America, the point is that not having financial luxuries and comfort is not exclusive to just one demographic group. Mr. Dillon's viewpoint of, “To me it's not a white/black thing. It's bigger than or more detailed than me just being an African American teacher.” Has a great deal of merit and encompasses the essential notion that simply narrowing student achievement or teacher effectiveness

goes way beyond the concept of gender-matching with regards to student-teacher relationships. A more comprehensive view of understanding the connections between students and teachers and how this impacts student achievement is necessary.

Urban vs. Suburban

Another very unexpected, but attention-grabbing subtheme was urban realities vs. suburban realities. All of the participants indicated that there a degree of divergence in the directions of approach when it comes to educational practice, policy, and student-teacher interactions. Characterized by Mr. Patton's words, "You are always going to have that clash of culture. I don't know how you change that? And in teacher education programs they don't understand that." Of course there are many instances where this cultural clash does not hinder the educational process, but it does exist. In having a more diverse teacher workforce some of this cultural clash could be avoided. As one participant put it," . . . I think that these other school districts are missing out and a lot can be said about the cultural diversity that schools have based on the exposure they get to minority to black men." Black male teachers have the ability to provide so much to a school building in terms of cultural understanding, enrichment, understanding of male behavior, and a different view on how to relate to and deal with kids both on a social and academic level. However, as Mr. Grand states, "Most teachers and white teachers at urban schools aren't like that. They don't share the same ideology. Their ideology is' let's give this black kid to this black teacher because I can't really get to them right now. Often times it's not that they don't know, rather it's because they are choosing to just focus on the ones who are doing what I want them to do so I can get into my lesson."

Discussing the conditions in the school district where they teach several participants clearly expressed a distinct cultural rift between one part of the city that is predominantly white and another that is heavily populated by ethnic minorities.

Mr. Jones explains,

There is a cultural thing particularly on the black side of town here in Main City. If I was out in the whiter part of Main City it would be different . . . it would be backwards. At times oh yeah, particularly my black kids. Some kids I have to take to the side and work with them one on one, still have high expectations and not allowing them to get away with what they want to!

Mr. Jones asserts the difference he feels that he has to address some kids compared with others based on his knowledge and understanding of the individual kid(s) and the circumstances of the particular kid(s). He goes on to elaborate on the cultural and gender comparative differences and sensitivities he, as a black male teacher, notices when dealing with his black students and white students, especially boys:

Sometimes I think kids, particularly black, they're guard is down a little bit-which can work both ways if I was working with a white student. They are more inclined to open up faster to you. I think that has something to do what's been going on in the home. Maybe they have been taught to not open up to white people. Before we meet they know what I am about . . . they kind of identify because we look the same. I think one of the positives things is that as a black male teacher or black teacher it is easier for me to hold them accountable because they ain't getting away with things . . . because other teachers (white) may think I hurt their feelings.

The misinterpretation of cultural behavior by white teachers, towards minority kids, especially among black boys was a unique subtheme that emerged. Consistent with current literature regarding black males and special education (Kunjufu, 2011, 2012, 2013). Mr. Grand spoke with depth and passion:

I am actually going back to school to get a degree in Special Education, I don't know if I'll get a doctorate, but the African American kids that are misdiagnosed

into special education versus what responses to interventions could have been done, but lets' just shove them in before the law comes down before you can't just shove them into special education. Look at the African American kids who actually have a clinical diagnosis or was it just the teacher couldn't teach a certain way and this child couldn't learn anything. . . ! My experience at the Mike Elementary School, I've seen students who I know should be in special education, the ones who were not-all they needed was a little tlc (tender, love, and care) and that's it! Looking at Echo Elementary School compared to here is too different . . . night and day difference. But the staff at Echo Elementary School African American staff was much more understanding of the kids, what it takes to get the kids to do what they need to do to be successful.

What Mr. Grand speaks to is the want and desire to understand minority kids, especially black males, through their own cultural prism and not through someone else's. Knowing about a child's cultural norms and behaviors acknowledges that there is more than one way of doing things that may be different than your own. And, that approaching a child, or anyone else for that matter, with that understanding could yield different results that do not end in disproportionate numbers of kids in special education, based on gender and ethnicity-not to mention the implications on social, academic, mental, and emotional development it can have on youth.

Building on the same premise Mr. Grand adds more speaking with spirit and excitement as he shares how he specifically targets some the young black males in his class:

the majority of students that I focused on were my lunch buddy group or boys to men . . . it's the black male who doesn't identify with some of those kids who come from a two parent home. Socially and academically there is at least 2-3 students that from 3rd-6th grade I identify within my own classroom. It's always one black male student who doesn't have that ability yet to realize their own value. Academically they feel defeated. Socially they can't get along with anyone because they don't know how to articulate themselves. They want to escalate their voices. When they ask a question, they are made to feel like they are asking a stupid question. I say, 'Great question, let's go into why that is'. So now the student isn't putting his head down . . . that gives that student who asked

that question the understanding that it's ok to ask that question and there is nothing wrong with asking that question! Now if another black male student has a question they are going to ask a question because they saw how I responded to his peer-the other black male. That reassurance, that it's ok! Kids in 5th grade still need that but maturity wise they may be in 3rd grade.

This illustration exemplifies the cultural and gender understanding, care, and ability to relate that many black male teachers possess in dealing with black boys, but all students in general. Having these tools in their teacher toolbox enables them to reach students, especially boys of color, in a way where many can't. In doing so, their sense of self in terms of academics is raised which can lead to overall success in the classroom and life beyond formal education.

Chapter 6

Discussion

The purpose of this narrative case study is to explore and examine the specific experiences, perspectives, and classroom practices of African American male K-12 teachers. Borrowing from case study and narrative qualitative research methodologies data was collected from six African American male teachers to describe their perspectives and experiences in education. Data collection was done by one on one in person interviews, classroom observations, and researcher reflective journaling. Data was analyzed and coded which provided for themes and subthemes. Critical race theory (CRT) was used as the theory to help guide this study due to the ability to consider the dynamics of race, gender, identity, and power especially with regards to ethnic minority populations. All of these characteristics play an important part in critical race theory and justified its use as the theoretical framework for this study (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lynn 2006, 2004, 2002; Lynn & Hassan, 1999). The themes and subthemes that emerged helped to serve as evidence supporting the use of CRT for this study.

The central question focusing on the stories of black male educators tell us about their relationships, practice of teaching and identities, as well as their interaction with other educational staff and students guided this study. Several sub-research questions helped to further guide this study concerning: (a) how black male teachers explain their life experiences and influences that prompted them to go into education; and (b) how black male teachers describe their perspectives on education and being a black male teacher; (3) how black male teachers explain their teaching practices; and (4) how black

male teachers describe their relationships with colleagues and students, especially minorities and males students.

This study focusing on the realities of black male teachers uncovered a number of major findings in its themes and subthemes to include: being black, male, and a teacher isn't a guarantee on connecting or acceptance; ethnic/gender domination; instances of students having their first and only black male teacher in their K-12 experience; matters of white privilege; and questions regarding the concept of social or cultural concerns rather than being strictly an ethnicity concern.

The theme of white privilege was highlighted by participants in a manner that was congruent with existing literature by Toldson (2013) and Kunjufu (2005). Participants in this study spoke about overlapping matters of gender where white females or males had opportunities afforded to them that black male teachers do not and how this impacts black male teachers' perspectives on staying in the education field or the perception of black male teachers' ability to perform their job duties. Such findings are supported by Kuzmic's (2000) research.

One of the other emergent themes participants expressed was the issue of being a role model for black students. Supported by Brockenbrough's (2008) study, although many participants discussed the fact that they perceived themselves as role models and students accepted them as role models, this was not always the norm. Participants in the study shared instances where they were not automatically, if at all, accepted by their black students as being role models. This is consistent with current literature that has challenged the notion that ethnic/gender matching automatically of teachers and students

is a recipe for success discussed by Brown (2009a), Brockenbrough (2008), and Shabazz (2006).

Being black, male, and a teacher was a theme that revealed itself in this study as well. Participants disclosed their views on the low number of black males in education and feelings and reflections on how they felt isolated not only in their places of work, but also when they were earning their teaching credentials. Of particular note is the fact that participants expressed the reality that they were the first and only black male teacher that their students have had in their K-12 experiences. Comparable to existing literature by Brown (2009a, 2009b) all the participants in this study shared their stance on being able to improve the lives of black male students and providing them a different view of black men. All the participants in this study shared their ability to be able to relate to their students, especially ethnic minorities, and the fact that they often fill a void in many of their student's lives as examples of productive males.

Socio-cultural themes and subthemes were revealed in this study. Participants shared experiences where intersections of culture played a role in how they relate to students and practice their craft. Substantiated by the work of Kunjufu (2002, 2011) and Brown (2009a, 2009b) urban and suburban cultural clashes were highlighted in addition to issues surrounding socioeconomic factors that influenced how black male teachers are perceived by students. Participants discussed how their socioeconomic and urban backgrounds and experiences serve as tools that facilitate a deeper understanding of their students which enable them to connect and improve teaching practices that result in student success.

Chapter 7

Implications

The results in this study offer more than a few important implications in K-12 education and society as a whole. The first implication centers on getting more black male teachers in K-12 education. High school counselors, college recruiters, and K-12 educational administrators need to consider the opportunities and skill sets the black male teachers possess and see this as a way to enhance the educational outcomes of school age children. For this increase to actually happen there needs to be a continued call to action for more black male teachers, such as the one by former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. In 2011 he issued a call to America to have more teachers from ethnic minority groups go into education. This referendum serves the overall purpose of ensuring we have qualified teacher for our new generation of learners, but also that these new teachers who will be replacing the large retiring amount of teachers in the upcoming years represent the diversity of ethnicity and gender that exists in today's schools., Calls like this coupled with awareness, programs, access to such programs, and promotion by concerned entities will increase the presence and contributions of black male educators in our classrooms given that our schools are now populated more by students of color than they are white students.

Another implication sheds light on the need for overhauling educational policies that are counterproductive and/or bias, particularly disciplinary policy. In lieu of the issues this study revealed regarding culture, policy makers need to reevaluate the current policies on student discipline. Black male teachers commented on their abilities to relate

to students, particularly black males, and understand their cultural behaviors. Often times teachers misinterpret the gender and/or cultural behaviors of their students and are quick to discipline some students. Being able to have policy(s) that account for situations involving cultural incongruence between students and teachers can potentially reduce the amount of time students spend out of class and keep them engaged and on task.

A secondary implication related to student discipline is the connection to literacy and academic outcomes. School districts and their decision-making personnel would do well to revisit and adjust their instruction to include ALL students, not just the socio-economic middle-class or ethnic majority (white) students. Along with this is the need to consider the culture of gender and how the dominance of women as teachers can impact/influence the educational outcomes of males. The need for more culturally relevant teaching practices is an issue of more than just ethnicity as it calls gender and urban vs. suburban culture clashes into question. By having instructional practices that emphasize male and female learning styles students could possibly achieve increased literacy.

A third implication involves multicultural education. In many teacher preparation programs across the nation future teachers are only required to take one course that stresses issues of diversity. Often times these classes do not delve into serious issues confronting issues of diversity in K-12 education. Additionally, educators need meaningful continued professional development on multiculturalism once they become practitioners. Teacher preparation programs require their students to complete a semester of hands on field training where they participate in lesson planning, classroom

preparation, instruct, assess, and discipline students. These field placements are not only too short, but also can be guilty of not providing future educators the multicultural experiences they will need as many will go on to teach in increasingly diverse settings. These field placements should be extended to cover a full school year so that education students have significant experiences in the K-12 setting that thoroughly stresses areas of multiculturalism.

The last implication that stems from this study is the need to have lawmakers consider schooling options that target specific demographic groups. Considering the findings in this study, K-12 stakeholders would be doing their due diligence to study the feasibility of having more ethnic and gender specific schools or even classrooms. Although this may be considered controversial by some, the option at least pushes the conversation forward in trying to close the achievement gap between ethnic minorities (specifically African Americans) and whites. Various charter schools have had relative success at achieving better educational outcomes for many students of color. Black male teachers have, along with others, have been a crucial part of many of these successful schools whereby they impact the social skills of students and assist in preparing students with life skills necessary to be productive citizens. The ancillary impact of these schools range from increased literacy, lower incidents of crime committed by students of color, and lower incarceration rates to name a few.

Limitations and Future Research

This study focuses on exploring and examining the experiences, perspectives, and classroom practices of K-12 black male teachers.

Because black males do not all share the same reality it should be understood that their experiences, daily lives and overall perspectives will represent some varying amounts of difference. From their ages, buildings they work in, cultural orientations, along with other factors help provide both similarities and distinctions in how they approach their pedagogical practices.

There were several areas of limitation in this study. One area involves participants. All participants for this study were from the same school district. The challenge of not having participants from different school districts is that the participant's experiences can be narrowed and therefore influenced in either a more positive or negative manner. Additionally, having participants from only one school district involves could mean that their student experiences can be large informed or influenced based on the demographics of their respective school district.

Secondly, this study was limited to six participants. Having such a small number of participants makes it hard to generalize the outcomes. Lastly, this study focuses on K-12 black male teachers and the researcher is a practicing K-12 black male teacher. The potential for bias with regard to data analysis and interpretation is increased. However, being able to share a great deal of demographic similarity with the participants of the study helps to provide a deeper level of understanding and perspective regarding the subject matter. Along the same lines, I have had previous knowledge and interaction

with five of the six participants before conducting the study. Although I may have known that these participants existed having them volunteer to participate in the study reflected a genuine concern to contribute to examining the phenomenon of black male teachers.

Future Research

Research that focuses solely on black male teachers is fairly new. Moving forward there are several key recommendations involving this subject matter. Future researcher can look at comparative data between K-12 black male teachers and white teachers. Having this comparative research would provide data that can be used to push conversation and practice of gender/ethnic matching between teachers and students in schools. This information can also be used regarding single-sex schools, charter, and ethnicity-centered K-12 schools.

Another recommendation involved the use different research methodologies. Much of the research involved qualitative research, specifically case study and forms of narrative research. Future studies could incorporate methods of phenomenology, focus groups, and mixed methods. Being able to include both qualitative and quantitative research methods to where the collected data sets (grades, disciplinary data, absences, confidence, self-efficacy, goals) could possibly complement one another and yield some great results that can be put into practice would be very beneficial in researching the realities of black male teachers.

Lastly, this study consisted of participants who are current practicing K-12 educators. Future research projects could include current black male teachers in addition

to retired black male teachers and black male educational administrators. The last two groups could potentially provide more data to analyze and develop better K-12 policies and teaching practices not to mention ways to recruit and retain more black male teachers in the classroom.

Future studies concerning black males have to be comprehensive in looking at the recruitment, mentoring and development and retention of black males. While there is more access and opportunity for black males in the workforce compared to previous decades there needs to be systematic efforts in place that enable black males to enter k-12 education as effective and inspiring educators. Research, practices and policies that address the social needs of black male teachers is just as necessary as the need to empower black males to be treated as valuable assets amongst their peers and supported by their schools and school districts. All of these factors are paramount to student achievement. By having more black male teachers in k-12 schools students of all ethnicities benefit by reducing the inequalities that exist in student efficacy, educational access and achievement in addition to learning how to be part of the global world.

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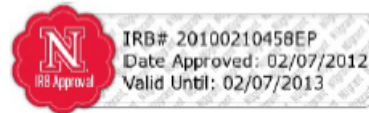
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Appendix A

IRB Approval/Consent Form



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Yes, We Do Exist!: Exploring The Experiences, Perspectives and Pedagogical Practices of Three African American Male Teachers

The purpose of this case study is to explore the life, experiences and classroom practices of black male classroom teachers. This study seeks to add to the emerging literature and understanding of what it means to be both black and male in the field of education. Researchers hope to gain insight into how the life experiences and views on teaching and learning influence black male educator's approaches to teaching. Hopefully, these efforts will positively influence student success, improve teacher development along with recruitment and retention of minority teachers.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you have self-identified yourself as a male K-12 educator of African American descent. Participation will take place during January 2010 through March 2010. As a participant in this study you will be asked to participate in one audio-taped semi structured interview along with occasional unstructured interviews. The interview questions will focus on life experiences you had while growing up, family influences, teaching practices and perspectives related to teaching and learning and student achievement. Classroom observations will be conducted to provide more detail and further insight into your educational practice and perspectives. If excerpts from these materials are published or shared publically, all identifying marks in data will be removed and your identity disguised utilizing pseudonyms and coding of data. Follow up interviews, which can be done via email or phone, may be necessary to clarify responses you provided in earlier interviews.

Minimal risks are associated with this study. Again, to prevent any risk of your identity being revealed to your school or school district pseudonyms will be used in place of your real name. You will have access to any data you provide at any point in this study. Information obtained during this study will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office. Material will be seen only by the investigators of this project during the study. All data will be kept for three years and then destroyed. There will be no compensation for participating in this research study.

IS NOT CONDUCTING OR SPONSORING THIS STUDY. You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or during the time of this study. If you have questions please contact Principal Investigator, Tyrie Lavyal Fant (402) 210-1966. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject, or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without any kind of penalty. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Please check one of the following choices below.

- I choose NOT to participate in this study.
- I choose to participate in this study but NOT in a follow-up interview
- I choose to participate in this study and am willing to be contacted for a possible audio taped follow-up one-on-one interview after the focus group interview has been conducted.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Researcher contact information: Tyrie Lavyal Fant, tfant@huskers.unl.edu, 402-210-1966

Appendix B

School District Approval to Conduct Research

April 30, 2010

University of Nebraska at Lincoln
Attn: Tyrie Lavyal Fant
23 Henzlik Hall
Lincoln NE 68588-0355

Re: Yes, We do Exist!: Exploring the Experiences, Perspectives and Pedagogical Practices of Three African-American Male Teachers

Dear Mr. Fant :

The Research Review Committee has reviewed your research proposal that involves the collection of data from students, teachers, and administrators through processes such as the examination and/or collection of information from files or records, direct observation, focus groups, or individual interviews.

We believe your study has merit and permission is granted for you to proceed under the following conditions:

- Principals in affected buildings agree to your study.
- Teachers in affected buildings agree to your study.
- In the reporting of the data/results, teachers, students, schools, and district will not be personally identifiable.
- You will be willing to share results of your study with

Thank you for your interest and support in meeting the needs of our students.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Instructional Research Administrator

Appendix C

School District Consent Form



Research Consent Form
(To be completed by district personnel participating in research study.)

Project Name _____

Sponsoring Organization _____

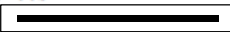
Principal Researcher _____ Telephone _____

Project Location(s) _____

Participant Name _____ Position _____

Home Address _____ Telephone _____

Participants/Parental Rights and Assurances

I have received a copy of the approved  Consent Letter for the
aforementioned research project. Having thoroughly read and reviewed the application I
am familiar with the purpose, methods, scope and intent of the research project.

I am willing ___ I am not willing ___ for my child to participate in the research project.
(check one)

I understand that during the course of this project my responses will be kept strictly
confidential and that none of the data released in this study will identify me by name or
any other identifiable data, descriptions, or characterizations. Furthermore, I understand
that I may discontinue my participation in this project at any time or refuse to respond to
any questions to which I choose not to respond. I am a voluntary participant and have no
liability or responsibility for the implementation, methodology, claims, substance, or
outcomes resulting from this research project. I am also aware that my decision not to
participate will not result in any adverse consequences or disparate treatment due that
decision.

I fully understand that this research is conducted for constructive educational purposes
and that my signature gives my consent to voluntarily participate in this project.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Principal Investigator and Interviewer: Tyrie Lavyal Fant, M.A.

Participant:

Location:

Date:

Time:

Yes, We Do Exist!: Exploring The Experiences, Perspectives and Pedagogical Practice of Three African American Male Teachers

Central Research Question

What do the stories of black male educators tell us about their identities, pedagogy, and relationships with other educational staff and students?

Research Sub-Questions

1. How do black male teachers explain their life experiences and influences that prompted them to go into education?
2. How do black male teachers describe their perspectives on education and being a black male teacher?
3. How do black male teachers explain their teaching practices?
4. How do black male teachers describe their relationships with colleagues and students, especially minorities and male students?

To the participant: Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. I appreciate your time today and your willingness to share your experiences. As you know, the purpose of the case study is to understand how you, an African American male teacher, describe and explain your experiences, perspectives and teaching practices. You have seen the questions I plan to ask during this interview. As the interview continues, I may ask you additional, different questions that you have not reviewed, in the effort to clarify and/or best understand your responses. Do you have any questions at this point? If you're ready, let's begin the interview.

Questions(s)	Observer Comments
1. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?	
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?	
3. In your opinion, what skills to teachers need to have in teaching today's students?	
4. Do we need more males and teachers of color in education? Why or why not?	
5. As a black male teacher do you think you have any advantages or pressures because of your gender and ethnicity?	
6. Do your life experiences influence the way you teach?	
7. Do you think you have to communicate or teach differently to your white students and students of color?	
8. What are your views on teaching students of color?	

Thank you for your willingness to be part of this study. Know that confidentiality will be honored in all realms of this project. Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity, as well as the identities of other people, places, or locations you identify during the interview will be given pseudonyms. During the study, data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office. The audio tapes will be erased and destroyed after the data is compiled. Transcripts of the interview will remain in the investigator's locked cabinet for three years, after which time they will be destroyed. The data (transcripts) will be seen only by the investigators and a possible external auditor. The information obtained in this study will be used in the investigator's dissertation and may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings; however, all identities and identifying information will remain confidential. Thank you.

Appendix E

Observation Protocol

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Yes, We Do Exist!: Exploring The Experiences, Perspectives and Pedagogical Practices
of Three Black Male Teachers

Observer: _____ Date: _____

Event/Meeting: _____ Time: _____
(Description)

Setting:

Participants:

Time	Verbal Communication	Body Language/Gestures	Comments/Notes

Appendix F

Coding Table

Table 4. Coding Table

Theme	SubTheme	Codes
“Where are all the Black Males?”	Lack of	I knew I was rare Not many black males going into education They don't see enough of us in education
	Filling a Void	We show that being educated is important Black students learn because we show education is serious Need black males that know their content, not just because they're black
	How Black Males are Seen	Pop culture defines black males Black males seen as negative
	How Black Males See Themselves	I hope black kids look up to me Wearing a shirt and tie Being professional I embrace being a black male teacher It's important that I am seen as a black male teacher I self identify as a black male teacher
	Relate	Most white teachers don't share the same ideology They identify because we look the same They open up to us faster We have an effect and not others? You can't relate if you never had to
“I was the only Black Male”	Where I Teach	My first year I was the only African American teacher When I walked in the female teachers cheered! I'm the only black male teacher
	Teacher Preparation Programs	Not many minorities or males No one looked like me Usually just me or another male in teaching class I would be the token I would always be the person for multicultural stuff I didn't see any black males until I graduated
	The only black male teacher they've had	Kids (black) don't have males at home All k-12 without a black male teacher Parents switched their kids to me because I was a black male
Role Models	For all Kids	I try to be a role model for all kids Not just those who reflect me, but all kids no matter their color
	For Black Kids	Something about the role we play in their lives Black boys don't have the right/positive male role models

<p>“I Don’t Take No Mess”</p>	<p>Being a Black Male Teacher Doesn’t Guarantee Acceptance</p> <p>Managing a Classroom</p> <p>Being the Disciplinarian</p>	<p>Black male and know your craft Black male may not be receptive of me Called an Uncle Tom by black kids Seen as a barrier Perceived as a threat Not from “da hood” Not really black</p> <p>Getting all the troubled kids Being the interventionist for black students I get the bad kids cause they know how I am No nonsense</p> <p>Do what you’re supposed to do or you will leave Not letting them get away with anything I don’t take no mess in my room I run a tight shift</p>
<p>“Female Dominated and Mostly White”</p>	<p>Such a gendered profession</p> <p>White Privilege</p> <p>Stereotypes/Biases</p> <p>“It’s not only racial, but it’s social”</p> <p>Urban vs. Suburban</p>	<p>A female profession Women have a different way Male students have trouble with female teachers</p> <p>Why are you in this field They assume it was easy for black males to teach Still trying to prove we belong Open invitation for whites and females Black males are the last to be sought Most Caucasian teachers take their privilege for granted</p> <p>Stereotypes of black male students being non-academic Stereotypical perceptions about minorities who teach Challenging my credentials Historical taboos and stereotypes People always react funny pause when I tell them what I do You don’t see me as I am Seen as janitors not teachers</p> <p>Upper middle class vs. lower social economic class Black kids have walls up against Caucasian teachers</p> <p>Cultural dissonance richer vs. poorer sides of town Missionary vision of education in teaching black students</p>