

Education's Silent Exodus:

A Critical Exploration of Race & the Shortage of Black Men in the Teaching Profession

By

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## Abstract

A drastic shortage of black men exists within the United States' teaching workforce. Centered on the assertion that both unsatisfactory, institutional conditions *and* racial insensitivity play key roles in black men's decisions to exit the teaching profession, this portraiture case study, framed by Critical Race Theory, deeply examines this issue. Unlike many other related studies, this one places considerably more emphasis on retaining black men in the teaching profession, not simply on recruiting them. It treats retention as equally-vital as recruitment (if not more than), propagating the idea that strengthening retention efforts is a sound starting point in the work to draw more black men into the field. The overall intent of this study is certainly not to push for the liquidation of all non-black men who teach. Instead, its primary aim is to highlight the fact that black men teachers<sup>†</sup>, the least represented demographic in the profession, are valuable sources of empowerment and instructional leadership who tend to be misunderstood, taken for granted, or underutilized.

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<sup>†</sup>Inspired by Marvin Lynn's (2002) article, *Critical Race Theory and the Perspectives of Black Men Teachers in the Los Angeles Public Schools*, I intentionally use this term (outside of quoted texts) over the more commonly-used term, 'black male teachers.' From a biological perspective, the label, *male*, makes boys and men indistinguishable. Therefore, the explicit use of 'black men teachers' is meant to avoid degrading those whose experiences help buttress this work.

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*To God, the Father*— You’ve seen me at my lowest and You’ve seen me at my highest. Thank You for Your inestimable love and patience with me, as I continue to be molded like clay. To this day, I still can’t fully comprehend what You see in me to bless me so richly as You have. Nevertheless, I’m humbled that Your hand of favor rests over my life and I’m determined to never take You for granted for as long as I live. Abba...may my love for You continue to burn like an unquenchable flame.

--

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--

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--

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you're simply amazing. Thank you for continuing to love me so hard, despite my flaws and all.

Thank you for praying for and with me. Thank you for believing in me and my obese-sized dreams. Thank you for giving me even more reason to live. Thank you for making me a better man, overall. Your steady, daily doses of encouragement make me feel like I can run through a brick wall, honest to God. I love you lots, Babe – this is *our* accomplishment!

--

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*\*Hada, baby girl...though you are not here quite yet – just a couple more months left of "cooking in the oven" – your big brother (who is pretty awesome, by the way) is holding things down. We all cannot wait to meet you!!!*

--

*To Mom*— Now you can go ahead and brag to your friends that you're the mother of a doctor, as you've always said you would! Jokes aside...there are people who, unfortunately, have taken their lives after going through a mere fraction of what you have been through in yours, making me realize just how incredibly strong you are. Thank you for never giving up and for making sacrifice upon sacrifice for your children. It is now time for you to invest in yourself more, though – self-care is the best care. I love and appreciate you, dearly. I pray that *true* happiness will be your portion for the rest of your days, in Jesus' name. Amen.

--

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--

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--

*To Black Men, Senselessly-Slain & Wrongfully-Incarcerated*— My eyes well up every time I think about you Kings, especially when I think about how easily we could've been in each other's shoes right now. I recognize how blessed and fortunate I am to be alive, free, and in this

position. Therefore, I vow to keep striving *for us*, no matter how high the odds keep getting stacked and re-stacked *against us*. You are loved...you are missed. Who knows what type of teachers and mentors you could've been. Hopefully someday, somehow, *we will be seen*.

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

—Nameless Protagonist, *Invisible Man*



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

June 22, 2016 officially marked the day that I walked away from the teaching profession, taking a sliver of the already miniscule percentage of black men represented in teaching with me. To be frank, I never expected to be a teacher for my entire career in education. I knew that eventually, my innate desire to continually grow would produce an itch to lead and to serve others in a greater capacity – an itch that I would find too difficult not to scratch. However, I never imagined that four years, a year shy of the average amount of time that early career teachers exit through a “...revolving door,” would quantify my career in the classroom (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012, p. 846). For me, being a teacher was much more than just a role I played to obtain a steady (albeit, meager) source of income. It was a personal calling which I regarded as a form of ministry work. It allowed me to feed young people’s spirits with hope, while simultaneously feeding my own with more or less the same. I absolutely cherished the opportunity I was given to serve my students and would always proudly discuss it with whomever wanted to know what I did for a living. Thus, I never thought that after just four years, I would become so deeply exhausted and defeated as a teacher, that I simply could not recover.

Painstakingly repeating technical, teaching-specific processes on a regular basis (e.g., planning lessons, grading assignments, filling out paperwork for IEP meetings, etc.) in limited amounts of time *is* quite exhausting (and defeating, especially when gains in student achievement are not apparent). However, these realities alone are not what ultimately wore me down and out. I grew most weary from a potent combination of frequently being on the receiving end of micro- and macro-aggressions from other adults in the building (all of whom were white), always being

a “good enough” teacher for the leadership team to parade for visitors who often flooded my classroom, but never “good enough” for them to consult whenever they sought to make major, instructional shifts or to spotlight best practices, frequently being called upon by various school personnel to serve as somewhat of an expert on negative child behavior, and frequently having my feelings challenged or dismissed whenever I brought these issues to the attention of my superiors. In a nutshell, like the protagonist in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison (1952), I, too, felt invisible (p. 3).

Since my departure from the teaching profession, I have often wondered if what I experienced was (or is) commonly faced by other black men in the field. I have also wondered if these experiences were common to all teachers or if they were gender-race specific. I have even wondered if there might be a link between these experiences and the well-known shortage of black men teachers. On several occasions, this nagging curiosity has compelled me to scour existing literature for information that might either affirm or challenge my speculations. However, these investigative quests have always felt quite disconcerting. Not only is there a dearth of literature solely devoted to unpacking the experiences of black men teachers, but within the literature that does exist around this topic, their experiences tend to get glossed over, unexplored in deep, meaningful ways. As a result, recruitment is typically spotlighted and placed on a pedestal, while the underlying issues that these experiences could raise remain “in the dark,” likely exacerbating the steady vanishing act of this specific group of teachers. To address this gap in literature, this study examines the following research question: In what ways do both institutional *and* racial factors contribute to black men teachers’ decisions to exit the teaching profession?

I doggedly sought to amplify the voices of black men who used to teach during my data collection and analysis processes. I did this in hopes of inspiring district leaders, school leaders, and other educational practitioners to critically examine current practices within their institutions and furthermore, to become more aware of their interactions with all constituents in the spaces they jointly occupy.

For so long, the realities faced by black men teachers have been consolidated with the realities faced by *all* teachers. However, “...existing research on exemplary Black educators has just begun to establish the ways race and racism influence Black men teachers’ work and the ways they view their role in the classroom,” challenging generalizing approaches toward understanding why so few teachers are black men (as cited in Hayes et al., 2014, p. 2). Recent research has also begun to shed light on additional hardships faced by these men that go beyond their having to be adept at both building curricula and delivering instruction – two already challenging aspects of a teacher’s role, aside from anything else. In her article on schools operating as hostile racial climates for teachers of color, Rita Kohli (2016) shares an example of this through the life of one of her study’s participants, Darnell:

For Darnell, his role as one of the 0.6% did not allow him the common struggles of a new teacher alone. Before he could develop his skills as a math educator, he was already given the jobs of counselor, role model, and father figure. Trying to balance all of these responsibilities in addition to learning how to teach is a pressure that Black male teachers like Darnell feel because of the limited presence of peers. If there were a critical mass of Black male teachers, Darnell may have been afforded the privilege that many new White female teachers have—of just being seen as a novice teacher. (p. 16)

Over time, stories similar to Darnell’s have certainly “...point[ed] to the need for more critical considerations of how Black male teachers negotiate the pressures to [also] serve as role models, father figures, and disciplinarians...” (Brockenbrough, 2014, pp. 502-503). However, as the

shortage of black men teachers continues to persist, it is clear that this need has not yet been met. Comparable to relegating students to “busy work” in the classroom, relegating black men teachers to such roles in schools is more than likely to obscure the full range of their talents, to stymie their growth, and to spur their intense dissatisfaction.

This study is not meant to function as a prescriptive, “how-to guide” for reversing the shortage of black men in teaching. Unfortunately, there is no one, surefire solution to this complex crisis. Instead, it is designed to extend our individual and collective thinking on this issue, out of which genuine, practical, and sustainable measures for improvement will hopefully emanate. In the words of Brazilian activist, educator, and philosopher, Paulo Freire (1970), “I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me. Even if the people’s thinking is superstitious or naive, it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change” (p. 108).



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Thanks chiefly to the numerous capabilities and sheer ubiquity of technology, the mistreatment of people of color in everyday life is visible and well-documented. On an almost monthly basis in this nation, for instance, an unarmed black man is murdered in cold blood for merely *looking* suspicious or untrustworthy. Even if professional news outlets do not broadcast these events, social media outlets always do and will. Over time, practitioners within the K-12 education sphere have become increasingly aware of such tragedies and societal shortcomings, looking more closely at the negative impact(s) they may have on students – particularly black and brown students – at school. In turn, environment-sensitive, uplift-driven doctrines like Culturally Relevant Teaching have gained much traction in the field of educational research, seen as a viable means to inspire “...students to dream of a better world for themselves and their communities” (Esposito & Swain, 2009, p. 38). While general consensus around Culturally Relevant Teaching has been and still is overwhelmingly positive, this instructional approach has proven to be rather elusive – difficult to both conceptualize and actualize. Thus, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive look at Culturally Relevant Teaching to identify implications for future research. In addition, this chapter examines the current state and critical importance of teachers of color within the profession – men and women regarded in existing literature as the best conduits for delivering Culturally Relevant Teaching; ones who tend to utilize teaching methods that are “...grounded in disrupting cycles of oppression” (as cited in Borrero et al., 2016, p. 28). Explicit attention is placed on black men teachers, toward the end of this chapter.

### Research Methodology

I examined the following online databases for scholarly, empirical articles: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Journal Storage (JSTOR), and SAGE. To focus my search, I used terms and phrases such as, *culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching, diversity in the teaching profession, shortage of black men who teach, and teachers of color*. In the similar vein of “buzz” words and phrases, *21<sup>st</sup>-century skills* is one that frequently emerges in educational discourse. Therefore, I predominantly utilized articles written within the 21<sup>st</sup> century for this review.

To supplement what I learned via the journal articles, I also drew upon insights from the following anthologies and books: *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School* edited by Mica Pollock (2008), *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education* by Christopher Emdin (2016), and *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)* by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009). I selected these specific texts for their unique fusions of history, personal experience, and authentic language to elucidate points on complex topics like race and the state of this nation's education system. Because book authors are generally selective in the literature they utilize to anchor their works, it was important that I examined multiple books to avoid being oriented towards a single viewpoint, as suggested by Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen (2008) (p. 67).

Lastly, utilizing Zotero and a self-created Excel Spreadsheet via Google Drive as information storehouses, I noted and classified striking findings for each literature strand. Given the enormity and broad scopes of my literature strands, I dissected them into sub-strands. These sub-strands were inspired by common, recurring themes I encountered in my review. While *Culturally Relevant Teaching* was only anchored by one sub-strand, roadblocks to effective

implementation, *Teachers of Color* was anchored by four: (a) unique issues they face in the teaching profession, (b) their importance to the teaching profession, (c) recruitment and retention, and (d) black men teachers.

Instead of focusing exclusively on black men teachers for this entire review, I took a broader, multi-faceted approach by first exploring Culturally Relevant Teaching and teachers of color, in general. I took this approach to determine if there were any parallels between the philosophical underpinnings of Culturally Relevant Teaching and the instructional practices that many teachers of color employ, as such connections would create a natural avenue for discussing the tremendous value that black men teachers, by virtue of group association, add (or can add) to the profession. Furthermore, influenced partly by the fact that much of the literature specifically around the dissonance between black men and the teaching profession is either sparse or redundant, often lacking a fresh, intellectual direction(s), the decision to take this type of approach grew out of a greater desire to underscore the magnitude and complexity of this issue. Complex issues cannot have simple solutions. What this means with regard to the shortage of black men teachers is that any simple solution (e.g., a recruitment initiative such as a city-wide diversity fair) cannot, at least by itself, enact a resolution. The “sprinkling in” of historical content in the teachers of color literature strand serves a similar purpose of demonstrating how complex this issue truly is.

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Sometimes referred to as Culturally *Responsive* Teaching or Culturally Relevant *Pedagogy*, Culturally Relevant Teaching was coined and first propagated in the early 1990s by Gloria Ladson-Billings. According to Ladson-Billings, Culturally Relevant Teaching seeks to serve a purpose beyond the confines of the classroom, as it is “...about questioning (and

preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 140). Furthermore, it is “...a pedagogy that [empowered] students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (as cited in Young, 2010, p. 248). A paradigm shift from traditional teaching models where students’ identities are forsaken (often for the sake of teachers satisfying narrowly-focused, curricular goals), Culturally Relevant Teaching is a form of teaching where students’ life experiences are validated by teachers “...utilizing their cultures and histories as teaching resources...” (as cited in Young, 2010, p. 249).

In their study on successful teaching of Black students, Cleveland Hayes, Brenda Juarez, and Veronica Escoffery-Runnels (2014), aided by perspectives provided to them by their participants – two former, successful teachers of color – conclude that “...education [should] be about life rather than just about content knowledge” (p. 8). This belief concisely sums up the underlying premise of Culturally Relevant Teaching. Moreover, Ladson-Billings describes it as “...a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (as cited in Young, 2010, p. 248). In other words, within this instructional framework, students should still be able to attain academic excellence and to sharpen the lenses in which they view the world, without having to “lose themselves” in the process.

Most of the participants in Evelyn Young’s study (2010) on challenges to conceptualizing and actualizing Culturally Relevant Teaching seemed to treat it (i.e., reliance on students’ cultural capital to enhance academic experiences) with paramount concern in their classrooms, validating it as a critical means to an end, evidently contrary to her original hypothesis:

Surprisingly, in defining culturally relevant pedagogy, none of the participants made any reference to academic success in the preinterviews. Although this idea was made in response to other questions, it was not conveyed when describing their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. In general, the participants regarded the students' cultural capital as the means to build learning on their personal experiences and to make the curriculum meaningful to them but not necessarily as a way to promote rigorous academic learning. (p. 252)

This finding emits one inherent truth about education: *rigorous* academic learning cannot and will not commence if basic academic learning has not yet happened. Additionally, basic academic learning cannot and will not commence if students do not feel connected to the course material or affirmed by the educator in some fashion. According to Christopher Emdin (2016), an educator's demise is imminent if he or she is never able to understand that "When teaching doesn't connect to students, it is perceived as not belonging to them" (p. 39).

Li Zhang and Yuan Jun Wang (2016) offer an international outlook on Culturally Relevant Teaching. In their study on how two primary schools in China have and have not embodied its guiding tenets, they euphemistically personify it as America's way of atoning for its shameful past, citing Geneva Gay (2002) when stating that it was "...initially designed to respond to academic failures within Native American and other marginalized groups in the United States" (as cited in Zhang & Wang, 2016, p. 55). Interestingly so, seven years before, Ladson-Billings (2009) also touched upon this idea of Culturally Relevant Teaching as a corrective measure – a way to "even the level playing field" for all racial and ethnic groups, asserting that "When schools support their culture as an integral part of the school experience, students can understand that academic excellence is not the sole province of white middle-class students" (p. 12).

Tyrone Howard (2001) identifies "Culturally relevant pedagogues" as being "...sensitive to the students' use of expressive individualism..." (as cited in Young, 2010, p. 249). Aside from

clothing and various art forms, language tends to be a popular mode of expression for today's youth. However, this presents a real tension in traditional, non-culturally relevant classrooms where student voice is usually quashed, especially if that voice communicates language not considered "proper" by Eurocentric standards and ideals. In short, "The language that students bring with them is [often] seen to be deficient--a corruption of English" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 151). On the contrary, in culturally relevant classrooms, such language is embraced by teachers who promote *code-switching*, for example.

Most commonly-discussed within the context of bilingual education, code-switching is the alternate use of two or more types of language "...with rapid changes of language [occurring] within a clause during a conversational turn" – essentially a back-and-forth referral between two or more cultures (as cited in Green & Wei, 2016, p. 883). According to Alyson Kieswetter (1995), this communicative phenomenon is malleable, capable of being employed in numerous ways (e.g., clarification, discretion, etc.) and in numerous settings "...to negotiate, challenge, or change different conversational situations" (as cited in Mokgwathi & Webb, 2013, p. 109). In general society, it might function as a means of social, cultural, and political adaptation. In many of this nation's schools, it might function as an intellectual "breath of fresh air" for certain students. Detractors of this linguistic method believe that it does not belong in schools, though. They believe that it serves as more of a learning hindrance than a learning aid, decelerating the process of firmly grasping the English language for immediate and long-term success. In fact, Massachusetts statute, Question 2 (2002), currently one of the strictest, anti-bilingual education laws to have been passed in the United States, rests upon this idea. Deric Greene and Felicia Walker (2004) discuss how code-switching is a skill developed naturally by members of the black community, as it is pervasive in their immediate cultural environments (p. 436). This

rhetorical tool has typically provided a way for black people to re-invent themselves “...in a society in which they are a racial minority” – a way for them to maintain a sense of sociocultural pride (e.g., “black power”) in the midst of a mainstream culture that makes it frightening and disadvantageous to be black (Greene & Walker, 2004, p. 436).

According to Jairus-Joaquin Matthews (2006) of Miami University (Oxford, OH), African American English (AAE), as it is formally referred to, has gained international recognition in recent years as a legitimate dialect and alternative to Standard American English (SAE), likely due to the global rise in popularity of Hip Hop culture (p. 41). Nevertheless, he conducted a quantitative study to gain definitive proof of whether or not AAE is viewed favorably and spoken frequently by members within the black community, here in the United States. At the conclusion of his study, Matthews discovered that the majority of his participants (randomly-sampled Black students attending Miami University) indeed viewed AAE in a positive light by characterizing the vernacular as legitimate. Some of the final statistics yielded were as follows: 88% of the students reported that they were familiar with the AAE dialect, 54% of the students believed that Black people code-switch to AAE to symbolize ethnic pride, and 60% reported that they tend to use AAE most around those they are familiar with and can relate to (pp. 33-40).

Research suggests that teachers concerned with cultural relevancy in their classrooms do not devalue their students’ language preferences (e.g., AAE) as “...inferior substandard form[s] of communication,” leveraging them during instruction, while occasionally using certain words and phrases to help students make meaningful connections to the content, instead (Matthews, 2006, p. 15). These men and women may employ “...teaching approaches [like this that] are not colorblind, individualist, or dependent on universal ideals but, instead, grounded in a pragmatic,

color-conscious understanding of their Black students' lives and universal ideals of equality..." (Hayes et al., 2014, p. 8). However, doing so should not come at the expense of maintaining high expectations for students. In her study, Young (2010) found that in addition to "...utilizing real-life examples to help students understand difficult concepts," the teachers she observed "...who practiced culturally relevant pedagogy set rigorous learning objectives, engaged students in critical thinking, [and] held high expectations and long-term goals for their students..." (p. 252). Lowering expectations for students is arguably a form of social injustice that replicates how they are treated by society at-large – the ideological antithesis of Culturally Relevant Teaching. Ladson-Billings (2009) shares a similar sentiment when discussing what she, too, observed during her field research:

...teachers help their students understand that societal expectations of them are generally low. However, they support them by demonstrating that their own expectations are exceptionally high. Thus they indicate that to prove the prevailing beliefs wrong, teacher and students must join together. (pp. 127-128)

This example reveals that such teachers seek to galvanize their students around a common, empowering message: *You matter more than people think, and probably more than you know.* Highlighted below from her research are three additional attributes possessed by teachers who successfully cultivate culturally relevant classrooms, summarized.

***Demonstrating appreciation for students' cultural identities.*** Teachers who explicitly "...make the students' culture a point of affirmation and celebration" during instruction are usually able to create and to sustain a sense of community among their students (Ladson-Billings, 2009, pp. 126-127). This is critical, considering that being part of a community (or simply being connected to another individual in some capacity) can be instrumental in enhancing one's level of self-esteem, guiding one towards his or her purpose, or even facilitating one's motivation to aim high in life.



***“Following the lead” of students.*** Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts that in a culturally relevant classroom, teaching is not prescribed and learning activities are inquiry-based, with teachers encouraging their students to generate their own questions before searching for answers to those questions (p. 127). Essentially, she makes the case that the teacher-student relationship must be symbiotic; both sides gain valuable insights from each other that ultimately inform and contribute to the overall academic experience.

***Constantly reminding students of the “big picture.”*** In the world of education, students are the top “clients.” Therefore, they deserve to know *how* the “product” (i.e., curriculum) they are being “sold” (i.e., taught) will help them in the future, along with *why* it is relevant to whom they are. In a culturally relevant classroom, teachers make it a point of duty to constantly remind students of this how and why. These men and women, unafraid to “...talk often with their students about the political nature of their work,” regularly convey to students that someday, their cultural capital, supplemented (not supplanted) by their formal education, will enable them to be agents of societal change – that “...their progress toward cultural excellence is the mightiest weapon they possess to fight against a mediocre status quo” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 128).

### **Roadblocks to Effective Implementation**

Young (2010) illustrates how the effective implementation of Culturally Relevant Teaching has been stymied by researchers who have complicated the theoretical aspects of it to the point where the practical applications of it have become too challenging:

As innovative as these adaptations of the theory were, they nonetheless demonstrated how inconsistently culturally relevant pedagogy has been defined and utilized in scholarly research. The theory’s varied usage was also evident at the classroom level. In Morrison, Robbins, and Rose’s (2008) meta-analysis of 45 classroom-based research studies from 1995 to

2008, less than one third of the classroom teachers in the studies that they reviewed utilized culturally relevant pedagogy as a way to promote academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Meanwhile, 42 of the 45 studies utilized the component of cultural competence for a variety of purposes, including using technology to create culturally responsive lessons (Duran, 1998) and studying African American students' perceptions of White physical education teachers' use of step dance to instruct in a culturally relevant manner (Hastie, Martin, & Buchanan, 2006). Even the researchers of the studies that Morrison et al. reviewed conceptualized culturally relevant pedagogy differently, with more than half of them bearing no reference to the sociopolitical consciousness component of the theory. (p. 249)

On top of the fact that human beings are creatures of habit, typically quite resistant to change and inhibited by a fear of the unknown, having too many route options (i.e., theories undergirding Culturally Relevant Teaching) for one destination (i.e., practical use of Culturally Relevant Teaching in the classroom with students) can certainly be overwhelming and confusing.

Culturally Relevant Teaching "...cannot be implemented unless teachers broaden their scope beyond traditional classroom teaching," as the "...brilliance of neoindigenous youth cannot be appreciated by educators who are conditioned to perceive anything outside of their own ways of knowing and being as not having value" (Emdin, 2016, pp. 10-11). Similarly, Young discovered that her participants' "...unspoken preference for the traditional curriculum prevented their conceptualization of how to effectively use the pedagogy in their lesson planning" (p. 257). Referencing Morrison and colleagues' study (2008) on the operationalization of Culturally Relevant Teaching, she goes on to provide a rather discouraging account:

Morrison et al. (2008) found that one of the challenges to culturally relevant pedagogy was that the theory "ultimately clashes with the traditional ways in which education is carried out in our society, thus making [it] seem herculean to many teachers" (p. 444). The participants in the present study, especially the newer teachers who were just becoming familiar with the curriculum, did in fact find culturally relevant pedagogy a seemingly impossible task. The teachers also felt overwhelmed by the limited length of time to cover the material so that the students met grade-level proficiency. These concerns were likewise echoed by Morrison et al.,

who argued that culturally relevant pedagogy is ultimately a constructivist pedagogy, which stands in sharp contrast to a standardized curriculum and high-stakes tests. (p. 257)

Granted, teachers deserve *some* of the blame for this, particularly those who refuse to confront their biases, fixed mindsets, and the failures within their curricula to satisfy the cultural appetites of their students. However, both Emdin and Ladson-Billings seem to place the bulk of the blame on Teacher Education Programs (TEPs). Similarly, each argues that these programs require rethinking, as they poorly-equip prospective teachers to become torchbearers of Culturally Relevant Teaching by not emphasizing the sheer importance of revering the communities in which they teach (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 143). Emdin writes:

These programs attract teachers to urban and rural schools by emphasizing the poor resources and low socioeconomic status of these schools rather than the assets of the community. Adages like ‘No child should be left back from a quality education’ and ‘Be something bigger than yourself’ draw well-intentioned teachers desiring to save poor kids from their despairing circumstances...programs like it tend to exoticize the schools they serve and downplay the assets and strengths of the communities they are seeking to improve. I argue that if aspiring teachers from these programs were challenged to teach with an acknowledgment of, and respect for, the local knowledge of urban communities, and were made aware of how the models for teaching and recruitment they are a part of reinforce a tradition that does not do right by students, they could be strong assets for urban communities. (p. 7)

Ladson-Billings writes:

Most teacher candidates do not need an immersion experience in white middle-class culture because they are either products of it or have been acculturated and/or assimilated enough to negotiate it successfully. However, when beginning teachers come into minority communities, many are unable to understand the students’ home language, social interaction patterns, histories, and cultures. Thus they cannot truly educate the students. (p. 147)

For the tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching to be actualized in schools, it appears as though this “top-down” cycle of negligence must first be challenged and disrupted. Ladson-Billings (2009) contests the notion that one can adequately understand or teach black and brown children

without first being exposed to the environments or cultural traditions that have helped shape how they act, speak, and think (p. 147). Especially for teachers *not* of color, circumventing this important step may very well guarantee that they will never be able to serve their students how they need and deserve to be served.

### **Teachers of Color**

As far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the genesis of slavery, European theorists led the charge in purporting racist ideologies, setting a precedent that the rest of the world followed. The “findings” of German anatomist, Johann Blumenbach, had a particularly strong influence on the United States, for example:

After visiting the region of the Caucasus Mountains, between the Caspian and Black Seas, German anatomist Johann Blumenbach declared its inhabitants the most beautiful in the world, the ideal type of humans created in “God’s image,” and deemed this area the likely site where humans originated...Blumenbach’s system of racial classification was adopted in the United States. American scientists tried to prove that Caucasians had larger brains and were smarter than people of other races (Mukhopadhyay, 2008, p. 13).

Centuries after Blumenbach, his ideas continue to thrive, both fueling and fueled by individual acts of terror and institutional machinations enacted to further the marginalization of melanin-rich girls, women, boys, and men. The institution of education has long felt the impact of such racialized ideas.

The landscape of primary and secondary school education in the United States was further shaped by the outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), a landmark case in which school segregation was determined to be fundamentally unconstitutional. Accordingly, segregated, single-colored schools were dismantled. Unfortunately, as a byproduct of this change, countless non-white teachers who taught in “colored-only” schools prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* “...were forced out of the profession,” unable to either gain or maintain

employment in newly-desegregated schools (as cited in Kohli, 2014, p. 372). Like so many other historical events, this one, too, has had a lasting impact on modern society.

Rita Kohli (2014) explores this specific legacy in her article on pre-service teachers grappling with internalized racism:

...even today teachers of color continue to be a small minority of the population of educators in the United States. Currently, 84% of all public school teachers are white (Feistritzer 2011); and more than 40% of schools do not employ even one teacher of color (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force 2004). These dismal statistics tell us that the majority of youth in the US grow up with few or no minority teachers within their entire academic career. (p. 372)

Referenced above, C. Emily Feistritzer's study (2011) found that people of color constituted only 16% of the teaching workforce, while a report released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), seven years prior in 2004, found this same statistic to be 17%, revealing that this demographic of teachers is gradually decreasing in number (as cited in Achinstein et al., 2010, p. 71). While a one percent difference might not seem like a statistically-significant decrease, it is a decrease, nonetheless. When juxtaposed with the increasing number of students of color, particularly in public education, this statistic becomes starker, explaining why "...we are seeing a widening of the cultural gap..." between teachers and their students (Achinstein et al., 2010, p. 82).

Over the decades, this cultural gap has become a seemingly-insurmountable "distance" for teachers and school administrators (particularly white teachers and white school administrators) to overcome. It has posed (and continues to pose) a serious threat to student engagement and achievement. Ladson-Billings (2009) suggests that the inability to close this gap stems from somewhat of a continual, self-inflicted wound, asserting that many schools in the United States are unwavering in their commitment to inculcate racially-diverse groups of

students (namely black students) with Eurocentric ideals, as opposed to honoring the distinctiveness that each group possesses:

Given the long history of the poor academic performance of African American students one might ask why almost no literature exists to address their specific educational needs. One reason is a stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African Americans as a distinct cultural group...It is presumed that African American children are exactly like white children but just need a little extra help. Rarely investigated are the possibilities of distinct cultural characteristics (requiring some specific attention) or the detrimental impact of systemic racism. (p. 10)

In the same way that challenging the current status quo of students of color requires a more nuanced, culturally-sensitive, troubleshooting effort(s), it would appear as though challenging the current status quo of teachers of color also needs this, considering that they tend to "...leave the field [of education] each year at a rate 24% higher than their White counterparts" (as cited in Kohli, 2016, p. 6).

### **Unique Issues They Face in the Teaching Profession**

General statistics on the state of this nation's education system have shown that within the first five years of a typical teaching career, one is 20% to 50% likely to leave, making turnover in the profession "...greater...than [in] other professions" (as cited in Hughes, 2012, p. 245). Furthermore, existing literature calls attention to the fact that men and women stemming from *all* types of racial, ethnic backgrounds exit the teaching profession each year, exasperated by "...poor working conditions..." (Abel & Sewell, 1999, p. 289). Millicent Abel and Joanne Sewell (1999) found that as a result, such conditions induce emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (i.e., developed apathy toward students due to a lack of emotional support), and burnout (p. 288). 'Poor working conditions' as a general conclusion for why teachers exit can be misleading, though, in the sense that it can mean different things for different individuals or sects of people. Therefore, as part of the research methodology for their study, Abel and

Sewell (1999) parsed out ‘poor working conditions’ into various types of specific stressors that teachers face (e.g., lack of professional recognition, conflicts with colleagues, lack of time to prepare lessons, inadequate compensation, etc.) to account for unique experiences and grievances (p. 289). Other researchers have followed this train of logic, finding it rather implausible that teachers of different racial groups share all of the same reasons for exiting the teaching profession. For example, one of the few scholars to explicitly tie race into the discussion around teacher attrition, Kohli (2016) posits that “...if teachers of color face incredible racialization in their preparation and teaching lives, racism could also serve as a barrier in their professional growth and retention...” (p. 6).

In her analysis of the narratives she gathered from 218 teachers of color, Kohli discovered that at some point and time, these men and women had “...experienced racial insults in their professional contexts, often referred to as racial microaggressions” (p. 12). She suggests that over time, these microaggressions can eventually accumulate into major “blows” that take emotional tolls on teachers of color, a demographic that tends to not receive “...support [in] negotiating sociocultural issues, with...regard to their racial identity,” to begin with (p. 6). These men and women often find themselves trapped in “damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don’t” situations. If they *do* decide to fight back against microaggressions, they run the risk of assuming stereotypical identities such as the “angry black man,” or even forsaking job security. If they *do not* decide to fight back against microaggressions, they run the risk of dying inside, overcome by worthlessness and shame, while at the same time, denying the guilty party a perhaps life-changing lesson(s).

Working in schools and alongside colleagues that abide by *colorblindness* – the idea that people do not notice race when perceiving others “...in an effort to avoid the appearance of bias”

– can also be daunting for teachers of color, especially those who champion social justice and equity (as cited in Mazzocco, 2017, p. 30). Kohli (2016) also explores this concept in her work:

A color-blind attitude toward urban schooling is an ineffective approach to addressing inequity or injustice and many times results in increased responsibilities for teachers of Color. Participants described that a neglect for racial discourse in schools often forced teachers of Color to be lone advocates for racial justice. (p. 10)

Inherent in the known adage, “There is strength in numbers,” is the message that there is weakness in isolation. Engaging deeply in the work of teaching for justice, while having to advocate for students’ complete humanity to be taken into account when decisions are made on their behalf, especially alone, can “...foster doubt, produce anxiety, and be exhausting” (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018, p. 3). As these teachers push the impetus for others to “see” their students’ color (in this context, to *see color* would be to acknowledge lived experiences, shared or not – to recognize the power of privilege and the ways in which it is enjoyed only by some), they tend to be met by a wall of resistance. According to Richard Milner and Anita Hoy (2003), frequently stymied efforts like this, in turn, “...threatens their self-efficacy as teachers,” causing them to become disenchanted with their schools of employment and sometimes with the profession altogether (as cited in Kohli, 2016, p. 6).

Metaphorically, men and women of color are “...invisibilized [*sic*]...” within the teaching profession (Kohli, 2016, p. 15). This is truly a conundrum, considering that as former students of color, teachers of color likely possess valuable insights on how best to educate, to motivate, and to appreciate students of diverse backgrounds. However, despite this, “Despite the extra work that they must engage in because of the responsibility and pressure they feel, teachers of Color are also often overlooked for leadership opportunities” where they would seem poised to have a positive influence on instructional shifts and behavioral interventions being made by the schools that employ them (Kohli, 2016, p. 17). Much like Emdin and Ladson-Billings do, in part of their



critiques on the lack of cultural relevancy in this nation's schools, Thomas Philip (2011) contends that this type of institutional myopia does not begin at the schools that employ teachers of color, but at the schools and programs that are supposed to prepare them, instead:

...teachers of color have been largely overlooked in teacher education. They argue that although teacher education has increasingly incorporated multiculturalism over the last decade and a half, the primary beneficiaries of these changes have been White teachers. Recent findings from Achinstein and Aguirre (2008) have also complicated assumptions of "cultural match" between students and teachers of color and have demonstrated that programs of teacher education fail to adequately prepare new teachers of color to negotiate their racial identity within the school context. (p. 356)

He goes on to assert that this inadequate level of preparation places these teachers in difficult positions where they must make sense of their racial identities while in the field, with very little to no support (p. 356).

### **Their Importance to the Teaching Profession**

Despite the minimalized to non-existent roles that teachers of color tend to have, in regard to being integral voices in discussions around education reform, "There is a growing recognition that teacher education must attend to the unique strengths and needs of teachers of color," as it has been proven that they possess a "...richer multicultural knowledge base" than their white peers (as cited in Philip, 2011, p. 356).

Granted, not all teachers of color fit this mold. Regardless of affinity group association, individual human beings are and always will be as unique as their fingerprints, meaning that people should be careful not to "...overestimate the importance of uniformity..." (as cited in Townley et al., 2011, p. 72). Therefore, "...it is possible for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to take on approaches to teaching that hurt youth of color" (Emdin, 2016, p. viii). However, numerous studies on teachers of color, specifically on black teachers, have affirmed

the belief that they indeed hold a clear, cultural advantage in the classroom, "...consistently succeed[ing] where others continue to fail at effectively teaching Black and other students often deemed hard to teach, if not unteachable" (as cited in Hayes et al., 2014, p. 1). Ed Brockenbrough (2014), in his article on how black men in teaching negotiate their roles as disciplinarians, provides an in-depth look at one of the ways this demographic of teachers sets itself apart:

In contrast to zero tolerance disciplinary policies that criminalize Black youth (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010), Black teachers' culturally relevant pedagogies have been associated with approaches to discipline that reflect insider insights into Black culture and culturally rooted modes of care for Black children...In two studies focusing specifically on discipline in predominantly Black urban middle schools, Monroe (2009) found that Black teachers, unlike their White counterparts, enacted disciplinary styles modeled by their own Black family members, and Monroe and Obidah (2004) found that Black teachers used culturally familiar forms of humor and displays of emotion to manage student behavior; both studies underscored the culturally mediated nature of Black teachers' disciplinary styles. (p. 501)

Some posit that "The more students of color see teachers who look like them and who understand their culture, the more culturally relevant and meaningful their education will be" (as cited in Kohli, 2014, p. 372). In fact, in his article on attracting more black men to schools, Sharif El-Mekki (2018) cited a recent study conducted by the IZA Institute of Labor Economics where schools in North Carolina saw a sharp decline in dropout risk for thousands of black students with an influx of black teachers within just four years (p. 60). As fascinating as such statistics are, the notion that more teachers of color will automatically result in improved outcomes for students of color is rather idealistic. It insinuates that teachers of color just have to "show up" to experience success with their students, merely by virtue of racial, ethnic synchronicity. Very few would deny that working to gain a child(ren)'s trust, respect, and belief that his or her best interests are what truly drives the work a teacher does, is no easy task. Yet

this labor of love is one that teachers of color have been known to undertake and to succeed at by approaching their everyday work from places of depth, no different from what grassroots activists do when fighting for causes most important to them. Research has found that these men and women "...tend to recognize and want to change inequities around them and enter teaching to apply education toward that democratically transformative end" (as cited in Hayes et al., 2014, p. 2). Achieving this aim requires a great deal more than just "showing up." It also requires an unwavering work ethic and tenacious attitude.

A major element of the success that teachers of color have appears to lie in the fact that their pedagogical approaches stem from asset-rich perspectives of their students and the communities from which their students hail. This is in direct opposition to "...deficiency perspectives" that have become so "...typical in dominant understandings of education and teaching and learning" (as cited in Hayes et al., 2014, p. 6). As documented by Cheryl E. Matias, Kara Mitchell Viesca, Dorothy F. Garrison-Wade, Madhavi Tandon, and Rene Galindo (2014) in their group study geared towards understanding white imaginations in teaching, some white teachers, admittedly affected by *white guilt* – a feeling of shame around the "...hegemonic power of whiteness" and its role in marginalizing non-white groups of people – sometimes find it difficult to hold students of color to high expectations (p. 299). They believe that in doing so, they are essentially replicating systems of oppression to further cast their students down and set them back. However, Kohli (2016), drawing upon works by bell hooks (2001), Theresa Perry (1998), and Lisa Delpit (1998), strongly asserts that the diluting of expectations for students of color is "...an insidious form of racism with detrimental impact on students' academic trajectories" (as cited in Kohli, 2016, p. 12). Teachers of color have consistently demonstrated to the world of education that remaining relentless in setting high expectations conveys love (i.e.,

*tough love*) to students, along with respect for the intellectual capabilities that they possess. As a result, they have generally witnessed a greater number of their students develop intrinsic motivation and mental fortitude, later “...resulting in their academic success” (as cited in Kohli, 2016, p. 12).

Given the amount of empirical evidence that exists around this topic, the decline of teachers of color neither bodes well for students of color or the teaching profession, as a whole. As Betty Achinstein, Rodney T. Ogawa, and Dena Sexton (2010) suggest, the steady turnover rate among teachers of color poses a major problem to the nation’s capacity to increase the racial and cultural diversity of its teacher workforce, a problem that may certainly contribute to the failure of schools to adequately serve the educational needs of students of color (pp. 94-95). In other words, a lack of diversity among teachers may not necessarily guarantee a lack of nuance in teaching strategies, per se, but it may in fact lead to a lack of depth and understanding around issues of race in the teaching and learning process, as teachers of color tend to “...empathize with students’ out-of-school experiences differently than do their white colleagues...” (Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 38).

### **Recruitment and Retention**

For years, schools and school districts across the nation have employed recruitment initiatives (e.g., high school and college-level teacher pipeline programs) in attempts to draw more men and women of color into the teaching profession, deeming such efforts as “...high priority, particularly in the nation’s urban districts” (Brown & Butty, 1999, p. 280). Nonetheless, the literature indicates that these have overshadowed retention efforts that are still severely lacking, perhaps due to how much they would require school and district leaders “...to be intentionally inclusive in their leadership and practice, provide excellent training and support,

and actively appreciate/reward the additional mentoring and support work that TOCs do, particularly for Students of Color” (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p. 9). While recruitment efforts may certainly yield immediate, short-term results, they seem likely to falter, long-term, if not coupled with well-conceived retention efforts.

In as much as teachers of color are sought after “...for particular assets, such as their language abilities and positive student relationships,” along with “...history knowledge of self, advocacy, and love...,” there is an important caveat that has surfaced in existing literature: these people are people, not commodities (Kohli, 2016, p. 15). In their recruitment efforts, schools and school districts would be remiss to not take into account that “Teachers of Color are not a quick fix to improve test scores or prove a school’s cultural responsiveness. Rather, they are people, and the hostile racial climates that we have recruited them into have taken a toll on their well-being, growth, and retention in the field” (Kohli, 2016, p. 22). This work must be approached with a keen understanding of and sensitivity to the fact that “...being a person of color does not guarantee you immunity from seeing the world, or parts of the world, with a perspective that privileges white culture” (Kohli, 2014, p. 372).

In theory, even if recruitment *is* successful, schools will not successfully retain teachers of color with cultures that embody white privilege and promote exclusivity. Kohli (2016) makes this point resoundingly-clear:

Increasing the dismal number of teachers of Color is essential. However, without any effort to reframe the culture of whiteness in schools, the labor of teachers of Color is often understood only in terms of its material value to schools (i.e., the ability to raise student of Color test scores), rather than its humanistic value (their pedagogy and advocacy). In this way, teachers of Color are no longer treated as people with intrinsic worth and the ability to challenge and transform education, but instead as commodities that are useful to the academic success of students of Color (Lapayese, 2007; Marx, 1867). Being alienated from their purpose, passion, and political goals, teachers of Color often begin to feel like they do not belong in the

profession... (p. 19)

There is clearly a need for school and district-level leadership to look more closely into their systems and practices for deficiencies in being supportive of teachers of color. However, research suggests that this cannot be done superficially, with minor attention to details. Kohli (2016) urges these leaders to "...consider a systematic evaluation of macro and micro forms of racism and how they shape the school racial climate," perhaps by way of equity audits and surveys (p. 21). Such measures, the literature indicates, would aid in identifying the ways in which their teachers of color have been neglected and marginalized, hence creating opportunities for amelioration.

### **Black Men Teachers**

Amidst possible contributors to the current, failing state of our education system that have surfaced in popular discourse, one has gained increasing attention in recent years: the shortage of black men teachers. According to Kohli (2016), black men, the smallest subset of teachers of color, have been and continue to be an even smaller iota of the general teaching workforce, currently at 0.6% representation (p. 16). As teachers of color, they, too, face all of the aforementioned challenges. For example, in his book, Christopher Emdin (2016), a black man and now former schoolteacher, reflects on how worthless he felt, following an interaction he had with a colleague, early in his career. Here is a snippet of that personal anecdote:

When I took my first job in a school with students whose faces looked much like mine, the most memorable advice I received from an older teacher was, 'You look too much like them, and they won't take you seriously. Hold your ground, and don't smile till November.' To be an effective black male educator for youth of color, I was being advised to erase pieces of myself and render significant pieces of who I was invisible. (p. 35)

Nevertheless, educational researchers have found that black men, specifically, face added challenges and pressures in schools. Some scholars have even attempted to correlate black men's

school-specific struggles with how they were (and are) treated in greater society. In many ways, the intersectionality of their race and gender seems to work against them.

Historically, black men have been depicted in less-than-genteel ways by various forms of propaganda, often viewed as hopeless and incompetent beings with high propensities for violence, actively seeking “...revenge for the atrocities committed during and after years of slavery” (as cited in Gayle, 2012, p. 9). To a great extent, they have not even been viewed or treated as people. In his speech titled, *A Talk to Teachers*, originally delivered in 1963 and later re-printed, James Baldwin (2000) briefly explains why and how black men were treated as sub-human in the United States:

The point of all this is that black men were brought here as a source of cheap labor. They were indispensable to the economy. In order to justify the fact that men were treated as though they were animals, the white republic had to brainwash itself into believing that they were, indeed, animals and deserved to be treated like animals. Therefor [*sic*] it is almost impossible for any Negro child to discover anything about his actual history. The reason is that this “animal,” once he suspects his own worth, once he starts believing that he is a man, has begun to attack the entire power structure. (pp. 126-127)

Unfortunately, such viewpoints have withstood the proverbial “test of time” and tend to go unchallenged today, invigorated by the abundance of black men in prison, the abundance of black men slain by law enforcement, and the scarcity of black men in institutional positions of power or authority. Unable to detach themselves from these pre-textual characteristics, black men often enter public and private spaces automatically stigmatized by biases whose “...influence [is] nearly impossible to avoid” (as cited in Blair, 2002, p. 242).

Within places of employment, manifestations of racial discrimination against black men occur, most times going unnoticed or ignored. Lawrence Gary (1995) confirms this in his sociocultural critique of the treatment of black men in the United States – an analysis based on a

study he conducted, in which he interviewed 537 black men to examine the correlation between perceptions of racial discrimination and various factors, stressors, and characteristics. In fact, his findings identified the workplace as the space most notorious for perpetuating racial discrimination against the sample of black men whom he interviewed:

The frequency of racially discriminatory experiences was measured by a question asking respondents how many incidents of racial discrimination they had experienced within the past year. The gross number of incidents reported by each respondent was recorded as a numerical response based on these self-reports. Almost one-third (28.8 percent) of the respondents reported one racially discriminatory experience over the past year, and 10.9 percent reported two or more such experiences. So about 40 percent of the respondents reported that they had personally experienced some form of racial discrimination within the past year. When asked about the social context in which these racially discriminatory experiences had occurred, nine different social settings were provided. The workplace was the setting most often cited by those who said they had experienced racial discrimination (18.4 percent). (p. 212)

Gary continues by stating that his findings are “...consistent with Sigelman and Welch’s (1991) analyses of national surveys that showed that African Americans reported experiencing more discrimination in employment than in housing or education...” (p. 214).

On top of dealing with racial microaggressions and still having to carry out typical teacher duties, research shows that black men teachers are often explicitly *and* implicitly delegated very specific roles outside of their job descriptions by school leaders and even by their own peers. Archetypically casted as “...ideal role models and surrogate father figures for Black youth, especially Black boys, who may lack adult male figures in their homes and neighborhoods,” they tend to become the point people for nearly all non-academic, socioemotional issues that their students (and sometimes other teachers’ students) have (Brockenbrough, 2014, p. 500).

As flattering as this role designation may seem, in the sense that it somewhat paints black men as nurturers and ambassadors of healing, the literature suggests that it may be an unfair



expectation to have placed upon them, exclusively, especially when, like their peers, they want “...instructional support and opportunities to share their strategies for building relationships with black children—not just to serve as disciplinarians and counselors” (El-Mekki, 2018, p. 57). Not only does it excuse other teachers from working hard to foster the types of relationships with students that would enable them to help fill the voids they may enter classrooms with, but it is also non-conducive to black men teachers’ enjoying satisfactory qualities of life, hence why “An emergent strand of scholarship has started to trouble popular discourses on Black male teachers as role models and father figures...” (Brockenbrough, 2014, p. 502). In her seminal investigation on the pedagogical perspectives of black teachers, Jacqueline Irvine (1989) provides a detailed outlook – pertinent to black men – that can be used to explain why relegating them to just these specific roles is a mistake:

...black teachers, as one example of a minority teacher, are more than mere role models. They are cultural translators and intercessors for black students, thereby directly contributing to their school achievement. Black teachers are more likely to understand black students' personal style of presentation as well as their language. They frequently exhibit a teaching style that attends to cultural differences in perceptions of authority, instructional delivery and teacher performance, and in their culturally familiar speech and events. (p. 51)

Emergent literature has also begun to “...raise questions about the presumption of Black male teachers as ideal disciplinarians for urban Black youth...” – men who supposedly possess a knack for “...govern[ing] the unruly Black boy in school” (as cited in Brockenbrough, 2014, p. 502).

### **Summary of Literature Review**

The body of literature I reviewed on Culturally Relevant Teaching and on teachers of color point to the need for a greater conversation around making schools more equitable for all adults, not just for all children. For teachers of color – men and women who tend to need support

in negotiating their racial identities and their roles within the profession, such negligence often “...makes them particularly vulnerable to attrition” (as cited in Philip, 2011, p. 356). In conducting this review, I have identified common themes relating to the tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching and practices employed by teachers of color. Culturally Relevant Teaching advocates for teachers “...treat[ing] their students as if they already know something,” while teachers of color generally derive their instructional styles and approaches from strengths-based perspectives on their students (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 127). Culturally Relevant Teaching advocates for teachers drawing upon lived experiences to make learning meaningful, while teachers of color generally demonstrate abilities to “...[build] cultural bridges from home to school for learners” (as cited in Achinstein et al., 2010, p. 72). Culturally Relevant Teaching advocates for teachers holding their students to high, academic standards, while teachers of color generally maintain high expectations for classroom excellence to “...[foster] an ethic of care and [show] a commitment to the larger community” (Zhang & Wang, 2016, p. 55).

This intersection of Culturally Relevant Teaching, race, and the experiences of black men teachers is where my research is situated. I seek to discover the ways in which both institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers’ decisions to exit the teaching profession. It is my hope that practical solutions for bolstering their rate of retention will be birthed out of my findings.

## Chapter 3

### Conceptual Framework

To frame the various components of this study, I utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an epistemology oriented towards “...help[ing] us understand the extent to which our society has in fact been ordered and organized along racial lines” (Lynn, 2002, p. 120). It originated from the realm of legal studies in the 1980s to compensate for “...the lack of attention paid to race in critical legal scholarship” (as cited in Lynn et al., 2002, p. 4). In his work on the intermingling of CRT, racial stereotyping, and teacher education, Daniel Solórzano (1997) outlines the five, key tenets that anchor CRT: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (pp. 6-7).

#### **Key Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

I drew from tenets of CRT that were most pertinent to the purpose of this study. Collectively, as an organizing framework, these select tenets were useful in helping me to make sense of the data that I collected. Below is a brief description(s) of the broader theory, followed by past uses of this theory, and lastly, how its tenets were applied to my study.

#### **The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism.**

CRT contends that racism is a permanent fixture and mainstay of the United States, as discriminant deeds stemming from racist ideologies are still ubiquitous. Furthermore, as supported by the work of Richard Milner (2017), it suggests that the omnipresence of racism in society renders societal institutions inherently-racist (p. 294).

#### **The challenge to dominant ideology.**

Geared toward debunking widely-propagated concepts like meritocracy and equal opportunity for all, this tenet asserts that such “...traditional claims are a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). It suggests that such concepts merely work to placate the marginalized, while their marginalization continues.

**The commitment to social justice.**

Essentially, this tenet suggests that the fight for racial justice is central to the broader forging of social justice and equity in society. It draws a sharp relationship between the elimination of “...racism or racial subordination...” and the elimination of “...other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation,” claiming that the former is an important step in achieving the latter (Solórzano, 1997, p. 7).

**The centrality of experiential knowledge.**

CRT places tremendous value on the lived experiences of people, particularly those of women and people of color – two demographics who have been marginalized with unyielding consistency over the decades. It is underscored by the belief that the experiential knowledge they possess are “...legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding...” (as cited in Solórzano, 1997, p. 7). Under this tenet, there is a recognition that the “...storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, chronicles, and narratives” emitted from these men and women have the power and potential to undo majoritarian narratives that are often false (as cited in Parker & Villalpando, 2007, p. 520).

**The interdisciplinary perspective.**

This tenet rejects the idea of scrutinizing any phenomenon for elements of race or racism “...without both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods” (as cited

in Solórzano, 1997, p. 7). In attempting to untangle this complex knot known as race, the use of methodologies traditionally ascribed to a single discipline will not suffice, according to this principle. Instead, drawing upon knowledge and methodological bases from other academic fields (e.g., sociology) is more likely to elicit “...research that better understands the effects of racism, sexism, and classism on people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27).

### **Use of Critical Race Theory by Other Scholars**

In their seminal text, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) delineate how a critical, race-based perspective should be applied to education. Guided by selected tenets of CRT, their aim was to “...uncover or decipher the social-structural and cultural significance of race in education” (p. 50). They describe *the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism* and *the interdisciplinary perspective* tenets that are needed to accomplish this goal:

Whiteness is constructed in this society as the absence of the “contaminating” influence of blackness. Thus, “one drop of black blood” constructs one as black, regardless of phenotypic markers. In schooling, the absolute right to exclude was demonstrated initially by denying blacks access to schooling altogether. Later, it was demonstrated by the creation and maintenance of separate schools. More recently it has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence on vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by resegregation via tracking, the institution of “gifted” programs, honors programs, and advanced placement classes. So complete is this exclusion that black students often come to the university in the role of intruders— who have been granted special permission to be there. (p. 60)

Similarly, critical race theorists who have come after Ladson-Billings and Tate have used CRT in their works to “...give shape to the personal narratives of Latino/Latina students in urban schools,” to aid in the “...conducting [of] research on the learning and development of preservice teachers,” and to even “...help researchers begin the process of interrogating their own racial thinking” (Lynn et al., 2002, p. 5).

While I, too, followed suit, in regard to using tenets of CRT to examine an important aspect of education (and to also interrogate my own racial thinking as a researcher, in the process), my unit of analysis – black men teachers in the K-12 education sphere – deviated from the typical units of analysis found in most CRT-influenced studies: students of color (in either K-12 or in institutions of higher learning) and preservice teachers.

### **Application of Critical Race Theory to My Research**

Three of the five tenets of CRT fit best with the purpose of my study: *the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, the commitment to social justice, and the centrality of experiential knowledge*. These specific tenets spoke most powerfully to my study and informed a significant portion of Chapter 6. Respectively, *the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, the commitment to social justice, and the centrality of experiential knowledge*, used loosely as analytic guides, enabled me to shed light on how racial variables advantage some teachers while disadvantaging black men teachers (thus replicating societal norms), how a passion for social justice leads black men teachers into the profession and keeps them in the profession for as long as they can stay, and how storytelling and sharing lived experiences add legitimacy to the belief systems rendered by black men teachers.

## Chapter 4

### Methods

In seeking to understand the ways in which institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession, I utilized a qualitative research design for this study. This type of method worked well for this study, as it "...allows you to examine people's experiences in detail..." and "...seeks to embrace and understand the contextual influences on the research issues" (Hennink et al., 2011, pp. 8-9).

#### Research Design

More concerned with depth over breadth, I utilized a case study design. This decision was heavily-influenced by Phillip Vannini (2015) in his book on the re-envisioning of the overall function of research and how it is typically conducted, where he argues that researchers must seek to "...enliven rather than report, to render rather than represent, to resonate rather than validate, to rupture and reimagine rather than faithfully describe..." (p. 15). I learned about five black men who were once teachers (see Table 1). In the course of multiple interviews, I took a holistic approach to learning about why they left the profession, not only asking them questions about their past lives as teachers, but also asking them questions about their self-concepts, motivations, general belief systems, family backgrounds, and upbringings. As an amalgam, this information provided keen insight on the different factors that led to their exits from teaching.

**Table 1.**

*Ages & Teaching Backgrounds of Primary Participants*

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b># of Years in Teaching</b>	<b>Grade Band(s)</b>	<b>Type of School(s)</b>
*Julius	36	5	High School	

				Charter, Private, Public
Nate	31	4	Middle School	Private
Dorian	35	10	Middle School, High School	Public
Eric	32	8	Middle School	Private
Cole	35	4	High School	Public

\*Worked at the charter school for three years, the private school for two years, and the public school for six months.

In his article on qualitative case studies, Robert Stake (2005) explains the value in studying more than one case in the way I have described:

When there is even less interest in one particular case, a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. I call this *multiple case study* or *collective case study*. It is instrumental study extended to several cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, with redundancy and variety each important. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. (pp. 445-446)

To add depth to each case study, in addition to interviewing these five black men, I interviewed people who have (or have had) close connections with them (see Appendix F for interview protocol). These people included (but were not limited to) family members, friends, and former co-workers (see Table 2). This multi-perspective approach allowed me to develop robust case descriptions and to ensure trustworthiness of the data I acquired from primary participants.

**Table 2.**

*Secondary Participants & Their Relationships to Primary Participants*

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<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>On Behalf Of...</b>	<b>Relationship</b>
Pablo	Julius	Former high school teacher and academic advisor
M'baku		Friend and former college classmate
Julie	Nate	Former co-worker
Dr. Jay		Friend and parent of his former student
Don	Dorian	Former student and mentee
Robert	Eric	Friend and former college classmate
Malcolm	Cole	Friend and former youth mentor
Germaine		Younger brother

Moreover, to add even more depth and nuance to each case study, I also drew upon portraiture methods.

Developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot in the late 1980s, portraiture is "...a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xv). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) characterizes portraitists as similar to ethnographers, in the sense that they also "...seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom" (p. xv). According to Thandeka Chapman

(2007), the integration of portraiture methods in studies framed by CRT is becoming a popular tradition in research, particularly in the examining of educational phenomena (p. 157). For example, portraiture has enabled critical race theorists and educational researchers to "...connect participants' experiential knowledge as racialized subjects to the multiple ways in which people of color understand and navigate their communities, schools, and professional lives" (as cited in Chapman, 2007, p. 157). Five essential features anchor this approach to qualitative research: (a) context, (b) voice, (c) relationship, (d) emergent themes, and (e) aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xvii). Below are brief descriptions of each feature and how it supported my study.

#### **Context.**

Juxtaposing the context of my participants' personal lives with the context of their professional lives was a necessary step in addressing my research question: In what ways do both institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession? In portraiture, context serves as a framework for inquiry. Furthermore, it is "...not only a frame for the action, [but] is also a rich resource for the researcher's interpretations of the actors' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 59). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) contends that constructing an authentic portrait requires one to pay attention to the environments around participants, more specifically how those environments shape the participants and vice versa (p. 59).

#### **Voice.**

Voice, for a portraitist, is considered to be a "...research instrument, echoing the *self* of the portraitist" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 85). Unlike in other research disciplines or methodological approaches where great lengths are taken to "...disguise or mask

the person of the investigator....,” so that “...the voice of the investigator is nowhere evident...,” portraiture encourages the researcher to inject his or her voice in the data collection and analysis processes. As a fellow black man who also served as a classroom teacher, I was forthcoming with my own perspectives and biases during one-on-one interviews. I did this to build oneness with each of my participants, specifically when prefacing certain follow up questions. While this practice is deemed acceptable in portraiture, portraitists are advised to keep their voices “...monitored, subdued, and restrained (though never silenced),” so as to not minimize the voices of those actually being studied (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 86).

### **Relationship.**

Relationships are crucial to the success of a portraiture study, as “...it is in the building of relationships that the portraitist experiences most pointedly the complex fusion of conceptual, methodological, emotional, and ethical challenges” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 135). Generally, building relationships with men can be difficult, due to how they (we) are “hardwired” by societal norms and hegemonic, gender roles. Michael Schwalbe (1996) begins his study on masculinity with a similar thought:

In my work life I rarely talk with other men about their feelings. If I ask a male colleague how he feels about some matter of university business, I am not asking for the full story. We both know I am asking for a heady and cool report, and that anything else might embarrass us both. Many men live this way—afraid to disclose feelings that could make them vulnerable to competitors, and afraid to risk discrediting themselves by appearing to need help in managing their feelings. (p. 58)

I first sought to establish rapport with my participants with open dialogue, so that later in the data collection process, they may be more willing to share intimate details with me – an outsider – about experiences (both joyful and painful) they have had. Of the three interviews that I conducted with each participant, the first one had virtually nothing to do with the overarching

focus of my study. Questions for this interview were primarily aimed at understanding what makes them happy, what keeps them motivated, etc. (see Appendix C for interview protocol).

### **Emergent themes.**

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), constructing emergent themes is a generative process comprised of the following: listening for verbal refrains, listening for poetic and symbolic expressions that participants use to illuminate their realities, listening for themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals, using triangulation to synthesize threads of data, and revealing patterns among perspectives that are experienced as contrasting and dissonant by participants (p. 193). All of the above guided my data coding process, as well as my memoing process – one described by Miles and Huberman (1994) as being helpful in moving the analyst “...easily from empirical data to a conceptual level...and building towards a more integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions in the case” (as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 189). Memoing played a key role in helping me to substantiate my data in Chapter 6 (see Appendices G, H, I, J, and K for coding memos).

### **Aesthetic whole.**

In sum, the first four elements of portraiture create the aesthetic whole. In building the aesthetic whole, portraitists “...come face to face with the tensions inherent in blending art and science, analysis and narrative, description and interpretation, structure and texture” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 243). I certainly grappled with these tensions, as I blended all of my acquired data together (including photographic artifacts that each participant shared to symbolize their teaching styles and philosophies of education) to try and create a provocative mosaic.

### **Tandem Use of Portraiture and Case Study**

A hybridized portraiture-case study design enabled me to be fluid in my data reporting and analysis. Portraiture is typically used to generate “...case descriptions that reflect the responses of a like group,” while in contrast, a case study is typically used to “...single out...” responses of a group member (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007, p. 119). This research design allowed me to document and to discuss singular, unique experiences to honor the fact that perspectives and inclinations of black men are diverse. Yet it also allowed me to document and to discuss common experiences among them to unearth a more powerful, collective voice.

### **Research Context**

Participants from both the public and private education sectors who served as teachers in K-12 for at least four years<sup>‡</sup> were included in this study. Including this sub-comparative variable and control (i.e., minimal amount of time teaching) lent additional insight into the institutional aspect of the shortage of black men teachers. Additionally, my search for cases was centered in the Northeast region of the United States.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data through two primary ways: semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

#### **Interviews.**

I used semi-structured interviews to learn from participants (see Appendices C, D, and E for interview protocols). This specific interview protocol “...typically reflects variation in its use of questions, prompts, and accompanying tools and resources...” useful in “...eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the

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<sup>‡</sup> According to a 2014 national report by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the required amount of time before a teacher can exit probationary status and earn tenure is three full years, in most states. Therefore, I elected to screen out potential participants who did not serve in the classroom for at least four years. This was done to eliminate a lack of professional competence as the reason why participants did not remain in teaching.

particular discipline within which one is conducting research” (Galletta, 2013, p. 45). The overall effectiveness of this protocol in its “...materialization of unexpected data...” rests heavily on the strength of its questions, specifically “...big, expansive questions...” that do not restrict participants but instead, allows them to take the study in different directions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 4). This protocol granted me the liberty to follow up my base questions with targeted sub-questions as often as I needed to, particularly in instances when participants gave responses that I deemed as needing elaboration or clarification.

Prior to conducting interviews, I anticipated that some of the questions I would pose would elicit memories that rekindle hard feelings. Therefore, the arrangement of my questions was strategic, tiered from easier (e.g., *What motivates you to get out of bed each morning?*) to more difficult (e.g., *What specific moment helped finalize your decision to leave the teaching profession?*) in attempts to ease discomfort and to “...slowly build confidence and trust with the interviewee[s]” (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 4). Coupled with sharing a bit of who I am outside of being a researcher, this strategy helped with building rapport with each participant which, in turn, enhanced the overall interview process, as “Making good connections means people share more of their story with you and as a result you get better data” (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 6).

The specific mode of communication that I utilized to set up interviews with my participants (e.g., via phone, via email, via Facebook, via LinkedIn, etc.) depended on what contact information I received from those within my personal and professional networks (i.e., convenience sampling). Once these one-on-one interviews were set up and the participants completed all necessary Institutional Review Board (IRB) paperwork (e.g., consent forms), I conducted each interview at a location of the participant’s choosing. Typically, these interviews took approximately one hour to complete. I was open to conducting continuation interviews at

later dates and times with all participants, should time have proven to be a constraining factor during our interviews. However, this accommodation was never necessary. Lastly, I used a tape recorder (visible to participants throughout each interview) to capture each man's words, verbatim. I slightly altered this process for my secondary participants (i.e., people in close connection to the five black men whom I initially interviewed), several of whom live outside of the Northeast region of the United States. I located these particular men and women via my primary participants (i.e., snowball sampling) and conducted all of their interviews over the phone. In sum, I was able to conduct 23 interviews total – 15 primary participant interviews (three per man, centered on the following focus areas, in order: building rapport/miscellaneous, personal background/upbringing, and past life as a teacher) and eight secondary participant interviews (one per person).

### **Document Analysis.**

In seeking to ensure "...that the study [will] be accurate because the information [is] not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection," I also collected data by gathering documents from education agencies, particularly documents that contain information on student perception, teacher demographics, and teacher retention (Creswell, 2002, p. 280). I used these additional sources of data to triangulate with data from interviews, along with triangulating interview data with one another. These data sources were affirmatory to my interview data. Therefore, I generally used them to punctuate and to strengthen the credibility of points made by participants. In Chapters 5 and 6, I refer to the State Education Agency (SEA) that I collected documents from as Department X. Additionally, I refer to the Local Education Agency (LEA) that I collected documents from as District Alpha, a school district comprised of

approximately 60,000 students. Like the primary participants, both agencies are located in the Northeast region of the United States.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis, for novice and expert researchers, alike, can be challenging, considering that “Qualitative research is sometimes defined as interpretive research, and as interpretations can be incorrect or biased, the findings may be controversial” (Sanjari et al., 2014, p. 2).

Therefore, it is a process that requires delicacy and acute attention to detail.

My data analysis process began with a careful transcription of each interview. Though a cumbersome, time-consuming endeavor, it was worthwhile for me to transcribe each interview myself, as “...transcription is a pivotal aspect of qualitative inquiry” that can “...powerfully affect the way participants are understood” (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1273).

For the sake of treating “...the substance of [each] interview...” with paramount concern, over the depiction of “...accents or involuntary [patterns of] vocalization,” I took a denaturalized approach to transcription, meaning that I omitted insignificant expressions like, “um” or “uh” when transcribing – expressions that participants used naturally before beginning their responses, sometimes (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1277). Upon completing these transcripts, I then manually coded them as a way to sort the acquired data for basic patterns such as frequency, sequence, similarity, and difference. The integration of inductive data analysis aided me in this process.

#### **Inductive data analysis.**

Identifying emergent themes across data collected from all participants in this study was a component of my data analysis (see Table 3). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) emphasizes the importance of this practice as a means for making complex ideas more comprehensible for one’s audience (p. 215). I employed an inductive, analytical approach – one commonly-used by



qualitative researchers for the primary purpose of leveraging "...the participants' views to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 23). Following this step, I utilized the axial coding technique to synthesize the themes that emerged. As described by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990), this style of coding, defined by them as "...a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" allowed me to piece together the narratives of each case (as cited in Kendall, 1999, p. 747).

**Table 3.**

*Emergent Themes from Interview Data*

<b>Emergent Theme</b>	<b>Examples of interview responses from which emergent themes were derived</b>
<p><b>Participants had their self-concepts challenged.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "...I was depressed, you know what I mean? And didn't really feel valued."</li> <li>• "...I didn't want them to see the stereotypical and the manifest of black males that they normally would see: athletes and rappers. So I felt like that was my battle every single day..."</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participants saw actions and inactions through racialized lenses.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I'm telling you...people do really grimy stuff to children, especially [to] children of color in these public schools, because they know they can get away with it."</li> <li>• "...I don't want it to be baffling for you. I want you to just be mindful of the history, particular of this country, and the way that they've viewed black males."</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participants could not trust the intentions of their peers or their superiors.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "...then on the other hand [they] might say, 'Oh, we value you,' but then you're trying to put 50,000 things on my back because you gave me a hug."</li> </ul>

- 
- “...I was actually about real social justice, not a cosmetic social justice. You know? Not, “I’m [gonna] pump my fist in the auditorium” kinda stuff...that always caused complications between me and my colleagues, you know?”
- 

### **Deductive data analysis.**

After employing axial and open coding, identifying emergent themes, and determining relationships between these themes, I deductively drew insights from Critical Race Theory. I examined how the emergent coding categories from my inductive data analysis related to the three tenets of CRT that I identified as most relevant to my goal of uncovering what institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers’ decisions to exit the teaching profession. It is important to note that I used this theory to *inform* my analysis, not solely to *determine* my analysis, in hopes that my deductive codes might “...spur the development of [more] inductive codes, to help recognize specific concepts, cultural references or contextual issues in the data” (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 219). For example, one theme that emerged from the data related to how participants viewed certain actions and inactions in schools through racialized lenses they had developed outside of schools. This theme relates to the CRT tenet, *the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism* (it could also relate to *the centrality of experiential knowledge*), which argues that race is so deeply-woven into the fabric of the United States that it is hardly surprising when it manifests in the form of policies or behaviors found in various institutions. This potentially explains why participants were confident in rationalizing many of their experiences in schools with aspects of race and racism.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In keeping with standard authentication protocol in research to ensure that my methods were ethically-upstanding, I submitted my preliminary proposal to the IRB at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for review and approval (approval date: 3/2/2018). However, as Stake (2005) argues, this measure alone is neither sufficient nor does it relieve me of my unspoken duty to protect the confidentiality of this study's participants, while also ensuring that their narratives are accurately represented:

Case studies often deal with matters that are of public interest but for which there is neither public nor scholarly *right to know*. Funding, scholarly intent, or Institutional Review Board authorization does not constitute license to invade the privacy of others. The value of the best research is not likely to outweigh injury to a person exposed. Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict...Something of a contract exists between researcher and the researched... (p. 459)

To honor this "contract," I kept all of my research motives and procedures transparent to all participants throughout the entire process. Aside from soliciting their voluntary participation via a detailed consent form which outlined the nature, intent, and purpose of this study, I remained open to answering any questions – relating to the study, of course – they might have had. I also made it explicitly clear that at any point and time, they could opt out of this study and would not be beholden to me to offer any sort of justification for doing so.

Furthermore, to ensure that participants' identities were not compromised, I used pseudonyms in lieu of their actual names, along with omitting the names of their current places of employment, where they currently live or lived, and any other pertinent information that was included in this study which could potentially cause exposure.

### **Limitations**

My study poses a few limitations to consider. First, my chosen sample size was rather small, hindering my ability to generalize my findings to a wider population. Additionally, though

it seemed logical for me to utilize convenience sampling to locate primary participants for this study (re: black men who formerly taught in the K-12 sphere), given that the basis for this study's existence stems from a *shortage*, it is an approach to sampling that has been viewed by some as lacking rigor. Detractors of this approach have argued that it "...may result in poor quality data..." and be devoid of "...intellectual credibility" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Lastly, in reference to Chapter 3, Critical Race Theory tends to be oriented more toward the researcher (i.e., an analytical tool), not necessarily toward the practitioner, which may keep implications for practice (i.e., ways forward) out of grasp. Furthermore, while popular and widely-utilized in race-conscious scholarship, CRT is potentially misleading in the sense that it can create the assumption that race, a dense, multi-layered concept, can be neatly packaged and understood within just five principles. In reality, due to the broad, far-reaching scope of race, CRT likely does not account for numerous "...other dimensions of identity and social structure" (Gillborn, 2015, p. 278).

Notwithstanding these limitations, my study rests on a wide-ranging body of relevant literature and a combination of methods that work together to make it intellectually-rich and thought-provoking.

### **Summary of Methods**

To review, I conducted a portraiture case study of a small sample of exited black men teachers from the Northeast region of the United States. I used qualitative data collection methods, including interviews and document analysis. After transcribing the interviews, I utilized open coding, a process out of which themes emerged. I then employed axial coding to decipher relationships between these themes before finally relating them to a few tenets of Critical Race Theory.

## Chapter 5

### Findings

I examined the institutional and racial factors that contribute to black men's departures from the teaching profession. This chapter begins with individual portraits of each primary participant, detailing various aspects of his life, such as his ethnic and cultural background, family history and upbringing, motivations, the type of school(s) he worked at, and his tenure at the school(s). For much of this chapter, I present and discuss the three most salient themes that surfaced from my data analysis: (a) Participants had their self-concepts challenged, (b) Participants saw actions and inactions through racialized lenses, and (c) Participants could not trust the intentions of their peers or superiors.

#### Participant Portraits

The portraits below are of the five black men whose experiences and voices provided the foundation of this study. These portraits help to contextualize my findings. Collectively, they function as bridges for learning about the personal experiences and inclinations of these men to understanding how those inclinations and experiences might have influenced their decisions to leave the teaching profession. Representative of the vast African diaspora, Julius, Nate, Dorian, Eric, and Cole, despite sharing some common experiences, have each been on their own, unique life journeys.

#### **Julius.**

*...my belief is that education will unlock many doors. So really, my teaching style was one where I didn't necessarily want to be the bearer of all information, but more so to help you learn, so you can teach yourself.*



**Figure 1.** A key. Provided by Julius to symbolize his teaching style and philosophy.

With almost no hesitancy, Julius smiled and replied to my asking, “What does this world need more of, to improve?” with, “The world needs more love in order to improve. More love.” This response reflected the “...deep heart...” that his former schoolteacher and advisor, Pablo, described him as having. Now 36 years old with a son that occupies most of his free time, Julius is happy, committed to accomplishing goals he has set for himself and leaving his troubled past in the rearview. For him, this new lease on life has been a long time in the making.

Self-identifying as part Haitian, part African American, Julius had to tightrope along the line of a dual ethnicity, growing up. His most immediate childhood recollections stem from his Haitian side, though. While “...it’s cool to be Haitian *now*,” according to him, Julius described growing up Haitian as somewhat of a badge of shame. Outside of his home, insults like H.B.O. (Haitian Body Odor) and “Haitian Booty Scratcher” were regularly hurled at his direction by other children. This, on top of dealing with his parents’ divorce and then later having to navigate the challenge(s) that come with adjusting to a blended family when his mother remarried, made his childhood rather difficult. Nevertheless, his affinity for Haitian culture and black pride never waned; in fact, it seems to have intensified over the years:

...there's no denying that I'm black, so I'm proud of that – I love that... Blackness has a depth to it that a lot of people I think would love to claim ...I appreciate that depth. And I don't ascribe to a lot of the notions and the narratives that are set forth for black people. So I don't see it in that negative light, in that negative sense. And in terms of being Haitian? [The] Caribbean is always nice...it's good to know that at least [my] people fought for their freedom.

School also proved to be a challenge for Julius as a boy. Often "...bored..." and "...always in trouble," school was merely a place for him to pass time. When asked what he used to get in trouble for, Julius let out a bellowing laugh, replying, "We could go down the list! I mean, how early do you wanna start?" Well aware of the deviant behaviors he engaged in that landed him in trouble, he also recalled being quite aware that "...white teachers were a little more afraid of me."

Making his way to college (and eventually into teaching) after taking an unfortunate detour to a juvenile detention center for a year was, according to Julius, nothing short of miraculous – a feat that he recognized is usually insurmountable for most people in his predicament. Humbled by the second chance he received to return to school, due to the unrelenting support that family and church members gave him, he entered the teaching profession with a profound desire to pay it forward to the next generation, fueled by the belief that "...education saved my life." Having taught high school students in a traditional public school, charter school, *and* private school over the span of his five-year teaching career, Julius carries a unique, three-dimensional perspective on education. Ultimately, he credits his work with students and their families for teaching him "...how to connect with people."

#### **Nate.**

*Rocks are often changing forms due to pressure and other factors that force them to change. This rock [gave] me hope that my students [were] always forming and evolving due to the pressure and forces around them...it wasn't a beauty, but it was something that sort of had a lot meaning for me and the work...*



**Figure 2.** A rock. Provided by Nate to symbolize his teaching style and philosophy.

Noticeably judicious with his words, Nate drew a deep breath after spending nearly 30 seconds in a silent, contemplative state before offering me the following words: “We were poor, but I never felt like I was poor. I always had meals on the table. I had a wonderful and loving family.” Family and community – two recurring topics that were embedded within several of Nate’s responses, across all three of his interviews. Considering the typical archetype of a household – two parents with one or more children, under the same roof – some might characterize Nate’s childhood as incomplete, with the absence of his father. However, between his hard-working mother, his older sister, his older brother, and members of the other, fellow Haitian families whom they shared their triple decker home with, he “...never felt like I was missing something” or someone.

Initially, Nate’s family was in staunch opposition of his decision to become a teacher. As one who deeply values family and what his family members think of him, he found it rather difficult to go against their counsel. But in the end, his heart prevailed. Despite their constant urging for him to reconsider his decision and to search for a more lucrative career path, he



remained adamant in stating that becoming a teacher was something he *needed* to do – a calling that he felt he would have been selfish to not respond to:

You know, as a child of an immigrant and often times I go to Haiti, I see people who've been in communities that don't have much...And I feel like I was granted a lot of chances in my life that I feel it's my duty to continue and give back. You know, it's a challenge in terms of feeling like I'm carrying a big burden. But I think it's our duty to try to create a better community...I always felt that I wanted to help people. I didn't know how, I didn't know in what ways that would manifest itself...I always had great educators that were sort of an extension of like a lifeline I had.

One of those chances he referred to was given to him back when he was a middle school student, following a situation where he was accused of rape by a girl in his class. 18 years later, Nate recounted this harrowing experience as if it occurred just yesterday.

He remembered being handcuffed and then escorted to the police precinct where he was interrogated. He remembered how terrified he felt as he sat in that cold room, naïvely thinking to himself, "...is touching a boob, is that sex?" He remembered how relieved he felt when months later, investigators concluded that the accusation was unfounded. While Nate was eventually exonerated, his reputation at such a young age was sullied, nonetheless; the school's ruling body remained firm on its decision to expel him, leaving him feeling unwanted. Fortunately, an older, black man who had worked at Nate's former school took it upon himself to serve as his advocate. He provided Nate life coaching and guidance, encouraging him to stay positive and even going as far as accompanying him on tours at local public and private schools. Eventually, Nate gained acceptance into an independent school<sup>§</sup> that served roughly 700 students across grades five through 12. Coincidentally, this was the same school where he later worked as a middle school teacher for four years – the first black man teacher in the school's 129-year history. For him,

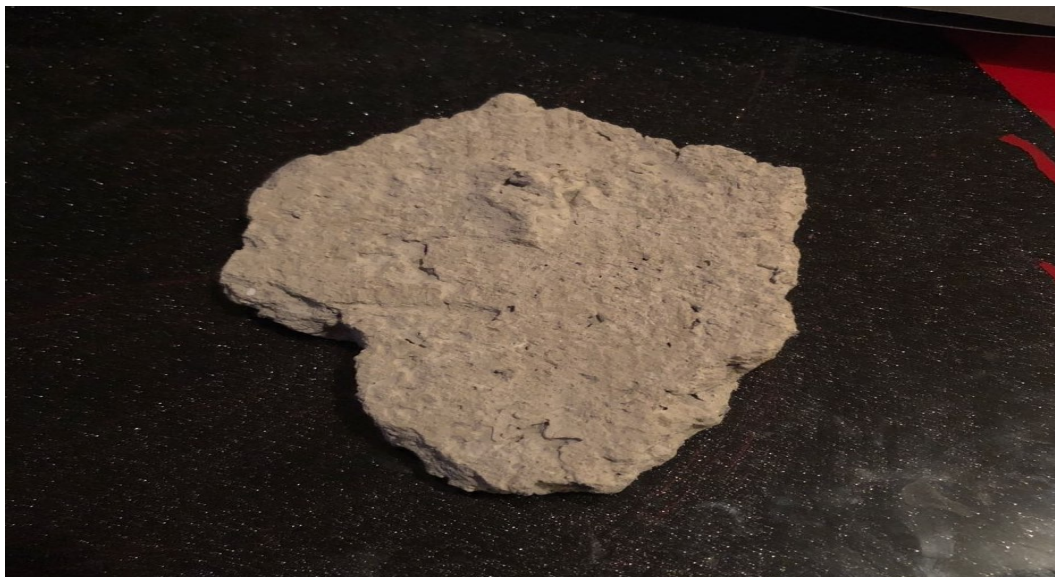
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<sup>§</sup> A type of private school that is strictly governed by a board of trustees, not an outside entity.

getting a chance to teach eighth grade students after missing out on his own eighth grade year  
 “...felt like I regained that experience back.”

**Dorian.**

*I chipped this rock away from a structure in Mexico City, while I was on a service trip...in my teaching, I did the same for youth as well, removing impediments like fear of pushing through tribulations and obstacles...*



**Figure 3.** Part of an edifice. Provided by Dorian to symbolize his teaching style and philosophy.

Unapologetically black, Dorian gladly obliged me when I asked him to elaborate on why he described himself and his family members as “...Africans in America...,” as opposed to African Americans. Pushing up his fitted cap, so I could see the intensity in his eyes and feel the conviction behind his response, Dorian continued on to explain how the label, ‘African American,’ is a misnomer, saying that “...on both sides of my family we have traditional colonialism slave narratives...America is just the locale in which we landed last.” Evident by the altar adorned with pictures of his matrilineal family, placed in the main doorway of his home, Dorian is proud to be in touch with his roots, able to trace them as far back as his great-great-great grandparents. The stories of his ancestors have kept him grounded over the years, giving him something “...to lean back on” during times when he has needed strength. He hopes that the

same will ring true for his two daughters, as they, too, will have to embark upon their own journeys in life.

Dorian survived growing up “...really poor in a really toxic kind of situation.” To this day, he sometimes wonders, “Why was I chosen?” Of his original group of friends, he is one of the few still alive and standing, causing him to often wrestle with *his* purpose in life. Whatever his lifelong purpose is, he feels quite strongly that it has to do with serving the black community – a sense of duty that he desperately wishes more people would have:

...the world needs to step out of its sheep state. I think a lot of people are asleep. They don't really care about things that are outside their realm of reality - they only care about things that touch them specifically and I think that's a problem because that's why countries are able to get away with all of these atrocities, world-wide. Because if folks were more concerned - particularly black people - were more concerned about the issues that face the folks in the whole diaspora, we would be able to have a stronger voice, not only here in America, but also world-wide. So I think folks have to transition out of like, “Well, if it ain't bothering me, it's not my problem” kinda thing. Because that's why many of our oppressors are able to get away with all [of] the things that they do.

Instrumental in helping Dorian develop this mindset was his mother, a survivor in her own right, having persevered through the grips of “...alcoholism and her woundedness,” along with one time “...getting arrested for a crime she didn't commit...”

Although his father, a former U.S. Marine, was somewhat in his life until being deported back to Jamaica by the U.S. government, Dorian's mother was the most consistent parental figure in his life. She worked tirelessly to instill certain virtues like responsibility in him and in his sister, determined that her children would not become statistics, as defined by society. She also “...had this thing about making sure that I got two educations: one in the street and one in the school.” Therefore, in spite of being a decorated scholar, now holding multiple Master's degrees, Dorian has somewhat of an apathetic attitude toward “...college and all that crap.” In

many ways, he feels as though life has taught him more than anything he has learned within the four walls of any classroom.

I learned from other participants that, throughout his 10-year teaching career, working exclusively in a traditional public school, Dorian had profoundly impacted the lives of many middle and high school students (though he would humbly contend that they impacted him, instead). One of his former students, Don, now 23, spoke to the fact that “He gave me a different perspective compared to other teachers I’ve had because it just seemed like they were more worried about getting you in trouble...he was more interested in educating,” adding that everything Dorian did with and for his students seemed “...genuine and from the bottom of his heart.” Once a student who was frequently kicked out of school before meeting Dorian, Don now works as a banker and is on his way to purchasing his first home – two milestones that he credits to Dorian’s life-saving words of wisdom and empowerment.

**Eric.**

*A flashlight only works when there are batteries in, giving it energy...Every once in a while, we have to charge those batteries to make sure the light is bright enough to walk with. I used a flashlight to represent my teaching style because a good teacher can "charge" the batteries of their students by creating engaging lessons, forming a personal relationship with his or her students, and showing their students that they are loved...*



**Figure 4.** A flashlight. Provided by Eric to symbolize his teaching style and philosophy.

Bursting with gratitude, Eric leaned forward with his hands clasped and elbows bearing down on the table between us. Speaking about his parents and how they have motivated him to strive for excellence clearly evoked a strong emotion from him:

...my parents came from the Cape Verde islands, which is off the west coast of Africa. They migrated here back in the 70s...they essentially came here before any of us were born to give their future kids a better opportunity in America, as all immigrants do. My parents, they ain't come from money obviously...my dad was a cab driver, my mother worked in a factory for 25 years. My dad is still a cab driver. I guess I want to do right by them for coming from Cape Verde...to do right by us. So I think that's definitely a big motivation for me for, you know, just getting up and going to work and working hard, whether it be in school or work.

Eric salutes his parents for working hard as a team to steer him and his two sisters away from the ills that plagued the neighborhood they grew up in, particularly the "...big street gang..." whose presence was prominent. Despite his parents' best efforts to create a structured and "...really strict" household, Eric, the middle child, was sometimes forgotten about. This enabled him to "...finagle the parentals a little bit and kinda sneak off..." to places he was not supposed to go, with people he was not supposed to hang around. While he admits to "...definitely [being]

associated” with gang members, he never actually ran the streets or partook in gang-related activities, as the core values he learned at home kept him from straying too far away.

According to Eric, “...there’s not a lot of positive role models in the Cape Verdean community – at least when I was growing up.” He recalled feeling a sense of hopelessness whenever he would watch the news and see repeated headlines such as *Cape Verdean Man Committed Murder*, *Cape Verdean Man Committed Theft*, etc. As discouraging as these reports were, Eric remained heartened, ironically helping to shift the narrative hovering over Cape Verdean men by becoming a teacher. Considering that teaching is regarded as a “...very respectable profession” by Cape Verdeans, he was flooded with support from family members and friends after making this decision.

Having studied Public Relations and Business Management as an undergraduate student in college, Eric was never driven by a deeper calling or intrinsic motivation to become a teacher; becoming a teacher was something that he could not, even in his “...wildest dreams...” fathom. Admittedly, the opportunity for him to become a teacher was one that “...just kinda fell in my lap and I took advantage of it.” Although he had worked as a camp counselor many years ago, prior to, Eric had never envisioned himself serving young people in *this* capacity, that is until the principal of the private middle school he attended as a boy reached out to him with an offer to be a teaching fellow. Only a month in, he became enamored with the art of teaching. He also found that he had a knack for connecting with and inspiring students from the same neighborhood he grew up in (and still lives in today). This growing desire to empower young people led him to attain the necessary credentials for working as a full-time teacher. He gave his former middle school eight years of service in the classroom before transitioning into an administrative role at a nearby public school where he works today.

## Cole.

*...it's a combination of the old and the new...there is that balance in between trying to be tech-savvy, while also staying true to what's been there...I tried to be somewhere in the middle of that mural because I think, at the end of the day, if you're moving forward without any knowledge of the past or without referring to it, you're destined to either repeat past mistakes, and or not be able to grow as much as you could because theoretically, we're all standing on the shoulders of others who've come before us. And so if we negate those influences and that impact, we are, I think, starting off at a deficit.*



**Figure 5.** A mural. Provided by Cole to symbolize his teaching style and philosophy.

The interview had reached a cathartic point where both of us were now silent, busy wiping tears from our eyes. Cole, in vivid detail, had just finished sharing with me the saddest point of his teaching career: the time he lost one of his students to gun violence. This particular student has held a special place in Cole's heart all these years, not because he was academically-inclined, but because he was one of the few teachers at that time that could see past the young man's tough exterior and loyalty to street life to see a "Great kid," instead. Unfortunately, before Cole was able to gain much traction in helping him to see this greatness within himself, it was too late:

*...it was really tough seeing him in the casket there because it's like, you know, I invested time and energy and all of that stuff and he's just gone... one of those times where I'm like, "What more could I have done?"...*

When I found out that he passed away, it was probably the first time that I knew of someone that died from gun violence and I cried... Yeah, he might've done some things that got him in jail and yeah, he may have even been doing something similar [to] what ended up getting him killed. But he's still a kid... I tried to teach him lessons, tried to bring him along. I think that was probably my toughest moment - was seeing him in a casket. And really feeling like in that moment, I should've done more for that young man...

Cole did not develop this desire to do *more* during his four years as a high school teacher, although this attribute helped him sustain a relatively successful career at the pilot school\*\* where he worked. Portrayed by Malcolm, his mentor of 20+ years, and Germaine, his younger brother, as “Very determined...” and “...loving...” (respectively), he has always been tenacious with putting the needs of others before his own, epitomizing the term, ‘public servant.’ Cole finds pleasure in bringing things into fruition and hates when he cannot resolve issues placed in front of him. Nevertheless, he maintains a great deal of resolve, even in his sleep where he often has “...visions of how I want things to be.” Drawing inspiration from the faith exhibited by King Solomon in the Bible, Cole believes that the “...world is my workbench” and that nothing is unattainable with “...help from the Big Guy.”

When asked about his family heritage and history, Cole sucked his teeth and gave a heavy sigh, seemingly already perceptive to the fact that I was looking for a response about his racial and/or ethnic makeup – a rather typical response to such a question. While his mother identifies as Black American and his father identifies as Bajan, with roots in Barbados, Cole’s connection to either side of his family is surface-level, at best, as, “...I don’t know anybody past bloodline past my mom’s mom. I don’t know my grandfather on my mother’s side and I don’t know any of my folks on my dad’s side...” Instead, his connection to music goes far deeper. He

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\*\* A district school that is spotlighted for innovation, thus granted autonomy in several areas such as curriculum and assessment, budgeting, school governance, etc.



self identifies as a “...young black guy immersed in the Hip Hop culture...an early to mid-80s Hip Hop person, as opposed to...being Bajan or being Black American.” He was quite clear that his cultural preference does not mean a rejection of his blackness or a lack of black pride, however:

...the Hip Hop culture is different than just being a Black American. Sometimes in Black America, folks have tried to separate Hip Hop from blackness. And I think it’s because they didn’t understand that Hip Hop culture was really born out of a desire to no longer be oppressed black folks. That we were going to express ourselves, not in like a R&B song, like “I love you.” No. We’re going to talk it straight. So, I think that has really been my culture...it just affirms the things that I feel internally. There’s greatness within myself and within my people. We got hope. Obviously, we’re struggling through times that are not ideal because of generational battles. But same fight, different round as Ali said, right? And we just got to continue to stick and float, man, or float and stick, float and stick, float and stick, protect, float and stick...

To him, Hip Hop is more than a musical genre. It is an escape from reality to a place where he feels liberated, validated, and disassociated from any notion of powerlessness – this was as true for him as a boy as it is now for him as a grown man.

Growing up, Cole’s family, consisting of his father, his mother, his older brother, him, and his younger brother, was “...definitely a strong unit.” Education was “...always pushed as something that was very important” in their household. Surrounded by newspapers and books that his parents would bring home, he and his siblings had no choice but to read on a regular basis. He recalled his father being a “...very serious gentleman” who provided them with a lot of structure within the rough neighborhood they lived in, but not *too much* structure. It was important to his father that they experienced “...enough scathing, so that we would have calloused and we would be tough, but not so much that we would be hindered from moving forward.” His mother, an aspiring schoolteacher whose dream of teaching English was derailed by a debilitating disease, spent a lot of her time volunteering as a librarian at a local elementary

school. Thus, in becoming a teacher himself, he felt "...able to fulfill something that, due to illness, she was not able to..."

### **Emergent Themes**

Three striking themes surfaced from my data analysis process: (a) Participants had their self-concepts challenged, (b) Participants saw actions and inactions through racialized lenses, and (c) Participants could not trust the intentions of their peers or superiors. Each theme (and the sub-sections within them) is discussed below.

#### **Participants had their self-concepts challenged.**

All five participants' views of themselves were overwhelmingly-positive. The list of specific descriptors they used during round one interviews are below in Table 4.

**Table 4.**

*Self-Concepts of Primary Participants*

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Descriptors used in response to:</b> <i>What three words would you use to describe yourself as a person?</i>
Julius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendly</li> <li>• Ambitious</li> <li>• Determined</li> </ul>
Nate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical</li> <li>• Fun</li> <li>• Nice</li> </ul>
Dorian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stubborn</li> <li>• Consistent</li> <li>• Passionate</li> </ul>
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardworking</li> </ul>

- 
- Down-to-earth
  - Charismatic
- 

Cole

- Intense
  - Caring
  - Professional
- 

Furthermore, when asked to describe these participants in their own words, secondary participants gave responses that either affirmed or extended the ones offered above. Some of those responses included: "...[a] really magnetic people person..." who is "...a visionary" bent on "...always trying to figure out how to help other people find their dreams, find their passion; help them move forward" (on Nate), "...a very deep thinker..." with "...a very strong mind..." who is "...really committed to education" (on Julius), and "...definitely a hard worker" who possesses a "...sense of humor..." and a "...willingness to help out in many different capacities..." (on Eric). These glowing characterizations aside, some primary participants faced circumstances as teachers that placed them into molds they did not believe they fit into.

***Being demonized and alienated for decrying child negligence.***

There is an inherent ethic of care that comes with being an educational practitioner. In her essay on care and morality in education, Nel Noddings (1995) posits that it is imperative for those who work in the field of education to demonstrate care for children, in addition to teaching them how to receive and how to give care (p. 139). Care, in this context, is all encompassing, meaning that how children are verbally and non-verbally treated must support their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness. All five participants expressed a similar belief in their interviews, speaking to how an ethic of care influenced their teaching styles and the restorative practices they used to curb behavioral challenges that some of their students posed. Cole, when reflecting on the time he publicly criticized the diluted, Eurocentric books that his school had

mandated him to have his students read, went further to suggest that an ethic of care should inspire all teachers to advocate strongly for their students, stating that "...if you understand an agenda is designed to have a negative impact on you and your kind, if you're not going to say anything, I think it's criminal." Most would deem this to be an honorable belief system to carry. However, two of the participants recounted times when they were viewed in contempt by their colleagues for acting upon such a belief system.

Dorian's students unknowingly gifted him many gems throughout his teaching career – critical lessons that still remain with him today. One of those gems is an understanding of "...the power of affirmation and letting children know that they have voice and impact..." a message that he made sure his students heard from him on regular basis. This empowerment campaign did not sit well with his colleagues or superiors, however. He remembered being "...everyone's friend..." earlier in his career when he focused most of his time and energy toward preparing students for the state's high-stakes, standardized test. Once he began to give his students voice "...and showing them how to use that voice," though, he almost instantly became "...everyone's enemy."

In the latter years of his career, Dorian grew increasingly frustrated with colleagues who "...had gotten complacent..." when it came to being culturally responsive to students' needs and planning differentiated lessons that honor their diverse learning styles. Instead of tweaking their instructional approaches or curricula each year to meet these needs, many of Dorian's colleagues often chose to bash students and their families. This frustration led to him eventually speaking out on his students' behalf whenever they were not around to utilize their voices to do so for themselves:

...they thought...that it was the children's fault...that they weren't succeeding, not theirs. And it was like, "Nah yo, what you taught last year

and how you taught it last year ain't gonna work this year." So you have to go through your own inquiry cycle and be willing to look at it and not point fingers at the children, but be like, "Damn, my instruction sucks here for these children, so I need to adjust." And that created a lot of tension, because they just wanted to say it was the children and their families. And it was like, "Nah yo, it's you. It's you and your instruction - what are you gonna do to be different now?" So I was like a loner for the last 3 years that I was there. There was no love from the administration and no love from my colleagues, so many days it was just like-- I think my last two years of teaching, I was horrible. And a lot of it was just because I was depressed, you know what I mean? And didn't really feel valued.

According to Dorian, his decision to hold up a mirror to his colleagues did not yield a positive outcome, resulting in his emotional health taking a major hit and his passion for the work dying a slow death; after a while, this lonely fight "...became too much."

Cole had a similar experience. One day, during a grade level meeting, one of his colleagues went on a verbal rampage against one of their students, describing him as if he were "...a Tasmanian Devil," according to Cole. Granted, this student exhibited *some* traits of one with special needs that might have posed a challenge to manage. However, what this teacher did not know was that that same student was excelling in Cole's class with "...proper scaffolding and guidance." She did not know about the amount of time Cole had invested in building a relationship with that same student outside of the classroom, primarily through American football – an interest that the two shared in common. Therefore, uncomfortable with how the young man was being portrayed, Cole felt morally-obligated to say something. Politely interjecting, he began to recommend some strategies she could maybe try with the student in her class. Before he could even finish his sentence, she stood up over him and exclaimed, "How dare *you* tell me how to teach and who I can teach and who can't be taught!?" Despite Cole's prefacing the intention behind his words with, "With all due respect...", this particular colleague stormed out of the room, so enraged that she left behind her keys, wallet, and phone.

Little did Cole know that word of the incident would leak out of that room to other faculty members who were not present when it occurred. Moreover, most shocking to him was the fact that he was viewed in a negative light by others, even though he remained composed the entire time he was being berated:

So let's say that's 10 in the morning, school day ends at 2:30. So at 2:30, I'm walking through the hallway and I turn the corner, and I literally feel all heads whip. It's like seven women, all in the group (including the Principal) - and they all look at me. And I'm like, Alright, here's the bad guy." But I also say to myself, "If I can't do what I just did, then there's no need for me to be in education."

In Cole's estimation, if every teacher is supposed to uphold an ethic of care for all students, yet in his doing so for that particular student was problematic, subsequently costing him his reputation as a consummate professional among his peers, then what was actually the point of doing or saying anything at all?

***Being encouraged to be passive and to accept undeserved culpability.***

Following the "How dare *you*..." incident, Cole's supervising teacher recommended that he apologize to his distressed colleague. His response to the recommendation conveyed pure incredulousness:

...I'm like, "For what? For standing up for one of our students against being demonized by someone who hasn't really taken the time to understand him as a full person? No, I'm all set. I'm not going to apologize; and if I do have to apologize in order for me to be successful here, then I'm not going to be successful here. I can't not do what I did. And I did it in a respectful way."

Cole, someone who usually has "...no problem putting people in their place," still would have had "...no problem if I was wrong on something saying, 'Yeah, I'm wrong. Let me go back.'" However, "...nine times out of ten with the students, I was spot on, because I would pay more attention; I'd listen more than I talk."

Julius also recalled feeling this way – guilty before proven innocent – when he was dismissed from the public school he had worked at for allegedly getting into a physical altercation with a student. Apparently one “...of many” negative situations he faced there, this one seemed to be the one that ultimately broke Julius’ spirit:

...I was assaulted by a student. I didn’t even hit the student back - I just grabbed them and held them. And because of the administrator, she didn’t know what to do because the school was understaffed, poor everything, she was just like, “Well, just leave the building and don’t come back. The parents are filing charges.” Which was wrong. She was lying. The union didn’t defend me, and as a result, I got a letter from [the district] saying that, “We’ll no longer need your services.” Did the mom file charges? Probably not. Was the situation handled right? Absolutely not. So I managed to teach probably for about another-- after that happened to me-- probably for about another 3 or 4 years. Then after that, I was done. I was just done.

By chance, Pablo also surfaced this story when asked if there had ever been a time when Julius shared his experiences as a teacher with him. At this point in the interview, the tone of his voice noticeably shifted, reflecting the range of emotions he admitted to have been feeling. On one end, he expressed feeling deep sadness that most of the teaching experiences Julius had disclosed to him whenever they spoke “...did not seem to be wholly positive to me...” On the other end, he felt angry that Julius, someone he has always esteemed “...near the top of my list, as humans go,” was essentially treated like a monster in the situation described above, ultimately forced to accept a punishment that, in his opinion, did not fit the person:

I mean, you heard me just describe Julius - that just seemed so out of character. And I am a person who has had to deal with a lot of disciplinary challenges among adults and family and he is in no way, in my mind, oriented towards ending up in that place. So I was really surprised and I couldn’t really put it together when I heard that news.

While Pablo is sure that Julius “...could scrap and did scrap back in the day...” as a young person, he could not think of an instance in Julius’ adult life when he ever “...present[ed]

himself in any kind of an aggressive way...” The entire situation just seemed off to Pablo – one that he reasoned could have very well been a malicious ploy enacted against Julius. Formerly a teacher and later school principal, he had “...been in the profession long enough to know that [Julius] was probably tested also for complicated dynamic reasons and to see if he’s gonna stick around; see if he’s gonna get shook, if he’s really committed, all that stuff.” According to M’baku, Julius’ former classmate and friend of about 15 years, the teaching profession ends up “...losing something really big and powerful when we lose men of color that way,” especially those who come from the communities in which they teach, as was the case with Julius.

*Having to “wear masks” as shields against stereotypes.*

While Julius, Eric, and Nate all worked in private schools (Julius, only in the last few years of his teaching career), Nate was the only one who worked in a suburban school setting comprised mostly of white people. With a student body that was 80% white and 20% of color at the time, Nate’s work environment presented a different type of challenge for him, a black man who already stood out for his height, standing at six feet, six inches tall.

Nate explained that he felt immense pressure every day to not be his full self at work. He noted that everything, from how he spoke to what he spoke about to how he dressed, had to first be self-scrutinized before he could present himself to others. Constantly aware of the cultural stereotypes that typically follow black men, some alleging that they lack the intellectual prowess to thrive in a variety of areas, the last thing he wanted to do was to confirm any assumptions that his students or his peers may have instinctively made about him:

...I felt that I had to be the best me, every single day. I had to dress up every day. I told my friends [and] my friends got mad at me. I’m like listen, I was going through it because...I was putting on for everybody that looked like me, right? And even though the students say, “Hey, Mr. [Nate], you know that rap song?” I was like, “No, I don’t.” Because I didn’t want to be--I didn’t want them to see the stereotypical and the manifest of



black males that they normally would see: athletes and rappers. So I felt like that was my battle every single day, even though I just wanted to say, “Yeah, I know that person! What do you know about [that]!” But you know, I felt like it was bigger than me, right? And to me, I wanted them to recognize that when they see a black man, they can see spectrums, just like the spectrums of white folks - an educated black man, right? [Those] who have similar experiences [as them]. I felt that I put that burden on myself, but I felt that it was an important thing for me-- at least for the students to see something that they may have never experienced...

Nate remarked having to fight this type of “...battle...” even outside of the school context.

Despite playing high school and collegiate-level basketball, he expressed how deflating it feels to constantly be asked if he was or is an athlete, sometimes on sight, especially at networking events that he attends strictly “...to engage [others] on a different level.”

To a lesser degree, Cole felt this pressure at the predominantly black school where he worked, too. This pressure to maintain a contrarian image of the black man influenced him to always wear a shirt and tie (sometimes even a full suit). His undying commitment to this look earned him the nickname, “...Preacher,” from his students, specifically because when they “...see black men in a suit and tie, they either think of a businessman or a preacher.”

*Having to constantly take on unfulfilling, menial roles and duties.*

All five participants currently hold at least one Master’s degree in curriculum and instruction. Each man either earned his degree before becoming a full-time teacher or during his tenure as a full-time teacher. Interestingly, some of them recalled feeling as though that distinction meant nothing, based on how they were [under]utilized outside of the work they had to do in the classroom.

Most days, at both the traditional public and charter schools he worked at, Julius felt as though his title should have been the “...kid charmer...,” often called upon by other adults to handle student behavior issues, sometimes with students he did not even teach. The underlying

assumption here was that he, being a black man, automatically knew what to do in these circumstances – that he essentially lived for these moments. But in reality, he did not enjoy playing this role. Nothing about being “...the bearer of bad news...that needs to go yell at [students] and tell them to sit down” appealed to him.

At some point in his third interview, when asked if he generally felt valued by his peers *and* members of the administration at those schools, Julius’ response was mixed. By colleagues? Yes. He measured how much he felt valued by them with the genuine connection he felt to them, as they were “...all in the trenches, quote, un-quote, together.” In fact, nearly every participant in this study felt this way. Take Nate, for example. He fondly shared about the time his colleagues elected him to lead their Professional Learning Community (PLC) on diversity and inclusion, an officially-recognized group in the school that had grown out of a series of informal conversations in the teacher’s lounge. Moved by the group’s sense of camaraderie and belief in him as a capable leader, Nate went as far as attending an off-site, accreditation training to gain tools that would enable him to lead the group effectively.

In contrast, Julius’ response to whether or not he felt valued by administration was a firm no, “Not so much,” also a common response given by every participant except for Cole who felt valued “...because again, at the end of the day...a smart leader is going to take someone who’s honest, who’s hard working, who has access, and who’s loyal...,” all traits he felt he consistently demonstrated. Julius went on to extend this pithy response by discussing how some days as a black man teacher, administrators made him feel indispensable, while other days, they made him feel dispensable. For him, this tension could be felt most when in the presence of his administrators; their looks and their actions toward him conveyed a mixed message of, “Oh, we can get rid of you and grab somebody else and then again, we can’t get rid of you, but we’re

gonna give you all these other things to do, too, because we need you here.” This *need* may grow out of the inability that many schools and districts demonstrate when it comes to successfully recruiting and retaining teachers of color. In fact, in a recent report released by Department X, approximately 50% of the school districts polled indicated that they do not have defined strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers of color. Some of these districts reported once having such strategies, but that these efforts were later thwarted either by a lack of funds or a lack of fidelity in implementation. District Alpha, for example, formerly had a small, recruiting task force that was exclusively charged with bringing in teachers of color. The group’s efforts resulted in the district seeing its greatest number of applicants (and later teachers) of color, to date, until those efforts were abandoned.

Robert, Eric’s former classmate in college and friend of 10 years, offered a perspective during his interview that helps contextualize and extend Julius,’ speaking to the unique, yet ironic position – somewhat of a gift and a curse – that many black men in teaching tend to find themselves in:

I think about Eric and just the situation in general, which I think leads to the numbers declining. Naturally, when you have a young black man like Eric, you’re gonna use him in multiple roles that stretch beyond the classroom. Due to the need of how the young black man performs and also because of the stereotypes on the young black man, you think you always have to have somebody in that area...to see him out of the classroom is what happens to all the black men that do well as a teacher. So the few that you have, you need them in so many different ways.

Seemingly-unworthy of due process in the incident he described earlier, one could certainly understand why at times, Julius felt valueless. However, Robert’s words suggest that Julius’ value, like Eric’s, although not explicitly or well-communicated by his administrators, was tremendous – they imply that Julius was burdened with requests that administrators felt only he was best-equipped to satisfy.

Malcolm amplifies this sentiment in his rendering of what Cole's presence must have meant to and for his students. While he did not speak to black men having to serve as chief disciplinarians, he did, however, share his thoughts on them having to serve as role models for their students. He made it unmistakably-clear that having to serve in this capacity can be incredibly exhausting, yet also painted this auxiliary role as critical to the development of young people, especially young men of color who may be in desperate need of affirmation:

...the black man is the most defined individual. Everybody can tell you what a real man is and what a real man is supposed to be as a black man... and it's hard to live up to all those things that everybody else expects you to be. And sometimes, the hardest thing is to have a model. And for him in the classroom, for a teenage boy, you're telling him how to be a black man. They may not know a black man to model themselves after. How can I be *real* and also be professional? For a lot of young men they don't have an actual example...A lot of the women have mom, and grandmom, and great grandmom and maybe the teacher or the administrator, but a lot of young men of color don't have another man who walks like them and talks like them that they can model their daily struggle after. So they get in those situations and they see how Cole handles them and they talk to Cole real after school...he can give them answers. They need modeling, they need to know what it looks like. Everybody can tell you what it's supposed to be, but for the person that has to walk in it, they gotta know what it looks like... When he's not working professionally, he's dressed like them, but they can also see how he dresses professionally – how he carries himself. They have a live action 3-dimensional model that they can model themselves after.

Essentially, Malcolm argues that it is unclear where else boys of color will see positive models of black manhood, firsthand, if not at home or in school.

When he first arrived there, Cole felt more like a "...guard dog..." than an actual teacher at the school where he worked, frequently tasked with keeping "...the kids in check, as opposed to helping them become well-rounded students." He recalled being asked to *make* students respect certain teachers who were relatively weak in the realm of classroom management. Cole, however, made it quite clear to his administration one day that "...I came here to be a teacher. I didn't come here to be the big, mean black guy...I'm not coming here to get a certificate in

conflict resolution.” With a strong belief in himself and in his versatility, he refused to be type-casted any longer for roles that other people felt were more suitable for him. According to Cole, prior work experiences where his stocky build and presence were preferred over his acumen had helped light this fire within him:

I realized that early on, man. And again, because I had work experience, so it wasn't like I hadn't worked anywhere before - I had never worked in a school, but I had just had enough-- (*smirk and a laugh*) I'll say it like this... enough interpersonal conversations. Again, being a young black male in a field dominated by folks that are not black males and being keen to the way that I was being treated, but then also having some agency to say, “Like yeah, this is not acceptable.” And so as they say, once a lollipop, two times a sucker...[when] I saw it happening the second time, I said, “Okay, it took me some time on this side to figure out how to advocate for myself, now that I'm here, this is not going to happen. And if this is where you all are going to pigeonhole me, then I'm just going to go and seek other opportunities, because I know that they're out there.”...I know my value.

Similarly, Eric found himself serving on countless disciplinary hearings throughout his teaching career. In contrast, though, being invited to these hearings made Eric feel valued. While they were not always convenient for him, he was “...okay with that because again, this is for the kids.” A simple man, he would have relished hearing the words, “Thank you,” “Hey listen, you're appreciated – don't forget that,” or even something like, “You sacrifice 60 to 70 hours of your life every week to dealing with students and doing [your] job, but also doing extra” from his administrators more, though. He did not hear words like this enough. For him, receiving such acknowledgments, from time-to-time, would have kept him reinvigorated to tackle all tasks at hand, both routine and additional.

Prior studies have revealed that black men teachers often feel burdened when having to take on additional roles, meaningful or unmeaningful. However, somewhat like Eric, Dorian offered a different, yet critical perspective to consider when he spoke about the first and best

administrator he ever worked for – someone whom he still keeps in touch with and thanks for the positive imprint she left on his life, to this day:

...it never felt burdensome because it felt like she respected me for who I was and what I brought. So anything she asked me to do, it was kinda weird, because it was like I was glad to do it. So it wasn't a burden, it was more like, "I'm doing this because I feel like I'm part of a team and she's asking me to contribute right now, so I gotta show up..."

Communicated by the snippet, "...because it felt like she respected me *for who I was* and *what I brought*," Dorian's self-concept seems to have been validated by this one administrator, making him eager to take on additional roles.

### **Participants saw actions and inactions through racialized lenses.**

In chapter eight of his New York Times Bestseller, *Just Mercy*, author, Bryan Stevenson (2014) discusses how engrossed in racism the United States is and has been with a critical look at the criminalization of black children, using the controversial Scottsboro Boys case of the 1930s as a historical backdrop (p. 157). With the exception of its outcome, this case eerily parallels the rape accusation levied against Nate as a 13 year-old-boy. Not even sure what sexual intercourse was at that time, Nate was faced with a swift and aggressive determination of his guilt, arrested, interrogated, *and* expelled from school, despite his innocence. When asked if the school he attended when he was younger – a predominantly white, all boys independent school serving children in grades seven through 12 – was a place where he enjoyed going to school each day, Dorian gave a quick and emphatic, "Hell no. Nah. Hell no." Not only did he "...always remember getting into trouble" like Julius, but he also recalled getting a bitter taste of racism there, a place he described as a "...a completely different world..." compared to the neighborhood where he lived. What got him through that difficult time in his life was the handful of other boys of color that attended the high school with him:

7th grade, 8th grade year was like a rude awakening into racism. Dealt with some punks that [were] in 12th grade that used to try to mess with me. So dealing with that kinda stuff, finding your voice quickly, learning how to advocate for yourself quickly came into play. Dealing with identity, you know what I'm saying?...high school was 'aight,' but it was mostly just because of the brothers that I was with. There [were] only about 12 of us in the whole high school. There [were] four of us in my grade... We created a strong affinity brotherhood for black and Latino young men at the school and that was phenomenal. The guys and the relationships that we bonded and forged in school was-- I don't think I could have survived without them.

Eric did not share anything about facing racism as a child, yet remarked that he "...still get[s] harassed by police officers, I get pulled over, and they ask me all types of questions like, 'Where do you work?'" The word, "...still..." in that statement resounds the loudest, implying that he has dealt with such occurrences several times before.

Having experienced subtle and blatant forms of racism as boys and even *still*, now as men, most of the participants consider themselves adept at recognizing what it looks and feels like, even in school contexts. During their teaching careers, they were keen to the racial undertones beneath the ways they and their students were treated. They were also quite aware of the racial implications around their work.

***Unpacking realities faced by black and brown children.***

As noted earlier, multiple participants were openly-opposed to other adults in their buildings who spoke distastefully about children. No account was more extreme, though, than the one Dorian shared about a former colleague who physically abused students without facing any repercussion(s):

...she was white, she was older, and she used to be a nun...there was all of this privilege that she got. She got excused for her behavior...at the end of the day, she's still hitting the children. And then when the children protested, I told them, I said, "Yo, don't go to her class anymore. Do these things." And they started doing them. Then the principal lied to them. He was like, "Yo, if any of you do anything else again, Ima get you all

expelled.” Never sent home any letters to parents. I’m telling you...people do really grimy stuff to children, especially [to] children of color in these public schools, because they know they can get away with it.

In 2017, Department X administered a student climate survey to a large sample size of students across multiple, urban districts. Data collected from this survey affirmed Dorian’s sentiments above, as only 46% of the students responded favorably to the declarative statement, *Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully*. Based on what he witnessed time and time again, Dorian concluded that people tend to mistreat children of color because the value placed on their lives is relatively low. In his opinion, if serious consequences were attached to actions detrimental to children of color, then cases such as this should happen less or not at all. Moreover, what seemed to hurt Dorian most in this particular situation was seeing how powerless his students and their families were (or thought they were, rather) in fighting for justice:

...the children were protesting, and I saw mothers, families like give up on the fight, I was like yeah man, I really gotta go ‘cause that hurt...I learned that families, poor families really don’t feel like they have voice – that they can do stuff to make the system change. So the families be like, “Oh, you know, my kid just needs to either get out of the school or do better.” And it’s like “Yo, but this woman is hitting your [child]!” It was intense. And then the principal was lying. It was crazy.

Eric, someone who stated that he tends to be at his happiest when “...*my* people are doing great,” also felt dismayed by this low sense of self-esteem or self-worth that he often witnessed his students and their families exhibit, especially whenever situations where their rights appeared to be infringed upon would arise.

Julie, Nate’s former colleague, had many warm memories of him to share during her interview, at one point describing Nate as “...really encouraging and someone that I think created a lot of buzz and energy around the things that he was involved with.” She reminisced



about him often "...walking down the hallways, engaging students, greeting students, [and] finding ways to make connections..." with anyone – staff and students, alike – who crossed his path. According to her, he had a unique way of "...making people feel valued and that they belong..." that she truly appreciated and aspired to emulate. This attribute came through most during mentoring sessions he held for students, particularly students of color, something that she could tell he found a lot of joy in, even though he expressed to her that it was sometimes a challenge.

Nate often grappled with the questions, "Am I a teacher? Am I a mentor?" when negotiating which role to play for the handful of students of color at the school. Making up only 20% of the student population, these young men and women stood out, whether they liked it or not. For this reason, Nate made sure to check in on them regularly, aware of what it is like to be in the minority – aware of the fact that every action they did and every word they spoke that could seem even the slightest bit divergent from what the school stood for, would likely be "blown out of proportion," so-to-speak. He also took it upon himself to represent them whenever they were being misrepresented by his colleagues. For example, year in and year out during faculty meetings where student assignments or reassignments to Advanced Placement (AP) classes were discussed, Nate would notice how none of the students up for consideration were students of color. He recalled frequently having to "...fight the perceptions with other faculty members about these students," making cases for why they, too, deserved to be enrolled in those classes.

Some of the more difficult conversations he used to have were actually with students of color who he observed acting freely-spirited, consequently increasing the spotlight that was already placed on them. For Nate, what made these conversations particularly difficult was

having to explain to these students that they did not have the luxury of just representing themselves:

For me I think another thing that was a challenge, specifically for me being in a predominantly white school [was] dealing with students of color, especially [young] black men...if I see something that the student of color did, and I'm recognizing that, "Hey, this is what you gotta realize: That your actions-- you're representing all of us. You're representing the students who are coming down in line 'cause you're in the minority. You are now a black boy, but if you do something that's really impactful, now you're gonna become a threat." That was tough. That was tough for a particular one kid who was in my advisor group. Trying to build that relationship, but also trying to help him navigate throughout his journey too, because kids are learning about their racial identity throughout that time, and especially when you go to a school where you're the minority.

Nate made it clear that he understood the position that these students were in because he was right there with them, due to their shared group association and to the fact that he, too, was undergoing a process of identity development at the school. He was adamant in supporting them with at least being cognizant of surrounding perceptions, often explaining to them that, "...this is how *they* see you." With this, however, came the pain of knowing that cognition of such perceptions, especially at a young age, is heavy and could certainly take an emotional toll on those children, something that Dorian attested to when recounting his middle and high school experiences with racism, earlier.

***Reading "between the lines" of micro-aggressions.***

Cole never received an apology from his former colleague who vehemently rebuked him for making a suggestion on how she can improve her practice and adjust the lens through which she viewed their student. He mentioned that, instead, "...she held resentment towards me..." Eventually, he figured that her wild reaction had to have stemmed from something deeper than *what* he said to her; it had to have been about *who* said it. In retrospect, he has come to realize that she, a middle-aged white woman, must have seen him, a young black man, as beneath her.

To Cole, this must have made it impossible for her to look past his exterior to see that his feedback was constructive, meant to help, not to humiliate her. Noticing a sharp change in my countenance after he shared these sentiments, Cole offered me a perspective that linked what happened that day to the past:

...I don't want it to be baffling for you. I want you to just be mindful of the history, particular of this country, and the way that they've viewed black males. And if you think about it like that, it's like how can it not be any other way until we make that change?

According to Cole, she might as well have added "...as a black man..." to her original statement beginning with, "How dare *you*..."

Participants also shared that non-verbal cues gave them keen insight on the meaning behind certain micro-aggressions – defined by Solórzano (2000) as insults that are subconsciously directed to others, often with subtlety – they faced (p. 60). Eric, for example, did not recollect a time when he faced a micro-aggression as a teacher. However, in his current role as a school administrator, he has faced a few where body language spoke volumes. One such instance came during an interaction he had with a teacher, "...this older white woman..." whom he met on day one of his training. After asking Eric if he was a teacher, to which he responded, "No, I'm not a teacher. I'm an administrator and I'll be evaluating teachers..." she gave him what he described as "...that look." It was a look that immediately made him uncomfortable and one that foreshadowed what was to come:

...for like the first couple of weeks when I was actually supervising her (she was one of the teachers I was supervising and coaching) and for like the first couple of weeks (maybe the first two or three months, actually), anytime I gave her some feedback, [she would] kind of dismiss it, roll her eyes, go to my boss and say like, "He doesn't know what he's doing."

Eric, while unsure if the woman's antagonism "...was...ageism, [or]...if it was racism..." knew that he was discriminated against, regardless of the type. Right from the first time they ever

crossed paths, he felt that she never gave him a chance – that she never took the time to get to know him and automatically assumed that he was incompetent and undeserving of his role.

***Building allies for the black struggle among staff and students.***

More than aware of the persisting shortage of black men in the field of elementary and secondary education, Nate hypothesized that his students were likely to “...not have [another] black teacher throughout their entire educational journey” after him – ever. Therefore, driven by a personal belief that “...we need allies in this fight,” he took advantage of his unique position and platform in the classroom, where each day, he stood before faces that did not resemble his own, by regularly having what he described as, “...critical conversations” with his students. Dr. Jay, a parent of one of Nate’s former students, board member at Nate’s former school, and now friend of eight years, spoke to Nate’s impact on his students, echoing much of what fueled Nate’s mission after reminiscing about his own experiences as a student:

I remember myself as a Ph.D. student, as an undergrad student, as a MBA student – I tell people, I never had a black professor. I’m almost amazed today that I’m a business school professor, ‘cause after earning 3 business school degrees, 2 graduate business degrees, an undergraduate degree, I never had a faculty member of color. Black. Never. It’s almost amazing that I would even choose a route like this, down the road. So I think his impact upon the kids, not just the group of kids who are kids of color, but also the majority students as well, getting a chance to see someone who doesn’t look like them, in front of the classroom, gives them a level of respect, gives them a level of understanding – sort of a level playing field.

Having had the opportunity to observe Nate teach, Dr. Jay recalled being thoroughly impressed by his ability to deliver instruction with clarity, to engage students with his charismatic, infectious personality, and to inspire them with his personal narratives. According to him, “...education is part educating, part entertainment, part motivational, and part inspirational,” a balancing act that he felt Nate had mastered.

Similar to the work he engaged his peers in during their PLC meetings, Nate managed to create a classroom environment where discussing race, equity, and other such topics became the norm. He did this by regularly planning lessons with the goal of helping his students understand that they were "...privileged by a social system that they, like educators, can help make more equitable" in mind (Pollock, 2007, p. xxii). Because of how polarizing they are and have been, topics like race or equity are often difficult and uncomfortable to broach. However, Nate believed that his non-judgmental, non-attacking demeanor and disposition made it easier for his white students to want to take risks during these discussions. Welcoming oppositional views and statements made out of ignorance, he used these moments as opportunities to gently enlighten. At one point during Nate's third interview, he excitedly shared a moment from his time teaching that made him feel like he was truly making a difference:

At one point, a white young student of mine said something about whites and he used racism in the proper way, in terms of power, privilege, and to me at that moment I'm like, "He's getting this! They're getting this!" – when they're able to use the terms and articulate and provide examples of their own. But he's white and understanding that privilege...It was cool for me. It was a journey, but also again, I'm learning from them and they're learning from me.

This was a proud moment for Nate because it proved that his efforts were not in vain. According to him, it signaled that he was finally succeeding at putting his students on a path to "...challenge racial inequalities of opportunity and outcome, rather than accepting racial disparities as normal" (Pollock, 2007, p. xxi).

Julius and Eric, who also worked with white students, but in a lesser capacity, did not mention having this deep of a connection with them as Nate did with his. However, Julius recalled feeling good whenever white parents would approach him and say things like, "Hey, look, we spoke about this [at home] because it's something you guys spoke about in class." Such

moments felt rewarding and pleasantly surprising for him, demonstrating that racial barriers between them did not exist, even though he "...didn't really get a chance to see the kids around in the neighborhood," his neighborhood. Interactions like these made him feel valued for his intellect and his ability to inspire, attributes he hardly ever saw or heard associated with black men in everyday life.

**Participants could not trust the intentions of their peers or their superiors.**

On almost every K-12 school's website in the U.S., in response to "...public pressure for the upbeat and the heart-warming..." one is sure to find a vision or mission statement that eloquently emits a commitment to one or more of the following: promoting social justice, honoring diversity, developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and preparing students for both domestic and global citizenship (or along those lines) (Rozycki, 2004, p. 94). However, particularly in the areas of promoting social justice and honoring diversity, some participants expressed that in reality, things were not always what they seemed at the schools where they worked; ulterior motives and hidden agendas were often shrouded by superficial acts of kindness or complacency.

***Dealing with tokenism and placation.***

Julius admitted to despising nearly every school administration he ever worked for. Having been betrayed by administrators on numerous occasions, it was evident to him that "...they don't know how to treat the teachers, don't know how to treat the staff..." and therefore, "...if they don't treat you right, it feels like they don't care about you. They don't value you. They don't want you there." For this reason, Julius was leery of the times when administrators would show him benevolence. According to him, those times always seemed to be strategic, occurring whenever they had special requests:

...if you put the work in to show that you value me, it'll be apparent. And if you don't then-- then on the other hand [they] might say, "Oh, we value

you,” but then you’re trying to put 50,000 things on my back because you gave me a hug. Now you feel like you [can] give me all this work to do... on one side it’s like, “Oh, you’re a teacher and we need you... You’re a part of the team, but we want you to do A, B, C, D, E, F, G – it’s like, “Whoa, wait a minute. Hold on. I want to do A through C.”

Julius expressed how hard it was for him to believe that he was valued by the very same people who seemed to consistently demonstrate a blatant disregard for his quality of life.

The following words by Robert creatively describes another challenge that Nate recalled facing as a teacher:

...it’s almost like the people who aren’t black men, they think it’s something that is like an innate thing, which that’s just a start. But the idea is you can relate to the point where you can stay disciplined in your approach and stay grounded when things are going wrong. And it’s more actually sticking to the procedures that you learned, but it gets masked in the fact that you’re probably gonna be one of the only black man that another young black man is gonna deal with. So, to me, it’s the equivalent of when you see a good black basketball player, you automatically assume they just came out of the womb [as a good black basketball player], which sort of discounts that they actually did the training more so than anybody else in that field...it’s a similar idea in terms of like when you have black male teachers, because the automatic, I guess, knee-jerk reaction is, “He has success with this person that nobody else can, just because he’s a black man.”

Along with every other participant in this study, Nate spoke about how hard he had to work at honing his craft to get to a place where he felt successful in the classroom (e.g., “My first year, I was garbage.” – Dorian). He craved meaningful feedback on his teaching, particularly earlier on in his career, yet was rarely ever formally (or even informally) observed in action by his principal. In fact, when he first came on board the faculty, he was “...given a textbook and [told], ‘Here. Just go and do what you do.’” Julie felt that this type of faux support offered by the school (where she still works today) to Nate is shameful, demonstrating “...a fault of the school for sort of wanting to attract talent, but then not necessarily having the structures in place to support young talent.”

Regardless of the situation, Nate said that he did not sit and wallow in despair. He described himself as being relentless in seeking out his colleagues for instructional support and visiting their classrooms to “...get a sense of different teaching styles...” during his free, prep periods. However, in the few instances when he did receive feedback from them or from his principal, he said that it felt almost like a “pat on the back” just to keep him happy and at the school. Granted, he enjoyed receiving praise for his work, as most people would. But to Nate, comments like, “Hey, you’re doing well. Just keep on doing what you’re doing” were not specific-enough, neither did they ever reveal what he needed to work on to make significant shifts in practice for his students. After a while, Nate became suspicious of these quick, placating “one-liners,” especially after learning about how involved his former principal was in coaching many of his peers – most of whom Nate felt were “...much better, talented...” teachers than he was. He wanted to have a mentor of some sort, *anyone*, regardless of race or gender, who would not operate under a colorblind mindset and give him words of substance to promote his growth:

Listen, I tell people all the time: I’m looking for a mentor who has the qualities that I aspire to. *But* the mentor has to recognize the level that race plays into it as well...not using it to a point where they feel sorry for you, no. But understand the reality that racism plays. But also being honest and say, “If you wanna be here, these are certain things that you have to do.”

Time and time again, Nate felt that he had to go above and beyond just to receive the same level of support that several of his colleagues received automatically.

***Discerning differences between “real social justice” and “cosmetic social justice.”***

Self-described as a “...revolutionary by heart...” who “...exemplified the possible” for his students, Dorian stated that he saw education as a platform for activism and a means for giving young men and women of color access – access to more programs or fields or study like robotics, where people in minority populations are typically underrepresented. A report on the



city where Dorian taught showed an achievement gap between students of color from low-income families and their more advantaged peers that was larger than well over half of the United States' 100 largest cities. No matter how bleak, statistics like this did not dissuade Dorian from feeling strongly that in the long run, more enrichment opportunities could help close those achievement and wealth gaps between people of color and white people, thus igniting him to pool resources together for his students. However, he was usually alone in this effort. While he was "...actually about real social justice...", Dorian noticed that other adults in their school building were fine with "...pump my fist in the auditorium kinda stuff...", saying they were for social justice, but sedentary when called into action.

In school, as an inquisitive student, Cole "...would get scolded for particularly things around slavery and not wanting to gloss over them and have deeper conversations." Ironically, in school, as an informed teacher, he recalled also getting scolded by administrators for being critical of texts and curriculum guides that either blurred or tactfully omitted key elements of historical events – ones that told traditional versions of history (e.g., Christopher Columbus' amicable relationship with the Taino people), as opposed to the people's version of history (e.g., Christopher Columbus' facilitation of the genocide of the Taino people):

...it got me into some trouble because I would ask questions and probe things that were, at that time, spoken as gospel. And just from my own reading and my own wandering mind, as a young, philosophical mind. I was like, "Yeah, that doesn't really seem like...you know." And they'd be like, "Well, that's a book and you can't question a book and so, so, so."

Cole read this administrative push back as the school's commitment to maintaining the status quo. He recalled it becoming clear as crystal to him that the expectation was not that he liberate his students and their minds. Instead, to him, the expectation seemed to be that he work to develop a sense of sheepish compliance in them that was good enough for passing tests.

In his classroom, Cole was passionate about fostering an "...audacity to question..." within his students. It was also important to him that they felt represented through the class materials that he set before them. Data from the same climate survey that Department X administered to a large sample size of students across multiple, urban districts in 2017 helped to underscore why this may have been so important to Cole. Of the students surveyed, only 23% answered, *Always True* in response to the declarative statement, *My textbooks or class materials include people and examples that reflect my race, cultural background, and/or identity.*

### **Summary of Findings**

The overall aim of this study was to determine what institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession. From my data analysis, I identified three emergent themes that brought me closer to a conclusion.

I first identified how participants' self-concepts were challenged by circumstances where they faced degrees of character assassination or identity loss. Such circumstances arose when they spoke out against child negligence, found themselves in volatile situations with staff and students, fought against stereotypes associated with people of color, and were given menial roles to play that were outside of the purview of their desired roles as teachers. Next, I identified how participants saw actions and inactions in their workplaces through racialized lenses they had developed experientially. These lenses enabled them to fully unpack the realities faced by children of color in schools, decipher meanings of the micro-aggressions they faced as teachers, and approach their work with deeper missions of helping others grow in racial sensitivity and competence. Lastly, I identified how participants were keen to the deceptive cultures at their workplaces, causing them to distrust their leaders and many of their peers. In certain situations,

they felt tokenized and manipulated, also making them more aware of how misaligned these institutions were with promoting *and* upholding social justice.

In Chapter 6, I utilize three out of the five tenets of Critical Race Theory to help ground my discussion of these findings. Furthermore, I also discuss the implications of these findings for researchers and practitioners in the field of education.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion

In this culminating chapter, I begin by explaining how this study – a critical examination of the shortage of black men in teaching, with a specific focus on how institutional and racial factors influence their decisions to exit – contributes to current research in the field. I then discuss how the findings I presented in Chapter 5 correlate with certain elements of Critical Race Theory, my conceptual framework. Lastly, at the chapter’s end, I draw attention to areas of this study where further research is needed and offer implications for practitioners to consider.

#### Contribution to Current Research

As I discussed in Chapter 2, not much existing literature chronicles the experiences of black men *teachers*. Extensive studies on the experiences of black men in the workplace, like Lawrence Gary’s (1995), certainly come close to this aim, yet fall short by not focusing exclusively on black men in the K-12 teaching arena (p. 214). Within the literature that does exist around black men teachers, their experiences tend to be lumped together with the experiences of all teachers or of all teachers of color. Blanketed approaches like these make it difficult to analyze a specific point of intersection, such as race and gender; in this case, they fail “...to acknowledge diverse expressions of Blackness and maleness,” essentially what it is like to be black and a man in a profession dominated by white women (Woodson & Pabon, 2016, p. 57). Additionally, within the literature on the shortage of black men in teaching, increased recruitment efforts are typically touted as the best possible solutions to this complex, multi-layered issue, while the unpacking of race and the importance of retention efforts largely go ignored or superficially-addressed. Recruitment efforts may certainly yield immediate, short-term results. However, they are bound to falter, long-term, if not coupled with well-conceived

retention efforts that are sensitive to the influence that race and implicit biases have on daily interactions. There is a relationship between recruitment and retention here that seems obvious, yet often gets lost in existing literature: black men will not find the teaching profession desirable if schools and school districts cannot keep the quality black men teachers they already have.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I highlighted this gap in literature to convey the need for my research on the institutional and racial factors that contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession. This study contributes to the larger body of research on black men in teaching by grappling with ideas for retention and integrating race-based perspectives. It is also unique in that it invites black men to share about who they were as teachers *and* about who they are as human beings.

Due to their scarcity in the field of K-12 education, black men are often discussed as mythical, unicorn-like figures in existing literature – a group “...consistently positioned in teacher recruitment and teacher education discourse as the potential solution to a myriad of social and educational problems” (Woodson & Pabon, 2016, p. 57). While the intention of the authors of these works is clear (i.e., communicating the well-documented value and impact that black men can, and often do bring into the field), what tends to be missing in these pieces are explicit recognitions of their humanity. Black men have hopes and dreams, too. Black men have legitimate concerns that trouble their minds, too. Sometimes they experience joy, peace, wholeness, love, and fulfillment. Other times they experience sorrow, pain, loss, hatred, and disappointment. This study is a reminder of these basic stages of life that we all share.

### **Connecting Findings to Critical Race Theory**

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Ladson-Billings and William Tate's (1995) application of Critical Race Theory to the field of education has paved the way for educational researchers to

continue theorizing race and exploring the ways in which it manifests in schools for various stakeholders (p. 48). Following this tradition, I used CRT to inform my data analysis, considering that my research goal was to learn about the institutional and racial factors that contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession. It is important to note that I did not attempt to test this theory. Instead, I applied three of its five driving tenets as an organizing framework to aid me in making sense of the empirical findings I presented in the previous chapter. The following CRT tenets are discussed below: the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, the commitment to social justice, and the centrality of experiential knowledge.

#### **The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism.**

CRT argues that racism is alive and well in the United States, often rearing its ugly head via individual, group, and institutional-level occurrences. Unfortunately, many of the participants in this study were well-acquainted with racism in contexts outside of the schools where they worked, enabling them to speak with authority when recounting acts of racism they either experienced or witnessed within the schools where they worked. In a slightly different vein, Nate spoke about how racist ideas hindered him from feeling free to be an individual, creating an internal struggle that was difficult to overcome.

Though indirectly stated in his response about challenges he experienced as a teacher, what Nate described feeling at work every day is known in the field of social psychology as *stereotype threat*, a term that describes "...the situation in which there is a negative stereotype about a person's group, and he or she is concerned about being judged or treated negatively on the basis of this stereotype" (Spencer et al., 2016, p. 416). Initially used by theorists only to examine its effects on students' academic performances, stereotype threat "...has now been

extended to examine how [it] is related to identity and well-being and how it is associated with feelings of belonging in various environments” (Spencer et al., 2016, p. 417). Nate, like many others from historically-marginalized groups, was unable to be himself, even when he wanted to, because his racial identity and the stereotypes ascribed to that identity often precede him. Therefore, whenever he stepped foot on that campus, he went through a process of shedding certain aspects of himself (e.g., favorite musical genre) that could be misconstrued as stereotypical to avoid being a poor example of the entire black community. Race also created the impetus for Nate to advocate on behalf of students of color at the school who deserved to be placed in AP classes, but were consistently denied entry. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon issue in U.S. schools, as research has shown that students in the minority are “...less likely than their White and Asian American peers to be classified as gifted or academically talented” (as cited in Contreras, 2011, p. 504).

Dorian’s account of how poorly the students at the school he worked at were treated also demonstrates the permanence of racism in the United States. At a macro level, the lack of efficacy he described those students and their families experiencing has generally typified the experiences of black and brown people in the United States for centuries, making membership of a minority group “...deflating and stigmatising [*sic*]” (Oyserman et al., 2001, p. 384).

Dorian asserted that his former colleague, despite the amount of evidence amassed against her proving that she was, indeed, physically-abusive to her students, remained secure in her job due to white privilege. A bit of a history connoisseur with an impressive library in his home that features dozens of books on racial consciousness, identity formation, and social power dynamics, Dorian makes a valid argument. In their article on the historical origins of white privilege, Stella Nkomo and Akram Al Ariss (2014) critically examine how labor conditions pre-

Title VII legislation, a law that made it illegal to reject a job applicant based on the applicant's race, religion, sex, or national origin, advantaged white people while severely disadvantaging people of other ethnic and racial groups (p. 394). Furthermore, they go on to discuss the enduring impact that pre-Title VII "...discriminatory laws and explicit job segregation practices in the workplace" have had on organizations today, as modern-day "...mechanisms (Post-Title VII) although more covert, subtle, and complex still operate to advantage those defined as 'white...'" (Nkomo & Ariss, 2014, p. 395). Similar to stereotypes and other racial, cultural stigmas, white privilege is not earned. Ironically, it, too, is inherited through skin color.

### **The commitment to social justice.**

This tenet places the fight for racial justice at the heart of the fight for social justice and equity. In some way, shape, or form, nearly each participant expressed an adherence to this belief system, evident by how they spoke about children and their families during interviews, as well as how they described approaching their daily work as educational professionals.

Nate's commitment to social justice was apparent by how he actively sought to leverage his students' innate white privilege for the greater good. Too often, black and brown people strain their voices, desperately trying to be heard and understood on a host of issues that negatively impact their well-being. What Nate recognized is that in many of these cases, a collective white voice goes mute, missing from the front lines of the black freedom struggle. He recognized that a collective white voice, unmuted, has the potential to offer the type of amplification necessary to spark change for those whose lives (like his own) lie in the margins. Therefore, he approached his work each day with a long-term vision in mind, understanding that "...white students also need to encounter in school the diversity they'll see in the world" (El-Mekki, 2018, p. 56). He regarded his work with a predominantly white student body as a golden



opportunity to groom change agents for the black freedom struggle, akin to the several white men and women who participated in the abolitionist and civil rights movements of the past.

To Dorian, the institution of school can serve as the perfect stage for activism and sparking a revolution for historically-marginalized populations, as young people tend to possess a fire within them that many adults seem to lose, over the years. This is a major reason why he pushed so hard for "...pre-college programs [that] have been found to enhance the retention and persistence of students of color in STEM education" at the school where he worked (Palmer et al., 2011, p. 492). He felt that such programs could drastically alter the trajectories of not only his students' lives, but the lives of their family members as well. While Dorian is one example of someone with this mindset, El-Mekki (2018) argues that it is not uncommon for black men teachers to use schools as platforms for promoting social justice and elevating their communities:

Schools and districts should note that many black men are adjacent to classrooms already; they are coaches, mentors, or father figures for countless young boys and girls. We must tap into this commitment to community. It should also be noted that social justice is an important aspect of teaching that resonates with black men. By showing how social justice and education are linked, schools and districts can make teaching even more appealing to these potential candidates. (p. 60)

In their essay titled, *Engaging Youth in Participatory Inquiry for Social Justice*, María E. Torre and Michelle Fine (2005) make recommendations for how schools can help students analyze and challenge unequal structures of opportunity through their curricula (p. 165). They specifically urge educators "...to consider undertaking participatory research projects with students to recognize the critical insights young people have about racial injustice and to generate cross-generational communities of inquiry around research, critique, and action" (Torre & Fine, 2005, p. 165). Cole, an avid follower of Paulo Freire and his philosophies on education (e.g., banking concept), attempted to foster this type of learning in his English classes by having his students

read and write material that would antagonize the status quo. He desired to develop critical thinkers who will someday lead for positive change in their communities. However, a lack of resources on racial disparities and community uplift and a lack of support from his administration (i.e., approval of resources on racial disparities and community uplift) greatly stymied his efforts.

Determined to help his students, particularly young men of color, break free from the cycle of failure and disappointment that many of them had become accustomed to witnessing in their home environments, Eric organized an initiative geared toward empowerment and instilling hope – one that he still runs today:

...dealing with inner city kids you hear a lot of sad stories. And I'm trying to work with these boys and steer them to a path where they're able to take care of themselves [and] take care of the people around them, without going the route of the streets. One boy in particular who I'm dealing with right now, his mom just isn't there for him [and] he's in the streets, he's in a gang. Just the way that he talks sometimes like, "I don't care about life. No one cares about me, so why should I do well for others? Why should I do well for myself, when I can get this easy money?" And it's really sad to hear that and you see that all the time.

Eric's hope is that in time, these young men will do better because they see better through his life, given that "...positive psychological capital influences organizational commitment, coping, performance, and the likelihood of achieving important goals" (as cited in Anglin et al., 2018, p. 473).

### **The centrality of experiential knowledge.**

CRT honors the lived experiences and narratives of people, especially of people of color. This specific tenet suggests that life is the greatest teacher by treating people's experiences and narratives as valuable as (or even more valuable than) theory and pure logic when it comes to developing understanding. In drawing connections between CRT and education, "...the voice of

people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). This is because “...without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58).

In his article on the art of storytelling, Robert Davison (2016) stresses the importance of having stories, particularly ones from the past that can help inform our present and future lives (p. 191). Every participant in this study was a story teller with a purpose. Though occasionally prompted to elaborate with examples during interviews, participants, more often than not, naturally used personal anecdotes that were “...illustrative and memorable...” to articulate their points and to explain their beliefs (Davison, 2016, p. 192). Eric, for example, drew heavily upon his personal experience(s) when responding to the question, *In your opinion, what does this world need more of, in order to improve?* His objective was to highlight the importance of everyone having a male figure of some sort in their lives:

I guess, just off of my experiences, more black male role models. I think, and again I’m just going off of what I know, what I understand, what I lived through, I was fortunate enough to grow up in a two-parent household – my parents were married. So, I had my dad all the time. And I deal with students who don’t see their dad or don’t have a dad or don’t know who their dad is ...I definitely think you know, again from my experience, more male role models, more male figures in general, more positive figures...it doesn’t have to be someone who is a celebrity, [it can] be a regular guy.

Soaked in experiential knowledge, as denoted by its many signal words and phrases (e.g., “...just off of my experiences,” “...just going off of what I know...,” etc.), firsthand accounts like Eric’s carry a level of legitimacy and authenticity that simply cannot be matched by secondary accounts or educated suppositions.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While I recognize that my findings from this portraiture case study of five black men in the Northeast region of the United States who were once K-12 schoolteachers do not necessarily generalize to the wider population, they, however, bring attention to areas where further research is needed.

Although he left the classroom, Eric did not leave education, altogether. In his third interview, he shared that his decision to ascend into a school administrator role was partly-driven by a desire to build up his career and to, subsequently, increase his earning potential. As a teacher, he felt that he could only accomplish so much in life. According to him, even though money was and is not everything, his desire to be in a better position to take care of himself and his future family grew weaker as time passed, given his economic reality. Furthermore, he mentioned that his decision was also fueled by the lack of people of color in educational leadership and the need for more representation in those ranks.

Studies have shown that there *is* a "...a critical race disconnect between communities of color and their schools, teachers, and administrators" (Parker & Villalpando, 2007, p. 521). In a day an age where "...demographics of the nation's schools are increasingly comprised of students of color," it has become troubling that the percentages of school leaders "...who are Black, Latino, or Asian American have barely gained ground" (Parker & Villalpando, 2007, p. 521). Additional research is needed to determine the role that upward mobility plays in black men's decisions to leave teaching, but not necessarily the field of education. Whether it is to earn a higher income, to expand one's reach and influence over what occurs in a school or a district, or some other reason(s), such research would lend key, additional insight on the shortage of black men teachers.

Indiscriminate of race or ethnicity, there is a severe shortage of men who teach in the United States, overall. Existing literature has revealed that the gender gap in K-12 teaching continues to widen, as women constitute "...76.3 percent of the workforce, compared to 70.5 percent 30 years ago" (Quintero, 2018). Furthermore, "...the majority of the arguments for more male teachers stress that the teaching profession has become increasingly 'feminized' and thus the education of boys has suffered because of the resultant lack of male role models" (Mills et al., 2004, p. 355).

With gender as a control, a comparative study between one or more groups of exited men teachers of color (e.g., Black, Latino, Asian, etc.) and exited white men teachers, with an explicit focus on their experiences while teaching, could be interesting. Results may further illuminate the dynamics of race in the teaching profession.

### **Implications for Practice**

My findings also have implications for educational practitioners, particularly those in leadership positions who have a direct impact on [re]shaping policy and culture. Colleges, universities, and policy makers have since "...initiated efforts to recruit more Black men into the teaching profession," along with a number of scholars who have "...investigated strategies for supporting recruitment and retention initiatives targeting Black male teachers..." (as cited in Brockenbrough, 2014, p. 500). Yet, the national percentage of black men in K-12 education continues to dwindle, pointing to an obvious dissonance between research and practice. Accordingly, I offer six practical recommendations below, each based on my synthesis of the research.

#### **Meaningful leadership opportunities.**

One of the black men featured in El-Mekki's (2018) article, a current teacher, candidly breaks down why he has no plans to leave his school anytime soon:

The one thing that keeps me in the classroom is the fact that I get to directly impact the things that my school (in the abstract sense) can accomplish. Teaching content aside, I spend my days problem solving, challenging my kids, and prepping them to take on the world. Doesn't get much better than that for me. (p. 59)

At one point in time, Nate and Dorian felt this same type of way. Being elected the leader of his former school's first teacher-created PLC is still an unforgettable experience for Nate – one of the highlights of his career. Dorian being given additional (yet, meaningful) roles to play by his former principal (e.g., lead facilitator for multiple professional development sessions around improving school-wide instruction) – roles that allowed him to contribute to the school making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – is something he is grateful for, to this day. However, over time, due to multiple factors, one of which being a change in administration, these men (along with the others featured in this study) became valued less for their intellect, but more for their physical presence and sense of gravitas. School and district leaders must be mindful of this if they are truly interested in building leadership capacity within and maintaining healthy relationships with the black men in their buildings. These men and women can learn from Dorian's former leader who, based on his sentiments highlighted in Chapter 5, truly studied him as an individual and assigned him roles tailored-made to his individual strengths, not roles based on some sort of group identity or perception.

**Clearly-defined, mutually-agreed upon job roles.**

The initial list of roles and responsibilities for many black men teachers tends to morph

into something else, over time. As confirmed by Cole's experience(s), this creates a professional haze that is difficult for these men to see through, an impasse that leads to deep frustration and regret. Griffin and Tackie (2017) shed more light on this issue:

...many reported that they have been pigeonholed by colleagues, parents, and administrators, pressured to take on the same few teaching assignments and leadership roles over and over again. In short, many participants said they felt undervalued and unappreciated, given few opportunities to build their pedagogical and subject matter expertise and advance as professionals. (p. 40)

To avoid such dissatisfaction, job duties for black men teachers must remain clearly-defined, mutually-agreed upon, and honored throughout their employment periods; professional boundaries must be established and understood between black men teachers, their colleagues, and their administrators, so that the weight of what they are asked to do does not crush their qualities of life. Granted, given the unpredictable nature of a school day, circumstances may arise, from time-to-time, where their flexibility in certain areas will be needed. However, out of respect for their lives, these requests should be cushioned with some form of compensation (e.g., an extra prep period, allowance to leave work early or to come in later, etc.). More importantly, such requests should be presented as favors, not expectations. Framing them in this way would remove the pressure and the guilt that black men teachers feel to always say, 'Yes.'

#### **Ongoing mentoring initiatives.**

Studies have shown that in general, black men "...tend to view themselves as mentors for their communities..." (El-Mekki, 2018, p. 59). It is therefore natural for black men teachers to want to mentor and to coach their students on life, in addition to supporting them academically, as illustrated in the work that Nate undertook as a teacher. Nonetheless, similar to the idea that flight attendants convey when reviewing safety protocols and urging passengers to secure their own oxygen masks before assisting others in the event of an emergency, black men teachers need

mentors, too. To be able to support others well, they must first be well-supported. Despite being in high demand, according to what participants in this study shared, black men do not always arrive to schools automatically expert in building curricula, delivering instruction, managing behavior, or even navigating cultural challenges that may occur in other parts of the school community, outside of their classrooms. Therefore, the schools that employ them should be prepared to "...provide opportunities for mentorship and support to develop their craft" (El-Mekki, 2018, p. 58).

Existing literature recommending mentorship as a solution for retaining teachers of color often purports the idea that mentorship pairings should be homogeneous by race, by gender, and if possible, by subject area. However, Nate, an avid proponent of mentoring initiatives, explained why homogeneity in this regard does not necessarily matter (as captured in Chapter 5). Besides the fact that finding enough black men teachers to pair up with each other, within the same school building is not pragmatic, given the current, abysmal national percentage of black men in the field, a human connection based on shared principles is what should actually drive the creation and the success of a mentor-mentee partnership. Having other traits in common is essentially a bonus.

#### **Commonplace discussions on race and implicit bias.**

In some way, at some point during interviews, each man described having worked at an institution where racial insensitivity and aggression were permissible. Stories like Cole's and Eric's, for example, beg to question: *Why did those white women feel so comfortable and emboldened to treat them with such disdain?* Additionally, Julius' story begs to question: *Why was he not worthy of even a semblance of due process before being dismissed by his principal?*



The ultimate goal should not be to help black men teachers (and other teachers of color) manage within racially-hostile environments; it should be to rid these environments of racial hostility. School and district leaders must create environments where disrespect toward people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds is not tolerated. This can only happen when there is a firm commitment to "...rejecting false notions of human difference and actively treating people as equally worthy, complicated, and capable," being that "...antiracism entails actively affirming that no racially defined group is more or less intelligent than any other" (Pollock, 2007, p. xx). Such a commitment must be evident at the top level of leadership before it can have a "trickle-down effect" through the entire institution(s).

Regular professional development on race and *implicit bias*, a concept defined by Cheryl Staats (2016) as the collection of attitudes or stereotypes that influence one's understanding and decision-making in an unconscious manner, could lead to school cultures where openly discussing those topics is not taboo (p. 29). In turn, such professional development could directly influence constituent behavior toward each other by helping to eliminate gaffes and micro-aggressions stemming from racial ignorance or racial malice, therefore improving the overall health of the institution. For example, the micro-aggressive act toward Cole by his colleague who presumably was suffering from *white fragility*, a condition that is caused when "...even a minimum amount of racial stress in the habitus becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves," ones that include "...the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation," likely would not be able to occur in such an institution (at least not without consequence) (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 103).

Regular conversations about race can certainly help to expand one's racial consciousness and even to demystify the concept of race, especially since it is a social construct originally organized around "...bogus biological categories invented in order to justify the unequal distribution of life's necessities..." that is not actually supposed to make sense, when stripped down, bare (Pollock, 2007, p. xix).

### **Socioemotional support.**

Unfortunately, in the United States, simply leaving your home as a black man (or a black boy) is an act of courage. Derrick Brooms and Armon Perry (2016), in their article on how black men respond to the rampant killings of their own in society, discuss how the racial climate in the U.S. has regressed, becoming incredibly dangerous for people of color, so dangerous that parents of tender-aged, black and brown children are having to equip them with skills that *might* ensure their survival (p. 169). They go on to explain their analytical framework, invisibility syndrome – a condition in which "...one's talents, abilities, personality and worth are not valued or recognized because of racism or prejudice" – before applying it to the realities faced by black men in the article's discussion section (Brooms & Perry, 2016, p. 170).

Constantly confronted by traumatic events or the threat of traumatic events (e.g., Eric frequently getting harassed by law enforcement, unsure of what his fate will be, each time), black men often experience a unique array of negative feelings, sometimes simultaneously:

...these negative racial encounters ultimately stress and obscure identity development. Individuals affected by invisibility syndrome experience frustration, increased awareness of a range of feelings, emotions, and perspectives, such as perceived slights, chronic indignation, pervasive discontent and disgruntlement, anger, immobilization, questioning one's worthiness, disillusionment, feeling trapped, conflicted racial identity, internalized rage, depression, substance abuse, and loss of hope. Moreover, responding to invisibility is largely about preserving one's dignity as it forces Black men to continually interpret others' intentions so that racial situations can be handled by either acting indifferent or fighting

aggressively to hold on to one’s self-image...(pp. 170-171)

Administrators’ (and peers’) silence on such issues is unacceptable – a silence that ironically speaks volumes about how little these men are *actually* cared for.

School leaders should not expect black men teachers not to carry such heavy, emotional baggage with them to work each day. Therefore, my research backs assertions that systems and supports (ones that these men can opt into and use at their discretion) such as an on-site mental health counselor or built-in time and space for group support sessions should be in place. These supports are not to coddle or to infantilize these men. Rather, they are to express an acute understanding of their realities outside of work and a genuine commitment to preserving their mental, emotional health for the good of all.

When interviewed for this study, Mario J. Shaw, Chief Impact Officer at *Profound Gentleman*<sup>††</sup>, an organization based in North Carolina that prepares black men from many different walks of life to be “Impact Leaders” for young black boys, spoke highly about the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) component of their program. Separate from the organization’s pedagogical and instructional components, its SEL component focuses primarily on identity conservation, centered around the question, ‘Who am I?’ Mr. Shaw regarded this part of their program as essential, “...absolutely a necessity,” not solely due to the high homicide and incarceration rates of black men, but also in consideration of the fact that many of the men they support grew up without their fathers present in their lives.

#### **Consistent use of exit interviews and the data they yield.**

No matter the recommendation or action plan, not all black men teachers will remain in the field – some will still leave, perhaps for other, unknown reasons. Therefore, induction

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<sup>††</sup> Participant gave explicit consent for his true identity to be revealed in this study. <https://www.profoundgentlemen.org/>.

strategies must be bookended with exiting strategies geared toward learning about every possible reason why they decide to leave.

Interestingly, not a single participant in this study shared that he was given the opportunity to divulge the specific reason(s) behind his decision to leave his school by internal or external school affiliates. This pointed to another institutional deficiency that needs to be addressed: a lack of value placed on teacher voice from the start of, during, and at the end of one's tenure. While there are schools that have some sort of formal exit interview process in place, many do not implement that process with the utmost diligence or care. In District Alpha's Equity Plan, for example, there is an acknowledgment that the schools within the district need to improve in surveying all exiting teachers to better understand why they leave. The data provided by these surveys, aggregated *and* disaggregated (e.g., black men) could yield powerful insight that school and district leaders could use to enact accurate, non-cursory solutions. While outlier responses might not be as useful, common ones could generate enough momentum to trigger a paradigm shift. Moreover, some schools and districts have this type of data already. However, they are not forthcoming with it, something that could maybe change if families and community members came together to demand that "...their districts and schools...be transparent about their data on black teachers and their plans to address the need for more diversity" (El-Mekki, 2018, p. 60).

## **Conclusion**

A combination of institutional and racial factors contributes to black men's decisions to exit the teaching profession. As learned from the five, primary participants (and the secondary participants interviewed on their behalf), institutions of learning that tend to push black men out are ones where their positive, self-concepts are challenged, where they either experience or

witness racial hostility, and where they are unable to trust the intentions of their peers or superiors, based on prior interactions with them. These conditions too closely resemble the conditions they are normally confronted with out in society, at-large. Therefore, to retain these men, schools must consistently work to show them what is societally-unfamiliar to them: care, respect, safety, and understanding. These qualities can be demonstrated by offering them opportunities to lead, setting them up with mentors who share similar belief systems as they do (and who are empathetic to their struggles as black men), and giving them control over what roles in their school communities they play or do not play (outside of teaching), among other strategies.

Typecasting black men who *are* in schools into specific roles is problematic, chiefly because of the subliminal messaging it sends. The role designation of behavior managers, for example, inherently suggests that those who are used to being policed out in everyday life are best-suited to police children. Moreover, such pigeonholing makes black men seem one-dimensional and professionally-impaired, when existing literature has proven them to be exceptionally-versatile. Emdin (2016) describes this versatility as magical when recounting a time he visited a school as a consultant, searching for a teacher he could use as a model for others in the building:

I went through the entire teaching staff in my head, and while many had the potential to be a lead teacher, no one had been teaching in the building for long enough to be able to take that role. But then I discovered that a gentleman who was introduced to me as the school's 'dean of behavior' was also a teacher at the school. He was tall, black, and had an imposing voice that students responded to...One afternoon, I walked into this class and witnessed magic. The students were at the edge of their seats, waiting for him to give them instructions for their next task. The room was filled with music, the blinds were off the windows, allowing light to shine through the classroom, students were asking questions, some hovering by the teacher's desk to access materials. All were obviously fully engaged. (p. 48)

What Emdin describes here is beautiful, controlled chaos, orchestrated by a culturally-competent teacher who understood how to strike a “...delicate balance between structure and improvisation” (Emdin, 2016, p. 50). This is the type of “magic” that needs to be lifted up and proliferated throughout our educational system, not stifled.

In his article where he explores the culturally relevant practices of black men teachers, Marvin Lynn (2006) argues that the black community suffers a great loss whenever a black man exits the profession (p. 2500). In his interview, M’baku shared a similar idea, remarking that the profession (specifically students), too, suffers a great loss when these men leave. Never seeing a black man at the helm of a classroom could adversely impact the psyches of *all* students, regardless of racial, ethnic identity. Since teachers represent power and authority to students (as administrators represent power and authority to teachers), the lack of black men teachers only congeals predominant stereotypes of black men within the minds of students, as they never get to witness them in positive lights and then perhaps, begin to form counter-narratives. Students of color (specifically boys of color) may be doubly affected by this absence, likely to develop inferiority complexes and to struggle to envision bright futures with no reflections of hope staring back at them.

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## Appendix A

### Oral Script for Participant Recruitment & Preliminary Screening Questions

#### *At My Church & Other Local Churches...*

Good morning, Brothers and Sisters in the Lord! By a show of hands, how many of you are aware of the lack of black men that work as teachers in U.S. schools? (*waits for audience response*). For those of you who don't know, black men currently make up just 0.6% of this nation's teaching workforce. This is a serious issue that can and is affecting children of all racial and gender groups, particular black boys.

I'm currently enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, pursuing a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis. The shortage of black men teachers is the focus of my work and I need your help. If you're a black man who used to teach (or if you know a black man who used to teach) and are interested in sharing your experiences, please come find me after church. I'd simply need to take down your [or that person's] contact information. Let's figure out how to combat this issue together. Thanks so much and God bless!

#### *At Other Public Venues (e.g., barbershops, gyms, etc.)...*

Hey, Ya'll! My name is Chuks and I'd appreciate only need a minute of your time. By a show of hands, how many of you are aware of the lack of black men that work as teachers in U.S. schools? (*waits for audience response*). For those of you who don't know, black men currently make up just 0.6% of this nation's teaching workforce. This is a serious issue that can and is affecting children of all racial and gender groups, particular black boys.

I'm currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The shortage of black men teachers is the focus of my work and I need your help. If you're a black man who used to teach (or if you know a black man who



used to teach) and are interested in sharing your experiences, please let me know. I'll be here for about 20-30 minutes. I'd simply need to take down your [or that person's] contact information.

Let's figure out how to combat this issue together. Thanks so much!

---

1. Are you a former schoolteacher in the United States? *(if yes, proceed to question #2)*
2. How many years were you a schoolteacher? *(if 4+ years, proceed to question #3)*
3. What type of school(s) – charter, private, or public – did you teach in?

## Appendix B

### Primary Participant Consent Form



### Research Participant Information and Consent Form

**Title of the Study:** *Education's Silent Exodus: A Critical Exploration of Race & the Shortage of Black Men in the Teaching Profession*

**Principal Investigator:** Peter Miller, Faculty Member/Academic Advisor; (608) 262-3771 [office] / pmmiller2@wisc.edu [email]

**Researcher:** Nnabugwu “Chuks” Ekwelum Jr., Ph.D. Candidate; (857) 237-1313 [cell] / ekwelum@wisc.edu [email]

### DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about black men in the United States' teaching profession. Currently, less than 1% of teachers in this country are black men, the fewest of any other teacher population. The purpose of this study is to take a deep look at this issue to determine what its causes and potential solutions might be. You have been asked to participate because, as a black man who used to teach, you could play a major part in accomplishing this goal by sharing your experiences. Below are a few more details:

- This study will include former black men teachers from the Northeast region of the United States and persons with close connections to these former black men teachers.
- All interviews will be conducted at the location(s) of each participant's choosing.
- Audio tapes will be made of each interview. Only the Principal Investigator, the Researcher, and/or other authorized transcription personnel will hear and/or transcribe the audio messages of these interviews.
- Audio tapes will be kept by the Researcher indefinitely, until it has been determined that they are no longer necessary – at which point, they will be destroyed.
- All data collected will be retained indefinitely for use in possible future research.

### WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to commit to three or four in-person interviews where you will be asked a variety of questions. A fourth interview would only be necessary if, for whatever reason, you are unable to complete one of the previous ones. At some point, in one of these interview sessions, you may also be asked to provide an artifact or object that represents you and/or your teaching style. **Each interview session will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour.**

**\*Note:** Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind, you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

The Researcher anticipates minor risks to you from participation in this study, such as breach of confidentiality and/or interview questions that could elicit strong feelings.

**ARE THERE ANY DIRECT BENEFITS TO ME?**

There are no guaranteed direct benefits to you from participation in this study.

**WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR MY PARTICIPATION?**

Yes. To honor your time commitment, you will receive three gift cards (each totaling 25 dollars) for participating in this study. You will receive each gift card at the conclusion of each interview.

**\*Note:** If you decide to withdraw from this study, prior to its end, you will receive gift cards only for the interview(s) you participated in. For example, if you only participate in one interview session, you will only receive one gift card of 25 dollars. Additionally, if you only participate in two interview sessions, you will only receive two gift cards of 25 dollars each. **Full completion of this study is participation in all three required interview sessions.**

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Pseudonyms (i.e., fake labels) will be used for names of persons and/or places in publication.

**\*Note:** If you choose to participate in this study, the Researcher would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allowing the Researcher to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

**WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any point in time. Feel free to direct these questions to the Principal Investigator, Peter Miller, or the Researcher, Nnabugwu “Chuks” Ekwelum Jr.

**\*Note:** If you are not satisfied with the response(s) of the Principal Investigator, have more questions, or want to speak with someone else about your rights as a research participant, you should contact UW’s Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at (608) 263-2320.

\*\*\*Your signature below indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research, *and* voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ *I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.*

## Appendix C

### Semi-Structured Interview #1 Protocol

1. What do you most enjoy doing on your free time?
2. What motivates you to get out of bed each morning?
3. What three words would you use to describe yourself as a person?
  - b) Would other people describe you in the same way(s)? Why or why not?
4. When are you at your happiest?
  - b) Your saddest?
5. Over the years, what is the most important life lesson you have learned?
6. In your opinion, what does this world need more of, in order to improve?

## Appendix D

### Semi-Structured Interview #2 Protocol

1. What is your heritage or family background?
2. What aspect(s) of your heritage or family background are you most proud of and why?
3. Please describe what it was like growing up in your household.
4. Did your upbringing influence your decision to become a teacher? If so, why or how? If not, who and/or what did?
5. How supportive of you was your family when you decided that you were going to teach for a living?
6. Growing up, was school a place you enjoyed going to each day? Why or why not?
7. Which teacher(s) made the greatest impact on you in school? Please describe this teacher(s).

## Appendix E

### Semi-Structured Interview #3 Protocol

1. Using your artifact, please describe your teaching style.
2. What was the most rewarding aspect(s) of being a teacher for you?
  - b) The most challenging aspect(s)?
3. Would you say that all of your colleagues faced the same challenges and/or pressures that you faced as a teacher? Why or why not?
4. Did you generally feel valued by your colleagues?
  - b) By your school's leadership team?
5. What specific moment(s) helped finalize your decision to leave the teaching profession?
  - b) What was or has been the hardest part of this decision for you?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me in terms of the importance of black men in the classroom, some burning thoughts that you have on the issue, that you just want to share?

## Appendix F

### Supplemental Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. What is your relationship to [*Primary Participant Name*] and how long have you known him?

2. How would you describe [*Primary Participant Name*] as a person, in general?

\*3. Was there ever a time that [*Primary Participant Name*] discussed his experiences as a teacher with you? If so, were those experiences negative or positive? Please explain.

*\*(backup for question #3, if not):*

Was there ever a time you got to observe him in his role as a teacher? If so, what did that look like?

4. If [*Primary Participant Name*] were still in the classroom today, what specific impact (in your opinion) would he have on his students?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about [*Primary Participant Name*]?



## Appendix G

## Coding Memo #1

<b>Memo Date:</b>	12/14/18	<b>Basic Patterns to Look for:</b>	<i>Frequency, Sequence, Similarity, and/or Difference</i>
<p><b>*Research Question:</b> <i>In what ways do both institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession?</i></p>			
<p><b>Purpose:</b> [OPEN CODING] To develop a solid "feel" of the qualitative data I collected via first round interviews with my primary participants. Though they serve a collective purpose throughout the study (e.g. - <i>What three words would you use to describe yourself as a person?</i> re: self-concept), the questions I posed during these particular interviews were intentionally-random, not geared toward a singular, specific topic. They were primarily meant to help me build rapport with each man and to gradually ease them into the crux of my study (re: past life as a teacher). In this go-around, I spent time annotating everything in the transcripts that revealed something about their emotions, racial (and social) consciousnesses, passions, and belief systems [about the world and about themselves].</p>			
<p><b><u>Emergent Themes/Patterns:</u></b></p> <p>*Re: Question #2 - All 5 men are intrinsically motivated by someone (e.g. - children, immigrant parents, etc.) or something (e.g. - survival from past hardships, a higher calling, etc.); they are not motivated by artificial means like money</p> <p>*^4 out of the 5 men spoke adamantly about either their own children or the children of their siblings (e.g. - how much they fuel their desires for success, how much they enjoy spending time with them and encouraging them to do their best, etc.)</p> <p>*Re: Question #3 - All 5 men have positive concepts of themselves, yet 3/5 were uncertain that others would see them positively</p> <p>*Re: Question #5 - All 5 men take pleasure in helping others/witnessing others have success</p> <p>*Re: Question #7 - All 5 men demonstrated a high level of social awareness, commonly citing a need for more unity [across <i>and</i> within racial lines] and more people being concerned for the humanity of others</p>		<p><b><u>Procedural Questions/Changes:</u></b></p> <p>One of the reasons why I like the semi-structured interview format is because it's flexible and allows for a more conversational "feel" to interviews. In hindsight, I wish I had more consistently leapt on opportunities to ask targeted, follow-up questions - ones that transcend beyond a simple [and broad] question like, <i>Can you say more about that?</i> As evident by these transcripts, the opportunities were there. Moreover, I wish I had asked questions that pushed participants to be more metacognitive (e.g. - <i>Why is that a belief system you hold so strongly? What past or present experience(s) - good or bad - have shaped that belief system for you?</i>). I wonder if it had crossed my mind to seize such opportunities at some point during these interviews. Maybe I held back for fear of them not being so willing to share something so personal, so early in the interview process? Maybe I felt that not enough interviewer-interviewee trust had been established yet?</p>	

## Appendix H

## Coding Memo #2

<b>Memo Date:</b>	12/24/18	<b>Basic Patterns to Look for:</b>	<i>Frequency, Sequence, Similarity, and/or Difference</i>
<p><b>*Research Question:</b> <i>In what ways do both institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession?</i></p>			
<p><b>Purpose:</b> [OPEN CODING] To develop a solid "feel" of the qualitative data I collected via second round interviews with my primary participants. The questions I posed during these particular interviews were geared toward learning about participants' personal backgrounds and upbringings. Having this information was critical in regard to helping me understand their motivations and inclinations more deeply, which, in turn could translate into rich, complementary narratives to the ones generated from their former lives as classroom teachers. Additionally, this information (similar in nature to information gathered during round one interviews) helped illustrate how various pieces (i.e. - ethnicity, family history and upbringing, [positive and negative] experiences in school, involvement with law enforcement and the justice system, etc.) have worked together to form their overall identities, today. In this go-around, I again spent time annotating everything in the transcripts that revealed something about their emotions, racial (and social) consciousnesses, passions, and belief systems [about the world and about themselves].</p>			
<p><b><u>Emergent Themes/Patterns:</u></b></p> <p>*All 5 men demonstrated a keen sense of racial and social awareness, describing multiple childhood experiences through racial and social lenses (e.g. - <i>I guess the white teachers were a little more afraid of me...</i> - Julius, <i>7th grade, 8th grade year was like a rude awakening into racism.</i> - Dorian)</p> <p>*Re: Question #1 - All 5 men have at least 1 parent who is an immigrant, meaning that they had to traverse along multiple ethnic borders/cultures growing up</p> <p>*Re: Question #2 - 4 out of 5 men focused on their ethnic backgrounds/cultures when responding to what about their heritage they're proud of; however, 1 does not identify with his ethnic background/culture, but identifies with Hip Hop and what it represents for black people, instead</p> <p>*All 5 men exuded pride in being black and/or multi-ethnic throughout various points in their interviews (e.g. - <i>I'm black so I'm proud of that - I love that.</i> - Julius, <i>There's greatness within myself and within my people.</i> - Cole, etc.)</p>		<p><b><u>Procedural Questions/Changes:</u></b></p> <p>Might a group interview of these men have been a helpful [or necessary] addition to my study? I think a meet up like that would've been POWERFUL and affirming for each participant (and for me, personally), but would it have been necessary? Though all 5 of these men live in the Northeast region of the U.S., how/when would I have even gotten them together at a mutual time and location? As a person of color, does working in a predominantly white institution automatically heighten your level of racial awareness (<i>per the responses on race that I received from Nate</i>)? What types of responses would I have received if I had asked participants why they repeated certain phrases or sentences? Could a move like this annoy someone, especially if repetition was done unconsciously when trying to recall an experience(s)? I generally didn't follow up on repeated phrases or sentences, assuming that what was repeated was of extreme importance.</p>	

\*Re: Question #3 - 2 out of 5 men had both their mothers *and* fathers in their lives growing up; the other 3 who didn't at least had their mothers as that constant parental figure

\*For the majority of these men, their mothers (some former school teachers, some not) played significant roles in terms of influencing them to enter teaching

\*4 out of 5 men entered teaching because they felt it was their calling/duty/responsibility to do so (i.e. - to "pay it forward" and to give back)

\*Re: Question #5 - 4 out of 5 men described being well supported by their family members upon deciding to enter teaching; reasons commonly given: teaching being seen as respectable in their communities and/or their family members just being happy/relieved that they were doing something positive with their lives

\*1 man worked on the "other side of the fence" and taught predominantly white students as an attempt to "build allies in *the struggle* and desire to counter majoritarian narratives of black men

\*Re: Question #6 - The majority of the men recalled hating grade school as boys, citing that they'd either been targeted by other (i.e. - white) students and/or teachers, "always put in trouble;" 1 was sent to a juvenile detention center for some time and 1 was arrested for a rape allegation at the age of 12

\*The importance of mentorship was explicitly and implicitly conveyed throughout various parts of these interviews; while the need for affinity was communicated in these responses, 1 man noted that *it doesn't matter whether or not his mentor looks like him - all that matters is that the mentor has qualities he can aspire to (see Nate's 3rd interview transcript, p. 20)*

## Appendix I

## Coding Memo #3

<b>Memo Date:</b>	12/26/18	<b>Basic Patterns to Look for:</b>	<i>Frequency, Sequence, Similarity, and/or Difference</i>
<p><b>*Research Question:</b> <i>In what ways do both institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession?</i></p>			
<p><b>Purpose:</b> [OPEN CODING] To develop a solid "feel" of the qualitative data I collected via third and final round interviews with my primary participants. The questions I posed during these particular interviews were geared toward learning about participants' past lives as classroom teachers - essentially the "meat and potatoes" of my study. Having this information was critical in regard to helping me understand their motivations and inclinations more deeply. Additionally, this information (in conjunction with information gathered from rounds one and two interviews) helped me to answer both of my research questions. In this go-around, I again spent time annotating everything in the transcripts that revealed something about their emotions, racial (and social) consciousnesses, passions, and belief systems [about the world and about themselves, within the institutions they were employed in].</p>			
<p><b><u>Emergent Themes/Patterns:</u></b></p> <p>*Re: Question #2 - In some fashion, all 5 men found the most rewarding aspect of teaching to be witnessing students thrive and succeed, especially in areas where they had once struggled</p> <p>*Re: Question #3 - 3 out of 5 men felt valued by their colleagues/co-workers, commonly citing that there was often a palpable feeling of camaraderie among them, as they all served "in the trenches" together</p> <p>*Re: Question #3 - 3 out of 5 men felt valued and/or supported by their admin/superiors (<b>caveat: 1 of these men worked under multiple administrations, 1 that was supportive, 1 that wasn't</b>); reasons for this collective sentiment: he/she challenged them to grow/improve, he/she showed them compassion and understanding, especially in challenging circumstances, he/she provided them with resources they needed to be effective practitioners, and/or he/she appreciated them for whom they were and didn't try to change them</p> <p>*Re: Question #3 - Only 1 out of 5 men felt valued by their colleagues/co-workers <i>and</i> their admin/superiors - he happened to be the only 1 who left teaching solely to advance his own career, not necessarily compelled or</p>		<p><b><u>Procedural Questions/Changes:</u></b></p> <p>I wanted participants to expound upon and to make perfectly clear whether or not the stressors they faced as teachers were common among <i>all</i> teachers or unique to themselves. However, I didn't consistently prompt them to draw this sharp distinction as much as I probably should have (particularly with Julius - <i>see page 10 of his interview transcript</i>). Additionally, staying on Julius, being that he worked in 3 different types of schools (charter, public, <i>and</i> private), should I have amended his interview questions to focus on his experiences in each type of school or was my prompting for follow up after certain questions sufficient? I'm leaning toward the latter. Explicitly asking him to respond to targeted questions about each work experience would've not only made this interview much longer, but it wouldn't have made total sense, considering that I'm not doing a comparative study on each type of school (something to maybe include in my implications for further research section?)</p> <p>I was ESTATIC to hear each participant "go there" and openly discuss race and how it manifests in schooling - a key piece of my study's focus! Could this be ascribed to the way I tiered my questions, the types of questions I posed, or simply the fact that they knew they could "take</p>	

forced to leave due to being tired of dealing with oppressive structures, racial micro-aggressions, etc.

\*Re: Question #4 - All 5 men cited various challenges faced while teaching, many of which happen to be supported by literature I came across for my review: being burdened by extra work demands, fatigued by the lack of self-accountability or willingness to best serve students by their peers, racial micro-aggressions/hostility (against them *and/or* against students), institutional politics and practices, having to "put on" for their entire racial/gender group every day, etc.

\*The majority of these men recalled having to really work on their craft before experiencing success with their students; none of them described themselves as having an inherent ability to teach effectively (it was more so an ability to weave in their experiences and belief systems into their teaching styles/practices; *see transcript of interview with "Robert" for his take on this myth-busting idea*)

\*Throughout each interview, all 5 men demonstrated a high level of social *and* racial awareness, often providing anecdotes (specifically negative ones) through racial lenses; generally, they all grew increasingly comfortable discussing race and how notions of race shaped their experiences with each round of interviewing

\*For all 5 men, a departure from the classroom didn't necessarily mean a departure from education or working with students (and their families) in some capacity; none could quit "cold turkey," 3 still work in education/education-related programs, 2 expressed the possibility making a return to the classroom (but under different circumstances than what they experienced before)

their masks off" with me as a fellow black man (or a combination of all of these reasons?

Based on the various responses I got that suggested that walking away from teaching spiritually *and* mentally for a lot of these men was not the case, maybe I could've included a culminating, direct question such as, *Would you ever return to teaching?* This would've replaced question #8 that, in hindsight, seems too open-ended

## Appendix J

## Coding Memo #4

<b>Memo Date:</b>	12/26/18	<b>Basic Patterns to Look for:</b>	<i>Frequency, Sequence, Similarity, and/or Difference</i>				
		<b>Coding Categories:</b>	<i>Self-Concept</i>	<i>Memory</i>	<i>Belief System</i>	<i>Racial/Social Awareness</i>	<i>Institutional Politics</i>
<p><b>*<u>Research Question:</u></b> <i>In what ways do both institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession?</i></p>							
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> [AXIAL CODING] To go back through all transcripts from all rounds of interviews with primary participants and to label (i.e. - color code) portions of them that I found striking and relevant to answering my research questions, according to the coding categories they fall into. Here's where I begin to really make connections between codes to drive viable theories. Above are the final categories, based on what emerged from the data collected (<i>specific to primary participants only</i>). These categories, commonly recurring in the data, will help me generate and expound upon larger themes (i.e. - synthesize them and make connections) within the findings and implications chapters of my dissertation.</p>							
<p><b><u>Emergent Themes/Patterns:</u></b></p> <p><i>(Already identified in memo #s 1, 2, &amp; 3)</i></p>			<p><b><u>Procedural Questions/Changes:</u></b></p> <p><i>(Already identified in memo #s 1, 2, &amp; 3)</i></p>				

## Appendix K

## Coding Memo #5

<b>Memo Date:</b>	12/28/18	<b>Basic Patterns to Look for:</b>	<i>Frequency, Sequence, Similarity, and/or Difference</i>	
		<b>Coding Categories:</b>	<i>Fresh Perspective</i>	<i>Affirmation</i>
<p><b>*Research Question:</b> <i>In what ways do both institutional and racial factors contribute to black men teachers' decisions to exit the teaching profession?</i></p>				
<p><b>Purpose:</b> [OPEN CODING &amp; AXIAL CODING] To develop a solid "feel" of the qualitative data I collected via interviews with my secondary participants before using it to complement (or contrast) data acquired from primary participant interviews. Meant to help me deepen the profiles of each primary participant, the questions I posed during these particular interviews (conducted with family members, friends, former colleagues, former classmates, mentors, and even former students) were concerned with their personal traits, character traits, professional traits (and experiences), and value (as perceived by others). In annotating these transcripts, I searched specifically for a.) fresh perspectives that I had not encountered during interviews or in my research for my literature review and/or b.) statements that affirmed what I discovered during interviews and in my research for my literature review.</p>				
<p><b><u>Emergent Themes/Patterns:</u></b></p> <p>*All [secondary] participants spoke highly/favorably of their respective [primary] participants</p> <p>*Re: Question #3 - Only 2 out of 8 [secondary] participants could recall their respective [primary] participants sharing positive experiences they had while teaching</p> <p>*Re: Backup to question #3 - 7 out of 8 [secondary] participants got a chance to observe their respective [primary] participants interacting with youth in some capacity (e.g. - in the classroom while teaching, on a sports field while coaching, in a supermarket, etc.)</p> <p>*Responses provided by [secondary] participants who knew [primary] participants for eight years or less tended to be less specific, detailed, and/or flowered with relevant context</p>		<p><b><u>Procedural Questions/Changes:</u></b></p> <p>Did the strength of my base questions for these interviews match the strength of my primary participant interview questions? How do I integrate the responses yielded in these interviews into my dissertation in a way(s) that is meaningful and makes sense? How do I integrate the responses yielded in these interviews into my dissertation in a way(s) that doesn't seem like I'm merely checking the authenticity of my primary participants' accounts?</p>		