

TO BE BLACK, TO BE MALE, TO TEACH:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE  
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

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Fred S. Klipsch Educators College

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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by

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Fred S. Klipsch Educators College  
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APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation, "To be Black, to be Male, to Teach: A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Black Male Elementary Teachers," has been approved by the Department of Educational Leadership in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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## ABSTRACT

Black males are underrepresented in the teaching profession at all levels, but especially at the elementary level. The low number of Black male teachers can be attributed to low salary, low regard for the profession, perception of being work for women, and lack of respect. Now more than ever after the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial unrest during the summer of 2020 the experiences of Black male teachers is important to explore. This qualitative study looked at the experiences of seven Black male elementary teachers, using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a theoretical framework. Through one-on-one virtual interviews seven themes emerged: physiological needs focus on salary and benefits, safety needs pertain to job security, physical safety, and emotional security, sense of belonging is often a struggle, esteem is often low, self-actualization manifests a strong desire to make a difference, COVID-19 influenced teachers' experiences, and turnover and recruitment challenges for Black men in elementary education. Recommendations for future research included studying Black male teachers who spent their entire careers at the elementary level then retired.

Keywords: Black, teachers, male, elementary, recruitment, retention

## DEDICATION

**To Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior:** Whenever I get asked the question how this process went, I always respond with the same answer, by God's grace. I have grown so much both personally and professionally through this dissertation process. The one thing I can say is that because of you, I am better, wiser, and have a deeper appreciation for the process. Thank you, God, for this opportunity and thank you for allowing me to make it to the end. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us. Romans 8:31.

**To my daughter, Zuri Reign:** You are my forever blessing. I know I must have done good for God to bless me with you. I hope when you get older, you will understand what your Dad has accomplished. Everything I do is to provide a better life for you. I hope you grow up and be as proud to be my daughter as I am proud to be your Dad.

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**To my siblings, Justin, and Emily:** Everything I have done as your big brother is to set a path and foundation for you all to follow. While I do not say it often, you are my motivation and inspiration and I hope that you are proud to have me as your big brother. I love you!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“To be Black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage.”

—James Baldwin

There are those who ask whether the United States wants an educated Black man teaching the children. Thinking back, Black men who taught were killed. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed, Malcolm X was killed, Medgar Evers was killed, and Fred Hampton was killed. Far too often, history has shown us that when individuals from marginalized groups seek to have their voice heard, those in power work to silence them. History has also shown that the best way to destroy the Black community is to go after its men (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Black men are often theorized as defective (Curry, 2017). They have been marginalized theoretically and compared to a norm by which they are usually judged to be lacking (Saint-Aubin, 1994). Royster (2007) describes the price Black men pay for enacting masculinity. In a study comparing the trajectory of less affluent Black men and white men Royster (2007) concluded the masculinity of Black men impacted their interactions with the education market, the labor market, and the criminal justice system.

Black men alone cannot change the landscape of teaching; however they are important to the improvement (House, 2017). Black men have and will continue to be a force within our nation’s education system, but our nation must come to truly appreciate their value in the classroom (House, 2017). Often the media in our nation pushes a narrative that teaching is the worse career and that teachers are rushing to leave the profession (Olmstead, 2021).

The teaching profession was one of the first in which women were allowed to practice and by many standards today, teaching is considered a profession dominated by women (Perry, 2021). There are not enough African American male teachers (Graham & Erwin, 2011). While there are more Black women teachers, the numbers of Black men teachers are fewer (Schaeffer, 2021).

Today, it is critical to achieve a diverse and inclusive workforce within K–12 education. Black male teachers positively impact all students, and the affects they can have on students of color cannot be understated. Causey (2017) cites a 2017 study by researchers from John Hopkins University, having at least one Black teacher in elementary school cuts the high school dropout rate by 39% and raises the college aspirations for both boys and girls by 19%. Black students tend to respond better when those leading the classroom look like them.

This study examined the topic of Black male teachers, specifically in relation to teaching in elementary schools.

### **Personal Story**

“The impulse to dream was slowly beaten out of me by experience. Now it surged up again, and I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing.”

—Richard Wright

Unlike many of the students with whom I have had the opportunity to work, both parents raised me in the same household. This was a privilege that I never fully understood until I got older. Neither my mom nor my dad attended college after high school, but, for me, going to college was not much of a choice for as far back as I can remember. While I did not learn the importance of college from my parents, they taught

me many other valuable lessons. My parents were my first and ultimately best teachers. The lessons I learned at home have impacted me long after my traditional education experience. My dad taught me the importance of hard work and being a man. I aspire to be the father to my daughter that my father was to my siblings and me. My mother showed me what it means to love and what it means to sacrifice for those you love.

My parents wanted me to attend college and made sure that my K–12 education experience was the best. My education journey began at the age of five, when a drive to visit my Kindergarten school was shifted by tears and what my mother saw. As my parents visited the school that I was set to attend in the Fall, my mother became overwhelmed with tears in fear that the school I was going to attend was not what she wanted. The location of the school, the surrounding area, was not what she envisioned for her first-born son. So, she did what she felt was right. She used my grandmother's address and lied to put me in a school in a different neighborhood. It is amazing how one decision puts you on a path that will shape your life for years to come. I spent grades Kindergarten through fifth grade using my grandmother's address until my parents moved to the district where I had been attending. The experience of attending a school outside my neighborhood shaped my present work because it showed me that no parent should have to lie about their address or drive their child across town to attend a quality school. Every family should have access to a high-quality school that they would be proud to send their child to.

My teaching journey began at the age of 17, specifically while sitting in a math classroom in my junior year of high school. I became more aware of the under-representation of males in teaching, and specifically Black males. In elementary school, I

had two male teachers, and both were White. I had one male teacher in middle school, my first and only African American male teacher in seventh grade. At the time, there were only two in the entire building. In high school, I had zero. In high school, I also noticed the difference in how Black boys and other students were treated. Could it be due to the lack of representation? Imagine being in a space where there is barely anyone who looks like you. I did not have a Black male classroom teacher in high school, but I did grow closer to my middle school basketball coach, Mr. Bryant (pseudonym). He was the social studies teacher, but he founded an organization called Young Men of Purpose. My engagement with the Young Men of Purpose program in high school was my first experience mentoring younger students, and it fed my hunger to be a teacher. While I never had Mr. Bryant as a classroom teacher, he was an important role model of the type of Black male teacher I aspired to become one day. My senior year of high school, while a great time in my life, as one major chapter was closing and an important chapter was beginning, was also a time when I had more questions than answers. I knew the next chapter of my life was about finding answers to the questions. The one question that I did not need to find an answer for was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

After high school, I attended Central State University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Wilberforce, Ohio. My experience at Central State University was one of the best experiences of my life. My experience there reinforced and shaped the type of educator I would eventually become. I majored in English, with a focus on African American literature. My first year, I met someone who guided me through the next 4 years. Nella Hurston (pseudonym) was my freshman English teacher and also my boss for my work-study job at the Hallie Q. Brown Memorial Library. It was

there when Professor Bailey introduced me to the author and book that forever changed my life: *The Fire Next Time*, by James Baldwin. Reading *The Fire Next Time* and other works by Baldwin opened my eyes to how the racial injustice Baldwin wrote about during his time was still prevalent some 40 years later. Baldwin and other works by African American writers inspired me as an educator but inspired me, more importantly, as a Black man in the United States. During my junior year, I had the opportunity to join Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the oldest of the Divine Nine Black Greek letter organizations. Our fraternity's aims were the following: Manly Deeds, which meant uplifting each other as we climb and not tearing one another down; Scholarship, which meant growth in knowing oneself and developing into a more well-rounded person; and Love for all Mankind, which meant to love everyone regardless of their pasts. I was fortunate during my 4 years at Central State University to learn so much that helped shaped me into the educator I became both as a teaching practitioner and, importantly, as Black man.

My career began the fall after graduating. I returned to my alma mater and taught English in the alternative program for students who had been removed from the general education setting. It was a great experience, both as a chance to get my feet wet in the profession, but also because it pushed me and challenged me, as the students had been pushed aside and the program, I was teaching in became their second chance at moving back into the general education space. The program was great and, unlike in my own K-12 experience, the other two teachers in the program were Black males. So, these students had an experience that I did not have by being taught by Black males. During

my first few years, I also had the opportunity to coach track and field, which I truly enjoyed, and I continued to build my skills as an educator and teacher.

After 2 years, I left the traditional school setting and worked for a non-profit focused on introducing students to a career in healthcare. While I was no longer in schools teaching, I had the opportunity to travel to different schools across the city and to talk with students about careers in healthcare. While visiting those schools, I was amazed how some high school kids had the same experiences as me even six to seven years after I had graduated. The students, who were predominately of color and mostly African American, lacked the representation of African American male teachers. I saw plenty of Black women teachers, but not many males. When these schools did have African American males in the building, they were not classroom teachers. They served as instructional assistants, coaches, behavioral specialists, and in-school suspension coordinators. I learned, traveling to those schools, that Black males were being pigeon-holed into roles in schools that were disciplinary rather than instructional roles.

After doing that work for 2 years and seeing the landscape of the schools, I decided to return to the K–12 space. This time, I entered a charter school. I taught high school English at a former Indianapolis Public School (IPS) high school that the state had taken over and converted into a charter school, which was now run by a charter management company. My 2 years there molded me into a better teacher and introduced me to the idea of leadership within a school. During that school year, I began studying to receive my building administrator's license through a program at Marian University. As I was older and had some previous teaching experience, many of the new teachers and others in the building leaned on me. It was a tough situation, but one that I was used to

considering my experiences in the alternative program. While there, I received a call from Mr. Bryant (pseudonym) who was the principal of a new middle school program back in Pike Township. He asked if I had any interest in returning. Intrigued by the opportunity of middle school, I left and returned to Pike. The next year catapulted me and the rest of my career.

In July of 2015, I was returning to Pike, but I had some other interest in education. I began to write and help start a blog focused on education stories in Indianapolis. I was beginning a policy fellowship through Teach Plus and was advocating for education policy. My focus was the lack of teacher diversity and the recruitment and retention of African American male teachers. I also helped launch a program called the Educate ME Foundation, which focused on trying to increase the number of Black male teachers in schools. The entire year and the work I was doing prepared me for the summer of 2016, when I was given an opportunity that ultimately changed my life.

After my second round at Pike ended after a year, I received my first principalship at a middle school in our charter network. Then, the next year, I was moved to the elementary school. Excited about the challenge, I flashed back to the 17-year-old version of me, when I had watched the African American boys in my school struggle academically, behaviorally, and socially. I then looked at the teaching staff and saw that they did not have teachers who looked like them. The difference now is that I was ten years older and two degrees wiser, and I could do something about it. The motivation for this dissertation began as I worked to increase the number of African American male teachers in my building and realized that, while there are some out there, there are not many who are interested in elementary school.

### Statement of the Problem

“I’m always trying to fight on both fronts and not act like schools can change everything  
but also not act like schools can’t change things.”

—Howard Fuller

The recruitment of teachers both at the primary and secondary levels of education has become a major challenge for many school leaders (Hanson, 2005). There are benefits for Black students to have at least one Black teacher, especially in elementary and middle school. Elementary and secondary teachers in the United States are approximately 86% White, although racial and ethnic diversity in public school students has increased over time (Egalite et al., 2015). Research shows that having a teacher of the same race and ethnicity can have a positive impact on student motivation, achievement, and attitude in school. By having a BIPOC teacher rather than a non-BIPOC teacher, the expectation level for minority students increases (Egalite & Kisida, 2018).

In Indiana, the low numbers of Black male teachers are alarming. Minor (2022) states that according to the Indiana Department of Education (2022), 3,173 of the 75,174 teachers in Indiana are Black. Out of those who are Black, only 888 are males. In other words, just 1.2% of teachers in Indiana are Black males (Indiana Department of Education 2022).

Black male teachers were displaced at a higher rate than Black female teachers between 1954 and 1968 (Fenwick, 2022). In the decade after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, that number dropped by half (Tillman, 2004). Almost 40,000 Black teachers and principals lost their jobs because the court decision shut down the predominantly Black schools. In her book *Jim Crow’s Pink Slip*, Leslie Fenwick

highlights how despite possessing qualifications that exceed their white counterparts, Black principals and teachers were illegally demoted, dismissed, and fired because of the resistance to *Brown v. Board* (Fenwick, 2022). Black teachers taught Black students in Black schools before *Brown v. Board of Education* (Tillman, 2004). After the verdict, things quickly changed, and the image of Black males as teachers in schools was almost wiped away. When schools were integrated, many Black educators lost their jobs due to the white resistance of *Brown v. Board* (Fenwick, 2022).

### **From Brown to COVID-19**

“Jim Crow’s Pink Slip was about telling stories, to challenge the quaint notion about Black educators of an era.”

—Dr. Leslie Fenwick

### ***Brown* Impact on Black Teachers**

In 1896, the court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld a Louisiana state law that allowed for “equal but separate accommodations for the whites and colored races.” Almost 60 years later, a new argument was brought to the Supreme Court that rejected the “separate but equal” clause in *Plessy v. Ferguson* as it related to public education, while also implying that it was unconstitutional in all other aspects of public life.

Many Black students were the beneficiaries of the *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1952) Supreme Court decision. It asked, “does the segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprive the children of the minority group of equal education opportunities?” (McCullough, 2012). After the court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, African American schools disappeared, and Black students were

integrated into predominately White schools. However, many White parents refused to allow their children to be taught by Black teachers (Dougherty, 1998).

Many argue that *Brown v. Board of Education* is one of the most significant milestones of the Civil Rights Movement, and there is no denying the impact it had on the Black teaching force in this country. It paved the way for all-Black schools where Black children could thrive and received a quality education from Black teachers. How can a court ruling give children so much, yet take so much at the same time? While many Black children now had equal access and opportunity to attend high quality schools, they no longer had Black teachers as role models. They lost the individuals who uniquely understood their backgrounds. In many instances, the Black voice was silenced in public education in this country.

Despite the lack of opportunities for Blacks, one career path available to Black communities was in teaching. Oakley et al. (2009) stated that over 38,000 Black teachers in the South and other border states lost their jobs after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. According to Leslie Fenwick from Howard University, prior to *Brown* there were 17 states that had segregated school systems, and 35% to 50% of the teaching force was Black (Will, 2019). The impact of losing of so many Black teachers is still impacting the teaching force today. In 2000, the percentage of teachers of color in the United States was 14% (Oakley et al., 2009). There are no states in the United States that produce a Black teaching force that high.

While a Civil Rights victory, *Brown v. Board of Education* had unintended consequences. There was no way to predict how it would impact the Black teaching

force, but the case and the white resistance caused the dismissal, demotion, or forced resignation of many highly qualified and experienced Black teachers (Will, 2019).

### ***COVID-19 Impact on Black Teachers***

In March of 2020, schools changed drastically as COVID-19 cases began to increase worldwide. School closures were not new; schools had closed before due to natural disasters, such as tornadoes and hurricanes. For instance, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused roughly 700 schools to close for months, and some never reopened in 2005 (Sacerdote, 2008). During COVID-19, the first school closure was on March 12, when Ohio became the first to close schools statewide (Camera, 2020). On March 19, Indiana followed suit (Herron, 2020). By late March 2020, all U.S. public school buildings were closed as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Education Week, 2020). The general belief was that schools would be closed for only a few weeks, but, by May, almost all states had closed their doors for the remainder of the 2019–2020 school year (Education Week, 2020). While the COVID-19 school closures drastically impacted students, specifically students of color, it also took a heavy toll on teachers. In a survey by Education Week (2021) in April 2020, about 56% of teachers said that their morale level was low.

Many believed that the 2020–2021 school year would bring a sense of normalcy, but it only brought new challenges as many schools opened remotely. Teachers had to learn a new method of teaching and interacting with their students. The shift caused teacher burnout and ultimately led to many leaving the profession (Education Week, 2020). The biggest harm of COVID-19 was on the recruitment of teachers; it was already hard enough to recruit Black men to become teachers, but COVID-19 and the uncertainty

how teaching and school would look in the future made it even more difficult. Teaching is a demanding job in normal circumstances, due to the challenges of classroom management, lack of resources, heavy workload, and the pressures of standardized tests. With a major health crisis and a switch to a new form of teaching, it became even harder.

For Black teachers, this is even more challenging due to lack of diversity in schools and the pressure to perform above and beyond just to keep their jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic required teachers to switch to remote instruction, all while the pandemic disproportionately killed people of color. Many students, especially Black students, did not have reliable internet at home to log on to class. Plenty of studies show that remote learning did not work for students of color, but it was also hard on Black teachers. Studies reported that Black teachers were more than twice as likely as other teachers to leave their jobs by the end of the 2020–2021 school year (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

COVID-19 hurt the recruitment of aspiring Black male teachers. The pandemic impacted higher education budgets, and budget cuts caused many Black students to leave or delay the completion of their programs. The cuts universities made ultimately led to smaller financial aid packages for students, and this impacted Black students who tend to rely more heavily on those packages to complete school. Black students enrolled in teacher preparation programs are also more likely to rely on federal student loans as compared to White students (Fiddiman et al., 2019). During the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer students applied for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is needed to get financial aid. The result was a dip in college enrollment and enrollment and teacher preparation programs.

Black male students like many other students who were aspiring to become teachers were impacted by interruptions to their student teaching and other practicum field experience due to COVID-19 (VanLone et al., 2022). Many of the teachers entering classrooms during the 2021–2022 school year did not have a normal student teaching experience. They found themselves doing student teaching online or not at all. Now, many are entering the profession with little to no classroom experience and are expected to students who are behind academically. Field experience influences the success of teachers, allowing them to feel more comfortable and to have mentors to help them navigate their first few years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and worsened the long-standing societal disparities impacting Black men in our country. The intersection between the COVID-19 pandemic and the social unrest that unfolded in the wake of the killing of George Floyd and others has significantly impacted Black men. Black men face a unique challenge as they grapple with the health risks of COVID-19 and the social unrest that erupted. The pandemic disproportionately affected Black communities, with higher infection rates and more severe outcomes, including higher mortality rates. The pandemic disproportionately affected Black communities, with higher infection rates and worse health outcomes, including higher mortality rates among Black individuals (APM Research Lab, 2021). Black men, in particular, faced elevated risks due to their overrepresentation in essential frontline jobs that exposed them to the virus (Hawkins & Stevenson, 2020).

Simultaneously, the social unrest triggered by the deaths of Black individuals continued to highlight systemic racism and police brutality, igniting a nationwide movement. Black men were at the forefront of protests and advocacy efforts, leading to a

complex dynamic where they were simultaneously at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and subject to increased scrutiny and potential violence during protests (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020). However, they also faced heightened scrutiny, police brutality, and arrests during these protests, underscoring the risks they took to demand change. The economic fallout from the pandemic, including job losses and economic insecurity, disproportionately affected Black men, exposing existing disparities in income and employment opportunities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the social unrest significantly impacted Black male teachers, shedding light on the resilience and vulnerabilities of these teachers. As teachers, Black males have played a crucial role in the lives of their students, serving as mentors and role models. However, the pandemic forced a sudden shift to remote learning, challenging teachers. The experiences of Black male teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest highlight the need for greater support and recognition for their contributions. Policymakers and education leaders should consider the unique challenges they face, including the digital divide, increased emotional labor, and job insecurity, and work to address these issues through targeted initiatives and policies. Additionally, efforts to diversify the teaching profession should be at the forefront to ensure that Black male teachers' voices and perspectives continue to enrich their students' lives and contribute to the broader discourse on racial equality in education.

Teacher shortages were already a growing problem in the United States before the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in high poverty schools where many Black male

teachers work (Garcia and Weiss, 2019). The shortage worsened as many schools closed due to not being able to fill vacant teaching positions. Other schools remained opened but struggled with the large number of teacher vacancies, leaving those teachers who remained to be overworked. As school struggled to keep up with the COVID-19 safety protocols, many teachers were making a choice between their jobs and their health. School districts have had to be creative in how they recruit and retain teachers of color, specifically Black men (Thomas, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

“Education is an important element in the struggle for human rights. It is the means to help our children and thereby increase self-respect.”

—Malcolm X

The purpose of this study was to examine why Black males decide to teach at the elementary level. There has been research done to highlight the views and the perceptions of Black males who teach at the elementary level (Bristol, 2014; Walker, 2012; Holmes, 2021). These researchers focused on recruitment and retention strategies. Additional perspectives on research has been conducted to approach the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers in looking at social identity and mentorship (Opoku, 2022). The purpose of this research was to understand why Black males teach at the elementary level. This research will address recruitment and retention, but from a different perspective than what has previously been done. Examining the why of these Black male elementary teachers and the different levels of needs for Black male elementary teachers will provide a better understanding and ultimate aid in the recruitment and retention.

### **Significance of the Study**

“Education remains one of the Black community’s most enduring values. It is sustained by the belief that freedom and education go hand in hand, that learning, and training are essential to economic quality and independence.”

—Marian Wright Edelman

Research in the education field makes a compelling case for the benefits of a diverse teaching force. While minority students would be the greatest beneficiaries of a diverse teaching force, there is evidence that all students would benefit, along with the country at large (Shanker, 2015). McCall (2017) studied the experiences of Black male teachers who left the profession using the framework of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. An advancement of that study was to focus on elementary teacher and teachers who stayed in the profession using the same framework. This study provided additional insight on the topic. The significance of this study was to provide insight on the lived experience of Black elementary teachers on why they pursued the profession, how they describe success, barriers they faced, how they view their importance, and what they believe helps recruit more Black male teachers to the profession. This research benefits African American males who desire to become teachers, particularly at the elementary level, by offering them valuable insight from current Black male elementary teachers. This study is significant in elevating the voice of Black male teachers, particularly at the elementary level. The majority of elementary-level teachers are women, and males, particularly Black males, are almost absent (Young and Young 2020).

An additional significance is added to this study, when factoring in how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the lived experiences of these teachers. COVID-19 added

additional stressors for teachers with the original shut down of schools and the move to virtual learning. The ever-changing guidelines for safety, social distancing, the back and forth quarantining all added to an already difficult job. Pressley (2021) says that teachers are facing new demands and showing high levels of stress with the new instructional requirements and the anxieties due to the current state of the education profession and the pandemic. This study became even more significant and will add an important contribution by exploring Black male elementary teachers who in some way had their experience impacted by COVID-19.

### **Theoretical Framework**

“The purpose of education... is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions.”

—James Baldwin

Theoretical frameworks provide four dimensions of insight in qualitative studies. They provide focus and organize the study, expose, and obstruct meaning, connect a study to the existing scholarship and terms, and identify its strengths and weakness (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) will be the theory utilized in this study. The theory will aid in the topic development, the literature review, and the study’s research design.

### **Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

While considering the motivation of Black male teachers to choose the elementary level, this study used Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954) in examining and understanding motivational. Maslow (1943) states people’s primary aim is to meet their basic needs, while also aiming to meet higher needs. This remains until they can reach

the highest of need of all, self-actualization. Maslow (1970) defined self-actualization as reaching the fulfillment of one's potential in life, along with developing an appreciation for life and growth in one's skills. Maslow (1962) determined there are five levels. The levels are as follows: physiological, safety, belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Before a person can find complete satisfaction and act unselfishly all five levels must be satisfied (McCall, 2017). Deep love and belonging happens with the physiological and security needs are met reasonably (Maslow, 1962). McCall (2017) cited Maslow's (1962) suggestion that when self-esteem needs are reasonably met, a person can begin to seek opportunities for achievement and advancement through a mastery given task. McCall (2017) concluded in a study that making a difference was important in the beginning, but the lack of return became a priority need for the participants.

### **Research Questions**

“Education must enable a man to become efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

While considering the impact of COVID-19 and in what ways did it impact the Black male teachers at the elementary level, this study considered the following overarching question: What were the lived experiences of Black male teachers that contribute to their motivation to teach at the elementary level? Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Need the following research questions guide this study:

Research Questions:

- RQ1: What physiological needs are met for the Black male teacher?

- RQ2: What safety needs are met for the Black male teacher?
- RQ3: How does the Black male teacher feel a sense of belonging?
- RQ4: What self-esteem needs are met for the Black male teacher?
- RQ5: What self-actualization needs are met for the Black male teacher?
- RQ6: How did the Black male experience COVID-19 as an elementary teacher?

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The study had both delimitations and limitations. Delimitations are defined as the scope of the study or established parameters. Limitations are the constraints on the study based on the research methodology and design (Miles, 2019). Delimitations are self-imposed restrictions to the study, while limitations are restrictions inherent to the methodology (Miles, 2019). The researcher can control for the delimitations in the study (Miles, 2019).

One delimitation is that the study focused only on male teachers. The choice to focus on this group limited the researcher's ability to include results from other genders of teachers. A second delimitation of the study is that it focused only on Black teachers. The choice to focus on this group limited its ability to include results from other races of teachers. A third delimitation of the study is that it focused on Black male teachers from the elementary grade level. This limited the study's ability to include results beyond this grade level.

One limitation of the study was whether the participants are being honest in their responses to the question and honest about their experiences as Black male elementary teachers. A second limitation was whether the participants will be available for the

allotted time to conduct the interviews or focus groups. A third limitation was in capturing the complete experience of each participant. A fourth limitation was the participant varied in age, grade levels taught, school types, and years of experience. A fifth limitation was sample size that is smaller than the total population.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

In education, terms can have multiple meanings. This section provides definitions and explanations of key terms in this study.

*African American male:* This term refers to those who identify as African American and who come from African descent. African American and Black are used interchangeably through this study.

*Catholic school:* A Roman Catholic parish-based, elementary school (Jordan, 2016).

*Charter school:* A public school that operates under contract, or charter, entered between the school's organizer and a charter school authorizer, sometimes referred to as a charter school sponsor (Indiana Charter School Board, 2021).

*Diversity (teacher):* In this study, diversity is used as the range of identities that exists in a group of teachers.

*Elementary school:* Schools that serve grades Kindergarten through Grade 6.

*Elementary teacher:* Teachers who teach grades Kindergarten through Grade 6.

*Pigeon-holed:* This refers to African American teachers who are forced into positions in schools, but not as classroom teachers.

*Private school:* A school that is established, supported, and run by a non-governmental agency.

*Teacher recruitment:* An effort to increase the number of qualified teachers who accept a teaching position in a school.

*Teacher retention:* The ability to keep teachers at a school year after year.

*Traditional public school:* A school that provides an educational service and receives public funds as the primary support and is operated by a district, metropolitan, local, or state educational agency.

*Traditionally trained:* Teaching preparation that happens during a 4-year collegiate program of study for a Bachelor's degree.

*Transition-to-teaching program:* Post-BA teacher preparation

*Under-represented:* Teachers from a group that has been historically under-represented in a school, such as males and African American males.

### **Summary**

“Education and work are the levers to uplift a people.”

—W. E. B. Du Bois

This chapter highlighted the need for the study. The purpose of this qualitative design study was to explore the experience of seven Black men teaching in elementary schools. The motivation for the research was two-fold: the researcher's experience as an elementary principal in recruiting Black male teachers, and the overall disproportionately number of Black male teachers in elementary schools across the country.

The study used a phenomenological design to discover Black male elementary teachers' motivations and their path to teaching in elementary schools. The researcher collected data through individual interviews, panel discussions, and focus groups. Chapter 2 of this study contained a review of the literature related to this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, there is a growing need in U.S. schools to recruit and retain Black male teachers. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2021) reported that during the 2017–2018 school year, there were 3.3 million teachers. White women comprised about 76% of the teaching force. Teachers in the United States have been a topic of concern and the federal government has made efforts to increase diversity in the teaching profession by focusing on changes to student demographics, the advantages of a diverse teaching force, and the turnover rate of teachers of color (Sun et al., 2018). The need for Black male teachers is due to the disproportionately high number of White woman teachers. Many schools across the country are growing in diversity. The number of minority students is increasing, especially the number of Black students. While the majority of students in urban areas are Black, most teachers in urban schools are White (Brockenbrough, 2014). The diversity of the teacher force has lagged for years and needs to catch up. Despite long-term career opportunities in teaching, there is still a shortage of Black male teachers. Mitchell (2016) stated that despite the efforts from researchers, policymakers, and alternative teaching pathways, the Black male is still underrepresented in the classroom.

This chapter highlights literature on the importance of Black male teachers, specifically at the elementary level. The literature review begins with a description of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. The current study focused on the many roles Black male teachers play within schools, including role model, disciplinarian, surrogate father,

symbol of diversity, academic influencer, change agent, and token. Previous researchers have explored the paths many Black male teachers take on their way to the classroom. These paths include both traditional routes through programs like Call ME MISTER and non-traditional routes such as Teach for America. The chapter concludes with an examination of gender norms at the elementary level, Black men in the elementary grades, and the perceptions of Black male elementary teachers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs provided the framework for this qualitative study. Maslow created this theory of basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs that motivate people to move consciously or subconsciously through levels or tiers based on inner and outer satisfaction of those needs. Walker (2017) referenced Maslow's theory in his study to lay a foundation that focused on motivation. Walker stated that motivation was a contributing factor to the satisfaction of an individual. In Walker's study, there were some similarities in participants' perspectives of the attrition and retention of Black males. Three main themes emerged from the study, including (a) role model, (b) recruiting, and (c) financial aspect (Walker, 2017). Walker's participants found motivation in one or all these of these themes. Walker concluded that the participants were motivated for the children to serve as role models, because of the low number of Black male elementary teachers. Money and work-related issues were dominant themes for many of the participants in Walker's study.

McCall (2017) conducted a study to understand why Black males left the profession, using Maslow's (1954) theory as a framework. McCall concluded that while Black men entered the profession to make a difference and impact the children they

taught, the low return on investment diminished the appeal of the profession. The participants mentioned low salaries and said benefits were important for Black male teachers (McCall, 2017). The low salary did not meet the physiological needs of the participants, which is why they left. Another common theme among participants in McCall's study was their sense of belonging. Many of the participants mentioned the challenges they faced while working in a female-dominated workplace. They were careful of their verbal communication, body language, and relationship acquaintances (McCall, 2017). These studies by McCall and Walker (2017) highlighted the utility of Maslow's theory in understanding why Black males stay in and leave positions as elementary school teachers.

### **Black Male Teachers as Role Models**

Black male teachers are often viewed as role models for students. Holland (1991) argued for increasing the number of Black male teachers so that Black boys may have more role models. There is a growing call for Black male teachers to help combat the plight that many Black male students face in urban schools (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) stated that while Black male teachers described the pressure and self-regulation that accompanied being role models and teachers, they also believed they were given opportunities to disrupt stereotypes. Research suggests that Black boys are more influenced by Black male teachers (Warren, 2017)

During his 2011 commencement speech at Morehouse College, then Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, launched a teacher recruitment campaign called *Black Men to the Blackboard*. During the address, Secretary Duncan said, "Less than three percent of the nation's teachers are person of color during a time when Black children need Black

teachers as mentors and role models” (Bristol, 2014, p. 24). Tafari (2018) agreed, as she believed one of the best ways to rectify the crisis affecting Black boys in schools was to ensure they were immersed in an educational environment where they could have realistic role models who shared their cultural experiences and had similar cultural capital.

This research did not just argue that Black male teachers at the elementary level were role models, but also highlighted how their presence as role models for Black students could change students’ perceptions as they matured. Black male teachers as mentors can support students in developing conflict resolution skills and strategies (Young & Young, 2020). If more students interacted with Black male teachers earlier on, negative stereotypes about Black men may be challenged. Additionally, it would allow Black youth who lacked father figures to see Black men working in other professions, beside sports and entertainment. Black male teachers as role models can support children of color, especially the educational, social, and cultural needs of Black boys (Jones, 2006). Chmelynski (2005) noted that students of color needed teachers of color to help them develop those skills.

Black students may better identify with Black male teachers as role models because of their shared experiences and backgrounds (Gordon, 1995). The role of the Black male teacher as a role model extends beyond what they can do for students in school. The Black male teacher as a role model can also have a positive impact on the development of Black students, as adults. As Foster (1991) explained, Black male teachers who serve as role models can reinforce cultural norms of the community. Black male role models often hold Black students to expectations that exceed those of the broader community (Foster,

1991). The growing challenges that many Black boys face has created an increased need for Black male teachers as role models. Lynn (2006) highlighted the correlation between positive male role models and the elimination of the barriers faced by Black boys, including racism, poverty, discrimination, incarceration, and high school dropout. Irvine (1988) noted that White students could also benefit from Black teachers as role models. There are benefits to having Black male teachers as role models, not just for Black students, but also for students of various backgrounds (Smith et al., 2004).

### **Black Male Teachers as Disciplinarians**

Due to the challenges in and out of school that many Black boys face, the push for more Black male teachers comes from a place of needing them to serve first as disciplinarians and as teachers, second (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). Black male teachers often perceive their peers and school administrators to expect them to become experts on all things Black (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). They are often forced to assume the role of the enforcer or disciplinarian. Bristol and Mentor's (2018) study of 27 Black male teachers in Boston revealed Black men had to attend to students' social and emotional development, which influenced their capacity to engage and manage perceived misbehaviors by students. When the few Black male elementary teachers must do more of the enforcing than educating in the classroom, their teaching qualifications are undermined. The high suspension rates of Black students lead many Black teachers into the roles of deans and behavioral specialists.

Often, Black teachers feel as though their school leaders see them as disciplinarians first and teachers second (Barnum, 2018). Many school leaders observe Black male teachers' abilities to relate to Black students without raising their voices and perceive

them as tough and strict instead of as individuals who found opportunities to connect and help students (Tomlin, 2021). When it comes time for promotions or advancement, a disproportionate number of Black men are recommended to or hired in disciplinarian roles instead of academic roles (Brockenbrough, 2015).

Data shows that Black boys in elementary schools across the country are twice as likely to be suspended than their Latino and White classmates (Catalyst Chicago, 2010). These suspension numbers speak to what happens to many Black males when they enter the classroom as teachers, as they are expected to help curve the data of suspension for Black boys. Multiple researchers have cited the overreliance on Black male teachers as disciplinarians in schools that serve large populations of Black students (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Brockenbrough 2015; Brown, 2009; Young & Young, 2020).

Brown (2009) believed the perceptions as Black men as disciplinarians comes from the label that Black men and boys are oppositional to the norms and expectations that exist in schools. These perceptions then lead to the disproportionate suspension of Black boys. Young and Young (2020) stated that perceptions of Black men as disciplinarians is not just harmful to Black male teachers who want to be seen as content experts, but also to the other teachers who are absolved from the responsibilities of classroom management. The Black male teacher is called upon to handle the discipline due to perceptions that they can successfully redirect the Black student because they are Black and male, and the student will better respond to them (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). These expectations could be the byproduct of expectations that Black male teachers fill the gap for fatherless homes.

### **Black Male Teachers as Surrogate Fathers**

This section discusses how Black male teachers compensate for what is missing in the students' homes. Carr (2002) suggested that Black male elementary teachers can compensate for the lack of strong male role models in Black students' homes. Many Black youth grow up in women-led households; in 2019, 64% of Black children grew up in a single-parent household (Kids Count Data Center, n.d). Black male teachers in the classroom can compensate for the absence of Black fathers at home, who are supposed to be the protectors, providers, and disciplinarians (Carr, 2002). A teacher cannot replace a Black father in the home, but they are the next best option for many Black students.

Black teachers who stand in front of Black children for six hours a day, five days a week, for seven months out of the year are vital to their development (Carr, 2002). By serving as surrogate fathers, Black male teachers can bridge the gaps that exist for Black students between the experiences at home and the experiences at school. When Black male teachers serve as surrogate fathers, they can help their Black students navigate institutional racism that society often characterized with Black students who grow up fatherless (Bristol, 2014). Cash (2021) concurred with this notion, suggesting that students benefit from seeing Black teachers in bodily form, even if interactions are limited. The Black male teacher often serves in the father role for at-risk, fatherless students. Black male teachers as father figures are not just needed for Black boys, but for all children. For example, Morgan (1999) stated that Black American is quickly becoming a nation of fatherless daughters. Very little attention is paid to the significant role Black men play in shaping their daughters' ideas about themselves and love (Morgan, 1999).

Brockenbrough (2011) noted that Black male teachers are identified as father figures and their 'other fathering' practices are associated with their culturally relevant pedagogies. He noted that six men from his study pointed to deep connections with Black male students as the central aspect of their work as Black male teachers (Brockenbrough, 2011). While many embrace the role of father figure as Black male teachers, others from the study expressed anxieties. Brockenbrough explained that despite scholarly and media depictions, seven of the eleven participants described the role of father figure as an extra-pedagogical responsibility. Some participants specifically expressed that it was not their job to assume a father role for their students (Brockenbrough, 2011).

### **Black Male Teachers as Symbols of Diversity**

Increasing the number of Black male teachers at the elementary level will increase equity and diversity in the profession. Multiple researchers have described the importance of Black teachers to Black students (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Brockenbrough, 2009; Young & Young, 2020;), but they impact White students, as well. Black teachers impact White students as they expose them to the diversity that exists in the world (Irvine, 1998). Curry (1986) explained that education has been the means for African Americans to help themselves. While education was easier for Whites, many Blacks had to pursue their learning in secret. Curry believed that African Americans emphasized education because they lacked other means of advancement, such as influential family members, access to capital, and living environments free of constraints. The importance of education for African American dates back long before Black people were forced into slavery in the New World. In Africa, many societies believed in the importance of education for young

children. Education and teaching were considered sacred duties. It was important for children to be educated, as this promised them better lives.

Historically, the Black community has regarded teaching as a noble and well-respected profession. Irvine (1989) and Maylor (2009) pointed to the vital role that Black teachers play in the lives of their students – especially Black students. Irvine (2004) described Black teachers as having a *cultural eye* that allows them to connect with Black students through shared cultural backgrounds. The cultural eye allows Black teachers to have more success with Black students, fostering better academic outcomes. The cultural eye is about teachers demonstrating the ability to recognize their students' backgrounds and create classroom experiences and instruction that align with those backgrounds. Black teachers also understand how non-classroom issues, such as a lack of food in the house, lower socioeconomic status, and poor at-home living situations can undermine the achievement of Black students (Mitchell, 1998).

For many Black teachers, success in the education profession can be attributed to cultural capital, a term Pierre Bourdieu introduced in the 1970s (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu referred to cultural capital as the social and cultural knowledge that can help students make progress (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu stated that cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state (Richardson, 1986). Cultural capital is about the experience, exposure, knowledge, and educational advantages over others who have not acquired it, had it transmitted to them, or had it handed down to them (Fant, 2017). Fant (2017) described Black teachers as being able to affirm the voices, viewpoints, and worldviews of their Black students in the classroom. For Black teachers in the education profession, the idea of cultural capital is

important for three reasons: (a) it helps Black students develop a strong sense of identity; (b) it encourages a love of learning; and (c) it builds trust and cooperation. Black students develop a strong sense of identity when their teachers help them feel more connected to who they are and where they come from. This encourages their love of learning because students show more interest in learning from teachers who look like them and understand them better. Trust and cooperation are built through recognizing shared backgrounds between teachers and students.

Scholars have underscored the importance of having Black educators in the teaching workforce. Cherng and Halpin (2016) argued that Black students benefitted from Black teachers because those teachers have higher expectations of them and are more culturally sensitive than White teachers. This is even more important with the variety of traumas Black students face outside of school, such as police violence and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, which drastically interrupted the education of Black students. Additional work is needed to strengthen the pipeline of Black teachers in U.S. schools so more Black students can receive a quality education and have better experiences in school.

### **Black Male Teachers as Academic Influencers**

Bristol (2014) noted that Black males are the most socioeconomically disenfranchised group. Black males perform the lowest academically and have a higher rate of high school dropout than students of other races (Schott, 2010). Jones (2006) suggested that Black males can influence Black boys, who suffer more from academic underachievement and are generally less satisfied with school. Black male teachers provide Black students with more support for their self-esteem, their hopelessness, their

productivity dysfunction, and their low expectations in school. These supports can improve their performance in school. Having a Black teacher is important for Black students to perform academically. The representation of the Black teacher is important in academic achievement; however, it is more about the Black male teacher being an influencer of academic achievement. The most important factor impacting academic achievement for Black students is the expectations of the teacher (Kunjufu, 2002). There are studies that illustrate how Black teachers express to their students the importance of education within their larger social and political worlds (Brown, 2009).

The Black male teacher who is an influencer of academics is the Black teacher who can provoke social and political change through pedagogical practice. Researchers have highlighted the importance of the pedagogical practices of the Black teachers on the academic achievement of Black students (Delpit, 1988; Foster, 1991; Irvine, 1990). Through research about the pedagogical practice, Brown (2009) discovered Black teachers' abilities to engage in a variety of culturally based rhetorical strategies helped foster student learning.

Through commonalities in culture and background, Black teachers who teach Black students can challenge and push them more than White teachers (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). According to a Vanderbilt University study, Black teachers are three times more likely than White teachers to refer Black students to the gifted program (Grissom & Redding, 2016). The study mentioned the fact that Black teachers provided more access to learning by not sending Black students to the principal's office as frequently, and they challenged their Black student to reach new academic heights. There is a link between the race of the teacher and the assignment of students to gifted programs (Grissom et al.,

2015). The Black male teacher as an academic influencer can push to see more Black students recommended for gifted program over special education programs. Participation in gifted programs have been linked better overall academic performance (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Of the various roles Black male teachers play, the role of academic influencer may be the most important of them all.

### **Black Male Teachers as Change Agents**

Maylor (2009) noted that students of color who have Black male teacher role models often demonstrate improvements in their behaviors, aspirations, and achievements. Black male teacher role models can improve students' outcomes, leading to a better school experience. Students cannot be what they cannot see. The push for more Black male teachers in classrooms does not suggest non-Black male teachers cannot impact student achievement and outcomes. However, research indicates Black male teachers can contribute greatly to the overall success of Black students. Thus, those responsible for hiring teachers must make the recruitment and retention of Black male elementary teachers a priority. Black male teachers position themselves as agents of change for students and their respective communities (Fant, 2017).

The push to increase the number of Black male teachers as a reason for social change in the Black community emerged after the Million Man March (Dawson, 2001). The Million Man March highlighted the need for Black men to stand in unity with one another and take responsibility for themselves and each other to build responsible communities (How Black Academics Viewed the Million Man March 1995). The Black male teacher as an agent for change assumes that Black men can reach Black boys on a different level because they overcame the existential dilemma of being "Black" and

“male,” and they possess knowledge they can pass down (Brown, 2011). As change agents, they provide knowledge that allows students to not only succeed in school, but also in life.

Brown (2009) highlighted literature that successful Black teachers of Black students possess a commitment to social justice (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lynn, 2002). Black male teachers as change agents achieve a level of success with their students by relying on social justice through education. The role of the Black male teacher as an agent of change is exercised in a variety of ways. As Brown (2009) concluded, the Black male teacher is not a monolith. Black male teachers have varied perspectives and beliefs that they employ when they are teaching Black students. While Black male teachers may hold similar commitments to changing both the academic and social outcomes of Black students, they approach that change in a variety of ways. As previously mentioned, Black male teachers are agents of change through their roles as disciplinarians, surrogate fathers, and academic influencers.

### **Black Male Teachers as Tokens**

The theory of tokenism was founded by Kanter (1977), whose research was focused on skewed sex ratios and responses to women. Kanter developed a framework to conceptualize the process that occurs between dominants and tokens. Kanter’s data collection and analysis were focused on the representation of workers in one organization. The theory of tokenism explores situations in which men and women operate as tokens (Kanter, 1977). For Black male teachers, these spaces could include schools, especially at the elementary level. While this dissertation was not centered on

tokenism, it is useful to conceptualize the notion that Black male elementary teachers are often considered tokens.

Bristol (2014) addressed the implications for racialized tokens by discussing gender and focusing on performance pressures, boundary heightening, and role encapsulation. Bristol's reference to performance pressures faced by Black male teachers at the elementary level may result in what Kanter (1977) described as either overachievement, intentionally making one appear less threatening, or trying to become invisible. Kanter suggested that boundary heightening occurred when both tokens and dominants were aware of their differences and interacted based on those differences (Bristol, 2014).

In the case of Black men at the elementary level where they are outnumbered, Kanter's (1977) theory positions the Black male teacher as the bridge between the school and the community, thus forcing Black male teachers to isolate themselves from the rest of the school because of this added pressure. Bristol (2014) focused on Kanter's idea that tokens face role encapsulation. This means they are required by dominant groups to serve in familiar and stereotypical roles. Bristol described a study by Hasse (2010), which focused on male primary teachers who negotiated gender in a predominantly female setting. The men in the study described how they were disproportionately asked to serve in roles as coaches and disciplinarians. Their failure to accept these roles subjected them to assumptions that they were gay or had pedophilic tendencies (Hasse, 2010).

There are some benefits to describing Black males at the elementary level as tokens. Research by Kelly (2007) countered the theory that Black teachers only faced negative experiences in majority White spaces. Using Kelly's expansion of Kanter's

(1977) theory, Black male teachers who are successful as elementary teachers could expand the issues of policy and practice in the teaching profession. Kelly described how Black teachers used the status of tokens to transcend racism through racial integration and personal contact. Tomlin (2021) believed Kelly's approach was better for achieving equity. The works of Kanter and Kelly offer insights into how the Black male teacher at the elementary level can experience tokenism as both a burden and a benefit.

### **Gender Norms at the Elementary Level**

Williams' (2017) data on the national level indicated male teachers were underrepresented in the elementary grades. The data shows that teaching is a woman-dominated profession. In the past, teaching was a career for men. According to Apple (1988), elementary school teaching became a women's profession when men left to work in more industrial fields. Some of the greatest educators of the past were Black men, including Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, and W. E. B. DuBois. Around the mid-19th century, during the birth of the country's public school system, the gender composition shifted to become majority women (Wong, 2019). However, the high school teacher make-up was still majority men until the late 1970s (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

Brockenbrough (2012) explored the idea of how the Black male navigates gender norms while teaching. Brockenbrough discovered three themes: inattention to male privilege, their conflict with women colleagues and administrators, and their desire to work in more male-centered spaces. This research also highlighted the complicated relationship between Black male teachers and women administrators. Brockenbrough described the realization that Black men were aware of how their gender influenced their relationships with women administrators. Brockenbrough only built on the literature that

explored the challenges that Black men faced in environments dominated by woman. Brockenbrough described how Black male teachers believed female administrators made efforts to emasculate them in the school environment. Participants recognized they had a blind eye to the impact of male privilege, as the maleness was a source and site of power (Brockenbrough, 2012). Brockenbrough's participants spoke about the possibility of working in spaces where they could be connected to more men and expressed preference for male principals.

Many teachers across the country feel overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated (Camera, 2019). These feelings do not bode well for the push to get more men to consider teaching, especially at the elementary level. In consideration of the push to attract more men into elementary teaching positions, masculinity and occupational prestige go hand in hand (Laib, 2021). According to Laib (2021), men do not seek jobs known to be low on the social status totem pole. The need for men to be head of the household and take care of their family the occupation of an elementary does not necessarily make that possible. The pressures that exist to maintain a level of masculinity makes it difficult for men to balance the characteristics ascribed to elementary teachers (Medford et al., 2013). According to gender theory, Medford et al. (2013) argued men are often uncomfortable filling roles such as elementary school teachers.

Greenberg (1985) described social equity as a focus on the education at the elementary level as a profession. Social equity can help eliminate stereotypes that teaching at the elementary level is only for women. Social equity is not about specific qualities of male teachers or what they can provide to students, but about their presence

in the classroom (Seifert, 1988). Social equity could increase the number of Black males working with younger students and change the mindset of those who see teaching as only work for women.

### **Perceptions of Black Male Elementary Teachers**

Teaching is one of the most underappreciated fields of employment in the United States (Camera, 2019). Many people hesitate to visualize teachers as Black males, instead picturing Black men as athletes. However, Black male teachers are important for helping Black students to see themselves mirrored in their educators. There is a growing concern about the lack of Black male teachers in the United States, especially in schools with a significant number of Black students. However, little research exists on why Black educators choose to teach at the elementary level. Young and Young (2020) noted the underrepresentation of Black men in elementary school positions, explaining the trend was nationwide.

The Merriam-Webster (n.d.) online dictionary defines the word *undervalue* in two ways. The first is to value or estimate something below its real worth. The second is to treat something as having little value. Black male teachers are often undervalued for their work and are called *unicorns* in the teaching profession. The term notes how rare and highly valuable Black male teachers are in the classroom, especially at the elementary level. It seems that students in the classroom see the value in Black male teachers, but school administrators do not see this same value. Far too often, Black male teachers feel less valued than their White counterparts or Black women teachers. In the Teach Plus and Education Trust groundbreaking study (2019), titled “If You Listen, We Will Stay,” teachers of color described feeling undervalued as such: “Teachers of color also feel that

at the same they are being marginalized, they are being asked to take on greater responsibilities and roles because they often share (or are perceived to share) similar demographic backgrounds with their students” (p. 9).

### **African American Males’ Path to Teaching**

A variety of factors contribute to the challenges African American male teachers encounter on the path to teaching. Many of those factors are not just educational challenges, like dropout rates and the lack of representation during their K–12 experience, but also societal factors such as high incarceration rates, unemployment, police violence, and family pressures. The lack of Black males in education is also due, in part, to the fact that society applauds the athletic abilities of Black boys and men over their intellectual capabilities. The stereotypical image of Black men can be traced back to slavery (Jones & Jenkins, 2012). Jones and Jenkins (2012) also noted that the young Black men increasingly internalize popular views about how they are lazy and unaccountable. While the K–12 educational experiences for some students is a time of self-discovery, meeting people, and a safe-haven, for Black boys, the school experience can be worse than the neighborhoods and homes in which they grew up.

Before a Black man can get to the classroom to teach, they first must navigate the K–12 system. The K–12 educational experience for many Black boys is filled with trauma and demoralizing experiences, so they do not want to return to that environment. Lynch (2017) described the Black youth experience in K–12 education as a crisis that begins at home, stretches through the entire K–12 educational experience, and fosters a cycle of incarceration. For many Black boys, the school systems are not paths to college, but one-way tickets to the prison system. Improving the K-12 educational experiences for

Black youth must be a first step in attracting attract more Black men into elementary teaching positions.

Black youth face two harsh realities when it comes to their K–12 education experiences. First, they are more likely to be suspended from school or receive harsher punishments. In the 2014 School Discipline Report produced by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Black children represented just 18% of preschool enrollment; however, 48% of this population received more than one out-of-school suspension (Gassaway, 2017). The unfair and harsh punishment of Black boys leads to lower academic performance. According to research published by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2021), Black students who are subject to harsher punishments than their White peers lose interest in school, which causes them to perform lower academically.

The second harsh reality Black youth face during their K–12 education experience is that they are more likely to be recommended for special education. Too often, especially in the early grades, Black boys are labeled with certain perceived disabilities at higher rates than their White classmates. Many are labeled as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as early as kindergarten (Lynch, 2016). The lack of understanding about how Black boys at the ages of five and six interact with their peers and behave in certain situations causes schools and teachers to label and refer them to special education. Black boys are more likely to be placed in special education classes than any other group (Lynch, 2016).

The K–12 experience for Black boys can be described as one of more failure than success. Many Black boys enter school with the energy of typical children, excited to

learn and ready to explore the world with a healthy level of confidence (Noguera, 2008). Despite this, the school setting does not embrace the attributes of Black youth. If this is the case, how can the expectation be for Black men to become teachers in that system?

Other reasons that Black men do not enter careers in teaching include low pay and gendered perceptions (Wiest, 2003). Rice and Goessling (2005) stated that men often fear teaching careers will be viewed as effeminate or homosexual. Instead of being pushed toward careers in teaching, Black boys are often pushed towards other things while growing up. Many adolescent Black males are encouraged to pursue sports over academics (Whitmire, 2010). In the highly controversial book titled *Darwin's Athletes: How Sports has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*, Hoberman (1997) discussed the experiences of Black male youth and their parents. Hoberman highlighted how sports have led many African Americans to embrace the damaging idea that physical self-expression is the essence of being Black (Valentine, 199). Beamon (2010) highlighted four factors that lead Black boys to sports over anything else, including teaching. Those factors included family, role models, neighborhood, and the media. Regarding family, Beamon mentioned how one participant in the study was encourage by their family to focus on sports because it would lead to a college scholarship. Despite being excellent students in school, the family serves as the earliest and most influential socializing agent into sports participation (Beamon, 2010). Felton (2022) cited a 2011 National Education Association study that found, despite prior academic achievement, high-performing Black students were 2.5 less likely to be enrolled in gifted and talented programs.

### **The Role of HBCUs in Training African American Male Teachers**

The role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in training African American male teachers cannot be understated. For many years, HBCUs have been at the forefront of African American education programs. During the 1800s, when the majority of HBCUs were established, they served as pre-collegiate schools for newly freed slaves and as normal schools for the training of teachers. HBCUs may comprise only 3% of all 4-year colleges and universities; however, they produce almost 20% of all Black college graduates (Seymour & Ray, 2022). As the need for more Black teachers increases, HBCUs will be even more important in their recruitment and training.

According to Irvine and Fenwick (2011),

The impact of School of Education (SOEs) at HBCU is indisputable. They graduate 50% of African American teachers with bachelor's degree. The United Negro College Fund (UNCF) reported in 1998 more than half of all prospective Black teachers in Missouri, Maryland, Louisiana, Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Delaware, Alabama, and the District of Columbia were trained at HBCUs. (p. 1)

There was a period in history when many higher education institutions would not admit African American students. Thus, HBCUs became the best place for Blacks to receive a quality education and played a major role in diversifying a majority White teaching force in the United States.

HBCUs played an important role in the Black community, especially during the Jim Crow era. Teachers from HBCUs protected Black students from overt racism while still encouraging them to push forward. These teachers were vital to the success of

students who came from backgrounds of low expectations, racism, and poverty. The United Negro College Fund (UNCF) partnered with the Annenberg Foundation to create the HBCU School Linkage Program, which is a 3-year, \$2 million dollar grant. The grant supports the Program in providing direct support to selected, eligible UNCF-member institutions to help improve the recruitment and retention of minority students who demonstrate an interest in pursuing careers in teaching. These programs are vital to ensuring HBCUs continue to lead the way in producing more Black teachers. The majority of HBCUs were founded as teachers' colleges. According to data from the National Center for Education Statics (NCES), the top producers of teachers are Alabama A&M University, Alabama State University, Albany State University, Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, North Carolina A&T State University, Tennessee State University, and Virginia State University.

HBCUs are needed to recruit more Black male teachers by offering recruitment, training, and support. HBCUs offer support with recruitment in the following four ways: by easing the cost of school, through their community focus on teaching, through alumni teaching support, and through targeted initiatives to support Black males. Many Black males struggle with the cost of tuition, which can create barriers in education programs. HBCUs on average have a lower tuition than predominately White institutions. Although HBCU students having higher loans than their peers at non-HBCU schools, they do report greater financial stability and a higher overall well-being after college (Seymour & Ray, 2021). HBCUs approach teacher recruitment with a sense of community and encourage teachers to be an integral part of the communities in which they teach. Many

HBCUs encourage teachers to go teach where they grew up. This sense of belonging leads teachers to believe more in the high achievement of their students as they were once those students, as well.

At some HBCUs, students can receive certificates after graduation to teach in the communities where they were trained. HBCUs also provide alumni support to help prevent early career burnout. Garcia and Weiss (2019) highlighted the importance of community support for helping novice teachers manage their first few years in the profession. Howard University and The Thurgood Marshall College Fund both have initiatives geared toward providing Black teachers with mentorship, advice, and professional development. HBCUs lead the way in providing initiatives to support Black men through programs with scholarships. Alabama A&M University offers support through their Males for Alabama Education Initiative Scholarship. Those who are eligible can receive financial assistance with tuition, books, and assessments. Another great program is a collaboration between HBCUs University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, Southern University, Alcorn State University, and Claflin University, which is called the Project Pipeline Repair. The program recruits men of color into teaching through skills development, application support, and an emphasis on social justice.

HBCUs are also leading in the development of alternative programs. One such program is The Ready to Teach Program at Howard University, which Irvine and Fenwick (2011) believed could be a leading program to recruit Black males in high-need schools. Funded by the Department of Education, the program partners the Howard University School of Education with five urban school districts in Chicago, Illinois;

Clayton County, Georges; Houston, Texas; Prince Georges County, Maryland; and Washington, D.C. (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011).

### **Teaching Programs That Support African American Males**

A growing number of programs across the country are dedicated to the recruitment of African American male teachers. The best way to recruit teachers is early, having them go through a 4-year college and university to be traditionally trained; however, many Black men become teachers as career changers. While the Grow-Your-Own model is a popular model for recruiting more teachers, it requires the recruitment of Black males to begin in high school. Typically, Black males in high school are not interested in becoming teachers. The lack of representation they encounter and the overall school experience for Black males does not make teaching an attractive profession.

While recruitment is an important first step, the second step arguably the most important step is the retention of Black male teachers. Wicker (2020) suggested that the retention of teachers is a critical challenge, nationwide. It is not good enough to recruit a large amount of Black male teachers to schools and classrooms without ensuring they stay in the profession, long-term. Black male teachers cannot make an impact in just 1 or 2 years; it takes year of commitment to yield the results necessary for Black children. According to the Council for Educational Change (2018), retention programs consist of the following: residency programs, workshops, mentoring, cultural pedagogy, school site visits, and independent evaluations. There is a growing movement to recruit and retain African American males in specialty programs, both at college campuses and after they graduate from college.

## Teach for America

Teach for America (TFA) founder Wendy Kopp opened her book, *A Change to Make History* (2011), with the following account of how she dreamed up the idea for TFA:

I envisioned our generation rallying to address the unjust reality that even in our nation—a nation that aspires so admirably to be a place of equal opportunity—the neighborhood into which children are born still largely predicts their educational outcomes and, in turn opportunities in life. (p. 1)

Since 1990, when TFA was launched with 489 corps members in New York, Los Angeles, Eastern North Carolina, South Louisiana, and rural Georgia, the goal was to take the highest achieving and motivated young professionals and to place them in the country's most high-priority schools. TFA wanted to level the playing field to ensure that all children had the potential to be taught by highly effective teachers who believed in their potential and who wanted them to receive an excellent education. TFA only requires a 2-year commitment, but it believes the 2-year commitment can have a lifelong impact (Kopp, 2011).

TFA is also where two TFA-institute roommates met and created an idea for a non-profit, Profound Gentleman (PG), which garnered national recognition for its work supporting Black male educators. Mario Jovan Shaw and Jason Terrell founded PG in 2012 when they were TFA members. Zingg (2018) reported that PG has served roughly 225 male educators of color across the country; during the year 2017–2018 school year, 100% of those teachers decided to stay in the classroom the following year. In 2020, TFA launched a 5-year initiative that was funded by the Ballmer Group and aimed to recruit

and retain Black educators. This initiative was called the Black Educators Promise Initiative (BEP) (TFA, 2020). The goal of BEP is to increase understandings of what resources are needed to support Black teachers and ultimately to increase the number of Black teachers in the field. The initiative supports Black teachers in TFA if they agree to stay in the field, offering funds to cover costs for certification and testing. For many Black teachers, especially Black males, the certification, and testing requirements are barriers to entry and retention; the BEP seeks to remove that barrier.

### **Call Me MISTER**

Roy Jones and Aretta Jenkins (2012) have written about the mission of Call Me MISTER: “We believe that Call Me MISTER is indeed in the vanguard of a fourth crusade to ensure a quality education for Southern Black children, building upon the advances of earlier generations” (p. 95). Call Me MISTER stands for Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Model Programs (Jones & Jenkins, 2012). Call Me MISTER was designed as a homegrown approach to recruiting, developing, and placing teachers. The program was founded in 2000 at Clemson University (Jones & Jenkins, 2012). Jones and Jenkins observed that Call Me MISTER never saw the program as national or global, but rather focused on the shortage of Black male teachers, especially at the elementary level, in South Carolina. Call Me MISTER wanted to draw on the pool of students in the state and develop them to have them stay in-state to teach in public schools.

During the late 1990s, less than 1% of South Carolina’s public-school teachers were Black males (Lennon, 2016). Through the collective work of educators, elected officials, civic and business leaders, superintendents, principals, and financial advisors,

the vision and initiative for Call Me MISTER were founded (Jones & Jenkins, 2012).

Call Me MISTER began by establishing partnerships with private colleges with a history of developing Black teachers. By 2004, the organization's partnership was expanded to include a select number of candidates from historically White colleges and universities (Jones & Jenkins, 2012).

As Call ME Mister was beginning to receive national attention and widespread funding, the local vision was beginning to look small. Thanks to a donation from Oprah Winfrey and a feature on her show, some of the first graduates from the program, in 2004, were known as the "Oprah Cohort" (Nicholson, 2020). Two decades later, the percentage of Black male teachers in the state has increased from 1% to 2.8%, thanks to the efforts of Call Me MISTER (Nicholson, 2020). Call Me MISTER has 10 national partner schools in other states, including Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois, Texas, Kansas, Kentucky, and Virginia. The Call Me MISTER program wanted Black males to see teaching as a true calling. According to Jones and Jenkins (2012), "we raise teaching to the level of a calling. Teachers have an impact that lasts for generations, and those impacts transform communities" (p. 97).

### **Summary**

The reason why African American male teachers do not choose to teach at the elementary level is complicated. The literature discussed in this chapter highlighted the variety of roles Black men play as teachers at the elementary level. Many of the roles are due to a combination of historical and societal factors that have made life difficult in this country for African American males.

Jones (2006) believed the shortage of Black males at the elementary grades places children at a disadvantage, especially for boys. Black men serve as role models, surrogate fathers, academic influencers, symbols of diversity, and change agents. This is especially true for students in the elementary grades. Most children spend a great deal of their waking hours in schools; during the elementary years, it is important to have Black male teachers to foster development (Hicks Takari, 2018).

The K–12 experience of many African American boys is another barrier to their journey to teaching. Research indicates some women teachers interpret specific behaviors of male students as challenging and unsafe (de Zeeuw et al., 2014). At the elementary level, this is particularly important because many male students begin to form their notions about school during these years. The presence of more Black men in U.S. schools can fill the gap in a system that fails African American children. As the K–12 system fails Black youth, jails and cemeteries become more of a destination for African American boys than do classrooms. As Nellums and Milton (2013) wrote:

As Black men we have given away the one responsibility that our culture deems essential to the survival of our race- rearing Black boys. Our generation must inform and teach young Black boys how to become productive Black men in the communities they call home. (p. 27)

As many of the country's Black youth struggle in school and life, many come to school to find the pieces that are missing from their homes. The impact of Black male teachers, especially at the elementary level, is an important foundation in for developing Black boys into men. Saving the K–12 school experience may rest on the shoulders of the Black educators currently in the classrooms, as well as those who will soon follow.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine why Black males decided to teach at the elementary level. Young and Young (2020) reported that qualitative research dominates research on Black male teachers. The study helped highlight the shortage of Black male teachers, amplified the voices of those who were currently in the teaching workforce, and raised awareness of the need to increase the number of Black male elementary teachers. Through participant interviews, a first-hand account was generated of their experiences and perceptions of the profession. In this chapter, the methodology of the current study is described, including a description of the participants, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness of the study, the role of the researcher, and member checking procedures.

#### **Connection Between the Theory and Research**

There can be a connection drawn between Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and the lived experiences of Black male elementary teachers. The first tier of physiological needs describes jobs that allow Black male elementary teachers to be paid salaries that provide them with basic wellness. Additionally, the salary must be adequate to make Black males feel secure about their abilities to provide for their families. The second tier of safety needs highlights the importance that Black male elementary teachers work in environment where feel safe and enjoy long-term job security. The third tier of belonging emphasizes the importance that Black male teachers feel valued and respected, despite working in a profession that is dominated mostly by woman. The fourth tier of

self-esteem emphasizes the need for Black male elementary teachers to feel a sense of accomplishment that fosters their professional self-confidence. Finally, the fifth tier of self-actualization highlights the need for Black male elementary teachers to experience professional and personal growth; they must feel their work has meaning.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to examine why Black males decided to teach at the elementary level. This study was guided by the following overarching question: What are the lived experiences of Black male teachers that contribute to their motivation to teach at the elementary level? Using Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of need, the following research questions were employed:

**RQ1:** What physiological needs are met for the Black male teacher?

**RQ2:** What safety needs of the are met for the Black male teacher?

**RQ3:** How does the Black male teacher feel a since of belonging?

**RQ4:** What self-esteem needs are met for the Black male teacher?

**RQ5:** What self-actualization needs are met for the Black male teacher?

**RQ6:** How did the Black male experience COVID-19 as an elementary teacher?

### **Qualitative Methodology**

This study shed light on the low number of Black male elementary teachers and highlighted the important role of African American males in the lives of elementary students. The study elevated the voices of Black male elementary teachers. To accomplish this goal, a phenomenological approach was used. A phenomenological approach is used by qualitative researchers to examine participants' lived experience (Creswell, 2007). The intended goal is to understand and give them meaning (Byrne,

2021). According to Byrne (2021), phenomenology involves the systematic collection and analysis of narrative data, using methods that ensure the credibility of study results. Phenomenological researchers use phenomenology to understand better the essential truths of participants' lived experiences (Byrne, 2021). In the current study, the goal was to better understand the meaning of their experiences of Black male elementary teachers, through the lens of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the lived teaching experience of Black male teachers at the elementary level. Phenomenology as a research design is uniquely positioned to allow learning from the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). The relationships between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the lived experiences of Black male elementary teachers shed light and provided a better understanding of the Black male elementary teacher experiences, through a lens of non-deficit.

### **Participants**

The researcher selected seven participants for the purposes of this study based on select criteria. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to: (a) identify as an African American, (b) identify as male, (c) teach at the elementary level, (d) teach a content position, and (e) have taught at least 1 year in elementary school. For recruitment to be successful, the researcher cast a wide net for participants across the United States. As such, it was important to connect with organizations across the country that worked primarily with Black male elementary teachers to locate individuals who met the inclusion criteria.

An exploration of the lived experiences of African American male elementary teachers was essential to answering the research questions. With such a small population

of Black male elementary teachers in the United States, few limitations were placed on participation. By allowing a wide range of teaching experiences, this study uncovered a variety of thought due to the differences in professional experiences. This approach countered the narrative that portrays the lived experiences of Black male teachers as monolithic.

### **Selection of Participants**

The researcher used the Marian University ProQuest website to find a variety of dissertations and articles related to the current study. The researcher selected three dissertations to use as a reference to finalize the specific criteria for selecting study participants. One of the dissertations was a portraiture study. Additionally, the researcher used research articles on portraiture studies to gain a better understanding of how to select the participants and to outline inclusion criteria.

Using online research and social media, the researcher identified a list of organizations that worked to support Black male teachers. The researcher did not use participants they personally knew but recruited individuals through personal relationships and professional contacts. Two organizations that stood out were Profound Gentleman (PG) and the Center for Black Educator Development (CBED). Profound Gentleman's mission is to build communities of male educators of color who have a profound additional impact on the communities they serve (PG, 2022). Profound Gentleman supports Black male educators across the country. The Center for Black Educator Development is based out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and its vision is to ensure all Black students have consistent access to high-quality, same-race teachers throughout their PreK–12 experience (CBED, 2022). The Center for Black Educators Development

hosts a conference each year focuses specifically on Black male teachers. The researcher used both organizations to locate eligible participants by reaching out to them and asking for them to share the study with others their networks.

### **Number of Participants**

Based on the relationships and connections the researcher established with PG and CBED, the goal of seven participants was attainable despite the low percentage of Black male elementary teachers across the country. In qualitative research, recommendations for sample size depend on the study method and design (Guetterman, 2015). Seven was an adequate sample size for providing appropriate context in the current study.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

The researcher used PG and CBED to help recruit participants who met the research criteria. Additionally, social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn were utilized to share information and recruit participants. Professional organizations, including Divine 9 Greek Fraternities, Education Leaders of Color (EdLoc), and Surge were also used to identify study participants. The researcher recruited individuals from across the United States, with a primary focus on teachers from the Midwest and South.

### **Background of Participants**

The background of the participants was an important part of their lived experience in this study. To provide meaningful context, the researcher gathered the following data on participants' backgrounds: (a) geographic location, not including state or city, (b)

school type, (c) content level taught, (d) years of experience, and (e) teaching pathway type, either traditionally trained or transition to the teaching program.

All seven participants had backgrounds either from the South or the Midwest. The representation of Black male teachers varies significantly between those teaching in the Midwest and those teaching in the South. Black males who teach in the South and Midwest of the United States represent an underrepresented population in the teaching profession. Research has shown that the representation of Black male teachers in these regions is significantly lower than their White counterparts (Ingersoll & May, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Research has highlighted disparities in teacher demographics across different geographic areas. Multiple studies highlighted the positive impact of Black male teachers on students, especially Black male students. Black male teachers can serve as role models and mentors, helping to narrow achievement gaps and improve educational outcomes for students of color (Dee, 2004; Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). In regions like the South and Midwest, where racial disparities in education persist, the presence of Black male teachers can be particularly impactful. However, Black male teachers in these regions also face unique challenges.

The South has a higher percentage of Black residents, leading to a slightly higher representation of Black male teachers than the Midwest (Ingersoll & May, 2011). However, it is important to note that even in the South, the representation of Black male teachers falls below the diversity of the student population, indicating an ongoing shortage of Black male teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In contrast, the Midwest has one of the country's lowest proportions of Black male teachers (Hanna, 2018). The demographic makeup of the Midwest, with a lower percentage of

Black residents, contributes to the underrepresentation of Black male teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The scarcity of Black male teachers is a significant concern in the Midwest.

The disparities between the two regions in the representation of Black male teachers underscore the importance of addressing recruitment and retention efforts on a local level. It will be important for the educational leaders and policymakers in both the Midwest and the South to recognize the significance of this issue and implement strategies to increase the presence of Black male teachers in their respective regions. This underrepresentation has important implications for both students and the education system. Research suggests that addressing these challenges and promoting the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers in the South and Midwest is critical to advancing educational equity and fostering diverse and inclusive learning environments (Irvine, 2003; Palmer & Maramba, 2011).

The representation of Black students in elementary schools in the Midwest compared to the South highlights a significant demographic contrast. The South has historically had a higher percentage of Black residents, leading to a larger presence of Black students in its elementary schools. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as of 2018, the percentage of Black students in public elementary schools in the South was approximately 26%, significantly higher than in the Midwest, where the percentage stood at around 17% (NCES, 2018). This disparity in student demographics reflects historical patterns of migration and demographic trends. If one were to consider The Great Migration of the early 20th century, Black families moved significantly from the South to other regions, including the Midwest. The legacy

of Jim Crow segregation laws and other historical factors meant that the South retained a larger Black population, resulting in more Black students in schools.

In conclusion, the representation of Black male teachers in the Midwest and South is a topic of significance within the education field. Their presence can have a transformative impact on students, particularly those of color, while presenting unique challenges that must be addressed to support their success as educators. It is important to understand these disparities in student demographics for the Midwest and South when researching Black male teachers, specifically those who teach at the elementary level.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection in qualitative research is more flexible than in quantitative research. Qualitative data gathering is not limited to one method (Creswell, 2013). There are various methods of qualitative data collection, such as individual interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and field observations. Researcher should select data collection strategies based on participants' characteristics, data collection sites, access to participants, and the type of data they are collecting (Wilson, 2013). In the current study, data were collected via interviews.

Collecting data through interviews is the most direct and straightforward approach to gathering detailed, rich data (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). This researcher conducted interviews to allow participants to recall their lived experiences while teaching at the elementary level. The interview cycle was broken into three parts. The first phase served to break the ice between the researcher and participant. During this phase, the participant answered two questions: (a) who they were as men, and (b) who they were as educators. The second phase followed the interview protocol, which was guided by the research

questions. The final phase created an opportunity for participants to review their responses to the interview questions and add any clarity towards their answers, via member checking. The interview questions led participants on a journey (Dilley, 2000). Participants had opportunities to answer every question freely, and the researcher informed them that there was no right or wrong answer, only the experience they lived. If there was a need for more information, the researcher asked follow-up questions to ensure clarity and understanding, such as: (a) tell me more, or (b) can you repeat?

The researcher recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and coded the data to identify themes. Recording interviews in qualitative research was useful before and after data collection, as it allowed the researcher to focus on listening, probing, and following up (Rosalind & Holland, 2013). Transcribing audio recordings is standard practice in qualitative research (Tracy, 2019). The software used to support in the transcribing of the interviews was Otter.ai. In qualitative research, coding speaks to how the data is defined (Gibbs, 2007). Coding is the process of identifying a passage in the text, searching, identifying concepts, and finding relations between them. Strauss (1987) believed that the excellence of research depended on the excellence of coding.

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews. Interviews were scheduled based on participants' availability and were conducted virtually, via Zoom. The researcher provided participants with the interview questions prior to the interviews. In addition, written informed consent was collected prior to data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is the process of providing order, structure, and meaning to the data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). There are two distinct types of

qualitative data analysis considered for this study. The first was content analysis, which is the process of categorizing and tagging qualitative data for thematic analysis. It involves combining results with behavioral data to garner deeper insights (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). The second is narrative analysis, which uses interviews that tell a story and shed light on underlying events and their effects on outcomes (Riessman, 1993). For this study, the researcher used narrative analysis.

After data were collected and transcribed, analysis was performed to identify the main themes. The researcher identified themes using repeated words, phrases, and patterns, and combining them to identify connections. It was important to identify themes that shed light on why Black males decided to teach at the elementary level. In qualitative data analysis, coding helps organize the data and develop themes (Creswell, 2013). Coding is considered the best way to analyze qualitative data and describes the use of tags or labels to assign units of meaning to descriptive data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this study, the researcher used manual coding. Manual coding involves reviewing the data and manually developing and assigning codes and themes (Saldana, 2015). During the manual coding process, the researcher employed inductive analysis; this allowed codes to naturally emerge from the data (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). There are multiple forms of inductive analysis, including open coding, which is often referred to as *initial coding* and *in vivo coding*. It develops from the words of the participants (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Inductive analysis can help with: (a) making meaning from the data, (b) developing a theme, (c) identifying representative data to support the theme, and (d) explaining the theme using theory and literature.

The main themes to emerge aligned with each of Maslow's (1954) needs and participants' experiences teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative data analysis process allowed the researcher to condense data into themes that were aligned with the research questions. It was important to review the data repeatedly to ensure interviews accurately captured participants' experiences.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

In a phenomenology, it is essential for participants to share deep and often personal stories about their lived experiences. In the current study, it was important for participants to openly share their experiences and decisions to teach at the elementary level. The researcher collected the stories and handled them in a delicate and sacred manner. It was critical to build the trustworthiness of the inquiry (Lincoln & Gaba, 1985). Leading up to the collection of data, researchers must establish relationships with participants to ensure they feel comfortable and openly share their lived experiences. It was important that each participant reviewed their interview transcript to ensure everything was captured as the participants intended. The researcher asked the participants to clarify their responses, if needed, to ensure the accuracy of the study data. All participants were assured that their personal information would be kept private and confidential.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research has methods for establishing credibility in research. Credibility can be established by incorporating the following strategies: (a) accounting for personal bias, (b) engaging with other researchers, (c) data triangulation, (d) meticulous record-keeping, and (e) acknowledging bias in sampling (Noble & Smith, 2015).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher is to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The role of the researcher is not easy, as they are tasked with asking participants about things that may be difficult for them to answer or very personal. The researcher is an essential component of the research process. Sutton and Austin (2015) highlighted how the researcher's primary responsibility is to safeguard participants and their data. Patton (2002) stated, "Because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, a qualitative report should include some information about the researcher (p. 566). As the researcher, I brought my experience as a Black male and former school administrator responsible for hiring teachers. My own struggle to hire Black males at the elementary level led to an interest in discovering more about the Black male experiences and why some chose elementary instead of the secondary level. I have over a decade of experience in the K-12 setting, working at all school levels. I approached this study as a Black male researcher seeking to study the experiences of Black male elementary teachers. I recognized my bias and vested interest in discovering ways in which the role of Black male elementary teachers could be elevated in order to recruit more to the profession. I understood that I may have shared lived experiences with the participants. As a Black male researcher, my positionality may have clouded my ability to remain neutral during the analysis of data collected from the participants. Positionality describes an individual's worldview and position on a research task, and social and political context (Foote & Bartell, 2011). My vested interest in seeing results that yielded answers to my personal questions about the researcher needed to be

recognized before embarking on this journey. I understood my positionality could influence how the research was conducted, its outcomes, and results (Rowe, 2014)

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is essential to establishing credibility in a qualitative study (Lincoln & Gaba, 1985). Creswell (1994) described member checking as a technique used to improve a study's accuracy, credibility, validity. All participants had opportunities to check and review their interview transcripts. Member checking can occur either formally or informally. An informal member check can occur during data collection, an interview, or focus group to check for understanding, or it can be done formally during a follow up interview, meeting, or conversation (Carl & Ravitch, 2018). The researcher offered to provide the participant with a copy of the interview transcripts for review, clarification, and suggestions, which occurred during the third interview.

### **Summary**

The chapter provided insight into the specific methodology used throughout this research study. It contained the criteria of how participants were selected, including if they are: (a) African American, (b) male, (c) teachers at the elementary level, (d) teaching a content position, and (e) had taught at least 1 year in elementary school. The chapter addressed how the researcher used organizations like Profound Gentleman and Center for Black Educators Development to help recruit study participants. The chapter covered the steps for data collection and analysis, and described the study's trustworthiness and credibility, the role of the researcher, and member checking. Study findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 offers a summary, conclusion, implications, and recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

Chapter 4 provides results of the study. The chapter presents the results of data collected from the qualitative phenomenological study conducted to explore the following six research questions:

**RQ1:** What physiological needs are met for the Black male teacher?

**RQ2:** What safety needs are met for the Black male teachers?

**RQ3:** How does the Black male teacher feel a sense of belonging?

**RQ4:** What self-esteem needs are met for the Black male teacher?

**RQ5:** What self-actualization needs are met for the Black male teacher?

**RQ6:** How did the Black male experience COVID-19 as an elementary teacher?

The data from seven interviews were analyzed to identify the frequency of words in interviews related to the research questions. Data collected during the interviews were triangulated with documents and observations. This chapter includes (a) a description of the codes and themes derived from the interviews, and (b) an analysis of themes, which will be arranged to illuminate the response of the participants.

Examples of open coding, code frequency, themes, subthemes, and codes are provided. At each level of analysis, a constant comparison was used to distill the data until themes emerged. Included in the chapter are tables used to present detailed code and theme data, as well as narratives from the individual interviews used to emphasize key themes and the resultant theory.

## Participant Descriptions

Seven participants were interviewed for this study. Table 1 illustrates participant demographics. All interviews were conducted via Zoom. Participants interviews were conducted between October and November of 2022. The first interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes which consisted of two introductory questions: (1) who are you as a man and (2) who are you as an educator. During the second interview the participants were asked the interview questions which can be found in Appendix G. Those interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour based on the response length of each participant.

### Wes

Wes described himself as a man who was laid back and reserved. Wes said he had moments when he could be outgoing, but for the most part he was a quiet person who liked to keep a low profile. When asked about his low profile, he expanded by saying, “I am more observant than just a person who reacts off impulse.” He liked to keep himself reserved as much as possible; however, he believed he was someone who could relate and get along with most people. When asked how he would describe himself as an educator, Wes said, “I am a bit more outgoing especially when it comes to teaching my kindergarteners.” When it comes to being around his students, Wes said he had to have “big energy.” Wes said that because of his demeanor of being laid back and reserved, he had to work hard early in his career to be more outgoing. He wanted his students to come in the room each morning and be excited and ready to go. He realized he had to keep his energy up in order to match their energy.

**Horace**

Horace described himself using three words: humbled, fearless, and grateful.

Horace was someone who was appreciative of all of life's experiences. When asked about his role as an educator, Horace said, "I am someone who is willing to do anything for the next generation." Growing up with both parents who pushed education on to him and his siblings, he saw the value of getting a good education, especially for a Black man. Horace was a proud graduate of an HBCU. He was motivated by the opportunity to lead and serve. With the tough work of being an educator, he found time to relieve stress by working out and smiling. When asked about smiling and why that was important for him, he said, "Smiling helps release all my stress, all my cares, and I do not have to worry everyone's expectation. I can just exist."

**Eugene**

When asked who Eugene the man was, the first words out of his mouth were a "man of God." Faith was extremely important to Eugene, guiding him throughout his entire career and allowing him to pivot into education a little over a decade ago. Being an educator was not all that Eugene did, as he was also encouraged by the gatekeepers of his family to get off the sidelines. Eugene was active in the community and expanded his civic engagement. Eugene described himself as a father, husband, extrovert, and someone full of joy. Family was important to Eugene as his older sister motivated him to become a teacher, as she was also an educator. He came from a background of hand workers. Eugene's father taught him the importance of hard work, which is why this self-described, "hustler" did not mind working multiple jobs. When asked about his hustler's mentality, he said, "I will do whatever it takes to provide for my family." While

completing his hours as a student-teacher, he also worked an additional 40 hours at a dropout recovery high school and drove for Uber and Lyft. As an educator, Eugene said he wanted the students that everyone else had given up on. He wanted the students that everyone else believed would not succeed. He wanted the difficult students because those were the students for whom he became a teacher.

### **Ralph**

Ralph was a first generation American. His parents were from Jamaica. He described himself as someone who was non-religious but very spiritual. Ralph got into education because his parents instilled the importance of learning. While his path was not traditional, he worked his way up to being a lead teacher, starting out as a teacher's aide. Ralph was encouraged by those he worked with to pursue a career in teaching. He was passionate about protecting children and helping them learn so they could have better futures. When asked how he would describe his teaching style he said, "I am someone who will do whatever I can to make a connection with a student in order to help them learn." Ralph wanted to help all his students learn about themselves and how they fit in the world around them. This was something Ralph himself learned and wanted the same for his students.

### **Augusta**

Augusta was a Black man who taught in a rural school district in the South. He valued building relationships with his students, their parents, and their caregivers. The work of an educator was deeply passionate work for Augusta. When asked about his deep passion for education, he said he wanted, "to make an impact not only for the Black males and minority students, but for all students in an effort to disband stereotypes

against, men of color who teach at the elementary level.” As a man, Augusta was a family man and loved his wife and children deeply. He was a loyal man who encouraged others in all aspects of life. His faith was important to him as well.

### **Herman**

Herman described himself as a man who was very intentional about his thoughts and his actions. He said he was a storyteller and believed he stood on the shoulders of the giants who came before him. His storytelling was about those telling stories of the past to those of the present who may not know them. He said he enjoyed the small and simple things of life. It was not just his approach that prevented classroom issues, but as he said, “While I am serious as an educator when it comes to the pedagogy and the curriculum I can be laid back and I can make sure it relates to my students and they can find connections in in themselves in the things I am teaching them.”

### **Julian**

Julian understood the struggles of being a Black male educator so much that he worked with an organization to build connections and create a space for Black male educators to come together and share in fellowship. As an educator, his nurturing spirit did not just come with supporting other Black male educators, but also from his students in the classroom. As an educator, Julian could be very calculated and quiet, but his students knew he took their learning seriously and he could be firm when needed. Julian the man was a little more outgoing as he described himself as eclectic and someone with a broad range of interests. He was just as passionate about writing poetry as he was about teaching his students. A lover of the arts, he was someone who lived a colorful life. At

the heart of everything, Julian wanted to see real change in the world. Table 1 provides demographic information about each participant.

**Table 1**

*Participant Descriptions*

Participant Pseudonym	Age Range	Undergrad Attended	Pathway	Region	School Type	Grade Level Taught	Years of Experience
Wes	30-37	PWI	Transition to Teaching	Midwest	Public Charter	Kindergarten	4
Horace	30-37	HBCU	Transition to Teaching	Midwest	Public Charter	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	7
Eugene	38-45	PWI	Traditionally Trained	Midwest	Public School	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	13
Ralph	54 and older	PWI	Different Route	South	Public Charter	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	5
Augusta	38-45	PWI	Alternative Certification	South	Rural	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	13
Herman	38-45	PWI	Traditionally Trained	South	Public School	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12
Julian	30-37	PWI	Different Route	South	Public Charter	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	7

### Data Analysis

The research design of the study was based on a qualitative methodology, as the researcher wanted to understand the lived experiences of Black male elementary teachers. The researcher gathered data through one-on-one interviews with seven Black male elementary teachers. After the interviews were transcribed, they were uploaded into Dedoose for analysis. The first step of analysis involved an in-depth review of all transcripts and journal responses, which allowed the researcher to become familiar with study data and begin identifying patterns in the data. Once the data were reviewed carefully, the open coding process began. Through open coding, a line-by-line examination of the data was conducted to identify codes. A code was represented by a

repeated idea, word, phrase, or sentiment shared by the participants. When a pattern was identified, it was then given a code name and was noted. Table 2 below provides examples of the open coding.

**Table 2**

*Open Coding Examples*

Excerpt from Data	Coded as
<i>Allow me to understand the power of freedom, and to embrace who I was and not have to, you know, show up and be anything other than my authentic self.</i>	authenticity
<i>I come from a family of educators. So, most of us were up at the same time, you know, getting ready for work and being able to collaborate and you know talk about the day and debrief.</i>	Family members are educators
<i>As an elementary school teacher, I feel very secure. If I had to teach somewhere else at another school at the end of the year. I 100% know, I could land another teacher position.</i>	Good job security
<i>I always tried to say what I need to say. But the challenging part is having to be political about it.</i>	Can't speak freely
<i>Schools are run on norms of white middle class society.</i>	White cultural norms
<i>You have some woman who feel a certain way if they find you attractive and you may not want to talk to them like that.</i>	Fear of sexual accusations
<i>There are already stereotypes and wondering, why does a male want to work with children.</i>	Negative stereotype
<i>Where I am teaching there has been legislation that has passed that has banned the teaching of anything that makes white people feel inferior.</i>	Threats to job security
<i>I am mostly interested in teaching Black and brown children because of the lack of teachers who look like them. I want to expose them to having a teacher that looks like them.</i>	Supporting Black students
<i>Rest is important you are not your best if you are not rested.</i>	Self-care

A codebook was created to track all the codes identified through the analysis of transcripts. Once all transcripts were coded, a second pass of open coding was conducted to ensure all codes had been identified and assigned. The final codebook consisted of 57 codes with 322 code occurrences. Table 3 details the frequency of codes. The most common codes included *purpose-make a difference-higher calling* ( $f=18$ ), *unheard/excluded/prove myself* ( $f=17$ ), *effects of COVID* ( $f=14$ ), and *heavy workloads and low respect/prestige* ( $f=12$ ). Less common codes included *benefits are important to me, desires for students to succeed, emotional safety, faculty predominantly White woman, high demand/many vacancies, safety concerns, student safety is priority, and push back against stereotypes* ( $f=2$ ).

**Table 3**

*Code Frequency*

Code	<i>f</i>
purpose - make a difference - higher calling	18
Unheard/excluded/prove myself	17
Effects of COVID	14
heavy workloads	12
low respect/prestige	12
low pay	10
challenges working in female dominated field	9
disciplinarian	9
DE&I	8
I feel heard/my opinion is valued	7
expected to do everything/taken for granted	7
family members are educators	7
provide for my family	7
salary is important	7
underrepresentation of Black men	7
I don't feel unsafe	6
good job security	6
passionate	6
poor work/life balance	6
racism/discrimination	6
special education	6

support Black students	6
support from family/friends	6
works two jobs	6
how to recruit more Black males	5
issues with White women	5
microaggression	5
political challenges	5
reason for becoming elementary teacher	5
White cultural norms	4
can't speak freely	4
entry requirements	4
fear of being misperceived	4
good work-life balance	4
has considered leaving the profession	4
improve salary and benefits	4
my skills are not fully used	4
pipeline	4
reasons for Black male turnover	4
relationships with students	4
self-care	4
threats to job security	4
authenticity	3
difficult to recruit Black male teachers	3
fear of being sexual accusations	3
moderate job security	3
my personal inspiration	3
negative stereotype	3
school shootings	3
benefits are important to me	2
desires for students to succeed	2
emotional safety concerns	2
faculty is predominantly White women	2
high demand/many vacancies	2
safety concerns	2
student safety is priority	2
Push back against stereotypes	2

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The next step of the analysis was axial coding. Axial coding involved identifying relationships between the codes and then grouping them accordingly. The codes were arranged into themes and subthemes. Through the axial coding process, 7 themes and 10 subthemes were identified. The themes included *physiological needs, focus on salary and*

*benefits, safety needs pertain to job security, physical safety, and emotional security, sense of belonging is often a struggle, esteem is often low, self-actualization manifests as a strong desire to make a difference, and COVID-19 influences teachers' experiences.*

The subthemes included *job security, safety, I feel a sense of belonging, outsider status, issues related to race and gender, esteem is fostered, do not feel valued, feel overworked and taken advantage of, turnover, and recruitment.* Table 4 highlights the alignment of themes, subthemes, and codes.

**Table 4**

*Themes/Subthemes/Codes*

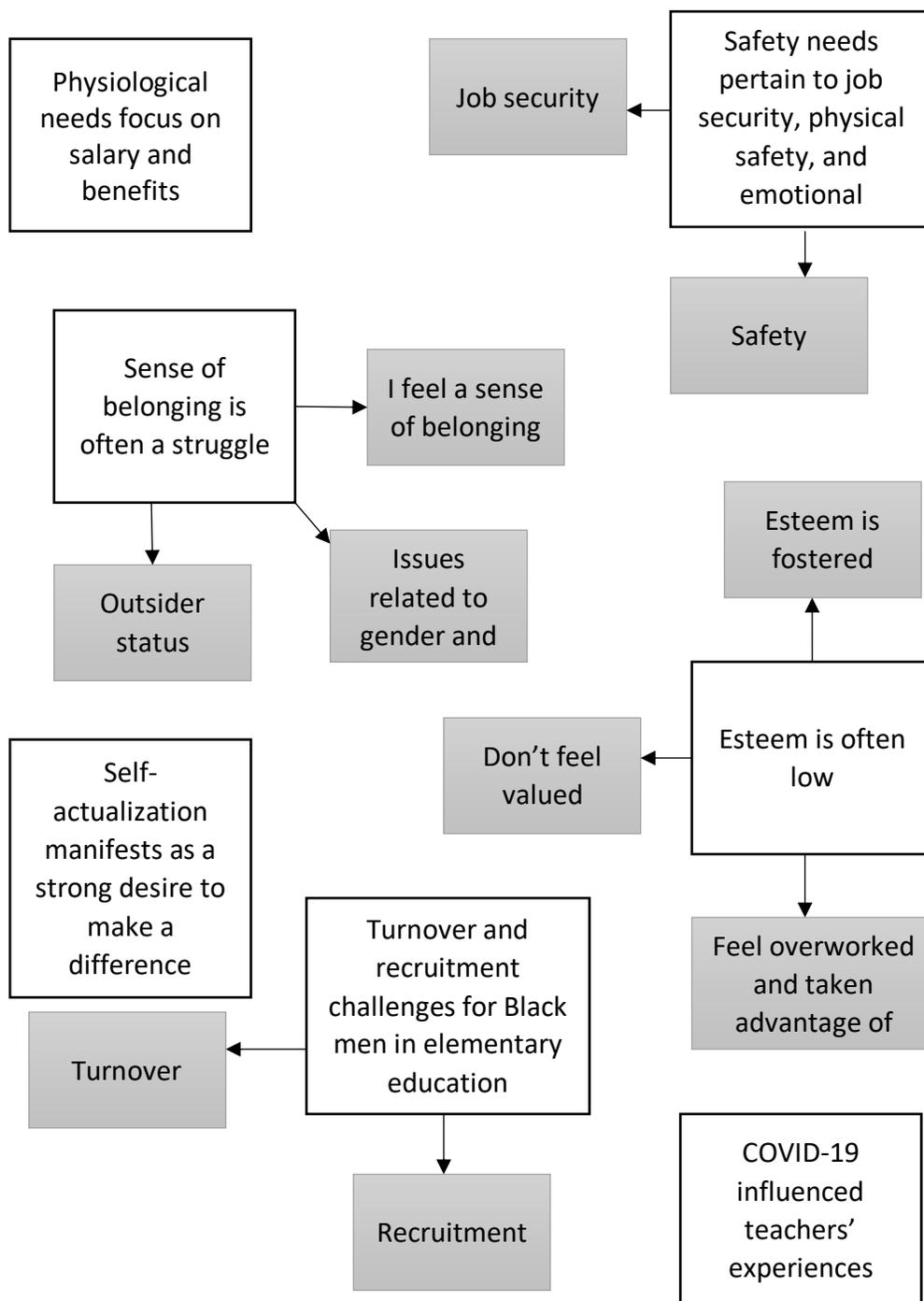
Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Physiological needs focus on salary and benefits		Provide for my family Salary is important Low pay Works two jobs Improve salary and benefits Benefits are important to me
Safety needs pertain to job security, physical safety, and emotional security	Job security	High demand/many vacancies Moderate job security Fear of sexual accusations Threats to job security Fear of being misperceived Good job security
	Safety	Safety concerns Student safety is priority School shootings I don't feel unsafe Emotional safety concerns
Sense of belonging is often a struggle	I feel a sense of belonging	Support from family/friends Family members are educators Relationships with students
	Outsider status	Underrepresentation of Black men Faculty is predominantly White women White cultural norms Authenticity

	Issues related to race and gender	Racism/discrimination Challenges working in female dominated field Negative stereotype Issues with White women Microaggression DE&I Political challenges
Esteem is often low	Esteem is fostered	Good work-life balance I feel heard/my opinion is valued
	Don't feel valued	Unheard/excluded/prove myself Low respect/prestige Can't speak freely My skills are not fully used
	Feel overworked and taken advantage of	Heavy workloads Disciplinarian Expected to do everything/taken for granted Poor work/life balance
Self-actualization manifests as a strong desire to make a difference		Purpose – make a difference -higher calling Passionate Reasons for becoming elementary teacher My personal inspiration Support Black students Desires for students to succeed Special education Self-care Effects of COVID
COVID-19 influenced teachers' experiences		
Turnover and recruitment challenges for Black men in elementary education	Turnover Recruitment	Reasons for Black male turnover Has considered leaving the profession Difficult to recruit Black male teachers Pipeline How to recruit more black males Entry requirements

Finally, a thematic map was developed to create a visual that represented the relationships between the themes and the subthemes (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Thematic Map*



## **Results of the Analysis**

### **Physiological Needs Focus on Salary and Benefits**

The first main theme to emerge focused on participants' physiological needs, which was in direct alignment with research question 1. This theme illustrated ways participants viewed salary and benefits as essential to fulfilling their physiological needs. The importance of salary was mentioned by all participants. For example, when asked about the importance of pay, Ralph replied, "Absolutely, important components, just like any other profession, we are in a culture where money ... says a lot about what you do." In response to the same question, Eugene shared, "Salary was a huge, huge thing to me," while Julian admitted salary was "extremely important." Horace described the importance of salary and benefits, in terms of being a single father, "Going from two incomes to one in the household I want to make sure I can take care of needs and for benefits that my daughter and me can get regular health checkups."

Analysis of the participants' response generated six codes which included: providing for their family, salary is important, low pay, works two jobs, improve salary/benefits, and benefits are important there were no subthemes that emerged from the theme of physiological needs.

### **Safety Needs Pertain to Job Security, Physical Safety, and Emotional Security**

The second main theme to emerge focused on participants' safety needs, which was in direct alignment with research question 2. This theme illustrated ways participants viewed job security, their physical safety, and their emotional safety as essential to fulfilling their safety needs. Job security was mentioned by all participants whether they

described it as having good job security or things they felt threatened their job security. When discussing safety, the participants rarely mentioned much about their own safety, focusing instead on the safety of their students.

### ***Job Security***

The first main subtheme that emerged when discussing safety needs was that of job security. Job security was mentioned by all participants whether they described it as having good job security or things they felt could threaten their job security. For example, while describing job security, Eugene replied, “We do have the benefits of being Black males where they are not many at the elementary level that we can go to different districts and find a job.” In agreement with Eugene about not having a fear of finding a job, Julian shared, “As an elementary teacher, I feel very secure, that if I had to teach somewhere else at the end of the year, I know 100% that I could land a job.” Augusta had a different take on job security, explain that certain politics are threatened the jobs of many teachers at his school. Augusta explained, “Where I am teaching, we have legislation that has passed that he opened legal pathways for parents to directly sue teachers, which makes it as a Black male especially at the elementary level of walking through a minefield.”

### ***Safety***

The second main subtheme that emerged when discussing safety needs was safety, including personal safety, emotional safety, and physical safety. The importance of safety was highlighted by all the participants, but they focused more on the safety of their students. For example, when asked about his safety, Horace responded, “I’ve never thought about my personal safety. I have always felt that as a teacher my role was focused on making my students a number one priority.” In response to the same question,

Wes replied, “I always want to make sure my students are ok, even if in a dire situation I always will put my students first and make sure they are alright.” Julian responded differently, “Sometimes I feel that they are not as high as they would be if teaching high school. In terms of school shootings and gun violence.” The mentality of putting their students first, coupled with demands placed on Black male elementary, could cause some threats to emotional safety. Herman, mentioned in his response, “Feeling protected or safe emotionally often within public education just is not there.”

### **Sense of Belonging is Often a Struggle**

The third main theme to emerge focused on participants’ sense of belonging, which was in direct alignment with research question 3. This theme illustrated ways participants viewed their place in the education profession, specifically at the elementary level, as essential to fulfilling their sense of belonging needs. Many of the Black male elementary teacher participants said they felt sense of belonging was often a struggle for them in their roles. The theme had three main subthemes that emerged, including I feel a sense of belonging, outsider status, and issues related to race and gender.

#### ***I Feel a Sense of Belonging***

The first main subtheme that emerged when discussing sense of belonging was that Black male elementary teacher participants felt a sense of belonging. When asked about his sense of belonging, Wes replied, “They are trying to make me feel comfortable and work with me to ensure I am prepared for my class and when I have concerns, I feel as though they hear me out.” Responding to the same question, Ralph stated, “The students knew from a previous role and welcomed me, so the teachers and the administrators followed.” Augusta responded, “There are opportunities where I was

asked to be on certain committees or work on different projects and that was appreciated and welcomed.” A sense of belonging extended beyond the school walls for Julian.

When asked about the support he received from family members, Julian responded, “My mother taught, and my grandmother taught, and I have other family members who taught as well.” In response to the same questions, Herman replied, “I come from a family of educators. I was trained by mother and her mother trained her.” Wes admitted that while he came from a family of educators, they taught at the middle school and high school levels. When he told them he would be an elementary teacher, he said “they were shocked,” but supported his decision.

### *Outsider Status*

The second main subtheme that emerged when discussing sense of belonging was that Black male elementary teacher participants often felt like outsiders. The outsider status was felt because women dominated the teaching profession especially at the elementary level. Five of the participants mentioned outsider status when referencing the underrepresented number of Black male elementary teachers. Horace mentioned, “I think being a Black male in the field of education is rare, but then on top of that, if you have training in special education.” Herman agreed by saying, “we do not have a lot of men in the space.” Eugene mentioned that when he graduated from his program before teaching, he was the only Black male graduating with a degree in elementary education. Ralph referred to Black male elementary teachers as “unicorns.” Herman also mentioned White cultural norms when referencing his feelings of being an outsider. He said, “I think the school system, especially in this country is designed for Black and Brown people to not

succeed.” Augusta responded similarly by saying, “Most schools are run on norms of the white middle class.”

### ***Issues Related to Race and Gender***

The third main subtheme that emerged when discussing sense of belonging had to do with issues the Black male elementary participants dealt with in terms of race and gender. Augusta mentioned two situations in which he experienced racism and discrimination. The first was when he was hired at a school, the White lady in the front office told him, “I am not sure how this is going to go with you working here.” At the same school, he mentioned that he had got to school early to get some work done and he was mistaken for the custodian by an older White lady. Julian responded to the question about working in a field dominated by White woman by saying, “I never had an issue with working with Black women or White men, but for some reason there has always been an issue with working with White women.” He went on to share that he felt the White women he worked with lacked proper communication skills and lacked self-awareness.

### **Esteem is Often Low**

The fourth main theme to emerge focused on participants’ esteem needs, which was in direct alignment with research question 4. This theme illustrated ways participants viewed their esteem needs as Black male elementary teachers. The esteem for the Black male elementary teacher participants was often low. There were three subthemes that emerged from the participants, including esteem is fostered, they do not feel valued, and they feel overworked and taken advantage of.

### ***Esteem is Fostered***

The first main subtheme that emerged when discussing esteem needs of the Black male elementary teacher participants was around their esteem is fostered. When talking about the balance he has, Horace, stated, “Right now I feel it is balanced. I can get my work done and not have to take work home.” Augusta replied similarly by saying, “I do not check emails at home. I do not stay at work extremely late unless my boys have after-school clubs.” Wes talked about how important it was to leave work at work: “With work-life balance, the first thing is to keep everything at work as much as possible... whenever at home, it is like my sanctuary.”

### ***Do Not Feel Valued***

The second main subtheme that emerged when discussing esteem needs of the Black male elementary teacher participant was the lack of value they felt. The lack of feeling valued was mentioned by many of the participants. For example, when asked about the lack of value felt, Eugene replied, “We always must prove ourselves, and that gets old fast. Why do we have to prove ourselves [when] we are already at the table?” In response to the same question, Wes shared, “I do feel I get overlooked by others, even newer teacher who someone sees one good thing in their room one day and they get recognized where I do not get recognized.” Julian shared about not feeling valued when it was time to collaborate with colleagues, sharing that his ideas were often overlooked and ignored: “If I do something on my team, or come up with great idea, it is not necessarily heralded or regarded in the same way as a white woman coming up with something that was invented 1,000 years ago.” In response to a question about the prestige of the

profession, Horace replied, “Teaching is not respected to the degree that it probably should [be]. When [I] think about other fields, it is not taken seriously.”

### ***Feel Overworked and Taken Advantage of***

The third main subtheme that emerged when discussing esteem needs for the Black male elementary teacher participant was focused on them feeling overworked and taken advantage of. Many of the participants shared feelings of being looked at as disciplinarians. Ralph discussed being pigeonholed into discipline because he was a Black male in the school. “I get put in a box, I became a disciplinarian and I get all the students who get in trouble.” Responding to the same questions, Horace stated, “As a Black male you automatically became a disciplinarian. You are not seen as a teacher or educator or as someone who possess the knowledge to educate students.” When asked about the heavy workload, put on Black male teachers the participants had strong opinions. The participants shared their feelings on the heavy workload. Wes stated, “As teachers, we are not just teaching, we have to be the parents, and deal with whatever comes up that is not teaching.” Augusta also shared feelings of the heavy workload, “The workload is intense. We get a 45-minute prep, but that time gets taken up by parent phone calls, case conference meetings, and other things the administrations need from us.” When describing times they were taken advantage of, Julian replied, “They want us to do all the work. Even when they do the bare minimum, they get exhausted by that, and I am left picking up the slack with things like helping with behavior issues and getting the class quiet.”

### **Self-Actualization Manifests as a Strong Desire to Make a Difference**

The fifth main theme to emerge focused on participants' self-actualization, which was in direct alignment with research question 5. This theme illustrated ways participants viewed their desire to make a difference as essential to fulfilling their self-actualization needs. This importance of making a difference was mentioned by all participants. For example, when asked about his purpose, Eugene replied, "We want to show that teaching, especially at the elementary level, does not have to be dominated by women." In response to the same question, Wes shared, "I did not get into education for the money, I got into to make a difference in my community and the lives of my students." Augusta replied in one word for why he became an elementary teacher: "Passionate." When asked about his personal inspiration for teaching at the elementary level, Herman shared, "I think it can be legacy, and something that is family inspired." Responding to the same question, Julian replied, "I am emotionally connected to the students, and I want to enrich them and see them grow into something positive when they grow up."

Analysis of the participants' response generated six codes which included: purpose, passionate, personal inspiration, supports Black students, desire for students to succeed, and self-care there were no subthemes that emerged from the theme of self-actualization.

### **COVID-19 Influenced Teachers' Experiences**

The sixth main theme to emerge focused on participants' experience and the influence of COVID-19, which was in direct alignment with research question 6. This theme illustrated ways participants viewed their experiences during COVID-19. All the Black male elementary teachers were in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, when asked about the influence of COVID-19, Eugene replied, “In my personal and professional life, it made me be more intentional.” In response to the same question, Julian shared, “I am not the same teacher I was before in terms of disposition... they actually feel different to teach and I am much more tolerate than I as before.” Ralph similarly replied to the questions by saying, “What COVID-19 did was a shine the light on the glaring inequities in our schools and our country.” Herman shared what he believed many people realized during the pandemic about teachers, “If we saw anything during the pandemic, we saw how important teachers are, especially in the time of crisis.” Augusta shared a similar sentiment as Herman, “When COVID-19 came, everyone seemed to value teachers a lot more than they did before COVID-19.”

### **Turnover and Recruitment Challenges for Black Men in Elementary Education**

The seventh and final main theme to emerge focused on what participants felt regarding the turnover and the recruitment challenges for getting more Black men at the elementary level. This theme was aligned to questions asked throughout the interview on turnover and recruitment challenges. All the Black male elementary teacher participants responded to questions on recruiting more Black males to the elementary level.

#### ***Turnover***

The first main subtheme that emerged when discussing turnover and recruitment challenges centered on the turnover of Black male elementary teachers. The Black male elementary teacher participants shared some strong views on the turnover of Black male elementary teachers. For example, when asked about the reason for Black male elementary teacher turnover, Horace replied, “The Black males leave the profession, because of the lack of recognition, being overworked, stressed out, and not seeing the

change in the profession that they came for.” Responding to the same question about turnover, Herman replied, “I feel there are two reasons. The lack of value of Black male teachers in the system, and as Black male teachers we are not just policing children, but we become the police to the children.” Julian discussed the emotional toll that happens that caused Black male teacher turnover, “I believe to make a decision that is emotionally rooted and then not have that fulfilled caused an immediate flight or fight emotion and it usually means for the Black male teacher to flight and leave the profession.”

Two of the participants shared powerful sentiments on why they considered leaving the profession. Augusta shared, “I started to become unhappy, and if figured if I am not going to be happy then I might as well make more. I then began to apply for five or six different jobs.” Ralph similarly mentioned, “Many teachers were doing the best they could, but it just was not enough. It was enough for the kids in the school, and it just became an exercise of frustration day after day.”

### ***Recruitment***

The second main subtheme that emerged when discussing turnover and recruitment of Black male elementary teachers was focused on recruitment, specifically the challenges with recruitment. The Black male elementary teachers shared why they felt it was difficult to recruit Black male teachers. For example, when asked about difficulties with recruitment, Augusta replied, “There are many external pressures to not go into teaching. As a teacher starting off, you make less than \$50,000, but in engineering and medicine you come out after your degree making more sometimes even double what you would make as a teacher starting off.” When asked about how to increase the pipeline of Black male elementary teachers coming through, Horace replied, “A lot of

Black males did not have a positive experience in elementary school... when they grew up. That will deter them from wanting to go into the profession.” In response to the same question about increasing the pipeline, Eugene stated, “We are going to have to groom them. We must think about growing our own.” Ralph stated, “There are going to have to be more avenues and more ways to spark the interest of Black males wanting to become elementary school teachers.”

When asked about what specifically could be done to recruit more Black males to the elementary level, Wes replied, “We must bring more Black males to our elementary classrooms. We must bring them in to shadow or volunteer to read a book to the kids and give them a chance to interact with the elementary students.” Responding to the same question, “Herman stated, “We need to contract organizations that are led by Black men who focus and specialize in recruiting Black men. The Black men must see that they are not alone that there are inspirations they can follow behind.” Augusta responded with statement on requirements, “There are a lot of requirements. There are a lot of tests. We should probably think about teacher licensure, there is a lot of work that goes into becoming a teacher and maintaining teacher status.”

### **Summary**

In chapter 4, the researcher presented findings from the qualitative study that explored the lived experience of seven Black male elementary teachers while using the framework of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. In chapter 4, readers will find responses from the participants related to the research questions of the study. Chapter 4 began with participant descriptions, data analysis, examples of open coding, code frequency table, a table of themes/subthemes/codes, a thematic map, and results from analysis. The

interviews of the participant captured how their physiological, safety, esteem, sense of belonging, and self-actualization needs were met. Additionally, the interviews captured the experiences of the Black male elementary teachers during COVID-19, how they felt about the recruitment challenges, and ways to combat high turnover among Black male teachers at the elementary level.

The research findings included seven themes which were: physiological needs focus on salary and benefits; safety needs pertain to job security, physical, safety, and emotional security; sense of belonging is often a struggle; esteem is often low; self-actualization manifest as a strong desire to make a difference; COVID-19 influences teachers' experience; and turnover and recruitment challenges for Black men in elementary education. The ten subthemes derived from the data were: job security; safety; I feel a sense of belonging; outsider status; issues related to race and gender; esteem is fostered; do not feel valued; feel overworked and taken advantage of; turnover; and recruitment.

The findings of the study show showed that barriers had an impact on the recruitment and were perceived as causes of turnover among Black male teachers at the elementary level. All the participants mentioned the importance of salary and benefits as part of their experience. While the participants shared that overall, they had the support of family members, they did also feel undervalued and overworked as elementary teachers. One participant shared that the predominantly White female culture was a barrier that could cause issues for Black male elementary teachers in getting their voice heard. Three participants believed they were primarily thought of by their schools as disciplinarians and not individuals who could lead in the education of children. For example, one

participant shared that he was used to policing children who were misbehaving, and his class roster was full of students who the administration deemed as behavior concerns. In the next chapter, the researcher will present a summary of the study, highlight implications, and provide potential recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of Black male teachers to understand why they decided to teach at the elementary level. The framework was provided by Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. The study was anchored by a literature review that explored that many roles and titles placed on Black males who decided to not only teach at the elementary, but all men who decide to dedicate their lives to teaching. The importance this study was stated by Brown (2012) as the voices and lived experiences of Black male teachers are often left out of the research. It was important in this study to get the voices of current Black male teachers and not Black male teachers who had already left the profession. The stories of the Black male elementary teachers added to the body of research of Black male teachers, just as the scholars who had researched before including, Bristol, Brockenbrough, Brown, Gordan, and Mitchell.

In this study, the stories and insights from the Black male elementary teachers revealed their experiences teaching at the elementary level. Additionally, those experiences coincided with a global pandemic that halted not just the school system, but the entire country. Across this study, the Black male teachers shared the driving force behind the work they did, the challenges of unwanted pressures, issues with being the "super" minority, thoughts on factors that cause Black males to leave the teaching profession, and their own struggles with staying in the profession. Although they did not speak of it directly, participants often seemed to carry burdens related to the impact of

COVID-19, their drive to make a difference, and the need to do something that felt purposeful and rewarding.

This chapter begins with a summary of the study, which provides an overview description of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, review of the study design, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and a summary of the major findings. This chapter includes a conclusion section that focuses on an overview and analysis of the findings. In addition, implication for practitioners are provided. The recommendations section highlights opportunities for future research on the topic of Black male elementary teachers. The last section includes the researcher's final remarks and perspectives.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

This study's theoretical framework was Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. These needs guided the research and interview questions. Additionally, the researcher considered participants' experiences within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question focused on participants' physiological needs. The theme that emerged from this research question highlighted the importance of salary and benefits. Overall, salary was an important component for the Black male elementary teacher participants. Each of them spoke about salary, while benefits were not mentioned as often. Those who spoke more about benefits were the Black male elementary teacher participants who were married or had children. Nelson (2002) highlighted how low teaching salary, coupled with the rising costs of college, are primary reasons why Black males do not become teachers.

## **Research Question 2**

Research question two was focused on participants' safety needs. The theme that emerged from this research question focused safety needs as they pertained to job security, physical safety, and emotional safety. Two subthemes emerged from the research question, which focused on job security and safety. The participants shared that they felt as though they had good job security due to the low number of Black male teachers, especially at the elementary level. Participants worried more about the physical safety of their students than of themselves. The threat of school shootings was on the mind of few of the participants. The participants believed their job was protect their students. For many years, Black male educators have been the linchpin for their communities (Smith, 2021).

## **Research Question 3**

Research question three was focused on participants' belonging needs. The theme that emerged from this research question, focused on a sense of belonging being a struggle. Three subthemes emerged, including *I feel a sense of belonging*, *outsider status*, and *issues related to gender and race*. The Black male elementary teacher participants shared that belonging as teachers at the elementary level was a struggle. One participant said he felt a sense of belonging because his colleagues made him feel comfortable. The majority, however, expressed what was termed in the study as "outsider status."

## **Research Question 4**

Research question four was focused on participants' self-esteem needs. The theme that emerged from this research question revealed esteem was often low. The three subthemes that emerged were *esteem is fostered*, *do not feel valued*, and *feel overworked*

*and taken advantage of.* In some cases, study participants shared that esteem was fostered because they created a sense of balance in their lives, leaving work at work. Other participants shared their struggles with esteem and how they did not feel valued, or they felt as though they were taken advantage of. Many participants said they were used primarily for discipline instead of instructional purposes. Casteel (1998) highlighted this notion, explaining that many schools give Black male teachers discipline duties instead of duties related to mentoring or instruction. Bristol and Mentor (2018) expanded on this, highlighting how Black men felt they were expected to be effective in crowd control and redirecting behavior.

#### **Research Question 5**

Research question five was focused on participants' self-actualization needs. The theme that emerged from this research question focused on how self-actualization manifested as a strong desire to make a difference. The Black male elementary teacher participants expressed a desire to make a difference. There was a strong passion for teaching at the elementary level. Participants expressed both inspiration from family who were teachers and for ensuring their students can be successful. They all want to make a difference. Holmes (2022) similarly found that Black men expressed a strong desire to teach to make a difference in the lives of their students.

#### **Research Question 6**

Research question six was focused on the experience teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme that emerged for this research question was focused on how COVID-19 influenced teachers' experiences. COVID-19 was such a difficult time for all educators. The Black male teachers were mixed in their responses about the impact of

COVID-19. Some of the participants explained that COVID-19 provided them with more motivation because of the inequalities that were made increasingly evident during the pandemic, as many students were out of school and lacked the resources they needed to learn. One participant expressed how his teaching style changed after COVID-19, as he was very strict before but became more tolerate afterwards. While COVID-19 did not cause of any of the participants to leave the profession, each of them did ask themselves the question whether their love for their students and teaching was worth the strain and pressure they felt during COVID-19.

Another theme emerged from questions asked in each research question and that was turnover, and recruitment challenged for Black men in elementary education. The subthemes that emerged focused on turnover and recruitment. We know that retention is a concern for Black male teachers, as the Black teacher workforce has decreased in roughly nine major cities over the last decade (Griffin & Tackie, 2017). The Black male elementary teacher participants shared insights and suggestions on what can be done to both slow down the turnover rate and to recruit more Black male teachers to the profession. Recruitment and retention will likely remain a topic of discussion for years to come, as the Black male elementary teacher participants in this study explained how hard it was to teach at the elementary level. Black and Rice (2020) noted that being Black and male in the American education system carries with it a slew of social implications.

### **Differences in Participants' Background**

Each participant in the study shared two distinct identifications markers: they were Black and teachers. Those distinct markers would have one believe their experiences were the same. In some respects, they were, but in others, they were not. Of

the seven participants, three were from states in the Midwest, while others represented states from the South. In some respects, the experiences of those from the South differed from those in the Midwest. The four participants from the South highlighted the importance of school safety with the recent school shootings across the country. They saw their roles as educators to include a responsibility to protect the physical safety of their students. The three participants from Midwest were all fathers who discussed how fatherhood played a role in the type of teachers they were and their obligations to educate other children as if they were their own.

School types were another way the participants' experiences were different. Two of the seven participants taught outside a charter school, either a traditional public school or a rural school. In their interviews, these participants shared how a community or political pressure made their jobs more difficult. The five charter teachers shared a commonality regarding the many hats they wear in their school outside of just being a teacher. It was almost expected that they do more than teach.

Each participant's journey to the classroom was different. Their experience growing up was not the only thing that made their pathway to the classroom different, but also their certification. The seven participants accounted for four different pathways. Two participants were traditionally trained, meaning their undergrad degree was in teaching. They each experienced the student teaching experience and got into teaching at an early age without any other full-time jobs. The two participants whose pathway to certification included a different route worked jobs in education, but outside of K-12 education. The two teachers completed transition programs but worked under mentor teachers for at least one year before taking classrooms over on their own, full-time.

## Implications

There is support from both the state and federal level to increase the number of Black male teachers in schools across our country. Research exists on ways schools and districts can recruit and retain more Black male teachers. As highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2 of this study, schools need to place higher value on the skills and contributions Black male teachers make beyond those of roles models (Brown, 2012). Lewis (2006) suggested that Black males represented an endangered species in the profession due to the amount leaving and the low number entering the profession. Based on findings from this study, a few practical suggestions may be implemented:

1. School districts should focus on the physiological needs of Black male teachers. One way this can be done is by increasing teachers' salaries, not just at the starting level, but at all levels of experience.
2. School districts should focus on the safety needs of Black male teachers. As shared by the participants in this study, Black males believe in the safety of their students often more than their own safety. Knowing this will allow school districts to have a better understanding of Black male teachers.
3. Schools and school districts should focus on the sense of belonging for Black male teachers. There should be an emphasis on recruiting Black men at the elementary level, to offset gendered stereotypes of male teachers at the elementary level.
4. School districts should focus on the self-esteem needs of Black male teachers by creating pathways in the instructional lane for Black men to participate, rather than relegating them to disciplinarians.

5. School districts should create Black male teacher affinity spaces for the Black male teachers to share stories and connect with one another.

### **Recommendations**

This study highlighted the perspectives of seven Black male elementary teachers' lived experiences and motivations to teach at the elementary level. Further research on the lived experiences of Black male elementary teachers who both stay and leave the profession is highly recommended. To gain a different perspective and gather additional data, the following are suggested studies for future research:

1. Interview Black male teachers in teacher preparation programs who are studying to teach at the elementary level, focusing on those in their last year;
2. Interview Black male teachers in alternative programs who decide to teach elementary instead of secondary;
3. Compare Black male teachers who began at the elementary level but moved to the secondary level;
4. Compare Black male teachers from both the elementary and secondary on reasons why they both stayed and left the profession;
5. Interview Black male elementary teachers who spent their entire careers at the elementary level and retired.

In an effort to continue the conversation around Black male teachers, specifically at the elementary level, it will be important to include the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings. Gloria Ladson-Billings' pioneering work on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and the intersection with critical consciousness provides a valuable framework for understanding the role of Black male teachers and their connections to the communities they serve. As

Ladson-Billings (1995) highlighted, CRP emphasizes incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum to enhance their engagement and academic achievement. The approach recognizes the unique cultural context of Black students, including those taught by Black male teachers. Gloria Ladson-Billings' work accentuates the importance of fostering critical consciousness among Black male teachers to address issues of racial inequality within the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Gloria Ladson-Billings argues that Black male teachers possess a unique perspective that can challenge and disrupt existing educational power structures. She contends that by developing a critical consciousness, these educators can become advocates for equity and social justice within the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In her research, Ladson-Billings highlights the experiences of Black male teachers who have developed critical consciousness. While this study did not discuss critical consciousness, future research would benefit from her work as it highlights how teachers often engage in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, creating inclusive learning environments that empower Black students and challenge stereotypes (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Ladson-Billings also emphasizes the need for teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities to support the development of critical consciousness among Black male teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The scholarship of Gloria Ladson-Billings' specifically on critical consciousness and its relevance to Black male teachers, highlights the importance of empowering Black male teachers to challenge inequities within the education system. Black male teachers, who often share similar cultural backgrounds and life experiences with their students, are well-positioned to engage in culturally responsive practices that foster critical thinking

and awareness of social inequities. The advancement of the body of research around Black male elementary teachers would contribute significantly by including the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings.

Gloria Ladson-Billings highlights the importance of community connections in developing critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Black male teachers who maintain strong ties to their communities can serve as liaisons between the school and their broader community.

### **Conclusion**

The low number of Black male teachers entering the profession is concerning, as is the high number of Black male teachers leaving the profession. The research mentioned in this study and previous studies highlighted how Black male teachers benefit all students, especially Black students. The participants in this study not only shared their experiences as elementary teachers, but also provided reasons why Black men enter, stay in, and leave the profession. Their stories and the stories of other Black male teachers should be considered in ways leaders work to increase recruitment and retention of these individuals. The participants in this study shared first-hand accounts of their experiences as elementary teachers; those experiences highlighted the importance of considering how Black males are treated, as teachers.

While the participants mentioned that salary and benefits were important to them, the low salary they were paid had not caused them to leave profession. While the participants mentioned different situations in which their voices were not valued, they did not leave the profession. While the participants shared examples of being overworked or

only looked at as disciplinarians, they did not leave the profession. Despite being given multiple reasons to leave the profession, these Black male elementary teacher participants stayed. They stayed because their passion and drive ran deep.

The one thing that was obvious is the Black men in this study were doing this work not for themselves, but for their students. Participants wanted to be looked at as teachers who could lead students to academic achievement and serve as positive role models. Whether motivated by their own experiences growing up in school, the connection to the family ties of teaching, or making a difference, these Black men were clearly more than security guards in schools. They were the brains of their schools.

### **Final Remarks**

The challenges faced by Black men in this time are more serious than any other challenges they have faced since the beginning of human time (Akbar, 2016). Even with the ability to do something completely different with their lives that will bring them more money, more recognition, and more praise, the Black men in this study each decided to teach and teach at the elementary level. They also each had made commitments to educating the future and putting students on paths to find their own greatness. After reading their stories and hearing their experiences, there was no doubt that all seven of the participants in this study loved what they did for a living. They saw teaching as a calling and a higher purpose. That feeling, along with their passion and desire to spark change, was what kept them going and allowed them to do everything that came with being a Black male teaching at the elementary level. These Black men carried a burden and wore many hats in their schools, some titles they embraced and others that were

placed on them. They carried the burden proudly and continued to do their part for the students they served.

While the search continues to find the silver bullet or magic potion to increase the number of Black male teachers, studies like this are important to learning about the experiences of Black male teachers, especially those at the elementary level. It is my hope that we continue to study the experiences to lend a voice to the men who are the stalwarts in their schools and communities. The struggle with recruiting and retaining Black male teachers is one that begins as early as the school experience of Black boys. Until our education system improves its education and treatment of Black boys, we will not see Black boys aspire to be teachers, themselves.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**RECRUITMENT EMAIL**

Dear [Insert Name of Recipient]

My name is David McGuire, a doctoral candidate at Marian University in the Klipsch Educators College. I am recruiting Black male elementary teacher participants for an interview style qualitative student on their lived experiences and journey to the profession.

I am writing to ask if you would agree to send my call to participants to all the Black male elementary teachers in your network.

The requirements for the study are listed below. Please feel free to share with anyone who may be interested and meets the criteria. I have attached a flyer as well to the email for reference.

To participate, participants must meet each of the following:

1. Identify as an African American
2. Identify as male
3. Teach at the elementary level (K-6)
4. Teach in a content area (ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies)
5. At least one year of teaching experience

All interested participants can complete a short survey of interest here:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ojUh6k3AqkGBPnCddSILSMmR>

[McniwiUBDoyWR1p0\\_DdVURTgyM1hLTkcxRkJUWjZaWVfVUUJFR0FBMC4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ojUh6k3AqkGBPnCddSILSMmR)

Interested participants or anyone who has any questions can email me directly at [dmcguire333@marian.edu](mailto:dmcguire333@marian.edu).

Thank you for your time.

**APPENDIX B**  
**RECRUITMENT FLYER**



**ARE YOU A BLACK MALE  
ELEMENTARY TEACHER?**

**SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

**TO PARTICIPATE EMAIL  
DAVID MCGUIRE  
DMCGUIRE333@MARIAN.EDU**

**MARIAN UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVED**

## APPENDIX C

### RECRUITMENT NOTE

I am a doctoral candidate at Marian University studying the lived experiences of Black male elementary teachers.

For my dissertation research, I will be recruiting Black male elementary teacher participants for an interview-based study of experiences through life and the teaching profession.

If interested in participating in an interview, please complete the survey.

[https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ojUh6k3AqkGBPnCddSILSMmRMcnwiUBDoyWR1p0\\_DdVURTgyM1hLTkcxRkJUWjZaWVfVUUJFR0FBMC4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ojUh6k3AqkGBPnCddSILSMmRMcnwiUBDoyWR1p0_DdVURTgyM1hLTkcxRkJUWjZaWVfVUUJFR0FBMC4u)

Here are the recruitments to participate.

You must be all the following:

1. Identify as an African American
2. Identify as male
3. Teach at the elementary level (K-6)
4. Teach in a content area (ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies)
5. At least one year of teaching experience

I hope you will be able to help with my research. Please feel free to share with others who you think may be interested and meets all the criteria.

Any questions or concerns about the recruitments, please free to email me at [dmcguire333@marian.edu](mailto:dmcguire333@marian.edu).

## APPENDIX D

## PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SURVEY

Link:

[https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ojUh6k3AqkGBPnCddSILSMmRMcnwiUBDoyWR1p0\\_DdVURTgyM1hLTkcxRkJUWjZaWVfVUUJFR0FBMC4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ojUh6k3AqkGBPnCddSILSMmRMcnwiUBDoyWR1p0_DdVURTgyM1hLTkcxRkJUWjZaWVfVUUJFR0FBMC4u)

**Dissertation Participant Survey**

My name is David McGuire, I am a doctoral student at Marian University Klipsch Educators College . My research will be looking at the lived experiences of Black male elementary teachers.

Please fill out this form if you are interested in participating in this research project. Roughly 7 participants will be selected and asked to complete an interview. If selected you will be asked to participate in an approximately 30-45 minute interview. I look forward to speaking with you about your experience as a Black male elementary teacher.

\* Required

1. Name \*

2. Email Address \*

3. Identify as an African American \*

Yes

No

4. Identify as a Male \*

Yes

No

5. Grade Level Taught \*

Kindergarten

First Grade

Second Grade

Third Grade

Fourth Grade

Fifth Grade

Sixth Grade

6. Teach a content position \*

ELA

Math

Science

Social Studies

7. Years of Teaching Experience (Has taught at least one full school year) \*

1-3

4-6

7-10

10 or more

3/31/2022

## APPENDIX E

### CONSENT EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for completing the study participant survey form. This email is to confirm that you have been selected to participate in the study. Please complete the attached demographic questionnaire. The information will be reviewed prior to the scheduled interview.

I ask that you take some time to read all the information below regarding participation in the research study.

#### **Voluntary Nature of Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. There will be no negative consequence for participating or not. If you agree to participate and later decide to discontinue your participation, you may do so at any time.

#### **Risks and Benefits of the Study**

As it stands there will be no risks in your participation in this study. Your participation in this research study will not impact your general safety and wellbeing. There are no direct benefits to the participants. The benefits to the broader community could be the changing of the perception around the importance of having a Black male teacher at the elementary level.

#### **Payment**

There is no payment or gifts (monetary or otherwise) for your participation.

**Privacy**

Information shared will be kept confidential; your name or any personal information that can identify you in the study reports will not be included. The researcher will not use this information for any purposes outside of this research project. The names of the participants will be coded using the pseudonym you select in the questionnaire to protect the identity of the participants. Additionally, the audio recording will be transcribed, and you will be allowed to review the interview transcripts before the material is coded and reviewed for themes. Lastly, the researcher will keep all materials used for the interview and study locked away where only the researcher will have access to the information. The audio recordings will be destroyed after the completion of the study. All data will be kept securely, locked away by the researcher David McGuire, in compliance to the Marian University rules.

Once you have read and you agree to all the terms send me three dates and times that work best for you for the interview. The interviews will last between 30-45 minutes, but I am asking that give me an hour of your time.

**Consent**

By replying to this email with the words "I Consent" and your first and last name in the subject line, you are agreeing to participating in this study. For your own record keeping, please print and or save a copy of this consent form.

**APPENDIX F****DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please complete the demographic questionnaire below. Please write or type your responses and email them back to me at [dmcguire333@marian.edu](mailto:dmcguire333@marian.edu).

1. Chosen pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Grade level teaching: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Type of school: (circle one that apply) Public School, Public Charter, Private School, Catholic School
4. State where you teach: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Pathway to Teaching: (circle one that apply): Traditionally trained [attended and graduate from a school of education at four-year university], Transition to teaching program [ Teach for America, Teaching Fellows, other], Different route
6. Undergrad College Attended: (circle one that apply) Historical Black College and University, Predominately White Institution
7. Number of years in the classroom: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Age Range: (circle one that apply) 22-29 30-37 38-45 46-53 45 and older

Anything else you'd like to share:

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## APPENDIX G

### RESEARCH AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background Questions:

1. Who is **participants name**.... The man
2. Who is **participants name**... The Educator

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did Black males experience COVID-19 as an elementary teacher?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe where you were in your career when COVID-19 first impacted schools? March 2020</li> <li>• If you were in a teaching program or undergrad, did you ever consider switching careers?</li> <li>• If you were currently teaching, did you ever consider leaving the profession?</li> <li>• How does COVID-19 impact you as an elementary teacher?</li> </ul>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. What physiological needs are met for the Black male teacher?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your work life balance?</li> <li>• Are the salary and the benefits an important component to job satisfaction?</li> </ul>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What safety needs are met for the Black male teacher?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe job security as an elementary teacher?</li> <li>• What safety concerns did you have as an elementary teacher? Personal and School</li> </ul>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. How does the Black male teacher feel a sense of belonging?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any challenges working in a field dominated by women?</li> <li>• Describe how those close to you felt when you decided to work as an elementary teacher?</li> <li>• Did you feel your race and gender make it challenging to work as a team?</li> </ul>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. What self-esteem needs are met for the Black male teacher?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the balance between the workload of a teacher and the prestige of the profession?</li> <li>• What can be done to recruit more Black males to teach at the elementary level?</li> <li>• Do you believe you receive equal recognized as those of another race and ethnicity?</li> </ul>

6. What self-actualization needs are met for the Black male teacher?
- Do you feel that your skills are being used to their maximum potential as an elementary teacher?
  - Why do you believe Black males decide to become teachers?
  - Why do you believe Black males leave the profession?
-

## **APPENDIX H**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL SCRIPT**

#### **Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to discuss your experiences as a Black male elementary teacher. You met all the criteria for participation in this study. Thank you for getting back the consent form and the demographic questionnaire.

A few reminders from the consent email sent previously, your participation in this study is voluntary and that even after beginning you can at any time withdraw from participation from this study. There is no payment from this study and the confidentiality is extremely important this recorded conversation will be locked away where only the researcher has access.

This virtual interview will take between 30-45 minutes but thank you for blocking out an hour of your time. Your responses will help the researcher gain perspectives on the lived experience of Black male elementary teachers and led to effort to increase the number in schools.

In writing the pseudonym you selected will be used and please refrain from using names, but if you do try to use first names only. Do you have any questions before the interview begins?

#### **Interview Script**

Recording will begin now. {Document the day of the week, month, date, and year of the interview. Document the time the interview begins.} I have received all consent

and required documents. Remember please be honest in all your responses based on your own lived experience.

### **Interview Questions**

RQ1: How did Black males experience COVID-19 as an elementary teacher?

Interview Questions:

- Describe where you were in your career when COVID-19 first impacted schools? March 2020
- If you were in a teaching program or undergrad, did you ever consider switching careers?
- If you were currently teaching, did you ever consider leaving the profession?
- How does COVID-19 impact you as an elementary teacher?

RQ2: What physiological needs are met for the Black male teacher?

Interview Questions:

- Describe your work life balance?
- Are the salary and the benefits an important component to job satisfaction?

RQ3: What safety needs are met for the Black male teacher?

Interview Questions:

- How would you describe job security as an elementary teacher?
- What safety concerns did you have as an elementary teacher? Personal and School?

RQ4: How does the Black male teacher feel a sense of belonging?

Interview Questions:

- Are there any challenges working in a field dominated by women?
- Describe how those close to you felt when you decided to work as an elementary teacher?
- Did you feel your race and gender make it challenging to work as a team?

RQ5: What self-esteem needs are met for the Black male teacher?

Interview Questions:

- How would you describe the balance between the workload of a teacher and the prestige of the profession?
- What can be done to recruit more Black males to teach at the elementary level?
- Do you believe you receive equal recognized as those of another race and ethnicity?

RQ6: What self-actualization needs are met for the Black male teacher?

Interview Questions:

- Do you feel that your skills are being used to their maximum potential as an elementary teacher?
- Why do you believe Black males decide to become teachers?
- Why do you believe Black males leave the profession?

**Ending Script**

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Remember your responses will be kept confidential. A transcription verbatim of your responses will be sent to you

via email for your review, accuracy, and any feedback that you may have. Recording ending now.

**APPENDIX I**  
**IRB APPROVAL**



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: 09-20-2022  
 TO: David McGuire & Dr. LaTonya Turner  
 FROM: Institutional Review Board  
 RE: S22.163  
 TITLE: To Be Black, To Be Male, To Teach: A qualitative Phenomenological Study on Black Male Elementary  
 SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project  
 ACTION: Determination of EXEMPT Status  
 DECISION DATE: 10-02-2022

The Institutional Review Board at Marian University has reviewed your protocol and has determined the procedures proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol and you are cleared to proceed with your project. The protocol will remain on file with the Marian University IRB as a matter of record. Please be mindful of the importance of reporting only de-identified, HIPPA-compliant information about the patient in any exhibit or publication.

Although researchers for exempt studies are not required to complete online CITI training for research involving human subjects, the IRB **recommends** that they do so, particularly as a learning exercise in the case of student researchers. Information on CITI training can be found on the IRB's website: <http://www.marian.edu/academics/institutional-review-board>.

It is the responsibility of the PI (and, if applicable, the faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project. Please contact me if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing to the IRB. **Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Amanda C. Egan".

Amanda C. Egan, Ph.D.  
 Chair, Marian University Institutional Review Board