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by

Kevin B. Thompson

August 2017

ANALYZING BLACK MALE DISTINTERST IN TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2017

## Acknowledgement

To my wife, Tara, for being my strength, my love, my rock...

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foundation

To all those who gave, who advised, who encouraged, and cheered me on...

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## Abstract

**Background:** The American teacher workforce has maintained homogeneity while the classroom has become increasingly diverse. One reason for the homogeneity is the educational system's ineffective attempts at educating Black boys, and subsequently, recruiting and retaining Black male teachers. Academia's over-utilization of deficit frameworks within investigations of this phenomenon have managed to portray the overall Black male educational experience as negative. **Purpose:** Giving Black males the opportunity to articulate their disinterest in teaching is the primary goal of this study. By examining the effect of educational experience upon the Black male narrative, the researcher can substantiate current claims of academia or report counternarrative(s) to predetermined explanations used by academia to explain the shortage of Black male teachers. **Methods:** A survey of thirty (30) Black men between the ages of 18 and 30 was conducted. Results were tabulated and used to develop an interview protocol for a subsequent focus group. After data analysis, three follow-up interviews were conducted to authenticate themes discovered within the data analysis. The narratives of those interviewed were used to either validate or counter findings. **Results:** Results show that Black male teachers are vital to students inside and outside of the classroom. While many shared similar stories, the Black male educational experience is comprehensive in nature, contrary to popular narratives. While salary was identified as a reason for their disinterest, negative educational experiences along with negative perceptions of current policies and pedagogical approaches were considered to be as important to their decision making as potential salary. **Keywords:** black males, black men, counternarrative, disinterest in teaching.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

As a conscious Black man in America, it is my duty to investigate the effect of past experiences on present realities to create a better future for myself and my ilk. As an academic, it is my responsibility to analyze and critique societal paradigms, construct or de-construct theoretical frameworks, and report the findings. As a personification of these roles, I am obligated to investigate an area that has affected the realities and futures of countless Black men in America: education. The education of Black males in America has suffered, in part, from a shortage of Black male teachers. Given America's reputation for diversity and inclusion, it is disturbing to report that the amount of Black men serving in this capacity is extremely small. Therefore, as a result of my duties, I must examine and report the reasons for the dearth in hopes of improving the educational experiences of other Black men.

### **Researcher Introspection**

I was curious about the educational experiences of Black men and wanted to know if these experiences had any bearing on their decision to avoid the classroom. I was also interested in finding reasons for the apparent demographical dislike of the profession. During a period of introspection, I recalled popular narratives about the profession, specifically, the ones that discouraged me from entering the field. I wondered if other Black men had similar stories, stories that discouraged them from considering a career in education.

After reading several articles and taking part in many conversations with other Black men, I discovered that there was an instantaneous disdain for the profession. I

combed through old news articles and watched videos on the subject and discovered an overabundance of negative press. It appeared that depressing interviews and disheartening statistics were prerequisites for the media's circulation of any narrative concerning America's lack of Black male teachers.

***Predetermination.*** I shifted my focus to academia's view of the topic. Article after article revealed an absence of Black male perspective on subjects such as teaching, pedagogy, and educational experience. It was as if Black men were denied the opportunity to articulate their position. Many articles revolved around popular deficit-modeled frameworks. It appeared that academia was guilty of "predetermining" the Black male perspective on education and teaching. My personal definition of predetermination is the application of a theoretical framework within a given research area that is based upon a preconceived notion that does not include the perspective of the subject in question. Primarily, the Black male narrative on education and teaching as a profession was written by those investigating the phenomenon instead of those living the experience. I was angry about academia's reluctance to include the Black male perspective on a subject about Black males. It was then that I decided to give Black men the opportunity to tell their story.

Following my reaction, I engaged in more conversations with other Black men to see if my anger was well-founded. I discovered that some had "predetermined" not to have anything to do with education after high school or college, especially any considerations about teaching within its common context. I assumed this predetermination was predicated upon on past experiences with education, societal attitudes toward education and Black men, along with personal and societal views on

teaching as a profession. Contrarily, I wondered if I was guilty of doing the same thing I accused academia of doing by negating Black male perspective on the subject while unconsciously framing their (our) narrative within a deficit framework of some sort.

### **Renewed Research Focus**

So, I decided to tell their (our) story. I wanted to report our negated perspectives, thoroughly committed to offering Black men the opportunity to tell their reasons for avoiding teaching as a profession. To do this, I needed to find out what Black men felt about the profession. The first question is an inquiry about the current attitudes of Black men between the ages of 18 and 30 toward teaching as a profession. I selected this age range for personal reasons. It was within this age range that I began making pivotal life decisions. Simultaneously, it was a time of personal discovery. As I matured, my focus moved away from making money to transforming my community. I wanted to know if other Black men have felt this “calling” and if they have avoided this calling because of past experiences, present perspectives, or peer pressure.

The next question deals with identifying factors influencing their decision not to teach. I wanted to know the impact education level, salary, cultural perceptions of teaching, self-efficacy, educational experiences, etc., have on their disinterest in the trade. So, if the media and academia are murky about the importance of the Black male perspective as it pertains to education and making it the profession of choice, why have I deemed it important?

This study is important for one major reason: it provides a platform for Black males to share their perspective on the issue (and other issues pertaining to Black males) and will contribute to the current body of knowledge and practice by including the critical

piece needed to understand the dearth of Black male teachers –which is the Black male perspective. By adding this perspective to research dedicated to this inquiry, researchers will increase the contextual richness of their findings with the inclusion of extra, albeit necessary, layers of validity and generalizability through the self-reported narratives of the subject(s).

### **Problem Statement**

In describing the need for more Black male teachers, we must discuss the factors that caused the need. The American classroom is one of America’s most diverse spaces. In an article entitled “Where Are All the Black Male Teachers?”, the author notes that “minority enrollment has skyrocketed over the last two decades” (Hawkins, 2015). Within an article aptly named “Black Male Teachers a Dwindling Demographic”, the writer asserts “America’s K-12 schools have never been more diverse, with nonwhite students now outnumbering whites...” (Mitchell, 2016). Other commentary on the current state of the American public classroom seem to validate this trend.

However, reports about the American classroom’s growing diversity indicate a lull in diversity within the teacher workforce. Statements such as “the number of teachers of color has lagged” (Hawkins, 2015), “...efforts to diversify the nation’s teaching corps haven’t kept pace” (Mitchell, 2016), and “the teaching profession is very white” (Brenneman, 2015) echo this sentiment. Goldring et al. (2014) report that out of America’s 3,377,900 teachers (counting those teaching in traditional public schools and public charter schools), only 229,400 were Black teachers, with Black women accounting for a majority of this number. In his “Leading a Life of Consequence” speech, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2011) stated that “less than two percent of our

nation's teachers are African-American males. Less than one in 50!" Hawkins (2015) states that "...nationally, no more than 2 percent of teachers in the nation's public schools are Black men." Mitchell (2016) repeats the statistic saying, "nationally, black males represent roughly 2 percent of all public school teachers." He continues on to say that the U.S. teaching corps remains "overwhelmingly white and female" and that "black men are the most underrepresented demographic in the teaching ranks" (Mitchell, 2016).

According to John King, the Secretary of Education preceding Betsy DeVos, America needs "a teaching force that is as diverse as our students" (King, 2016). Hawkins (2015) quotes an African-American educator in California who says that his state is "crying out for more men and more African-American men...in the classroom." It is clear that the media is concerned with the recruitment for more men of color given the level of diversity within America's classroom.

### **Statement of purpose**

The purpose for this study is two-fold: 1) to investigate counter-narratives within current discourse concerning Black males and education 2) to provide Black males with an intellectual platform to present their reasoning(s) for the Black male exodus from education as a profession. I believe that in order to affect the nation, one must influence the classroom. One must be willing to entrench themselves in the fight of education. Teaching should be a vocation, not a job. It requires passion, competency, and care. In order for public schools to compete with private schools, administrators and policymakers must focus on establishing and maintaining stability and consistency within the classroom. As it relates to teaching, attrition and disinterest are costly instances. Richard Ingersoll (2001) states "teacher turnover is a significant phenomenon, and a

dominant factor behind the demand for new teachers and the difficulties schools encounter adequately staffing classrooms with qualified teachers” (p. 501).

While the impact of attrition is well documented, predicting who and when is guessing at best. This notion of speculation is applicable to an entity all but disappearing from the American classroom. Black male teachers are integral members of the teacher workforce. However, current statistics highlight a phenomenon of interest among Black male teachers. Black male teachers account for 2% of the teacher workforce roughly (Graham & Ervin, 2011) with this number projected to decrease for years to come.

### **Research Questions**

The research question and sub-question associated with this study is intentionally introspective due to my personal experience with the apprehension associated with selecting a college major, trade, or career path. The following research question and sub-question will anchor this study:

- 1) What are the current attitudes of Black men between the ages of 18 and 30 toward teaching as a profession?
  - a) What factors affect Black male interest in teaching?

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the primary focus of this study is to analyze and discover factors associated with the dearth of African-American male teachers within the American educational system. The secondary focus is to allow Black males the opportunity to express their sentiments about their educational and professional choices sans predetermined theoretical frameworks. However, the goal of this study is to improve the educational experience of Black males in America, provide American students with more opportunities to interact with Black men, and to increase the overall morale of Black men

as it pertains to education. In the next chapter, we will highlight themes often associated with the Black male education experience and their contributions to the current state of Black male education.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

America's population is very diverse, yet the American teacher workforce is homogenous, relatively speaking. Ensuring future tolerance on cultural and ethnic levels requires that we address current attrition patterns. In order to examine these movements fully, researchers must consider personal factors responsible for influencing a black man's decision to enter the classroom. The writer attributes his interactions with male teachers with the formation of his identity as an educator/teacher. He further substantiates that he based his educational and pedagogical philosophies on these connections. He felt that they were father figures, role models, and disciplinarians. The writer felt that these were their unwritten roles. They were obligated to carry themselves in a manner familiar to black children. Within the African American community, this is a preconceived notion commonly associated with black teachers. This burden of conventional expectations frames the identity of the black male teacher. It is assumed that these individuals enter the profession with knowledge of these concepts. This is an unfair responsibility and the African American community cannot assume that teachers of color, especially male teachers of color, should bear the weight of these expectations.

There is very little research regarding Black males and attrition. Introducing notions of perception and belief into the inquiry intensifies the scarcity. Nevertheless, the purpose of this literature review is to highlight trends regarding black male thought and perception regarding education as student or teacher and the impact these factors have on black male participation within education. Before the literature review can begin, the writer will recap the research questions and provide the reader with a trajectory of



investigation. The first research question is an inquiry surrounding preconceptions black men have about teaching. The writer searched for resources addressing preconceptions of Black males regarding education, along with works dealing with external factors influencing their (black males) views on teaching and education. The second research question involves Black men who currently serve as teachers and the discomforts associated with their experiences. The final question involves an investigation into behavioral, personal, and environmental reasons why black men leave education or avoid education as a profession.

The writer observed several themes within the literature that are worth noting. The first theme to be identified were ideas of perception, belief, and attitude as they pertain to male teachers of color –especially Black men who are either leaving education as a student or as a profession. The second theme deals with the impact the presence of Black men have on teacher education programs – in particular on measures that focus on recruitment and retention of Black men for urban schools. Thirdly, the researcher noted research on the effect culturally relevant practices have on black male perception of teaching and education. Interestingly, the presence or absence of culturally relevant pedagogy and practices dictated black male attitudes toward education. Fourthly, the researcher discovered the relevance of gender roles in black males’ decision to teach. Lastly, the literature introduced narrative inquiry as a viable means of explaining black male thought toward teaching and education. Because the writer believes that his personal reflections are vital to the validity of his research and imperative to this chapter, he may enter some personal reflections written in first person. This is intentional.

## **Media Perception**

Couched within media's commentary about increasing the number of Black male teachers is an underlying theme about the effect of positive exposure. Many educators feel that increasing the number of positive experiences with Black men will aid in changing societal views of Black men. Chris Lloyd, president of Maryland's Montgomery County Education Association at the time of Hawkins' (2015) article made the following observation:

It's not just about Black and brown teachers teaching children who look like them. It's about White children, too, who will be able to see Black men and people of color at the front of the classroom. White kids will hopefully reflect on their positive interactions with Black, male teachers and teachers of color and be able to debunk stereotypes that link them to negative things.

Concurrently, there is a growing concern for the education of young Black boys, a "demographic" as Lynch (2016) notes, "that continues to be misunderstood in P-20 classrooms" whose "misbehavior, learning styles, and social skills are often misconstrued as problems by educators." There is a great deal of research that says the presence of Black men within the classroom would aid in the endeavor of properly educating Black boys. One Black male educator in Hawkins' (2016) article articulates that he as a "professional, college-educated Black man" is better equipped to teach certain life lessons to Black male youth because of his cultural and physiological similarities. As a Black man pondering an entry into teaching and education, it would seem as if my presence in the classroom would be enough to provide students with the required amount of positive interaction needed to sway the public opinion of Black men. While the notion

of simply “showing up” is primarily communicated to Black men and the rest of society through media, the Black male presence within the classroom is more burdensome than advertised; it involves more than merely “showing up.” Black male teachers often encounter more scrutiny and bias while receiving less support and less resources than their white counterparts. Dr. Christopher Emdin, associate professor in the Department of Mathematics, Science, and Technology at Teachers College at Columbia University, explains the weight associated with the Black male classroom presence in his article aptly named, “Why Black Men Quit.” Within this article, Emdin (2016) notes that “Black male teachers are not just expected to teach and be role models,” but are “tasked with the work of disciplinarians...keeping black students passive and quite...suspending them when they commit infractions”, echoing the sentiments of Dr. Travis Jackson Bristol as stated within an article for NPR (Nadworny, 2015). Emdin argues that Black males entering the profession are often required to carry more than the burden of lesson facilitation and classroom management. Because these men look like misunderstood demographic, they are met with the burden of expectation, the role of savior, and students who are hardened by years of inequitable treatment. Emdin (2016) posits:

These students are often struggling with the adverse effects of poverty, the inequitable distribution of resources across communities and the criminalization of black men inside and outside of schools. Black male teachers can serve as powerful role models, but they cannot fix the problems minority students face simply by being black and male.

Emdin (2016) continues the assault on society’s focus on Black male presence within the classroom by calling the phenomenon a “cycle of dysfunction” which is perpetuated

nationwide when “black men, unprepared and burdened with expectations that inhibit them being effective, are placed in front of students and told to teach.” His commentary suggests that Black men are used as scapegoats for society’s inability (or reluctance) to support Black males within educational spaces, be they pupil or teacher. John King, who served as Secretary of Education from 2016 to 2017, sympathizes with Emdin’s concern with the burden of Black male presence within the classroom. Secretary King penned an article for the Washington Post entitled “The invisible tax on teachers of color” in which he describes this “invisible tax” on Black male teachers. King (2016) writes:

“...the “invisible tax” is imposed on them when they are the only or one of only a few nonwhite male educators in the building. It is paid, for example, when these teachers...are expected to serve as school disciplinarians based on an assumption that they will be better able to communicate with African American boys with behavior issues...it is also paid when they have to be on high alert to prepare their students for racism outside of school...and it is paid when teachers of color are seen as the experts on any question of cultural diversity.”

King extends Emdin’s argument by detailing the pain of isolation experienced by Black male teachers in school settings, the stress of articulating the presence and effect of racism against Black males to Black boys, while involuntarily assuming the token role of cultural expert on diversity. Unfortunately, the Black male’s role within the classroom differs from that of his white counterparts. His (Black male) role is expressed in several layers which serve as added psychological weight to the already cerebral responsibility of teaching. King states that the tax takes a chronological and emotional toll on the teachers which leads to burnout (King, 2016). Emdin (2016) states that while King’s notion of an

“invisible tax” is admirable, it is a “cop out” because of the education’s system failure to educate Black boys regardless of the teacher’s race and that “...teachers are not heroes; they do not need to save children, they just need to educate them.” While Emdin and King are due the utmost respect for their work as educators and as African-American men, they are high-profile figures far removed from the proverbial trenches of public education. In other words, willfully visiting the plight of Black male teachers is different from living the plight of Black male teachers. To provide the reader with a baseline view of the Black man’s plight as teacher and subject (of research and commentary), the writer will introduce the perspective of Black males currently serving as teachers.

Introducing this needed and obvious perspective within media’s narrative concerning America’s dearth of Black male teachers is problematic for several reasons. The first reason is that the inclusion of the Black male teacher’s perspective (especially those individuals who have had negative experiences with the profession) may dissuade Black men from entering the classroom. Subsequently, any opposition to the media’s “come one, come all” narrative about the lack of Black male teachers could disrupt popular attitudes on education’s handling of Black male students and Black male teachers. The second reason is that the perspective would deal a blow to the waning credibility of the media and education. Mitchell (2016) introduces us to Chrissell Rhone, an African-American male teacher from New Orleans whose “sense of security...from teaching alongside people who looked like him” was shattered with a forced migration 45 minutes north to Picayune, MS. With the gust of Hurricane’s Katrina’s winds, Rhone exchanged security with isolation, becoming “the lone black teacher at the district’s (Picayune) alternative education center and among only a handful of black male

educators in a district where a majority of students are white” (Mitchell, 2016). While Rhone remains dedicated to his craft, the cultural isolation he experiences within his new surroundings add new dimensions to responsibilities as teacher. Mitchell (2016) describes this feeling when he mentions that researchers investigating teacher retention note that many “nonwhite educators feel voiceless and incapable of effecting change in their schools.” The combination of one’s teaching responsibilities, cultural responsibilities, cultural expertise, and a lack of peer and administrative support is a harmful mix when taken in large quantities. In this instance, Black men are being turned into addicts with education serving as their pusher.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Before we can alleviate the pain of Black male underachievement and under-participation in education professionally, we must do as Steele (1997) suggests and take the actor’s (subject’s) perspective as it relates to research, especially within the context of this study. To do this, researchers must take a hard look at the impact of race within this conversation. While many researchers have conducted investigations under the auspices of utilizing critical race theory as a theoretical framework, many have failed to “honestly and critically examine race and all of its manifestations” (Howard, 2008). The nature of this investigation is predicated upon the introduction and the preservation of the Black male narrative within academic discourses regarding the shortage of Black male teachers in America. It is without fanfare that we admit and acknowledge racism’s incredibly negative impact on societies and societal systems across the globe. While racism is a global phenomenon, assuming that its reach into smaller segments is hampered by its size is to show an ignorance of its foundational scope. Therefore, an analysis of race and its

impact, particularly in the case of education, is warranted and necessary. According to one of the progenitors of critical race theory, recognition of the “normalcy and permanence of racism” is prerequisite to critical inquiry within any societal domain (Bell, 1992). According to Audre Lorde, racism is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and there by the right to dominance” (Lorde, 1992, p.496), reminiscent of Gramsci’s work on cultural hegemony. Marable Manning defined it (racism) as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress” people of color and other minority populations within society “on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (Manning, 1992, p.5). The definitions centers around three principle themes: supremacy, power, and oppression. While broad in scope, these concepts are easily comprehended and readily employed within macro- and micro-segments of society. In order to understand education’s problem with Black boys and its inability to recruit and retain Black male teachers, we as researchers must undoubtedly examine the impact of these constructs on the educational systems and the American classroom. Solorzano (1998) positions critical race theory as the instrument needed to oppose “the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups.” This critical approach to inquiry is instrumental in understanding Black male disinterest in teaching as a profession. Regarding education’s problem with educating Black boys, Howard (2008) understood critical race theory as a “lens that enables a discourse about race, class, and gender to be the centerpiece for an analysis of African American male underachievement.” Howard (2008) continues to highlight the need of a critical race perspective within this conversation by stating that

academia's failure to adequately investigate the role of race within education "may reveal insights into why previous measures have had limited effectiveness for marginalized student populations." We can extend this notion to include the educational system's cultural rigidity and its impact on recruitment, pedagogy, and curriculum making. He continues to say that this negligence has the potential to impact the quality of life for African American males (Howard, 2008). Pelzer (2016) supports this notion by challenging stakeholders to "commit to challenging oppressive ideology by rejecting the concepts of objectivity and meritocracy" asserting that in order to "create a culture where Black men expect to thrive academically", the American educational system "must reframe the Black male experience from a critical perspective."

***Cultural Discontinuity.*** While disidentification appeals to an individual's development, cultural discontinuity is another concept that presents a communal component to the Black male psychic separation from education. Tyler et al. (2008) define cultural discontinuity as "a school-based behavioral process where the cultural value-based learning preferences and practices of many ethnic minority students –those typically originating from home or parental socialization activities –are discontinued at school." Tyler et al. (2008) elaborate with the following statement:

For many ethnic minority students, their introduction to public schooling in the United States includes an introduction to sanctioned behaviors and expectations that often reflect Western or mainstream cultural values. Moreover, given the belief that the dominant cultural heritage found in mainstream society is superior to that of ethnic minority students, exhibition of nonmainstream cultural values is



discouraged or ceases in public school classrooms, whereas the display of mainstream cultural behaviors is deemed appropriate (p. 281)

Within the context of this investigation, it is important to consider a critical race perspective in reviewing education's impact on Black children. The dominant class' culture has permeated the classroom and the family room simultaneously. This poses a problem. This creates an internal conflict within students not belonging to the dominant class by adding the weight of dominant cultural acquiescence at school and to that of parental expectations, causing identity incongruence.

***Dysconsciousness.*** In her article "Dysconscious: Ideology, Identity, and the Miseducation of Teachers," Joyce King defines a term reminiscent of my state of mind while attending undergrad. Dyconsciousness, as defined by King (1991), is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given (pg. 135). I attended Mississippi State University in Starkville, Mississippi. The historic campus teemed with industry, academia, and whiteness. When I attended MSU, the student population was roughly 86% white. Blacks comprised 10% -12% of the remaining population while foreign students made up the rest. The teaching staff mirrored the population. My only experiences with black professors was in U.S. Government during my freshman year and Business Ethics my sophomore year. While I experienced blackness socially, there was a noticeable absence of black male teachers. I began to associate higher education with being male and white. I did not question the lack of black professors. I considered black intelligentsia a novelty as opposed to potential reality. I accepted the order established at Mississippi State. While there was some semblance of

diversity at the university, one understood the overt whiteness of all things academic and the blackness of things menial. As educators, we are required to question all established systems. King (1991) suggests teachers analyze and reflect on their own knowledge and experience while involving students in critiquing of ideologies and the examining of influences on their thinking and identities. As a student, I did not know that associating whiteness with academia and blackness with unskilled labor was racist. King (1991) exposes my ignorance as follows:

Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness.

Within my ignorance, I believed black men unsuitable for higher education. I recognized secondary education as the pinnacle of educational influence for black men, with only a few allowed entries into the bosom of academia. Lynn (2006) supports this notion by stating that Black men are still regarded as an unwanted presence in America's classrooms (pg. 2500). Currently, I am questioning past and current views of black males within higher education. I wonder if my perception was affected by the dearth of black male professors or an inner dialogue sabotaging attempts to establishing my contextual space within education.

According to Lewis (2006), "...teaching in the African American community has been viewed as an honorable and noble profession." My father and other black male teachers considered teaching vital to the community. Preachers and teachers were (and still are) held in high regard in Mississippi. People respected the positions and valued the

opinions of those operating in that capacity. The black male teachers of Benton County instilled a sense of pride, critical consciousness and a drive to become agents of change (Lynn, 2002; Lynn, 2006). Because of their commitment, I longed to make a difference within my community –locally and globally. I wanted to impact hegemonic structures created to marginalize the disenfranchised. I wanted to fight on the behalf of my people. However, my fear arrested me. I avoided my vocation in exchange for familiarity. There was something within the demeanor of black male teachers that bothered me. I sensed that they operated in capacities unknown, within duality reminiscent of Superman. I felt as if they suppressed a piece of themselves for the greater good of the student. I was a free spirit. I wanted to continue life’s journey uninhibited. To assume responsibility for education meant that I would have to relinquish a vital part of my being –my freedom. Black male teachers make concessions daily. Lynn (2006, p. 2500) argues they operate on a continuum between resistance and accommodation ...as a way in which to survive the profession. The vacillation between doing what is right as a teacher and what is required of you as a state employee is taxing mentally and physically. I watched this truth play out in the life of my father. Stresses from work aged him.

While most research surrounding black male teacher attrition deals with recruitment and retention, some scholars have found addressing misconceptions of black male teachers instrumental in addressing attrition. Anthony Brown’s “On Human Kinds and Roles Models: A Critical Discussion about the African American Male Teacher” focuses on how efforts in curbing black male teacher attrition is really an attempt to manage the behavior of black boys. Brown (2012) explains his position in the following passage:

It is not uncommon within the contemporary educational discourse about African American males for school districts, foundations, teacher education programs, and politicians to position these men as potential role models for Black male students. Even within popular discourse, there is an assumption that the connection between a positive adult Black male and a troubled Black male youth could profoundly impact the boy's life (p. 302).

He continues this sentiment by stating "...the Black male teacher is fashioned in a way that subtly reifies problematic raced and gendered stereotypes that privilege the physical capacities of African American men, rather than their mental and pedagogical capacities to work with Black male students (Brown, 2012, p. 311). Many of the black male teachers I came to know and love were imposing physical figures. Reading Brown's piece affords one a differing perspective on initiative developed to recruit black male teachers. Dr. Travis Bristol echoes a comparable sentiment in an article written by Elissa Nadworny for NPR ED. During the interview, Bristol suggests, "black men said their colleagues saw them first as police officers and not teachers (Nadworny, 2015). Bristol continued by stating that their (black male teachers) colleagues sought their help when it came to behavior management and not when it came to matters of pedagogy (Nadworny, 2015). Given this particular set of circumstances, one can sympathize with the frustrations of current black male teachers and apprehension of black males into the classroom.

***Internalized racialism.*** Dr. Kevin Cokley offers a third perspective on this research area with his work on internalized racialism. According to Cokley (2002a), the idea refers to identification with and internalization of both negative and positive

stereotypes about one's racial group. Placing this definition within the context of this study, an example of what Cokley terms as a "racialized Black identity" would be a Black male believing in the negative stereotype that espouses his inability to be effective as a teacher. This idea grounds the notions of disidentification and cultural discontinuity by illustrating the power and influence of stereotype upon the Black male psyche, especially the promotion of negative stereotypes about Black males and education.

***Disidentification.*** One of the more popular conversation topics within education is the widening achievement gap between students, with race and socioeconomic status serving as principal reasons for intellectual variation. However, these explanations are not useful in describing the academic underachievement of Black children. Steele (1992) asserts that "achievement deficits occur even when black students suffer no major financial disadvantage...that even poor black Americans value education highly, often more than whites." This argument suggests the insignificance of using socioeconomic status as an indicator of interest or performance of Black children in education.

Concerning the issue of race, there is an alternative factor to consider. Disidentification, defined by Dr. Claude Steele as "a reconceptualization of the self and of one's values so as to remove the domain as a self-identity", is a concept that suggests that as a defense mechanism, individuals sever ties with a particular domain, entity, or concept "in relation to the self" to maintain a positive image of self (e.g. self-concept, identity). This concept would offer an interpretation on why Black males are underperforming in schools while simultaneously explaining the shortage of Black male teachers within the American teacher corps. Within this context, Black males have distanced themselves from education (educationally and vocationally) in order to preserve (or establish) their

identity. Given society's and academia's common narrative surrounding Black males and education in which the application of deficit thinking (and deficit theoretical frameworks) are commonly used to understand and/or articulate the Black male educational experience, it is possible to suggest this as motive for Black males' minimal involvement with education as an institution or with education as a vocation. Primarily, academics mention the notion of disidentification with academic achievement. In this study, the researcher would extend this thought to include the impact of disidentification on Black male career choice as it relates to the consideration of classroom teaching. To underpin this notion of disinterest and its impact on academic ability and potential career selection, the researcher will introduce the concept of stereotype threat within this discussion. Steele (1997) defines the term as a "social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies." He explains that the "predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype..." (p.614). Using media's general depiction of individuals with extraordinary intellectual prowess as socially (and physically) awkward and unpopular as a basis could explain the Black male desire to recognize the domain of education as an institution with the power to erase any semblance of positive self-image given education's perceived inability to adequately educate and support the Black male, given the consistent reinforcement of this stereotype within media. Osborne's (1997) study on the impact of disidentification on academic achievement illustrates that "African American boys, as a group, are particularly and perhaps uniquely vulnerable to disidentification." Among Black boys, Osborne (1997) notes that there was a low

correlation between self-esteem and academic outcome, meaning that the personal self-image of Black males within this study was not affected by any decline in personal academic achievement. According to Steele (1992), the problem with America's education of Black students is its inability to curtail the onset of disidentification. Osborne (1997) blames the poor academic achievement of Black students on a "system of schooling" that encourages those students to "disidentify with academics." This set of circumstances is antithetical to improving the educational experiences of Black male students and the probability of recruiting Black male teachers. A cultural shift within education and among African American students (especially males) is needed to combat this trend.

### **Identity**

Disidentification, discontinuity, and internalized racialism have offered specialized views on the plight of Black males in education—as students and as potential educators. To understand the complexity of the issue, we must combine the aforementioned paradigms within a centralized domain to crystallize and galvanize the dialogue about Black male disinterest in teaching. Consequently, that domain is identity. For this study, the researcher will use Swanson et al.'s (2002) definition of identity which describes it as "the central psychological element that defines and maintains an individual's sense of self and "other" through developmental changes." According to this definition, identity is a fluid construct moderated by internal and external forces. As one progresses chronologically and experiences more, their identity constantly vacillates between definition and maintenance in attempts to establish and preserve equilibrium. Given the educational experiences of some Black males, any association with education

in a vocational sense is antithetical to their internal belief structure(s), thereby, destroying any semblance of identity equilibrium.

***Stereotype threat.*** Milner and Hoy (2003) introduce stereotype threat (as cited in Wheeler and Petty, 2001, p.804) as means of understanding the reluctance of assuming stereotypical expectations (Milner and Hoy, 2003, p. 264). Stereotype threat (as cited in Wheeler and Petty, 2001, p. 804) is defined as “the pressure an individual faces when he or she may be at risk of confirming negative, self-relevant stereotypes” (Milner and Hoy, 2003, p. 264).

While romantic, assuming the role of surrogate father is daunting, Milner and Hoy (2003) postulate that stereotyped individuals placed within stereotypical contexts bear an extra emotional and cognitive burden (p. 265). Brockenbrough (2012) supports this notion by stating the following:

Over the past decade, a growing chorus of educational stakeholders has called for the recruitment of more Black men into the American teaching profession, casting these men as ideal surrogate father figures for Black youth who may lack adult male role models in their families or communities (pg. 1).

The emotional and cognitive weight associated with surrogate fatherhood could halt entry into education. Studies have shown that a majority of African American children come from single parent homes, generally headed by the mother. This absenteeism has served to erode the esteem associated with fatherhood within the African American community. Brockenbrough (2012) states that in a society that assesses men by their ability to wield patriarchal power, Black males continually face a crisis of patriarchal impotence (pg. 5). Black men are familiar with communal expectations and may be unsure of their ability to



fulfill this perceived obligation, especially if their experiences with fatherhood were not positive and the respect attributed to fatherhood is damaged within their respective community. This undue stress could influence their effectiveness as teachers.

*Perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs.* Studies have shown that perception is an invaluable factor in predicting attrition and avoidance. Lynn (2006) deals with the perceptions of teaching held by black male teachers within a large school in the Midwest. Utilizing a critical race theory framework for the study, Lynn noted that these individuals perceived teaching as an “opportunity to correct social, political, and even economic wrongs” (p.127). According to Lynn (2006), the men extended this sentiment by describing themselves as “change agents, role models or father figures...committed to improving and strengthening the community...” (p.127). Participants saw teaching as a means of facilitating improvement within their classrooms and communities ultimately. Lynn (2006) states, “...race and gender identity caused feelings of racial obligation and responsibility (among the black male teachers) to the Black community” (p.126). These findings support the notion of black men entering education with intentions of alleviating their communities of symptoms commonly related to educational and economic stagnation.

Williams and Williams’ (2006) research on African-American male junior faculty promotion and tenure illustrated the impact of mentorship and academic hegemony on African American male junior faculty perception of the tenure process. In their study, the researchers discovered four strands within the data. The first theme centered on the “lack of an African American male senior faculty member (Williams and Williams, 2006; p.297). Participants in the study noted that the presence of a mentor (a representative of

their ethnicity) would ease the tension often associated with the tenure/promotion process. Along with the presence of a black male senior faculty mentor, the participants considered advice from such individuals helpful to their career paths. The participants' interest in this "guidance" had to do with a perceived "lack of knowledge of the unwritten and unstated rules of promotion and tenure" (p.298). According to Williams and Williams (2006), the participants viewed the tenure/promotion process as more "political than merit-based...more practical than theoretical." The researchers noted that participants felt that success would happen after proper application of the "unstated rules" within the advancement process (p.299). The next factor affecting perception was a "lack of respect for their (participants) research and scholarship (Williams and Williams, 2006; p. 299). Williams and Williams (2006) noticed the following subtopics within the respondents' perceived lack of respect: research interests and topics beyond the mainstream, use of nonconventional research techniques to better address research questions, and publishing in outlets beyond more traditional top-tier journals. The respondents viewed this criticism as their punishment for employing unconventional research methods and for having research interests in areas contrary to department norms. The final observation of the researchers dealt with "service conundrum and quagmire" (p. 300). The participants stated their efforts with "mentoring students; serving on committees, and recruiting only garnered token appreciation" (Williams and Williams, 2006). While departments strongly encouraged Black junior faculty members to engage in service projects, the junior faculty members felt their efforts were "token" in nature only.

Mabokela and Madsen's (2003) research on Black teachers in suburban schools examined "intergroup tensions within suburban schools and the impact those tensions have on the professional experiences of African American teachers." Utilizing various frameworks, the researchers identified two themes affecting African American teacher perception. The first theme identified was Cox's "boundary heightening." As cited in Cox (1994), boundary heightening is the "heightened awareness of differences that exist between majority and minority group members in a given work environment." The researchers observed tension between Black teachers and their European American peers on the issues of pedagogy and management, which pressed the African American teachers to "debunk negative stereotypes European American teachers held about students of color" while "negotiating their insider-outsider status with colleagues" (p. 100). The researchers state that these experience urged intergroups (minority group members and majority group members) to "bond together around similar beliefs and values...creating boundaries that separate this group from those that are perceived as 'different'" (p.100). The aftermath of this separation enabled the facilitation of "negative stereotypes of Black children" and the development of "insider-outsider roles" (Williams and Williams, 2006). The stereotypes occurred through views held and promoted within the majority intergroup. The "insider-outsider" definition is attributed to the perceived dual identity of African-American teachers in the school –insider on all things African Americans, outsider as it relates to the power(s) attributed to the dominant intergroup. The researchers labeled the aforementioned as "role entrapment" (p.105). As cited in Kanter (1977), "role entrapment" means that the African American teachers fit preexisting generalizations that force them to play limited roles within the organization

(Williams and Williams, 2006; p.105). The African-American teacher was “entrapped as the token, a position that invalidated other contribution within the school and limited their upward mobility to positions of authority” (p. 105). The researchers argued that the African American teachers within this setting were “burdened with the psychological pressure of proving their worth” and “pigeonholed into the role of African American expert” (p. 108).

Milner and Hoy (2003) report on self-efficacy, stereotype threat, and persistence provided insight on self-efficacy’s role in teacher perception. The researchers here posit “teacher experience of social and collegial isolation, the burden of invalidating stereotypes among colleagues and students, the importance of students’ and parents’ perceptions and respect, and the role of successful self-reflective experiences” affect teacher self-efficacy (p. 267). Regarding this “social and collegial isolation”, the researchers found that “efficacy is affected as a result of socially unwelcoming environments” (p. 268). One of the reported factors involved in black male teacher attrition is mentioned within the following discovery. During their study, the researchers noted that the subject “bore the burden of invalidating stereotypes among colleagues and students” because of the scarcity of African American teachers within the school (p.268). In essence, the subject played the role of race apologist. Given the subject’s credentials, she was still “relegated to the duty of managing kids others couldn’t handle” (p.271). However, the subject shouldered the task stating that it was her responsibility to demystify or change negative stereotypes about Blacks (p.268). These “responsibilities” took their toll on the subject. However, she countered thoughts of quitting through the implementation of “successful self-reflection experiences” along with reflection on

praises received and respect given to her by the so-called “problem” students and their parents.

Brown’s (2012) article examined “the theoretical implications around positioning the Black male teacher as the central agent of social change for Black male students” (p.296). The author suggested schools placed more emphasis on the “breadth of knowledge and capacities of Black male teachers beyond assigned identity as role model, allowing them the space to become more involved within the fabric and mission of the schools (p. 312). Brown (2012) theorizes teachers felt that Black male teachers were expected to be physically intimidating and use this presence as a means of governing Black boys, which alludes to some of the trepidation of Black men entering education. Brown (2012) noted that Black male teachers wanted to be respected for their ability and not their color and gender.

Graham and Erwin’s (2011) study on the perception of teaching as a career among high-achieving high school-aged boys illustrated the overwhelmingly negative perception Black boys have about teaching and education. Within the data analysis, Graham and Erwin (2011) noticed the following themes regarding Black male thought toward education: negative perceptions of teachers and teaching, schools as oppressive institutions, and African American men as nonconformists. While all of the themes are pertinent, the notion of schools as oppressive was striking. The participants’ answers provided the researchers with additional insight into the areas of avoidance and attrition. The participants felt that teachers (most of their teachers were white) “devalued the experiences of African American males, victimized African Americans through labels and stigmas, and partnered with white parents in disrespecting them.” (p. 406-410).

***Teachers of Color.*** In analyzing the phenomenon of attrition, Brown and Butty (1999) set out to “identify the factors that influence African American male teachers’ choice of teaching as a profession” (p.283). According to Brown and Butty (1999), the researchers conducted a study with the intentions of recognizing the “educational and career aspirations of African American male teachers working in a suburban school.” The following quote is the summary of their findings:

“The relationship between African American students and African American male teachers is a symbiotic one –that is, the number of African American males who go into teaching is influenced by the number of African American males who attend college, which is in turn influenced by the number of African American high school graduates and so on (p. 282).

However, Brown and Butty (1999) recognized the “motivation to teach...the desire to impart knowledge” as the “sole significant predictor” of whether African American male teachers pursued higher education (p. 289). Bryan and Browder’s (2013) inquiry into the “lived experience of male kindergarten teacher” gives the reader some insight into why African American males avoid teaching as a profession (p. 142). Utilizing what they coin as “racial microaggression taxonomy”, Brown and Butty (1999) found that:

“...schools have been hostile places for many Black males, and this lack of cultural responsiveness to this group has painted bleak and distorted images of the academic and professional trajectories for this population at all grade levels, even before school begins” (p. 144).

The researchers illustrate that a perceived enmity between Black males and education is a cause for avoidance of education as a career potentially. Brown and Butty (1999) further

support this notion by remarking that entry into a career that has “degraded, undervalued, and marginalized African American males is not a welcoming and inviting profession in which to work” (p.145). Within their survey of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade African American males on the impact of a “pre-collegiate pathway to teaching program”, researchers Bianco, Leech, and Mitchell (2011) report that the level of respect for teaching careers is low in the African American community (p. 373). The researchers illustrate the need for African American male teachers, high school teachers in particular, when they quote students saying “high school teachers were most reported as being influential in the students’ decision to be a teacher” (p.373). The researchers support this citing student remarks about encouragement from high school teachers as motivation to consider teaching as a viable career option (p.375). Martino and Rezai-Rashti’s (2010) interview of two Caribbean teachers in Toronto, Canada illustrated the need for African American teacher input within conversations regarding the African American male teacher shortage. The researchers found that “...the access of minority teachers to the teaching profession has historically been attributed to systemic racism and economic marginalisation [sic]” (p.260). This statement provides the reader with a framework for understanding the genesis of the current problems of attrition and avoidance. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010) believe that “including the voices of black teachers within the context of debates about male teacher shortage has highlighted the need for a more nuanced analysis which defies simplistic calls for more male teachers as role models in elementary schools” (p.259). Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, and Freitas (2010) discuss attrition among teachers of color recently entering the profession. The intention of the research was to “examine research on retention and turnover of teachers of color,

focusing on new teachers because they leave at disproportionately high rates” (p. 71).

According to the article, the researchers reviewed approximately 70 studies and identified reasons for African American teacher turnover. The researchers found that “...lack of multicultural capital... reflected in low expectations or negative attitudes about students of color, lack of support for culturally relevant teaching, and limited dialogue about race and equity in the school” (p.90) were reasons for African American teacher turnover. The researchers observed, “humanistic commitments” such as “working with students from low-income and non-dominant cultural backgrounds either persuaded teachers of color to remain in the classroom or dissuaded them from continuing if lack of concern for the students was evident (p.90).

In her book, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach*, Ruthellen Josselson (2013) states, “if we imagine ourselves as trying to get ‘answers’ to our ‘questions,’ we have moved outside the dance of creating shared understanding (p. 73).” This quote illustrates the nature of research surrounding black male teacher attrition. A perceived lack of mutual understanding prohibited my entry into teaching. I attributed this dearth of understanding to current findings stating that black men comprised a very small percentage of the teacher workforce. Imagining educational experiences devoid of black male influence and experience was foreign personally. In Benton County, Mississippi, black boys (and girls) were impacted tremendously by the presence of individuals whose hue, culture, and build were similar to our own.

### **Teacher Attrition**

In an attempt to understand black male teacher attrition, one must identify the peculiarities associated with teacher attrition. While defining the phenomenon of attrition



is profitable, the purpose of this literature review is to frame teacher attrition within a subjective context, focusing on the distinctiveness of black male teacher attrition. This literature review will address the black male teacher's influence on critical responsive pedagogy and mention misconceptions surrounding the black male teacher. My experiences with corporate America thwarted my initial views on teacher attrition. If individuals from other professions mentioned their dissatisfaction working on a weekend or holiday, I chided them and articulated my standard reality - working weekends and holidays were mandatory. I was especially intolerant of educators. I considered their work schedule lax. Depending on the region, they worked nine months and enjoyed summers off. I envied their position. However, my position changed after several conversations with teachers in my family. They advised me that the teaching profession was quite challenging. They schooled me on the early mornings and late nights of writing lesson plans and grading papers. They educated me on the multi-faceted nature of their work with students, introducing me to titles such as peacekeeper, doctor, counselor, personal banker, clothier, referee, and store clerk. They introduced me to the world of curriculum formation, development, and implementation, while adhering to the directives of administration. I discovered that my insensitivity was misguided and unjustified. I was guilty of using my personal occupational lenses to view education. I discovered possessed an attitude toward teaching common to society.

Macdonald (1999) states that teacher attrition is frequently positioned as either a problem for work force planning and resources or an indicator of the relatively poor quality of school life and teacher morale (pg. 835). Some assume that a lack of classroom management along with poor working conditions contribute to teachers

leaving the profession. It appears that an increased level of attrition is due to a combination of the aforementioned factors. While taking a global approach to attrition is convenient, researchers understand that attrition is an individual occurrence. Macdonald (1999) supports this by stating "...the study of attrition is positioned within an individualistic, human capital theory perspective" (p. 837). As researchers, we must seek to understand the reasons why people quit. We must ask the question instead of pursuing the answer. In their article *Questioning the Research on Early Career Teacher Attrition and Retention*, Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012) "...consider early career teacher attrition as an identity-making process that involves a complex negotiation between individuals and contextual factors (p.106). In attempts to reduce sweeping generalizations, the researchers determined that individual combinations of personal and contextual factors warrant examination. Schaefer et al. (2012) continue this thought by stating that discourse surrounding teacher attrition and retention focuses on retaining teachers, rather than sustaining them (p. 117). Here, the researchers allude to questioning as a means of answering attrition.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Problem Statement

The American classroom is more culturally, linguistically, ethnically, religiously, economically, and socially diverse than ever before (Douglass Horsford, 2011; Juarez & Hayes, 2010, Hayes & Juarez, 2012). Yet, America's teacher workforce is not reflective of this shift (Hayes & Juarez, 2012; Jarrett, 2015; McIntyre, 2016; Hawkins, 2015; Mitchell, 2016). Current educational statistics indicate that the national K-12 teacher workforce is overwhelmingly homogenous. One noticeable factor contributing to this circumstance is the amount of Black men serving as teachers within public K-12 education presently. Black men make up 2% of the teacher workforce (Chemlynski, 2006; Graham and Ervin, 2011; Kena et al., 2015; Duncan, 2011). Bryan and Ford (2014) argue that Black males make up an even smaller amount of the teacher workforce accounting for only 1% of the total teacher workforce after combining gender and race. Analyzing the dearth of black male teachers is an issue worth investigating.

While addressing the scarcity of Black male teachers is the primary motivation for this study, there is a secondary issue hidden in this narrative. There are many articles concerning the plight of Black male students. Researchers interested in this topic focus on popular themes such as critical race theory, the school-to-prison pipeline, and critically responsive pedagogy/curriculum and the effect these frameworks have on and within the black male educational experience. Hence, most research studies on the Black male educational experience are built on preconceived notions on what Black men *should* encounter within the classroom. Given the amount and availability of the research, it would appear as if most Black males have experienced an overwhelming amount of

misfortune within the classroom, which would explain their absence (in an occupational sense) from it. While many scholars have attempted to articulate these issues, they have omitted the most important ingredient to the solution –the Black male perspective. Consequently, our dearth of Black male teachers resembles the dearth of theoretical approaches to Black male study, with, unfortunately, the dark side of the Black male educational experience serving as the dominant narrative.

An impartial approach to investigating the Black male educational experience would urge researchers to consider counter-narratives within the dominant narrative as a vital part of research. An example of this would be the researcher's educational experiences as a Black man. The researcher did not experience suspension, expulsion, lack of parental involvement, nor a lack of Black male teachers. While there were a few areas for improvement, the researcher's educational experiences were good. Given current research trends, where would this narrative fit within predominant discourses surrounding the Black male educational experience? The problem with academia's initial attempts at articulating and resolving issues within the Black male educational experience is the omission of counter-narratives, especially those that oppose current investigational trends. To disrupt this pattern, researchers must adopt a different approach to inquiry regarding the Black male experience, which means, decomposing society's *social imagery* of Black males (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012). Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry (2012, p. 85-86) use the following definition to describe social imagery's impact on society:

“...an integral part of a population's thinking when it is institutionalized for a sustained period of time through different venues...shapes generations of people's

thinking about a particular reality or perceived reality...frequently...reified through the use of tools, language, forms of media, constructed knowledge, and the purported experiences that are displayed and widely distributed about a particular group.”

An integral part of understanding the Black male’s perceived struggle with education is recognizing the imagery (or images) often associated with the Black male experience with education. Therefore, scholars must shed preconceived notions of Black males and the Black male experience to promote cultural and intellectual objectivity. Instead of focusing solely on the Black male’s issues within education, scholars must “place appropriate scrutiny on institutional practices, structural arrangements, cultural practices, and ideologies” that facilitate conditions restrictive to the “intellectual, academic, and social growth and development of Black males” (Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry, 2012). To deconstruct these preconceptions, Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry (2012) argue that our approach to Black male research should center on the following principles:

- abandon theoretical approaches on Black males that are ‘deficit’-oriented;
- avoid perpetuating a false dichotomy where the challenges for Black males are focused on either individuals or institutions;
- acknowledge the complexity of identity and notions of self among Black males, especially in educational settings;
- prioritize Black male voices as central for engagement and analysis in research and practice;
- pay attention to the intersectionality of factors such as race, class, gender, and more when examining identity-construction and sense-making with Black males.

Booth et al. (2014) illustrate the importance of the counter-narrative by arguing that one’s “...ethnic classification/identification does not reflect the reality of...personal ethnic

identity”, which clearly indicates that one’s educational experience as a Black male within a classroom does not mirror that of another Black male in the same classroom or another. This uniform approach to research has led to the systematic application of homogenous frameworks to differing situations, thereby overlooking any variation in opinion, identity, or response. This point alludes to the need for narrative. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest, “narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study...” (p.2). They argue for the advancement of narrative by stating, “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives (p. 2). The researcher empathizes having doubted his place within education for years, constantly pondering if his unorthodox entry into the classroom made his voice insignificant regarding matters important to educators, students, and administrators. While combing through the literature, it is obvious to see that Black men have not had many opportunities to share their stories. Finding themes within personal narratives would make for richer discussion about the reasons why Black men are not interested in teaching. Approaching research in this manner allows the subjects the opportunity to tell their story in their own words and on their own terms.

### **Purpose Statement**

The ultimate purpose of this study is to allow Black men the opportunity to tell their truth about their disinterest (or interest) in teaching as a profession without the confines of hypothesis. Personally, the researcher is interested in examining the influence of educational experience within the Black male narrative as it pertains to their decision-making regarding teaching as a profession. The researcher theorizes that the formative educational experiences of Black males influence their educational and vocational

pursuits. Booth et al. (2014) posit “...as communities across the U.S. experience increasing ethnic and cultural diversity, educational systems must understand the relationship between ethnicity and student perception of their school climate.” This quote illustrates the potential influence of identity within educational experience. Goings and Bianco (2016) conducted a study regarding factors influencing or deterring high school age Black males from considering teaching as a profession. They found that “negative school experiences, including low expectations, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions” influenced their considerations of teaching. Potential salary (e.g. earning potential), cultural perceptions of teaching, and perceived self-efficacy are other factors that could potentially co-mediate career choice. Completing a study of this kind is important for several reasons. The first reason deals with the combination of cultural relevance and pedagogy. Given the fact that statistics show that most of the American teacher workforce is white and female (Jarrett, 2015), we can assume that most pedagogical practices within the classroom reflect this reality. Therefore, it is possible to assume that many Black males have consciously and subconsciously associated being white and female with teaching, assuming that the role of educator is reserved for those who are white and/or female. This study is designed to test the merit of this assumption.

### **Research Questions**

As thoughts morphed and progressed toward the notion of educational experience and its impact on interest in teaching, the researcher hypothesized that the educational experiences of Black males influenced (or moderated) their interest or desire to teach. However, instead of pre-selecting a determining factor, the researcher resolved to allow participants the opportunity to self-report any moderating variables involved within their

decision-making process. The following research question developed from this introspection.

- What are the current attitudes of Black men between the ages of 18 and 30 toward teaching as a profession?

The researcher seeks to discover if teaching is a practical career choice for Black males given ideal circumstances. However, using the previous question alone is insufficient in yielding the amount of detail needed to conduct proper analyses. A consequent sub-question is needed to encourage the production of themes within the varying attitudes.

The sub-question that will be used to elicit such themes is listed as follows:

- What factors affect Black male interest in teaching?

The question should inspire participants to identify reasons for a disinterest in the profession and encourage them to provide detailed rationale as to why the factors are linked to their decision to pursue (or not pursue) education as a career. The following section will discuss the design and purpose for this research design and how the utilization of this particular design will simultaneously elicit rich data and benefit participants.

### **Counterstorytelling**

Embedded within the study's purpose is the introduction of counter-narratives within conversations concerning Black male disinterest in teaching as a profession. The researcher will become a "counter-storyteller" in order to assist the education system in its plight to educate Black boys, recruit Black men as teachers, and provides all students with an opportunity to positively engage with a Black man in a classroom. (Reynolds, 2010) describes counterstorytelling as "a methodological tool with a history in communities of color that use oral interpretation to convey stories and struggles often not



validated by the dominant culture.” An unfortunate reality of belonging to the minority class is witnessing the dominant class’ narrative promoted as the standard for all to follow, unless the minority perspective is needed by the dominant class to explain or exploit some token sentiment. This approach to research will undergird attempts at providing the Black male counter-narrative within academic discussions. This tool will counter this notion by using an obscure point-of-view to explain a phenomenon within a minority demographic without consulting or using the dominant narrative (deficit narratives included) as authority figures or linchpins. Academia’s failings center around its inability to integrate theory, research, and practice. Ravitch (2014) states that this integration only comes “through the development of systematic research procedures and practices that foster critical reflection and action in the context of professional practice”, which is missing from the overarching narrative of the phenomenon of Black male disinterest. She expounds on this notion with the following quote:

Taking an inquiry stance on practice reflects as it engenders a particular attention to one’s practice and a view of oneself as an agent of that practice. This kind of stance pushes against more normative and hierarchical notions of knowledge and can lead to the formation of critical counter-narratives that speak back to grand narratives of groups and communities that are formed within (and perpetuate) deficit orientations towards under-resourced communities, communities of color, communities, communities in “developing countries,” and educational/community practitioners broadly defined.

As a qualitative researcher, one must maintain a heightened awareness of personal feelings/thoughts/actions during the research period. While dutifully guarding the

integrity of the methodology and the findings, the researcher must be able to situate themselves within the data and allow the proceedings to incite critical reflection and identity reappraisal within the investigation. This period of reflection allows researchers to report the findings from a personal level that accentuates (not taints) the findings with a counter-perspective that is ultimately a part of the grand narrative. The lack of research is a perfect opportunity for the researcher to identify certain factors associated with black male teacher attrition and apprehension associated with entry into the profession. There is a story hidden within the narrative.

### **Research Design**

This is a qualitative research study designed to gather Black male perspectives concerning the teaching profession, to find themes Black males often associate with their disinterest in the profession, and to counter popular deficit-centered narratives woven within the fabric of the Black male educational experience. The proposed study will use survey research and focus groups to discover, analyze, and codify levels of black male interest in teaching as a profession while recognizing and recording intersections between educational experience, race, cultural norms, perceived gender roles, and interest in teaching. The researcher will draw all inferences and hypotheses from participant information solely. This approach will allow participants to guide the intellectual and informational trajectories of the research.

The topic's complex nature encourages the researcher to employ what scholars refer to as "bricolage", a multi-faceted methodological tactic that combines techniques from various methodological approaches in hopes of excavating rich data from very

broad or very dense subject areas. Kincheloe (2001) offers the following commentary about bricolage:

Bricolage involves taking research strategies from a variety of disciplines and traditions as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation.

Such a position is pragmatic and strategic, demanding a self-consciousness and an awareness of context from the researcher.

The researcher will use surveys and interviews as the primary data collection tools and will combine strategies used within grounded theory and narrative inquiry to code, categorize, and interpret the data. The researcher will detail the usage and purpose of each tool within the instrument description subsection.

***Instrument Description.*** While the research problem calls for comprehensive investigative measures, the researcher thinks the utilization of a more personal approach is a preemptive measure needed to assuage participant apprehension. Since the researcher is a Black male, he theorizes that his demographical similarities to the target population will equip him with the “pre-rapport” necessary to engage the demographic without fear of rejection or avoidance.

***Survey.*** The study will utilize a survey as the initial data collection tool. Its primary purpose is to gather demographical and statistical information pertinent to the study. The researcher will personally distribute the survey to each participant. The researcher will engage each participant in conversations surrounding education and ask their thoughts on teaching as a profession. Discovering this information is pertinent to later interview protocol formation and thematic coding procedures. While circulating the

survey via email would be an easier approach and may yield greater numbers, building rapport and engaging in conversation are necessary by-products of this first meeting.

The survey does not include a question requiring recipients to self-identify as Black and male. While personally distributing the surveys, the researcher will ask the individual to self-report ethnicity and gender prior to asking the subject to complete the survey. The survey will do several things. It will serve as an authenticity measure in that it will allow the researcher to verify that the desired population of the study is being targeted. Secondly, it will allow the subjects to self-report any continued educational efforts, current or future career plans and goals, along with their interest (or disinterest) in teaching. Thirdly, it will afford the subjects an opportunity to rank the importance of factors often considered with the decision to pursue teaching as a career. Fourthly, it will give subjects a chance to express an interest in sharing their feelings about the research topic. Finally, it will give the researcher an opportunity to build rapport with the subjects.

***Focus Group.*** The focus group session is designed to provide subjects with a safe space to articulate their thoughts about teaching as profession, the impact of teachers, and their experiences as students. A secondary reason for the session concerns the potential establishment of rapport amongst participants in hopes of continuing dialogue about the importance of education and the need for more Black male teachers. The session will give the researcher the ability to see any visceral reactions from questions posed and answers given, comment and/or pose questions in response to the reactions, and engage with other Black men interested in talking about the subject. It will also allow the researcher the opportunity to adjust the interview protocol questioning in the event a topic warrants further engagement.

**Interviews.** After analyzing the focus group transcription, the researcher will conduct follow-up phone interviews with three of the focus group participants. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed, given the participant consents. If the participant declines, the researcher will contact another participant and will continue this process until three interviews have been completed. Each interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes maximum. The researcher will briefly re-hash the initial focus group proceedings, report findings, present themes found within the subject's narrative, and encourage interviewees to provide commentary on the information given.

The researcher will encourage the interviewee to offer additional commentary on the focus group session, final thoughts on the research topic, or share something they were reluctant to share with the group. Providing participants with an opportunity to comment on the study's results along with themes found within their personal narratives is a validity measure needed within qualitative study. Since participants are providing the researcher with personal narratives, it is imperative that the researcher check with participants to ensure the highest level of accuracy.

### **Sample and Data Collection**

It is the researcher's goal to have thirty Black males between the ages of 18 and 30 to complete the preliminary survey. To accomplish this objective, the researcher will personally distribute flyers and surveys to Black males on the University of Houston's (UH) main campus and Windsor Village United Methodist Church campus (WVUMC).

***Areas of Distribution.*** Concerning UH, the researcher will schedule distribution between the hours of 12pm and 3pm because of the high amount of foot traffic on campus during this time. The researcher will split each distribution session in half by

circulating materials outside along major walkways for the first half of each session and the other half circulating materials near eateries and popular student attractions. The sidewalk between M.D. Anderson Library and the Student Center has an exceptional amount of foot traffic daily. The researcher will concentrate most of his outside distribution efforts to this area.

The researcher will center recruitment efforts around four buildings on UH's campus -M.D. Anderson Library, the Student Center, Agnes Arnold Hall, and Farish Hall -due to the large amount of foot traffic, eateries, and student attractions within these areas. In Farish Hall, the researcher will hang flyers within all three elevator cabins and in the designated bulletin board areas on the first and second floors. Agnes Arnold Hall is home to the African-American studies department. The researcher will contact the program director and ask if she will distribute flyers within the department. The researcher will also contact professors within the African-American Studies department to see if they will distribute flyers to Black males within their respective classes.

Windsor Village United Methodist Church has one of the largest African-American congregations in the Houston Metropolitan Area. The church has over 17,000 members on its roster. It has a very large millennial population that is educationally and vocationally diverse. Since the summer of 2013, the researcher has handled developing, writing, and teaching Windsor Village's weekly Young Adult Bible study. The researcher will distribute surveys before and after the Young Adult Bible Study, which begins at 7:30pm every Wednesday night. Over 300 individuals between the ages of eighteen (18) and thirty-five (35) have attended this Bible study.

Windsor Village's Young Adult Ministry maintains a spreadsheet with the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of its attendees. If visitors attend the Bible study, they are encouraged to provide the aforementioned information. Since this spreadsheet is readily accessible to the researcher, the researcher will use convenience sampling and distribute the study's promotional flyer along with the survey link information to willing participants.

***Social Media.*** The final recruitment measure employed will be the researcher's personal usage of his social media accounts. On Facebook, he will post a status with a link to the survey along with his contact information. On Instagram, he will record a video encouraging black males currently attending college between the ages of 18 to 30 to complete an online survey concerning potential interest in teaching as a career (Appendix A). The researcher will code and categorize the narrative data collected from the survey while tallying Likert scale responses in preparation for the focus group session. The researcher will rank variables and themes by frequency. The researcher estimates that two weeks is ample enough time to properly record and analyze survey data.

***Focus Group Session.*** After analyzing survey data, the researcher will develop a focus group interview protocol (Appendix B) and conduct a subsequent focus group session for individuals who self-report an interest in participating within the session. From the thirty completed surveys, the researcher will use convenience sampling to invite (via email, face-to-face interaction, or telephone) ten individuals to take part in the focus group. The focus group will take place at WVUMC in one of their private meeting rooms. The proceedings will be recorded and should last for no more than an hour and a

half. In appreciation of their participation, each participant will be given a \$5 gift card. The purpose of the session is to create what Carspecken (1996) calls a “primary record” for coding purposes. The researcher will transcribe the session within two weeks of the meeting. The entire process of survey dissemination and transcript analysis should last about four to five weeks.

### **Analytical Technique**

The researcher will employ open coding to find themes within session dialogue. Open coding is “where the researcher begins to segment or divide the data into similar groupings and forms preliminary categories” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). After the researcher completes the open coding phase, the researcher will begin axial coding, which is when the researcher assembles categories he has identified into groupings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The aim of the researcher is to find variables associated with the perceived lack of black male interest in teaching. Upon finding emergent themes from the second round of coding, the researcher will facilitate individual interviews with three of the focus group participants. The interviews will serve as a member check, allowing the participants the opportunity to confirm or deny the researcher’s findings. Each interview session will be recorded and transcribed. The researcher will use these transcriptions to support or rebut previous findings.

### **Ethical Issues**

An informed consent statement will go with each survey distributed. Since the survey is electronic, each participant must acknowledge that he has read the statement and give the researcher the permission to collect this information electronically to continue with the survey. Prior to taking part within the focus group session, each



participant will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The agreement will list guidelines for the group session along with a statement of fidelity asking participants to refrain from disclosing group proceedings. Each participant must sign and submit this document before participating within the focus group. All participants will be at least eighteen (18) years of age and have graduated from high school. There will be no need for parental consent to take part in this study. All information gathered will be stored within file cabinet drawer with the researcher's office for three (3) years.

### **Limitations**

Sample size and subjectivity are the main limitations of this study. It is highly unlikely that the researcher has the capacity to contact a sample size large enough to represent the targeted population for this study. Furthermore, the demographical parameters for this study limit black male perspective by excluding the viewpoint of black males outside of the age range. Using a survey as a data collection tool comes with certain restrictions. Participants experiencing cognitive dissonance may not answer questions truthfully, especially if the participant or his peers can view the responses negatively. Since the purpose of the study is to analyze black male interest in teaching, answers that highlight certain idiosyncrasies may dissuade honesty. Another flaw associated with survey research is its inability to follow trends in real time. This study will measure perception at one point in time. This will only give the researcher with a specific snapshot within a small chronological span, ending any possibility of evidencing cause and effect.

**Implications**

This study will enrich conversations surrounding black male interest in teaching by exfoliating decades of blanketed assumptions about a perceived lack of black male interest in teaching. Current literature shows that these assumptions lack black male perspective. The study will allow researchers to examine some reasons why black males do not select teaching as a viable career option. It will also illustrate impact of intersectionality on black male career choice. Thus, researchers, non-profit organizations, colleges, universities, and other entities interested in attracting black men to the classroom will understand the significance and impact of factors such as race, culture, educational experience, etc., within the career decision-making process of black males.

## Chapter 4

### Results

#### Purpose of the Study

The study was designed to investigate reasons for the dearth of Black male teachers. It was also used to dispel current notions about the Black male educational experience commonly used to explain their reluctance to join the teaching ranks. The study surrounded one research question: *What are the current attitudes of Black men between the ages of 18 and 30 toward teaching as a profession?* This question ascertained current Black male perspectives on the teaching and introduced the notion of educational experience to the narrative. Subsequently, the following sub-question was used to flesh out additional reasons for the shortage: *What factors affect Black male interest in teaching?*

#### Research Design and Analysis

The research study included the distribution of a preliminary survey on one of the most ethnically diverse campuses in the United States along with a focus group comprised of African-American males aged from 18-30. Initial survey results were tallied and used to develop the focus group protocol. The protocol was written and administered to a group of six African-American males in April 2017. The session was transcribed and coded. Codes were developed and defined after two rounds of analysis. Next, each code was assigned to a related category. The research documented emergent themes within each category and used narrative inquiry to articulate the results. Lastly, three follow-up interviews were conducted with members of the focus group to validate findings.

## **Participants**

Six individuals participated in the focus group. All the participants attend Windsor Village United Methodist Church. All identified themselves as Black men between the ages of 18 and 30 who have graduated from high school. Each expressed an interest in discussing their disinterest in teaching as a profession. Three of the individuals have taught school in some capacity with two of the individuals being former school teachers while one serves a Sunday School teacher for small children at another church in the area. Each member selected a pseudonym to be used within the study.

## **Survey Findings**

Regarding the overall survey, 18 out of 26 African-American males indicated that their educational experiences were important in their decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career. This factor was ranked as “most important” by the participants. The second most important factor was the profession’s earning potential, followed by their personal level of education. I took the liberty to compose a rank of insignificance. According to this measure, the participants’ personal level of education did little to affect their decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching. This was followed by earning potential and personal educational expenses. Next, I took the overall findings and divided them into two chronological categories: participants aged between 18 and 24 and participants aged between 25 and 30.

As stated in Chapter 3, the initial data collection tool used in the research study was a survey designed to collect demographical (Questions 1-5 and 10) and statistical (Questions 6-9) information in hopes of discovering factors associated with Black male disinterest in teaching as a profession. The survey (Appendix A) began with questions

designed to identify the target population which were Black males from eighteen (18 and graduated from high school) to thirty (30) years of age. Preliminary findings have indicated significant differences of opinion regarding the causes for Black male disinterest in teaching within the survey's initial age range. Subsequently, the researcher divided the survey's initial age range into two categories (Black males from 18 to 24 and Black males from 25 to 30). To contextualize these differences, the researcher compared this data with the overall findings. The section (with three sub-sections) will communicate these differences. Before analysis begins, it must be stated that each group was given the same survey with no changes to the order of the questions. The sections will address the statistical questions and the results for each category.

### **Overall Summary of Survey Results**

Overall, 52% of the survey participants have not considered teaching as a potential career. 69% of the participants indicated that their educational experiences were important in their decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career. The participants deemed educational experiences as the most important factor within their decision to consider teaching as a career, with potential earnings (salary) and personal level of education ranking second and third respectively. Subsequently, the participants deemed personal level of education as the least significant of the factors in question.

*Survey results for 18 to 24-year-old Black males.* Initial survey results indicate that 18 to 24-year-old Black males are not interested in teaching as a profession. 72% of survey participants within this category stated that they have not considered teaching as a potential career option. While this figure is alarming, it cannot be used to assume a disinterest in mentoring or disinterest in teaching subjects not common to general

curriculum (e.g. hobbies, interests). Preliminary findings concerning factors affecting this category's interest in teaching indicate that educational experiences were the most important factor affecting their interest in teaching with 12 out of 16 respondents articulating this sentiment. The second most important factor was earning potential with 10 out of the 16 respondents identifying the factor as a reason for their disinterest in the profession. Lastly, 9 out of the 16 participants stated that their personal amount of education affected their interest in the profession.

Interestingly, there were some individuals who not only said that these factors did not influence their decision to teach, but indicated that the factors were “not important” or “somewhat important” within their career decision-making process. 5 of the 16 deemed their personal level of education as “not important” or “somewhat important” to their decision to pursue teaching as a career, meaning this factor carried the least amount of significance with this decision-making process. 5 out of 16 indicated that earning potential was not the most important factor within their decision to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career. Finally, only 2 out of the 16 considered educational experience as insignificant, establishing educational experience and salary as the most influential factors on their interest in teaching.

***Survey results for 25 to 30-year-old Black males.*** There were some differences between the age categories. One difference is that 73% of survey participants within this category expressed an interest in teaching as a profession. This is a stark contrast from the 18 to 24-year-olds' interest in the profession. Concerning the most influential factor within their decision to teach, 70% of 25 to 30-year-olds surveyed indicated that educational experiences influenced their decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a

career. However, 40% of the respondents considered personal level of education and earning potential as influential within their decision to teach. Here, educational experience is the most influential factor while personal level of education and earning potential held equal rank.

Contrarily, the number of individuals deeming factors insignificant is as important as the previous findings. 60% of the respondents indicated that their personal level of education was not a significant factor with their decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career. 40% of the respondents considered earning potential as relatively insignificant within this process while 20% were indifferent about influence of the variable. Only 20% of the respondents stated that educational experience was insignificant. Preliminary findings for this category hold that educational experience is the most influential factor within their decision to teach. However, given their responses, there is no other clear cut factor responsible for their disinterest in the profession. Overall, 70% of the respondents list educational experience as the most influential factor within their decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career.

***Initial Comments.*** Initially, it appears that educational experience is the most important factor within a Black man's decision to pursue education as a career. This can be explained two ways: because of some negative experiences in the past and they want to avoid memories of those experiences or there were some positive experiences that were enjoyable enough to share or replicate. There is also a third alternative. Perhaps, there was something that happened in the past that they want to change for future generations or that there is some feeling they want to replicate.

## Section Explanation

The next sections will cover four pivotal phases within the Black male educational experience. Personal appraisal, observation, reflection and mentorship were coded as phases of experience during the analysis of the focus group session transcription. The codes were selected as section headings because they appeared most frequently within the first and second stages of coding. The first 3 sections highlight distinct changes of perception within the Black male educational experience. However, the final section, entitled Mentorship, deals with the interaction between the participant and a Black male teacher. During these periods, participants articulated the impact these interactions had on their educational experience.

## Personal Appraisal

Personal appraisal is defined as *an evaluation of one's actions, thoughts, and feelings within particular educational experience(s)*. These self-evaluations are used to critically analyze one's ability to function within certain capacities. Personal appraisal breaks from Bandura's notion of self-efficacy in several ways. The first difference between personal appraisal and self-efficacy is the former's comprehensive application. Generally, Bandura's self-efficacy is mentioned with an individual's belief in their ability to perform certain tasks while the concept of personal appraisal is not only applicable to one's belief in their abilities to perform said tasks but combines these beliefs with one's sense of belonging (or perceived acceptance) within these spaces, with "spaces" referring to the classroom and/or the function of teaching. Therefore, personal appraisal embraces one's belief in their ability to perform as teacher and one's confidence in occupying the position and the physical space. The second difference between the concepts is timing of



application. Primarily, individuals conduct self-assessment post-experience, which implies the reservation of self-evaluation until one has had time to reflect on their actions, thoughts, and feelings within a particular experience. The amount of time between experience and appraisal allows one to ponder nuances associated with a particular experience. When one determines that the amount of information is sufficient, they proceed to determine if they are confident in their abilities to perform the task or occupy the space. In turn, individuals base their ability to perform certain actions or confidence in their ability to occupy certain spaces on this information.

### **Examples of Personal Appraisal**

This section will highlight instances of personal appraisal within the focus group session. The first example deals with Brian and his feelings about the restrictiveness of the teaching profession. He is a Sunday School teacher for young children at a prominent church in the greater Houston area. While he enjoys teaching children at church, it is hard for him to fathom teaching within the traditional classroom because of his personal experiences. The excerpt below chronicles his frustrations with pedagogical restriction.

I think two things kept me from...from ever having a desire to become a teacher.

One of them was their evaluations. I can't stand this stuff. Like I'm a habitual rule breaker when it comes to like have a teacher...or breakdown coursework...anything like that...I'm creative and I'm animated and I'm expressive...a textbook or curriculum that doesn't work for me...like I have to break it down in a way that I can explain it to them where it will pique their interest in wanting to learn.

He explained that his disinterest in teaching stemmed from this interaction. This particular experience involved the teacher showing visible frustration after the arrival of administrators in his classroom for a routine observation. Brian was not only disturbed by the intrusion, but also by the effect the intrusion had on the teacher. He advanced his point by stating that a prerequisite for optimal teacher performance is an environment that promotes minimal stress and interruption. He supported this argument by stating the combination of “routine” interruptions and strict curricular and procedural adherence did nothing more than frustrate teachers, thereby stifling creativity.

Along with pedagogical restriction, participants expressed character restriction as a source for their disinterest in the profession. During the focus group session, participants equated the role of teacher with the role of father. Consistently, they mentioned the difficulty they would encounter keeping the functions separate. Muhammad articulates this sentiment within the following passage:

...you're gone develop that relationship...and you're gonna want to treat them like they're your kids...but you can't because the school is gonna be like they not your kids...regardless if you got permission from the parents...it was some parents who came up there like Mr. [withheld] beat his behind and call me let me know if he tripping....or...if you see her with this boy you snatch her up...even if you got permission from the parents...it don't...it don't matter...it don't matter...

The participants recalled the father-like role Black male teachers played within their educational experience (if they had the opportunity to experience a Black male as teacher) and combined it with their understanding of school policies concerning student-teacher interaction to appraise their ability to function within the role of teacher. Here,

their disinterest is predicated upon a supposed inability to replicate behaviors needed to impact the lives of students, especially young Black males.

Regarding impactful behavior, participants mentioned the importance of physicality within their educational experience. Within this context, physicality is defined as a teacher's bodily reaction to inappropriate behavior. Several participants implicated their rambunctious behavior as the provocation for the teacher's bodily reaction. While this behavior can be viewed as unbecoming within most educational circles, those who experienced it spoke highly of its implementation. An analysis of the transcription highlighted several reasons for physicality's effectiveness.

The first reason surrounds an establishment of dominance or hierarchy. Participants cited personal examples of their willingness to test the boundaries of their physical strength during their educational experiences. Muhammad mentions that during a fight at school in which he was a participant he "tried" to fight his teacher who was breaking up the fight. However, he reported that his attempt failed when the gentleman "put him on his behind", thwarting his attempts at establishing physical dominance over the teacher. This failure to physically impose his will upon the teacher established a hierarchy within their student-teacher dynamic. After this altercation, Muhammad stated that he gained respect for the teacher and later apologized for his actions. Within this example, it appears that physical prowess is equated with respect. This is a common assertion regarding masculinity. Respect was garnered after a physical boundary was crossed.

As a former teacher, Thad agreed with Muhammad's statement and indicated that he had used physicality when dealing with a certain student. He stated that he took him to

wrestling practice and “put him on his neck” when the student would exhibit certain behaviors. While most instances of physicality occurred because of inappropriate behaviors exhibited by the student, it was also used to connect with students.

Subsequently, the second reason for physicality surrounds its use in establishing rapport. The researcher has witnessed the bonding power of physicality. The writer’s educational experience included interactions with numerous Black male teachers. However, he personally experienced the physical interaction between one teacher and his students. The researcher’s father presided over the county’s alternative school while coaching basketball and baseball for the local school. Whenever his father exchanged pleasantries with male students or caught them exhibiting unbecoming behaviors, he would squeeze the student’s trapezius muscle with one hand while speaking to them. While uncomfortable, the hold allowed him (the researcher’s father) to connect with the student, illustrating the power of touch and establishing a father-like role within the student-teacher dynamic.

Many of the Black male students at the local school recalled the power of this “grip.” Yet, they recall with affection lessons learned while in this position, similar to the participants within the research study. The researcher theorizes the focused attention of physicality materially exhibits a teacher’s care for a student’s well-being and establishes the teacher as the dominant male figure within the student-teacher relationship. establishes the teacher as the dominant male figure within the student-teacher relationship.

While participants touted physicality’s impact within their educational experiences, they expressed a distrust in the educational system’s ability to properly

interpret the behavior. Muhammad recalled a scenario in which his father's partner was suspended without pay for physically restraining a student who risked arrest after threatening to fight a young lady. He stated that the individual "grabbed a dude that was like his son...slammed him down like 'chill out' the police about to come get you." He stated that this was done in the presence of an assistant principal who knew the situation. Nevertheless, the security guard was reprimanded for his actions.

The participants based their personal appraisal of their ability to teach on assumed difficulty in separating the role of father from teacher, the usage of physicality, and the educational system's perception of physicality between Black males. Since these roles and behaviors are considered part of their character, any restriction of these traits is avoided.

The next example illustrates the plight of Black males who have taught in the classroom previously and have since sought other means of employment. Within this example, Thad attributes the profession's low pay, increase levels of stress within the profession, and an aversion to additional schooling as his reasons for resigning as a teacher. Within the following narrative, he articulates his position.

...the principal pulled me back into the office and is like I want you to teach...because I want to put you in school and I want you to teach. I was like I'm not going to school, because...I saw the teachers stressing and I knew how much they made and I wasn't going to go to school...I'll just...I'll just teach a resource.

Despite his affinity for teaching and mentorship, he eventually resigned from his position to pursue other opportunities. While salary was a significant factor within his decision to

leave, he strongly identified the level of stress associated with the profession as a major factor within his decision to stop teaching. He exclaims the following:

But, after the four years, he was like, "do you want to go teach?" I said no I don't want to do it because of all this stress. Uhh, I was there from 7:30, no not 7:30...I was there from seven o'clock...school started at seven thirty and I didn't leave until eight o'clock, because I was in an after school program too. So I was in an after-school Mentor Program... take the same kids that I saw today...I was the only one in the school that stayed there that late, because I was the only teacher on staff for the after school program.

While there were multiple instances of both negative and positive personal appraisal, the primary purpose of this section was to illuminate reasons for Black male disinterest post-experience. The next section will transition from the individual to a more holistic perception of the Black male educational experience.

### **Observations**

Investigating educational experience of any demographic requires researchers to investigate mechanisms used to procure information. Within this context, observation is the utilization of memory within decision making. Initially, one could argue that observation and experience are similar. However, the difference lies in the fact that one's observation(s) can include the narratives and memories of other individuals, while experience remains a singular endeavor. This section will contain observations made by Robbie, Vernon, and Muhammad. While the amount of observational material was plentiful, these passages were selected because of their content. These excerpts highlight

the impact of low self-esteem, the absence of Black male teachers, and the impact of Black male teachers upon the Black male educational experience.

***Robbie's observations.*** While considering educational experience, researchers must establish and maintain sensitivity for the individual narrative. They are often told and re-told by the individual to themselves and others, in turn, reinforcing messages transmitted within certain instances, thereby intensifying its influence over the individual. In Robbie's case, his educational experiences involved severe self-esteem issues. Consequently, he lashed out at peers, fighting frequently to cope with non-acceptance into social circles and insulting treatment by teachers. Robbie expresses this sentiment within the following statement: "I spent a lot of time trying to find myself...find my inner peace...find out what was wrong with me because I actually think man...I'm always getting into it with people so it must be something wrong with me, you know..."

Throughout the exchange, Robbie told and re-told this story of low self-esteem, constant fighting, and frayed relationships with teachers, reinforcing an association of school with negative experiences, thereby, making this message his reality. Subsequently, Robbie's disinterest in teaching is linked to his personal observations of the classroom, teachers, and fellow students.

***Vernon's observations.*** Vernon's disinterest in teaching as a profession centers on the absence of Black male teachers during his educational experience. He communicated that he "...had all female teachers" and that Black male teachers were not individuals he looked up to. He made an interesting observation when he articulated that "all" of the Black males eligible to assume the role of teacher were "mostly principals

and coaches.” Within Vernon’s narrative, not only did he observe a severe shortage of Black male teachers, but he also witnessed homogeneity within the teacher workforce.

While Vernon did not say that his educational experience was devoid of the male presence, he alluded to the fact that the female presence dominated his educational experience. His dismissal of principals and coaches as teachers relegated the function of teacher to the classroom. This observation warrants future investigation. Consequently, his disinterest in teaching as a profession was solidified by the dearth of Black male teachers within his educational experience. Thad made similar observations within his educational experiences. When asked about his memories concerning the profession, he stated that he “grew up thinking [that]...teachers were women” and that the profession was “feminine.” This viewpoint represents a common stereotype of the profession.

***Muhammad’s observations.*** Muhammad expressed gratitude for the Black male teachers who were integral parts of his educational experience. He passionately communicated that these individuals made a “stamp” on his life, an indelible impression of positivity. He chronicles their impact with the following words:

...if they weren’t there...the influence that influence that they had, probably would have altered some...some of my decisions and I probably would have did different things. But because they showed me stuff and talk to me, I made other decisions. So, I wanted to do that. I wanted to do that.

Muhammad’s experience with Black male teachers articulates the potential impact Black male teachers can have on Black males and others within the classroom. His narrative teemed with occurrences of Black male teachers assuming the role of mentor and father. Muhammad’s emphasis on the role of father stems from the close



relationship he had with his father, who is now deceased. He articulates this position within the following excerpt:

...the whole time...umm...I revered my dad a lot...so he was the only man...the only man...only person who could tell me anything...so that caused some trouble....but when it was an African...an African American male in the school...his presence...depending on how he was...he would kinda get the same reverence as my dad...almost...I'd be like...I'd pull some stuff on some of the other teachers...I'd talk back...I'd do this...I'd do that...but with the African American male teacher I probably wouldn't...I'll chill out...you know I'd...he'd get that respect.

While he respected the presence of Black men, Muhammad expressed a firm disinterest in education:

...school to me was just...it wasn't good...it wasn't bad...it was just one of those things you had to do...that's how it was...and um...it's no one word or one expression for it...'cause everyday had its different days...sometimes I love it...sometimes I hated it...but overall...I didn't like school...loved learning...love learning...school...the aspect of the pressure...the testing...deadlines and all that stuff was just...not for me...

Muhammad frequently communicated his love of learning and his disdain for the institution of school. While he observed and experienced the impact of Black male teachers, he did not express an interest in teaching, citing a perspective similar to Thad's concerning the stress-to-salary ratio:

I heard one of my teachers and he was like I don't get paid for this and I love y'all, you know what I'm saying? And I wanna see y'all excel, but I don't get paid for this. So, I was like "what?" Hell naw. [laughter ensues] Hell naw. Man naw. You ain't got no money ,then you gotta have the responsibility...like, naw.

Primarily, Muhammad based his disinterest in teaching on his “hatred” for the institution of school and the stress-to-salary ratio. He expressed other reasons for his disinterest in the profession. They will be covered within another section.

***Additional observations.*** Participants noticed differences in the way Black male teachers and Black female teachers were treated in terms of student interaction. Here, student interaction concerns “contact with teachers outside of the classroom.” One contributor indicated that a Black male teacher got in trouble for taking him to the bus stop. He recalls the incident within the following passage:

“...you know the one I was talking about with the annoying voice? He got in trouble for offering me a ride home. He lived around the corner from my mama’s house. I already knew him...played basketball with his son...offered me a ride home and I was like ‘nah’, you don’t have to give me a ride home...you can just take me to the bus stop...got in trouble.”

The same participant noticed the amount of attention a ride to the bus stop from a Black male teacher garnered in relation to the amount of attention his sexual exploits with a Black female teacher received. His frustrations are articulated within the following quote:

“I messed around with my computer lab teacher. And she would take me to the crib. Take me to her house...drop me off...I’m fooling around with my teacher. So, because it’s a female, they cool with it. My mans dropped me off at the bus

stop...that's it. But, because he's a male...Black male...he gonna get that trouble. They got a teacher fooling around with a student, nobody looked at that. Like nothing happened so...it's kinda out of our hands, somewhat...you know what I'm saying...what can you do about that?"

Within this example, the participant articulates potential issues Black men face when assuming the role of teacher. He used this example to emphatically denounce his ability to function as a teacher. The researcher noticed several things within the participant's commentary. The first thing the researcher noticed was the anger and frustration the participant expressed during his monologue. He was upset that a trip to the bus stop from his neighbor (who happened to be his teacher) caused so much trouble. He stated that he would have done the same thing if he were the teacher. However, he realized the amount of trouble he could potentially face doing something he deemed second nature. He seemed more upset at the lack of attention given to his sexual escapades with a Black female teacher. Based on his observation, Black male teachers should expect controversy when providing extended support for students, especially Black male students. If other Black males observed similar instances and shared these experiences with other Black males, then this may be a factor influential within their decision to teach or not.

The lack of positive Black male images in media was an observation made by another contributor. He stated that the lack of positive Black male images, especially images showing Black men as teachers, within the media contributed to the Black male's disinterest in the profession, alluding to the proverbial "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" effect. He chronicles the observation below:

...so right now...whenever I look at the news...it's a lot of Black women but not really black males...if you look at these kids' role models, it's rappers and sports cars. So, that's what they want to be. Like, when I was teaching...[he'd ask his students] what do you want to be....[a] football player...basketball player or rapper.

According to the participant, the lack of Black male teachers within the classroom and within media has produced a vacuum as it relates to Black male career aspirations. Accordingly, the dearth of physical and visual exposure to Black male teachers render the position and function of teacher invisible to the Black males, particularly those within the educational system currently. The shortage of Black male teacher role models leads Black males to select careers that are more visible and portrayed as more successful.

The participant also included the parental factor within this argument. His past experiences as an educator allowed him to observe parental reactions to questions concerning their child's ambitions. Instead of encouraging the child to heed his advice regarding mastery of general curriculum, the parents supported their child's ambition. He communicates his frustration with parents within the following quote:

And if you told them...what does it take to get there then...I had a parent tell me don't ever tell their kid what they can't do. And I was like I didn't tell your kid what they couldn't do, I just told your kid to look at how much work it takes to get there. You know only maybe one percent of people that want to get in the NFL actually get in there. So this was the mentality that I had to fight.

The participants' observations gave the researcher a small glimpse into the Black male educational experience. While unable to provide an encompassing view of the Black

male educational experience, the observations gave the researcher a glimpse into what Black males think about the profession. If these observations are common among Black males between the ages of 18 and 30, we can assume these factors to be influential within their decision to consider teaching as a profession.

## **Reflections**

Reflection is the final phase of the Black male educational experience. Within this phase, a simultaneous introduction of logic and emotion occurs. Subsequently, this combination is paired with a critical examination of one's personal appraisal, observation, and experience, with the result being an emergence of belief. The following narratives illustrate the final product of this process. The data has proven educational experiences' impact upon the Black male's decision to pursue teaching as a profession. Throughout the session, participants mentioned the minimal disciplinary action their personal examples of inappropriate behavior received. However, one participant reflected on a situation that led to his distrust of the profession. During his educational experience he was accused of something (participant withheld this information) that landed him in serious trouble with the law. While eventually vindicated, the state of affairs made him leery of teachers. He expresses these feelings within the following narrative:

I didn't want to be no teacher...I couldn't see myself taking a little Tommy or Jonathan or whatever and or go to the police...or go to the police station...or go sit in the principal's office so you can get kicked out of school...go to juvie [sic] for something as small as an argument or an altercation...or brawl...that happens...that's a part of growing up.

Within this example, a common disciplinary procedure like a trip to the principal's office morphed into a serious set of circumstances. While the researcher assumes the teacher responsible for turning the participant in was doing their job, nonetheless, the participant expressed disappointment with measures taken for what he considered to be a trivial offense. In turn, the participant resented the profession. While he did not want another child to experience this stress, he understood that serving as a teacher could require him to put another child within a similar predicament.

### **Societal Perceptions of the Profession**

While serving as a childcare provider currently, Brian still wrestles with the impact of the “lack of male presence” within his home. Within his narrative, he reflects on this reality and mentions how this absence influences his educational experience. He admits that he squandered opportunities throughout his educational experience. While he has dedicated himself to teaching young children, he mentions that a “stigma” comes with being a Black man who chooses to work with small children.

*Muhammad's reflections.* Muhammad supports this notion and advances it by posing a scenario to the group. Within the scenario, he articulates the trouble he would encounter asking parents to allow him to care for their child.

...who all got kids? Alright. If you don't got kids, think about...a lil' brother...[or] a lil' sister, but for y'all who got kids...let's say they are one [one year-old]...you need to find a daycare. I come to you and I'm like...I run a daycare service, are you gonna let me watch your kid? [The group laughs] Hell no...you ain't about to let me watch yo' kid...it don't matter who she is...how she looked...but if some other chick come up and say...I run a daycare service

too... she can charge more than I do...yall gon' be like [gaining approval from other participants]...am I right...or am I wrong?

Within this exchange, Muhammad uses his physically imposing stature to substantiate his disinterest in teaching. While Muhammad was preparing to offer additional commentary on the scenario, Robbie interjects and says that male teachers are "...seen as a pedophile..." As an educator, it was disheartening to hear these comments. As a researcher, it was reassuring to witness this exchange because it meant that participants felt comfortable to communicate their true feelings within this space. Muhammad continued by mentioning sexual orientation within the narrative.

...now a big old macho man ain't really considered nurturing...when you do see African American teachers...they're not heterosexual for the most part...they're not...they're not...I mean for it to be accepted...for it to be okay...for somebody to just walk to school if we're at this all white school...predominantly all white school...all diverse school...you walk into there and you see the African American teacher and you see that he's straight...ehh...okay...but when you see he's gay, you're almost like...the parent kinda relieved...it's like they cool you know...and it's a total flip in African American community...you go in there and see an African American teacher and you're like cool...but if he's gay, you're like ahh man I don't want him teaching my kid...you know what I'm saying...(Muhammad)

Within his explanation for Black male disinterest in teaching, Muhammad lists several reasons for Black male disinterest in teaching:

- Society is not willing to trust men, especially physically imposing Black men, with their kids.
- Society immediately thinks of women when teaching or other nurturing professions are discussed.
- African-American male teachers are perceived differently along the lines of sexual orientation and school environment.
- The African-American community is particularly homophobic.

Besides salary and educational experience, the points raised within Muhammad's scenario could be considered as reasons for Black male disinterest in teaching, if other Black men widely hold these opinions of the profession. To authenticate this information, additional studies would need to be conducted.

*Vernon's reflections.* While Vernon assumed an observant posture for most of the session, he added several observations in support of Muhammad's claims. He supported Muhammad's opinions on masculinity and sexual orientation and teaching and added the notion of restriction to the lively commentary. Vernon argues that this restriction is:

... a major part of why we're not in the school system for you ...you know tag these children with all these symptoms...all this stuff...it makes it hard to teach because now it is like whatever a child does NATURALLY we want to put a label on it...and then now...the restriction is now is like the teachers are not over the school... the kids are...so now it is making it even harder to even teach...

His description of "restriction" is aimed a perceived lack of behavioral management on the part of teachers. This definition also includes a frustration with the educational system's misdiagnosis of children's natural behavior. Within his soliloquy, he posits that



Black males avoid teaching in attempts to dispel any notions of homosexuality in bolster their efforts in obtaining female companionship.

...and then now you have the stigmatism of...okay...black women want a certain type of man...especially in the black community...for that certain type of man...teaching is not that ideal place to get that...you know...that...that...uh recognition from...so all those combined is kind of like a guy...black man is you know...is kind of stuck...it almost has to be a passion for him to want to actually be a teacher...other than that I don't see no reason why they would want to be a teacher.

Earlier in the conversation, Vernon mentioned an affinity for female companionship and the complete absence of Black male teachers within his educational experience. One can assume that he developed these beliefs from his personal experiences.

***Additional reflections.*** The data has demonstrated educational experiences' impact on Black males' decision to pursue teaching as a profession. Throughout the session, participants mentioned the minimal disciplinary action their personal examples of inappropriate behavior received. However, one participant reflected on a situation that led to his distrust of the profession. During his educational experience he was accused of something (participant withheld this information) that landed him in serious trouble with the law. While eventually vindicated, the state of affairs made him leery of teachers. He expresses these feelings within the following narrative:

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something as small as an argument or an altercation...or brawl...that happens...that's a part of growing up.

Within this example, a common disciplinary procedure like a trip to the principal's office morphed into a serious set of circumstances. While the researcher assumes the teacher responsible for turning the participant in was doing their job, nonetheless, the participant expressed disappointment with measures taken for what he considered to be a trivial offense. In turn, the participant resented the profession. While he did not want another child to experience this stress, he understood that serving as a teacher could require him to put another child within a similar predicament.

A prevalent theme within the focus group session was politics and its ability to impact one's ability to teach according to one's convictions. One participant mentioned his experience with school politics and how his passion for changing the lives of students superseded earning potential and administrative procedures. He communicates this passion below:

...one of the things that I strayed away from teaching was the politics...because for me in my personal opinion...I cared about my kids...and so when I wanted to teach...I wanted to go on a tour...trying to make an impact...I wanted my pay to be good because ...I had responsibilities...but you gotta understand that my impact was to be worth more than this paycheck that I'm getting...my impact was going to be worth more...than what this observation is going to do for me...because...I think it got to a point where I knew I felt like I wasn't doing it by their standards but still impacted these kids...

The participant articulated a desire to influence students regardless of pay and administrative procedures. A follow-up conversation with the participant highlighted a lack of administrative support within the classroom. He was a first-year teacher at a low-performing school. While administrators observed his teaching methods regularly, he stated that he received minimal pedagogical training and no mentorship during his tenure. This led to his departure from the profession.

***Researcher's observations.*** While most qualitative researchers advise that focus group sessions last no longer than one and a half hours, this session lasted for approximately two hours. One would assume that this was enough time to ask all of the questions within the interview protocol. However, the researcher only managed to cover half of the questions. The first question asked dealt with the participants' thoughts of school as an institution. Unfortunately, the researcher underestimated the amount of time each participant needed to give a thorough response. Yet, this period of reflection appeared therapeutic with each participant articulating his school experiences in a safe environment in the presence of individuals with similar experiences. Though lengthy, the time spent on this first question allowed participants to preemptively answer follow-up questions associated with the initial inquiry.

Officially, the second question asked focused on discovering the impact the previously articulated memories on the participants' decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career. The participants mentioned several factors for their decisions to resign from teaching or avoid the profession altogether and articulated these positions. However, within this phase of the discussion, those who had Black male teachers rarely associated their reasons for not teaching (or avoiding the profession) with individuals

they considered mentors. Seemingly, respect for these mentors encouraged participants to shield them from these factors. They were held in extremely high regard. Interestingly, the participants appeared to separate teaching from mentoring, which would explain their affinity for mentorship. The researcher deduces that participants assume that mentorship is a more flexible vocation than traditional teaching.

The final question asked of the participants concerned thoughts on attracting more Black men to the field. Brian, who formerly taught, stated that Black men must understand that their impact is worth more than their “paycheck.” He stated that to attract more Black men, the educational system and American society must do a better job of selling the difference one can make in the life of a child instead of focusing on increasing numbers. Others stated that Black men must become interested in community leadership before undertaking the mantle of classroom teacher.

### **Mentorship**

The most promising aspect of their educational experience appeared to be their interaction with Black male teachers. Within the session, participants articulated that these individuals invested their personal time into guiding and counseling the participants at certain points of their educational experience, bearing a strong resemblance to fatherhood. There are several reasons why the participants had a strong affinity for these individuals. The first reason is the fact that these individuals appeared to offer guidance inside of and outside of the classroom. The show of concern resonated deeply with the participants. The second reason for the affinity is the perceived one-on-one interaction the participants received. This interaction allowed the formation of a loose father-son dynamic. The third reason for the affinity is the mentors appeared to periodically risk their livelihood to make a difference in the lives of the participants. This behavior

illustrated a certain level of loyalty and convinced the participants to make necessary changes in response to their (the mentors) risk. The final reason was the fact that mentors served as figural and literal examples of what they wanted to be in the lives of other individuals. Participants appeared to recall these memories with fervor and joyful appreciate. The following excerpts illustrate the impact of mentorship upon their (the participants) educational experience.

***Muhammad's mentorship experience.*** Throughout his narrative, Muhammad mentioned the impact of mentors on his personal life. He mentioned that the most impactful thing mentors did for him was taking him “under his wing outside of school.” Muhammad explains his mentor’s impact in the following passage:

...he took me under his wing outside of school...He took me up to Central State...show me that ...the college campus...all that stuff and expanded my horizons...sat through a couple of college courses with him...took me to a couple of parties...I mean just really expanded my horizons...I'd switched up everything man...he was bringing me to his church...all kinds of stuff...and it was...it was all positive...

His horizons were “expanded” through the mentor’s comprehensive interest in his education and spirituality. This extended interest encouraged Muhammad to finish high school and attend some college after threatening to drop out of high school.

Another example of the impact of mentorship on Muhammad’s educational experience came after he was promoted to another grade. He was particularly rambunctious within this mentor’s classroom and complained about the nasal quality of his voice. However, the mentor held Muhammad to higher standards, which encouraged

him to act out more. Yet, Muhammad was compelled to apologize for his actions later and describes the exchange below.

...we had a heart-to-heart talk and he talked to me and let me know like “man it’s potential in you”...us African-American males...we have to work that much harder than other ones...it was like dang he ain’t even my teacher no more and he still got that love and that care...

The “love and care” the mentor showed Muhammad inspired him to assume a similar role within the lives of others within his community. He mentioned that he mentors a little boy that lives in the area around his job. He gives the child advice and the occasional meal to keep him from stealing. In his words, he is trying “to be that guy for some...that those guys was for me...”

This experience was significant for several reasons. Muhammad loved his father deeply. His passing had a great impact on him. He had a great respect for individuals who carried themselves and acted in ways reminiscent of his father. Second, Muhammad needed extra guidance. He led a fast life and often fell victim to its trappings. However, he seemed to crave positive male interaction and his mentors filled this void.

***Thad’s continued support.*** Thad exemplifies the extended concern Muhammad describes within his narrative. As a former schoolteacher, Thad has mentored several students during his tenure and after his resignation. He explains that it is the development of relationship with students that encourages mentors to provide continual support. The following passage articulates his position:

...The good thing is that you do develop relationships...like the fifth graders that I met when I got there I told myself I wouldn’t leave until they graduated...so I

got to see them graduate...some of them I still keep in contact with just to make sure they're okay, you know?

It appears that this extended support strengthens relationships, increases respect, and encourages similar behavior.

***Robbie's mentorship experience.*** Robbie's educational experience was tumultuous at best. He grew up in a rough part of town and attended schools known for low academic performance and high levels of violence. While his father was a part of his life, he was absent during the initial phases of his educational experience. He looked to his mother and grandmother for support. Throughout his educational experience, he struggled with self-esteem issues and being bullied. He had strained relationships with teachers, especially white teachers. The Black male teachers within his educational experience provided him with the positive male affirmation he needed. They helped him with his self-esteem issues and provided him with the structure he desired. Robbie recalls the words of a particular mentor after a fistfight in the following passage:

...I remember Mr. Jeter pulling me aside...telling me...you know you can't be getting into this mess..you got a good future man...you actually go to do something with your life...you actually gotta like..you're a smart kid..you don't need to be hanging out with certain people...and stop trying to be with everybody...

The words encouraged Robbie to seek alternative ways of venting his frustration with peers. They also urged him to take his studies more seriously. Another mentor by the name of Commander Johnson provided Robbie with extensive guidance and structure during high school. The sheer presence of the mentor convinced Robbie to not only

manage his behavior, but seek opportunities to lead others. He explains, "...I wanted to gain rank...I want to do this...I want to be a drill sergeant...I want to be this and I can't look bad in front of him..." The mentors within Robbie's educational experience provided him with structure, encouragement, and consistency. In turn, Robbie sought to return the proverbial favor by serving within leadership roles in his school's ROTC.

***Vernon's desire to mentor.*** While Vernon stated that he did not have a Black male teacher within his educational experience, he did articulate a strong desire to mentor children. However, he was adamant that his endeavor to mentorship would not include teaching. He states, "...my thing is more focused on mentorship than actually teaching. I feel like when you're a teacher you're kind of restricted, you got to follow a certain...curriculum...". Vernon consistently expressed the need for ownership and flexibility within any endeavor. Given this desire, he became an entrepreneur, with his latest efforts earning him co-ownership of a semi-pro football team. Vernon wants to use sports as an instrument of change, especially within the lives of Black boys. The following excerpt highlights his passion:

... I wanted to have a mentorship...me and my friend...we thought about having a mentorship, with a gym we was going to do and then provide little kids with sports stuff, you know, helping them in sports and after that, after helping them with sports, we'd have little talks with them about you know, life in general. Just so they can get, you know, not just the sports aspect of it but also you know the real life aspect as well...as you know, you know combine those two together, because as you see, you will see like you know black guys in sports now, they are kinda wild, you know.



Identifying a need for Black male athletic mentorship was a result of his experiences.

While Vernon stated that it was his mother who encouraged him to do well in school and pursue other educational goals, it was not his desire to seek further education after graduation. Whereas Vernon is not a teacher per se, he fully embraces the role and commitment of mentor, which some consider to be a vital function in the role of teacher.

### **Conclusion**

Educational experience was found to be the most influential factor within the participants' decision to pursue or consider teaching as a career. While factors like stress-to-salary ratio, perceived gender roles, and societal perception were considered, findings indicate educational experience as the most reliable indicator for potential consideration of the career, particularly if the individual had positive interactions with Black male teachers during their educational experience. Within the focus group session, the researcher observed that participants rarely used bad educational experiences as reasons for their pursuit or non-pursuit of teaching as a career. Some participants experienced suspensions, being kicked out of multiple schools and trips to alternative school. However, they did not indicate these troubles as deterrents to their education necessarily. They viewed these instances as periods of introspection. It was during these periods of introspection that many of the participants received mentorship from Black male teachers. This focused attention during these times may indicate the level of respect for Black male teachers who served as mentors during their educational experiences.

The participants expressed an interest in mentorship. Many of them benefitted from the mentorship role Black male teachers assumed within their educational experience. Subsequently, the participants recognized a need for increased involvement

with other Black males, especially Black boys. However, due to certain observations within their educational experiences, the position of teacher became less attractive. While participants are willing to shoulder the responsibility of mentorship and offer extended support to mentees, they reject the pedagogical and intellectual restriction that comes with the profession. The need for creativity and freedom along with observations of increased stress levels and inadequate compensation encourages their reluctance to teach.

Follow-up interviews were instrumental in confirming prior beliefs concerning the near absence of Black men from the classroom. Each interview was conducted over the phone. Google Voice was used to capture each conversation. The participants gave consent to record before each interview began. Once consent was given, the researcher thanked each participant for their cooperation and presented the research study's findings. After the presentation, the interview began. The researcher asked each participant the following questions:

- Would you agree that personal educational experience was the strongest factor within your decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career?
- What are your thoughts on these results?
- How would you get more of us to teach knowing this information?

The first interviewee agreed that educational experience was the primary motivation in his decision to pursue teaching as a career. He used his experiences with conventional and unconventional teachers to gauge his personal ability to do the job. He stated that sharing knowledge with “the next generation” was a “feeling” unmatched by financial gain. He said that having the ability to “change a child’s mindset” with intellect was “mind-blowing.” He communicated a passion for increasing the number of Black male

teachers by explaining that we (society, media, the educational system) must do a better job of showing men that teaching is not a complicated endeavor. He offered an explanation for the shortage of Black male teachers. He stated that regardless of the location, men who effectively teach can “see” their impact. However, they have financial obligations that require more than what a teacher’s salary can handle. He finished the interview by stating that teaching is transferrable, meaning that it can be done inside and outside of the classroom and that men avoid teaching and seek higher paying jobs because of its (teaching) flexible implementation.

The second interviewee indicated that salary was his primary reason for entering and leaving the profession. While he agreed with the importance of educational experience, he stated that his need for employment and financial stability overshadowed his desire to teach. He said that increasing teacher pay, decreasing their level of stress, and changing society’s perception of the profession would make the job more attractive. Within the interview, he mentioned that he regretted “teaching for money.” He stated that one should have a passion for what they do and not undertake such a responsibility without careful consideration.

The third interviewee stated that educational experience was his primary reason for not considering teaching as a career. He said the focus group session was therapeutic and that more conversations concerning the research study’s topic needed to occur. He believed that we covered factors important within the Black male’s decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a profession and offered no suggestion to increase the number of Black male teachers. While participants agreed that educational experience was a major

factor within their decision to pursue or not pursue teaching, earning potential remained a chief concern for those considering the profession.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

Providing the platform for allowing Black men to articulate their positions concerning their disinterest in teaching as a profession was the primary focus of this research. Providing a counter-narrative to the narratives often used by society and academia was the secondary reason for the study. By-products of the investigation included 1) a discovery of Black male perspective on teaching as a profession; 2) a deeper look within the Black male educational experience; 3) articulation of the Black male educational experience devoid of predetermined societal and academic narrative; and 4) finding reasons for their disinterest within narratives of their educational experiences. This chapter will use several sections to summarize findings, make practical suggestions, and recommend areas of future research.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Conducting this research study was a pleasurable experience. Each interaction was refreshing and informative. Most participants were friendly and willing to help in this endeavor. The majority were students at the University of Houston while the rest were members at the church where the focus group session was held. Within the survey's distribution phase, participants shared their current educational pursuits or present vocation. Remarkably, most participants did not express an interest in teaching as a profession. When asked why, many stated that they either lacked the patience to teach or wanted a career that paid more money. These were very popular responses in the early stages of the interaction. However, many verbally expressed an interest in the reasons for

the shortage of Black male teachers within the classroom and offered several explanations. Yet, within dialogue concerning the survey, its purpose, and the researcher's need for the information, the participants shared their experiences with education without coercion. It appeared that they were waiting to communicate their experiences and appreciated the chance to do so.

Only one individual stated that he was pursuing teaching as a career. He stated that he wanted to help other young Black men avoid the pitfalls he experienced during his educational experience. As he continued his story, he mentioned that on the day he was to graduate, he was in jail. His mother walked across the stage to accept the diploma on his behalf. He stated that he did not want any other mother to experience the pain that he caused his. He decided that teaching was his way of giving back and alleviating pain. During another exchange, one respondent identified himself as an educator, yet was not a teacher in the traditional sense. However, he passionately articulated that his job as a social worker should be considered within conversations about teachers. He stated that his duties encompassed that of teacher and mentor. While the initial goal was to ascertain demographical information, thoughts on teaching, factors affecting their decision to consider the profession, investigating the concept of experience seemed beneficial to the research. After tabulating survey results, participants identified personal educational experience as the most important factor within their decision to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career, contrary to their stance on pursuing higher paying jobs.

Within the focus group session, the participants communicated utmost respect for the teaching profession. Those who worked as teachers previously stated that they enjoyed their time within the classroom. There was a consensus regarding the need for

more Black male teachers. Yet, the participants illustrated a disdain for the perceived inflexibility of the position. They predicated their arguments upon observations made within their educational experiences. They indicated that teaching to a general curriculum and operating within administrative guidelines would stifle creativity, thereby affecting the quality of instruction. They also used their educational experiences to provide other reasons for their disinterest in the profession. The group discussed several factors not listed on the initial survey or within the focus group protocol. They mentioned the impact of societal perceptions within their decision to pursue or not pursue teaching. They commented on the difficulty people had envisioning men, especially Black men with physically imposing builds, within nurturing positions such as teaching.

The group also mentioned perceived gender roles as another reason for their disinterest in the profession. They stated that teaching was viewed as a feminine profession. They did not want to associated themselves with the profession, because they feared the homophobic stigma commonly ascribed to male teachers, especially those who to teach younger children. They continued this conversation and the notion of female companionship was brought into the debate. One individual stated that in order to increase one's chances of procuring female companionship (if the male in question was heterosexual), he should avoid teaching. He advanced this notion by stating that women were attracted to men who worked in certain areas. Apparently, teaching was not within this category. He stated that he could not fathom a man teaching unless the man had a "passion for teaching." Stress-to-salary ratio was discussed as a reason for their disinterest in the profession. The participants stated that the compensation teachers

receive was not enough to endure constant scrutiny from parents, administrators, and students.

Discussions surrounding the impact of Black male teachers were instrumental within the investigation of the Black male educational experience. Those who encountered Black male teachers within their educational experience expressed gratitude for their presence and involvement. While the participants recognized them as teachers, they also regarded the teachers as mentors. The participants appeared to separate the function of mentor from the profession of teacher. The “mentors” father-like interaction with the participants could explain this disconnect. The mentors provided their “mentees” with guidance, “tough love”, structure, and encouragement. The mentors did not confine this interaction to the classroom. There were several examples of mentorship that occurred outside of the classroom. The participants expressed a desire to mentor others. However, they were not interested in using teaching as a platform their mentorship.

While conducting follow-up interviews, two participants validated the notion that personal experience was an important factor within their decision to pursue or avoid the profession. One of the participants mentioned earning potential as his primary reason for leaving the profession. He stated that he taught for the wrong reasons initially. He indicated that he needed a job at the time and teaching provided him with employment. When asked for recommendations on recruiting more Black men, one participant offered the following explanation:

The more knowledge that I can pass down to the next generation is a feeling that can't be matched by money. The fact that I can change a child's mindset by my ability to reach them on an educational level is somewhat mind blowing. For me



to get other men to see that I believe that is not hard to do. I would say that most men can see the impact they have whether they are a school teacher or teacher in the streets. What happens is that because we have bills and we have the ability to be a teacher outside of the classroom, we choose to take that route. We find jobs that will pay us the bucks to take care of our families and look like jobs for men but we use our experiences along the way to pour into young students as we see fit.

This observation reiterates their opposition to restriction and their desire to teach (mentor) others. Instead of adhering to a pre-described curriculum or pedagogy, they prefer full autonomy when sharing their experiences. This allows them the freedom to teach as they please. His commentary about salary was particularly insightful in that the Black male's ability (or preference) to teach outside of the classroom encourages him to seek vocations that offer better pay. Within his statement, he equates jobs capable of "paying the bills" with masculinity, which alludes to societal perceptions of the profession.

### **Limitations**

The research study is incapable of providing a comprehensive overview of the Black male educational experience. Data collection for an all-inclusive study of this magnitude would take a considerable amount of time and effort. The second limitation of the study is that it omits the opinions of Black males outside of the 18-30 year-old demographic. These additional perspectives would enrich the data by introducing additional layers of educational experience and opinions on the profession.

## **Recommendations**

To attract more Black men to the classroom, several things must happen to improve the profession aesthetically. First, the American educational system must not assume that Black men share the same educational or life experiences. It is an affront to educational experience and assumes that one is an expert on things concerning Black males because one is a Black male. If schools are adamant about recruiting Black male teachers, they must begin with improving the educational experiences of Black boys. Curricula tailored to their learning styles would greatly benefit this demographic. This focused support would facilitate better marks and work toward closing the achievement gap.

Secondly, the creation and implementation of specialized professional development seminars concerning Black male behavior would decrease confusion surrounding the impetus of Black male “misbehavior” within the classroom, reducing the percentage of Black males being suspended and expelled from school. Teachers would be trained on how to effectively communicate with Black males. Subjects would include but are not limited to: relationship building, one-on-one interaction, learning style and behavior, soft communication, classroom management, and behavior de-escalation. Meanwhile, teachers and administrators could regularly ascertain the Black male educational experience by dedicating a certain time during the day to talk to a group of Black males. Allowing them space to freely communicate their feelings among peers or in private would provide the feedback needed to gauge efforts at providing Black males a quality educational experience.

Improving recruitment efforts associated with Black men is paramount. While promoting the need for their physical presence is cordial, ascertaining their reason for teaching would improve retention. During the recruitment process, we must ask them if they would prefer to teach with the possibility of mentorship or simply teach. We must eradicate the notion that Black men willingly assume the role of mentor when they agree to teach. If teaching without mentorship is their preference, respect their wishes and provide them with support and relevant feedback to improve their chances for success.

If one chooses to embrace the role of teacher and mentor, pay him a differential for the additional responsibility. Allow mentor-teachers the flexibility to provide extended support to students identified as viable candidates for the mentorship program. Establish mentor-teacher communities within the school and within the community. These communities would meet quarterly to discuss current educational conditions, mentee progress, classroom observations, and develop methodologies and pedagogies specific to the Black male educational experience.

### **Final Reflection**

Instances of love, affection, instruction and discipline were the crux of my educational experience. Brown-hued individuals endowed with a love for children, a passion for education, and virtuous character were more than teachers for us who attended the predominantly black schools of North Benton County, Mississippi. Mr. Sobukwe, formerly Williams, was an interesting sort. He was a thin man with round glasses and matted dreadlocks who frequently played African music and motivational speeches during quiet times. He made reading and learning seem cool and militant simultaneously. Mr. Bostick, one of my father's friends, had a knack for making the most

intricate mathematical formula appear simple. I cannot forget Mr. Hicks, who used humor and quick wit to cultivate within us a love for social justice. He called our minds to action through daily engagements with current events. If one had to deduce what entity or thing powered the magic these teachers possessed, most would say that it was their ability to care and show compassion. They treated curriculum and student with respect and admiration equally. These experiences shaped my views education and its importance.

The influence of Black male teachers of Ashland, Mississippi was far-reaching. It is safe to say that every child who attended school in my hometown, during my tenure there, interacted with one of the aforementioned men academically or socially. The Black community in my town is tight-knit. Families attend church together. Children are often classmates and neighbors. We watched the older men build and create things together. We, the children within the community, were privy to this wonderful reality. From them (our Black male teachers), we learned important life lessons. We learned that the power of influence did not reside within the confines of a wallet but within the bounds of relationship.

The impact Black men had on my education was immeasurable. I saw individuals countering the ideal that teaching is a job reserved for women. I saw men showing compassion and concern about my intellectual formation and well-being. My father was one of those men. I watched how he cared for my sisters, my mother, others, and me while he taught and coached. He worked tirelessly to provide us with love, instruction, and support. Other Black men such as Mr. Steve Bostick, Mr. John Henry Bostick, Mr. Alvin Fortenberry, Mr. Delassie Thompson, Mr. L.T. Hicks, Mr. Wovoka Sobukwe, Mr.

Charlie Brown, Mr. Walker Tucker were invaluable to my education and becoming a man. I benefitted from their presence. I learned that it was okay to care, educate, and show compassion.

I wanted to instill a greater sense of self-worth within black boys. I was upset at all the negative imagery associated with black boys and men within the media. I wanted to do something to dispel these rumors. I wanted to reassure them that it was okay to pursue something besides career in sports or entertainment. I wanted to reassure them that curiosity surrounding things of nature, law, politic, math was completely acceptable. I wanted to tell them that it was okay to be considered a nerd. That it is okay to be smart, to pursue knowledge. That it was okay to oppose society's definition of a black man. I believe this epiphany changed my views of teaching. Initially, even after all of the black male interaction, I thought teaching was a job for women. I considered it extremely nurturing. Honestly, I did not consider myself the nurturing kind. I thought of and carry myself as a "man's man". I associated a punch in the chest with education from men. I thought that pain and discipline were the best teachers. However, I soon discovered that all of that meant nothing. I discovered that if I wanted to influence students, I needed to be a part of the learning/education process. I learned that this job belonged to men and women alike.

I believe that to affect the nation, one must influence the classroom. One must be willing to entrench themselves in the fight of education. Teaching should be a vocation, not a job. It requires passion, competency, and care. For urban schools to compete with their suburban counterparts, administrators and policymakers must focus on establishing stability and consistency within the classroom. So, why am I running toward the chaos

when others are avoiding it altogether? I wanted to be as influential to someone as my role models were to me. I wanted to help someone along the way. I wanted to be that positive influence. I wanted to be that mentor. I wanted to be that person who showed someone how to do something (especially young men).

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## **Appendix A**

### **Survey**

Survey

1. What is your age?
2. What is the highest level of education you've completed?
3. Are you currently employed? Yes or no (**please circle your answer**).
4. Are you currently enrolled in school? Yes or no (**please circle your answer**).
5. Are you a teacher? Yes or no (**please circle your answer**).
6. Have you considered teaching as possible career? Yes or no (**please circle your answer**).
7. How important was your personal amount of education in your decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Not important</i>			<i>Very important</i>	

8. How important was earning potential in your decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Not important</i>			<i>Very important</i>	

9. How important were your educational experiences (e.g. personal thoughts about education, your views of former teachers, academic achievements/shortcomings) in your decision to pursue (or not pursue) teaching as a career?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Not important</i>			<i>Very important</i>	

10. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group with up to 9 other individuals to discuss your thoughts and views on education and teaching as a profession? Yes or no (**please circle your answer**) and write (in print) your name and contact information below:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Figure 1.* Participant Survey. List of introspective, demographic questions.

## **Appendix B**

### **Focus Group Interview Protocol**

Focus Group Interview Protocol

**Title of research study:** Analyzing African-American male interest in teaching as a profession.

**Investigator:** Kevin B. Thompson

1. What did you think of school growing up?
  - a. What did you want to be when you grew up? (potential follow-up question)
2. What was your favorite subject in school? Why?
  - a. Who was your favorite teacher? Why? (potential follow-up question)
3. Think back over all of your years in school from kindergarten to your senior year in high school. What was your favorite memory? What was your least favorite memory?
4. How did these memories influence your decision to pursue or not pursue a career in education?
  - a. What other factors played a role in your decision-making? (potential follow-up question)
5. In your own words, describe the importance of education.
  - a. What could have improved your educational experience? (potential follow-up question)
6. What are your thoughts on teaching as a profession?
  - a. Do you feel that teaching could be a possible career option for you? Why or why not? (potential follow-up question)
7. What do you think we need to do to get more Black men to teach?
8. Is there anything that we didn't cover that we need to address?

*Figure 2.* Focus Group Interview Protocol. Probing educational experience questions.

## **Appendix C**

### **Focus Group Transcript**



Kevin: Alright. I'll lay down the ground rules here. So, here's what I want you all to do, want you to think about. Like I said I want to talk about African American males...um...and education. I want to look at the disinterest in teaching. I want to know why more African American males are not teaching in the classroom, right? And, I'm really glad I have you all here because...uhh..because a couple of you all have a really interesting background. That I want to...uhh..key in on, which is cool. Umm, so...ground rules...umm...everybody speak loud, speak proud...umm...Vegas rules...everything that we say here, stays here. Umm, if there are any disagreements, we just ask that you respectfully agree to disagree and go on. I don't think it'll come to that, ahh..but I have to say that for the purpose of this study.

Kevin: Ahh...so...what I want you to do right now is to think about K-12...kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, if you can remember that. Just think about what was going on...what were you doing...different schools...different teachers...and all that, right? And, I want you to tell me about ...umm...what did you think about school growing up? What were your thoughts about school growing up? And I'll say..umm...maybe up to a minute...a minute and a half...because I want to get everybody's information, so just whoever wants to start. I'll be jotting things down. So, I'm listening, but I want to try to keep notes. So whoever wants to start, you can go ahead.

Brian: Do you want a general summary or can we...uhhh elementary, middle, high...

Kevin: (interrupts) Yeah

Kevin: Umm...however you want to do it...however you want to do it, yeah

Brian: Okay

Brian: I loved elementary school. My experience with elementary school ...umm...went...first off, I went to private school. My mom...the school I went to...the lady who owned it...used to babysit my mom and my uncle, so that's actually how we met them. So, my...from the time I was in daycare...up until 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I loved it. It was very intimate...not as many kids there...everybody knew everybody...

Kevin: ummhmm

Brian: So I just enjoyed that environment.

So when I got to middle school, it was just like all...all you know...coming from a place where you're sheltered and you know you're in a confined area to where you are exposed to a lot more.

Like middle school for me was just...just...it was big time. It was overwhelming. I was exposed to a lot more. Uhh...different...not just a different environment but different...uhh different backgrounds...

Kevin: right

Brian: ...like students and parents and teachers...so, I think getting adjusted to that...the first year was okay....my second grade year...I mean...that's when my whole rebellious stage like fully kicked in.

Kevin: ummhmm

Brian: I just hated authority.

So, I'm not really sure what clicked in my mind then, but just coming from that...that transition...I think that played a big role in it. And it...just...created and "bam" you're hey (with extra emphasis)

Kevin: (laughs softly) hmph

Brian: ...come from a school where you maybe with one hundred...hundred fifty kids...to you in a school with 800 kids....that's a big gap...so...

Kevin: ummhmm

Brian: I ended up getting sent to alternative school...towards the end of 7<sup>th</sup> grade year...my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year...I was in alternative school...umm and...I kinda got some discipline back in me...I mean...you have to walk through metal detectors before you even come into the school...and then the teachers actually are given permission to use physical restraint on you...

things get outta hand for any student for that matter then....me thinking I was the baddest negro coming from where I was up until that then..you know...being around gang members and just...bunch of everything...I mean I was horrible but I wasn't that outta control. So that...that kinda uh...brought me back in line

...and then having a mentor who actually taught at the school...that helped along as well 'cause I was able to talk to somebody...so that gave me a positive male role model who actually taught and the...not necessarily ironic thing about that is...that school had predominantly African American males who taught there...at a alternative school...which kinda..y'know...made sense but it didn't...because in my mind I thought you know...all of these qualified men...you know...they're here making sure that we stay in line but there are other kids at other schools who need this presence as well...

Kevin: ummhmm

Brian: ...so I pretty much flew under the radar there and everything went smooth...and I was able to go back to quote unquote regular school my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year.

As God would have it...I actually went from alternative school to Barbara Jordan, which is uhh...magnet school...and so I go from a place where a fight could break out to go to a school in which I can learn a trade...and a career...and at Barbara Jordan that's where I learned to weld..

Kevin: hmph

Brian: so...you know that was another positive step forward for me.

In my world a teacher was an African American...so I just didn't take advantage of that...I kinda took it for granted...and I end up gettin' kicked out of there and sent to a different school...  
...so (medium length pause)...I think...not having...having the lack of male presence in my household contributed...it translated into my academics.

...like I was a good student...but I just didn't apply myself...and I think had I took advantage of the African American male role models in my life I probably would have a higher GPA and could have graduated top of my class.

So, I have uh...I have uh....high level of respect for them...it was just....immaturity and you know things going on in my personal life. So, that's my story.

---

Kevin: Ok, thank you. Anybody else care to share?

Vernon: ummm....I'm trying to think if I liked school or not...elementary...ummm...ummm...if I can remember...ummm..all of my teachers were cool, you know...I liked my teachers...I had female teachers....

Kevin: In elementary school?

Vernon: In elementary school. And umm...they were all cool...they were all hard...Black women...umm...they were real disciplinaries...

Kevin: ummhmm

Vernon: even in my first grade I used to get...you know...the spankings with the ruler...

Kevin: (chuckles)

Vernon: from my teachers so...they were real disciplinarians...

and umm...once I went to middle school...uhh...that's when...I went to...It was kind of uhh...a white school...so you know...teachers more lenient...and that's when I started to...gettin' a little active in school...I started getting a lot of writeups.

Kevin: ummhmm

Vernon: ...my mama used to be like...my brother actually...used to see a writeup and be like dang you got a write up again? (chuckles)...so, I used to always get writeups for lil' stupid stuff...I used to be like the class clown

and umm...in middle school my main focus was basically...uhh..football really...football...and girls at the time (chuckles)...cause you know I wanted to be like my brother you know...my brother he used to always be messing with...you know females...

I think when I went to my high school years...that kinda messed me up...you know...got me off track because I wanted to play football but then I was looking up to my brother...and you know he was getting the ears pierced and I wanted to get my ears pierced...and once you play...play football at my school...you know...you can't have your ears pierced...you know...wearing earrings during the school day...

Kevin: ok ok

Vernon: or when you're playing football...and I wanted to wear my earrings...

Kevin: right

Vernon: ...so you know I end up quitting football because I wanna wear my earrings (heavy emphasis here)...and talk to females and stuff..and uhh...it kinda...I kinda...regret it at..sometimes.

...sometimes...I feel like maybe it was a blessing I feel like because I didn't have football to lean on...you know...it helped me umm...umm...you know...mental wise...as far as education....you know getting toward my books and everything...

I felt like school was pretty easy all the time...umm it was...it was just a lack of me...wanting to do the work. I feel like the work was so easy I didn't feel like doing the work...

Kevin: right

Vernon: ...and I (chuckles)...I kinda see that in my son now...and it's like we kinda need something to test us...you know...because we...we...we're like analytical people...we overthink or we try to analyze everything...we try to you know make sure we're ahead of the game every time...you know

...umm...school was you know...umm...it was...wasn't really that much of a problem for me....as far as my academics...

...but as far as....I liked the school for relationships...I liked the school for friends and things like that you know...where I went to school, it was always good to see...you know...my friends...the...the...females...the...umm...'bout time I was in high school, I was always in relationships...(chuckles)...umm...had a couple of relationships..uhh...that went long in high school...you know..uhh...got me past the uhh...*adult series* of life...

Everyone: (laughter)

Vernon: ...you know that happened in high school...and umm...umm...happened to my brother...but that one (laughter)...(inaudible)...but yeah...school...you know...elementary through 12<sup>th</sup>...I mean nothing really drastic happened...

Kevin: ummhmm

Vernon: ...I mean you know you had trouble here and there you know...I have some friends who did a lot of stuff...uhhh...so...we was all in Missouri City...but we all came from...you know...black people get a little money...you know...they move to Missouri City...they wasn't from Missouri City

Kevin: right

Vernon: ...so all these different neighborhoods coming into this...Missouri City...they still had the mentality of the other neighborhoods they was coming from...umm...that's why when people say Missouri City the 'hood...people laugh about it...but really it's not...exactly Missouri City...it's the world they came from...the mentality where they came from

Kevin: ummhmm

Vernon: ...to Missouri City...(clears throat)...you know...it was a lot of things that you know...that happened...during those...you know...outside events...especially when Marshall had came up...it was a lot...it started to be a lot of gang fights...

Kevin: hmph

Vernon: ...closer to my uhh...11th and 12th grade year....when I started Alief High School...we had a lot of activity that went down from shootings and everything....from neighborhood shootings....shootings at clubs...

...umm...one of my ummm...a girl that went to my school...she was a real good friend of mine...uhh we went to uhh club....uhh...my 12<sup>th</sup> grade year...and uhh...we had gotten into a fight with some uhh guys from another school...and it just so happened the next time we went there...I didn't go...I said I couldn't go...'cause I had move to Pearland...my second semester so I couldn't go with my friends...

Kevin: ummhmm

Vernon: and that night...the same guys we got into an argument with uhh...they shot you know this time...she actually got hit and...she died that night from...from a fight...that was our 12<sup>th</sup> grade year...she could have been graduating that year...so you know that's one thing that stuck to me...

...and uhhh...also a friend of mine from umm...girl name (xxxx)...I'm sure everybody knows (xxxx)...'cause you know she...we thought we was cousins...'cause she was a cousin to my cousin...so we used to always talk and say "are we cousins or not"

Kevin: ummhmm

Vernon: ...we used to always laugh about that...and uhh...you know...that's just one of those things that happened that just stuck with me...my uhh...high school year...I actually saw her that night 'cause I was at that same game...saw her...hugged her...and then the next thing I know is somebody comes to me saying your cousin just got shot...and I'm like what...and then you know...I just seen the whole lil' episode and I was like that's...surreal...

Kevin: ummhmm

Vernon: ...somebody you know...something happened just like that...you just saw the person...you know...so it's just (inaudible)

...I guess I'm thankful that I actually moved to Pearland because that moved me away from the situations of me going to other paths in my life...to you know me actually...(inaudible)...being on another path where I thought...you know...about bigger things than doing uhh...criminal activities that my friends were doing...uhh...other than that

...I had both of my parents...they had a strong presence in my life...my dad wasn't there as much because he was always working...but he was still there enough to actually you know lay his hand on me...and keep me straight...and my mom you know she...uhh...she was basically doing everything...she was always there at my school...she was always at my events and everything...so ummm I was glad I had both of my parents there in my life...

Kevin: yeah...anybody else? Any different experience or...

Craig: ...for myself...I can say throughout my whole school career umm...academics was the basis of my...uhh...any of my schools...elementary...middle school...high school...academics was always the basis (inaudible) ahh for me...I came from umm...a household with two parents...my mother was a teacher (laughs)...so that wasn't gon' change regardless

...umm I think when I saw a change...I think it was elementary was where I think I was most challenged the most uhh academically...because in elementary everybody was trying to have the highest grade...we was always trying to be on the A honor roll...the AB honor roll...and I think elementary is where I saw academics really mean something and that's where...that's when academics was cool...like umm...it was a point in time...let's say I went to school with family members...you know my family members was there...

...but you know as I got older in the elementary school...umm it was a...you was...it was the uncool thing to be doing something smart...

...so like say a lot of the kids were at choir...so our teachers had it easy 'cause their whole class was gone on a field trip...or gone to uhh you know uhhh a performance...but it wasn't like we wasn't doing our work...we was...having the highest scores in the district...you know and as far as the standardized testing...back then we had the TAAS test and umm...

Kevin: right...

Craig: ...we had TAAS test and everything like that and but it was the cool thing to actually have academics...you know...have good grades...like...you were mad when you find out you made a 92 on a paper and somebody else made a 99...you wanted to be better than that top person

Kevin: right...

Craig: and that's how it was for me in elementary...ahh middle school like I said being there with family...umm...myself...like I said academics was a big thing...so I never considered myself a cool kid...I think once I got into like middle school that's where I like kinda...umm...I actually saw where you start having those...those cliques...where you have the cool kids hang here...the you know nerds or whatever hang here...and then you got like "in-betweeners"...then you got like the goths...you know that's where I start...where I started seeing separation by association...so either you're gonna be a goth, a you know nerdy kid...bad kid or whatever...you know you're gonna be the athlete...the jock...that's where I first saw all that...umm...then you know...

I guess in middle school that's when you start experiencing a lot of this...I experienced...you know...seeing fights...you know I never saw a fight in elementary school...in middle school

like...it's almost like...it's kinda weird or whatever where there wasn't at least one fight a week...whether it be at a bus stop...or be in the neighborhood...and you know the funny thing with that is you know...my mom is a teacher...and she was always out when we got out...so everybody knew my mama...and so...they would know her car and everything...so if somebody is trying to fight...here my mama come in her car...coming around the corner 'cause she see everybody

...umm...high school was an interesting time for me.

Craig: ...umm high school was very interesting...like I said freshmen year...I played sports middle school 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade football...9<sup>th</sup> grade year I wanted to play football but I took the first year to focus on my grades again because I knew it was a new experience...

I went from going to a predominantly black and Hispanic elementary school to a mixed bi-racial black and white middle school to an all-black (chuckles)...all-black and Hispanic high school...

Kevin: ummhmm...

Craig: ...so it was kinda like a culture shock to me because you know...these was the same people I went to elementary with now we're high schoolers so like they had had they're experiences at their schools...now I'm coming together with all these people coming from different backgrounds and you know my background...I couldn't relate a lot to them...

...now my freshmen year...academics were my big thing...I chose not to play sports that year because I wanted to make sure that I had my grades up because I know as my mom...as my parents...she stressed academics...

Kevin: right

Craig: ...so my thing was to try to get as high as I could on the totem pole early on so when...if I were to fall off in my later years...you know...I'll still be okay.

Kevin: right

Craig: ...and so uhh...freshman...was all academics...you know...got introduced to like my

...my sophomore year is where really I got first introduced to like my first real girlfriend I guess...you know...kinda umm...with that experience...I didn't have an older brother but my older brother knew about my uhh..escapades...you know then he was helping me out...dropping me off and stuff...places...

Kevin: (laughing)



Craig: ...uhhh...uhh..but yeah high school was a different experience...academics was the forefront...you know a lot of the people there maintained academics...we still had that academics challenge...

...but I think high school is where I learned a lot of social differences... that's where those social differences increased...'cause like I said you still had your jocks...you still had your people...like I say...your ummm...your people who was gonna umm cause you know mess...but you know the underlying under that you know I always...I dealt with like a lot of social things...a lot of personal stuff...umm...you know...experience...that the first time I experienced people being pregnant in high school...like I said I never really understood that till my senior year...

I actually had umm an episode...I ain't gon' say an episode but I had a umm...I had a moment where...uhh...a girl I was dating umm...was...had umm...told me she was pregnant...this was like my senior year....

Kevin: umm hmm...

Craig: ...umm yeah...that experience there you know I had a girl that I was dating...you know had told me that...and then a girl that I had dated like sophomore year...she ended up coming back finding out later she got pregnant my senior year...so it was kinda crazy experiencing something like that...you know...you're sixteen...seventeen...going through things like that...

Kevin: ummhmm

Craig: and umm...it was just a different experience...like said...you had the people you know...the people...you know...society...your groups...umm...or you had people you know who were always in the wrong...then you had people you know who...focused on academics...

Kevin: right

Craig: ...and myself...I knew how to...I developed a way to maneuver through all of that...like I had...you know I still hung out with the people who considered nerds...I hung out with the thugs...like you know like...aye I knew all them

...you know I say I'd say what's up and they go beat somebody up in the parking lot...I saw them at Astroworld...and umm I see the people I go to school with and they're beating up people at Astroworld...and they see you and they're like "what's up?"...they dab me up...and I kinda...high school I kinda find my way to maneuver thing...but they introduced me to a lot of umm...changes then that helped me develop into my true adult life...

Kevin: ummhmm...okay...cool deal...alright..umm...let's move to....uhh...anybody want to add somethin'?

Muhammad: me

Kevin: ok...

Muhammad: umm..umm...man...school to me was just..(long pause)...it wasn't good...it wasn't bad...it was just one of those things that you had to do...

Kevin: ummhmm

Muhammad: ...that's how it was...and um...it's no one word or one expression for it...'cause everyday had its different days...

Kevin: okay....

Muhammad: sometimes I loved it....sometimes I hated it...but overall...(pitch upwards) well overall I can say I didn't like school...loved learning...

Kevin: ummhmm

Muhammad: ...love learning...school...the aspect of the pressure...the testing...deadlines and all that stuff was just...not for me...and at an early age...I learned umm...what school was for

Kevin: right

Muhammad: ...and the history of it...and I was already a rebellious child...so I heard that...so I was bucking the system...like bump their system...they ain't about to railroad me...

Everyone: (laughter)

Muhammad: ...like I was like...stick it to 'em...

so...i was like...for real like...like me man...I was the youngest of my family...and I had a lot of uncles...and uhh...older siblings that I would hear from...and I'm taking the information that they're saying...and umm...put it in my way of thinking and you know like I said...it caused a lot of rebellion...I was uhh...I went to...I went to two schools every year...up until...ummm...the 8<sup>th</sup> grade excluding alternative school...and I had four...three...three African American male teachers...in total..

Kevin: hmph...

Muhammad: ...in total...and (pounds the table in rhythm) each of 'em uhh...left a stamp on my life...each one of 'em..and I remember them over all the teachers I

had...umm...preschool...even for preschool... always in trouble...always gettin' popped with the ruler...all the way up to...I think it was like when I was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade when they took that out of schools...

...the whole time...umm...I revered my dad a lot...so he was the only man...the only man...only person who could tell me anything...so that caused some trouble...but when it was an African...an African American male in the school...his presence...depending on how he was...he would kinda get the same reverence as my dad...almost...I'd be like...I'd pull some stuff on some of the other teachers...I'd talk back...I'd do this...I'd do that...but with the African American male teacher I probably wouldn't...I'll chill out...you know I'd...

Kevin: ummhmm...

Muhammad: ...he'd get that respect...

Kevin: ...ummhmm

Muhammad:...umm...my third grade year the principal was African-American...I'd would act a fool in class but when I go to the office...everything would just shut down...and it's been like that you know my whole life...

...and I never knew why until like you know...umm my...7<sup>th</sup> grade year was when I had my first African-American male teacher and he was over African American studies he found something in me and heard what I was going through...always had a problem with girls...and I was like...I was like all... has always been a problem, man...

...so like... I was...I played every sport in school that the school offered and was good at it...and was like...I have to go to practice...I'm about to go dip out with shorty... always... always the case...And he would sit me on the edge of the class away from all the girls and stick me with some lame dudes [laughter] ... And I'd be like...and I'd tell him bro...you blocking brother chill out [laughter] and he would just like pull me to the side and say it ain't about this...it ain't about that...

And so he set me up... It was this one chick, alright I'm in eighth grade...this one chick is in the tenth grade and I'm trying to talk to her...He put me in the door...just 'cuz he knew what she was gonna do...she was like I like you and everything and I want to go with you but your behavior is like this...Man I changed everything [laughter] ...That's why...That why I said my eighth grade I went to two schools...every year since my eighth grade year, once I got with that girl and he put me on game ...he was like you wanna get a girl...

so he taught me like [laughs] he taught me like a whole bunch African-American studies...number one

...and then he took me under his wing outside of school...He was an Iota...I knew about the Divine 9 from my family...everybody Greek and Mason but I'm like, him, you're lame...He

took me under his wing...He took me up to Central State... showed me that...the college campus all that stuff and expanded my horizons...

I knew it through my family...They were like "yeah you gotta go to school" ...You got legacy...But he actually took me to that setting...I sat through a couple of college courses with him...Went on...on campus to the parade...homecoming...all that stuff...Messed around and took me to a couple of parties...one of the other frat parties... I mean just really expanded my horizons...I'd switched up everything man...He was bringing me to his church...all kinds of stuff...And it was...it was all positive...

One of the other guys was in my seventh grade year...the year before...so he was my second [African-American male teacher]

So it was this one guy who knew my uncle... He was a teacher and I didn't like this dude because he would be hard on me... He wasn't so hard on other kids but because I was one of the only black kids, he was really hard... And I couldn't do nothing... I couldn't say nothing...I got into a fight... almost tried to fight him...He put me on me on my behind the whole nine...

And something just clicked years later and I was like in my sophomore year of high school and I saw him... It just made me want to apologize... We had a heart to heart talk and he talked to me and let me know like "man it's potential in you"...us African-American males... we have to work that much harder than other ones...Like he put me up on game and it was like "dang he ain't even my teacher no more and he still got that love and that care"

...So I had to respect that...I respect that... Then it was my ninth grade year...It was like back to back to back...I had this one dude...he was a radio DJ and a teacher...He was a lame, bruh... He had a voice like that dude on the commercial..."with dry eyes" [laughter] ...So I'm falling to sleep in of every class and he mad... If I'm not falling asleep... I'm trying to mess with some girl in the back of the class...And so he was just like kicking me out his class all the time... and I'm like bruh, you don't even try to help me... And then he put me up on game like...you don't even try help yourself... why are you coming to school?

He was like...then and he was like... he gave me the whole talk again about how Black people gotta work hard and all that stuff...

He was a history teacher and he just really like...they really... they really showed tough love...And I guess that's what I'm saying...They really showed tough love and the way that... I guess... I had should have been... I needed that I guess... I don't know...

They left a good stamp of my life... stopping me from doing a lot of stuff that I shouldn't have been doing... They all knew I had a problem with between trying to just play on teams and mess with girls... that would stop me from like everything man... And I'm like glad that they took me as their own son...

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Because at the end of the day... you could be a mentor to a kid... I mean... I hate to put like this but if it's a white guy with a white guy... I mean [unintelligible] ...you have a relationship...[unintelligible] But even if you had took a little kid under your wing... you being African-American... it's an Indian... it's an Asian... I feel like it don't fully cross into your mind as you...you take them in as your as your child but when it's of your own ethnicity and y'all have that connection...it's a little more serious...

I think so...especially as African-American men when we know the struggles that we have ...like it's a true struggle to be African-American men... And you as an older person and you see a younger person... you really want to help them out and put them on game so that they don't have to come to the things that they could come to in the day and age...

Vernon: So I've never had an African-American male teacher. I don't think I've had a male, oh no, I had one male teacher. That was it.

Robbie: Just hearing y'all, but I'm trying to categorize everything, because I have vivid memories of everything. But, uh, [someone whispers, it was just last year, then laughter ensues.]

The funny thing about my education is that it didn't start in elementary, in fact, it started before that. My mother had me when she was 16 and I remember when I was born, three or four years old, I was running around the college campus.

My mother's zoomed through high school and she finished high school in two years and she spent a little bit of time at the actual high school I graduated at. I remember, I have a few memories. I actually remember actually being on a college campus and her showing me to professors and they would be laughing at me. I can't remember what it was. I think I was doing something stupid.

But, I remember my first actual educational institute. It was an academy. It was like pre-k kindergarten and it was like mid-downtown and I remember my mother working hard having two jobs and me going there and it was like the help increase my learning. It prepared me for advanced learning methods and things like that.

I remember when I actually started elementary. I was only there for like a year...a year or so, and I left there and actually started elementary at Montgomery Elementary right over here and moving to the Clarke [Hiram Clarke].

And I remember my dad because he was still serving at the time, so he was sporadically coming back and forth to home for a minute. And, then like 2 or 3 years later, that he finally came back.

But, most of my elementary career, I spent trying to learn how to work with people...getting bullied and I was a real smart kid.

I remember the two black male teachers that I had in elementary. I can remember till this day. One was named Mr. Jeter and the other one was named Mr. Thomas...Mr. Jeter... I had like my second or third grade...

And I remember like everybody had knew my dad and like my parents' family because all my little family was [unintelligible] ...The Landrys' were know for going to Montgomery...If they knew your last name or if they knew your daddy they knew everybody...So there was no you know I got in trouble and like there was some old head teachers that knew my people...There were some new teachers who had seen my parents but they didn't really know who they was... But the old heads? I couldn't mess around when I was younger... When I was younger man...they was on our behinds...

I remember getting to skip a grade because they were trying to hold me back because they ain't know I went to an academy...But I was zooming through their work...I think it was like kindergarten I skipped... I went straight to the second...first... first grade...And I remember all being in those classes man and had these teachers and they at that age... they made a real influential experience of my life because I can remember a lot of the lesson they taught because they taught back then... It wasn't just teaching They were actually teaching some lessons... Like they would incorporate right and wrong methods and methodology into whatever you was learning... So you would go home and be like man ...you'd actually be thinking about the lesson compared to like later on in my education and it was like [unintelligible] You know? [unintelligible]

...And you know I remember after I left Mr. Jeter's class... you know he never actually was my teacher...that's the funny thing about it... I had another teacher and her name was Mrs. Jones and she was right next to it and I would get into it with people that was in there because I was smart or we was beefin'...

And I had a friend named [withheld] and so with him... he was always getting in trouble... He was the bad one and I was the knucklehead with the genius ideas... He would just hype me up and we would just go at it...I'd say something crazy and be like man let's do that... then he'd be like "yeah man let's do that"...And five minutes later, I'd find myself stepping outside thinking I don't know how...

I used to get into fights with a lot of kids I really didn't have a problem with girls in elementary because they really weren't my focus... But I remember the issues I had with them was that they always saw me as a big dude...I was a bigger kid... I was taller... I was the big dude with the big build and that's just what it was

And I remember, you know, I was always the monster and things like that I was always getting into it with upperclassmen...the fifth and fourth graders...

I had to walk home from Montgomery... so I had people and we'd get in fights and brawls walking home...

I think what sped up the process for me in elementary was the fact that I was the oldest child...And then my brothers got born and then Lamont...which was my second oldest brother... he finally started to school with me about third or fourth grade... So we spent a little bit of time together and having him around it changed my whole perspective...

...because I went from being the victim... to I won't say...that I was doing the victimizing but just not taking it no more... I was standing up for myself and I was like I'm not getting beat up in front of my brother... This ain't happening...No no no...

So you know we'd be getting into fights and if we was getting into brawls... we were just gettin' in brawls man... And if I was about to get beat up... we was runnin together so it is what it was...

So you know he was a smart alec... So you know he would say something and he wouldn't realize what he had said until it was too late... He'd look at me and be like "yeah I just said something too smart didn't I?" And I'd be like "ahh man we're about to run home but it is what it is..."

So you know I remember Mr Jeter pulling me aside telling me the same conversation we're having with you telling me... you know you can't be getting into this mess... You got a good future man... You actually got to do something with your life... You actually gotta like...you're a smart kid ...you don't need to be hanging out with certain people ...and stop trying to be with everybody...

But it was hard for me to understand that because at that time everybody around me had a clique... Everybody had a friend...So for me it was just like why can't I have a friend? Why I gotta be alone? Why I always got to be the odd one out and that's just how I looked at it...

I was just angry at school for a good minute because I felt like I just never fit in...that bothered me for the rest of my educational career... all the way up into high school...even passively sometimes... I ain't even realize it...

When I left uh...finally after leaving Montgomery when I got Mr Thomas... he was my math teacher after going through those grades and things...like that I remember the mind(?)...it was a time period...I think it was around the time when no child left behind got enacted...in the middle of that and they were just pushing people through the grades man... They didn't care if you failed or not...

I remember that this mentality changed in the middle of that because he went from I want you to succeed to kind of... felt like he didn't really...he cared but he didn't care as much... Like he knew things were out of his hands...

So it was kind of like I was struggling in math and I always struggled in math...And I knew I was and it was kind of hard because my dad was still learning how to be a dad after he came back...so our relationship wasn't like that... My mom was still busting her behind working...my dad was still readjusting trying to figure out you know to get a constant steady job...We were in the hood so it was still a struggle...

I remember it wasn't that many opportunities for me to go and my dad always wanted me to play sports and things like that but, we didn't really had stuff like that elementary...I remember man him telling me...I ended up gaining weight when I was in it because all this I was going through...

I remember... I... they wanted me to do tutoring and stuff like that... Sometimes I would go and sometimes I wouldn't just because my family wasn't available... I had responsibility at home...I was helping Mom with my bros or helping out with the house or whatever...being there to help Mom...help Dad or whatever was going on... So I spent a lot of times just growing up real quick on the fly...

And I also spent a lot of time trying to find myself...find my inner peace...find out what was wrong with me because I actually think man... I'm always getting into it with people so it must be something wrong with me, you know... And that's just how I looked at it...and that's just how it was... So for the longest I was just putting myself down for a good minute...

When I left elementary, I was real smart and I had some high test scores in science... So my parents applied and got me into YES Prep and this is right for before...this is right in the process where YES Prep is going from a private school to a public school... So this whole concept was new to everybody... And my Mom and them were like "you're going to the school" And I was like aight cool...

And I went up there and it was predominantly white and Hispanic and it was only like [x] black kids there... It's like my first time really experiencing racism on like an extreme level, cuz you know...after leaving... is seeing a teacher kind of feel like he failed himself and then going to this school knowing that I'm smart... But I knew for a fact when I got there I was going to be higher in math...So my mindset was I'm bout to be dumb...and that's not really what happened...

I got there and I was just blowing them away in English, history, and science... I was just making people look flat out dumb and I wasn't trying... And that just caused a lot of issues with the Caucasian kids... They were like this Black person up here talking like us... sounding like us...that's really what they used to say...



I remember they would...they had testing...so they would pull and they would test every kid on their reading levels where they were at...And I remember the first test I took...I remember this white teacher...she pulled me aside and she was testing me and she said you reading on a college level already... She was like...and she was so shocked that I was able to interpret this...it was a playbook like...it wasn't even something serious... It was like one of those books with the pictures and just a couple of [unintelligible] and I was able to describe the emotions... the feelings the scenery so vividly... so descriptively that I almost changed the story into something other than what it was... She was like I can't believe that you perceived all that from that little bitty book...

That's when things really got heated... We had teacher aides and things like that... and after that conversation... the relationship with that teacher kind of went down hill because they kind of like started neglecting me because they didn't really care no more cuz "oh he smart but he not one of us... so I don't really care"...So it was what it was...

So for rest of that time I was there...me and them teachers didn't really have a relationship... that's just what it was... But I had a counselor... was a black woman... I wish I knew I knew this lady's name 'cuz she saved my life... I used to go see her every week and then by the middle [unintelligible] I was seeing her every day... Every time I got into an issue with somebody... I was seeing her and I would go to her crying or whatever the issue was because...it became very abundant and very... it became very apparent that it was just me out here...

We had other black kids they were spread throughout the grade levels... So we was riding the bus and the bus would take us all over the city because they was busting... kids from everywhere...from the YES schools that's what they called them...

So everybody was coming in there and we couldn't get along for nothing...black kids against whites and Hispanics and we want to fight each other more than we would want to fight them... I'm talking about we'd be in the middle of a fight bruh and you and me going and instead of you turning around and fighting a dude who's about to hit you with a chair you gonna swing at me... You're about to get knocked out with a chair but you gon' fight me... So you know that's what it was...

I used to get into brawls early on the bus...I used to get up at like 5 o'clock in morning... just to get to school on time... My parents still wasn't really understanding the impact of them being in our education and I don't think it really was their fault... Because my mother had a college degree... she knew how important it was but she just had so much on her plate that it was hard to focus on her older son... being there consistently for him you know? And she had so much on her plate because she tried and she tried... she tried... she tried...

My grandmother really stepped up and she started filling in the gaps... My dad was kind of understanding... but he wasn't understanding the whole concept of bullying... He was like "huh my child shouldn't be getting bullied... Boy you too big to get bullied"... you know... "Use your weight beat these people up "Look like what's really going on"... My dad didn't really know how to communicate that into English in physical terms like this how you fight

man... this how you bob and weave this how... how you do things like that He wasn't really doing it like that so I was just trying to figure things out of my own .....so I just kept getting into fights...That's just what it was... that's how I learned to fight [unintelligible]

...It got so bad after seeing this counselor right before spring Break... I was already at this kind of suicidal stage and it was just sixth grade and I was just like I don't wanna go to school... I don't wanna do nothing...If this is all life got to offer me then I don't want to be around...

One day my grandmother picked me up from the bus stop and I just bust out crying...telling her how I wanted to kill myself and I had already tried once or twice...And after that everything flipped and changed...

And the whole point of my parents sending me to these YES schools was because they didn't want me to go to Dowling...which is like the worst middle school in Texas...in Houston really...They didn't want me to go there because they all went there...

So they knew it was going to be brawling and fighting... It was a typical black middle school... hood... and they knew what was waiting there for me...And before I went to YES Prep... I spent like two days there... so I knew all my classmates had went there but I had no case of knowing what happened in between that time period after I'd left to go to the other school...

So after my parents... my mom and them got me out of YES Prep... I end up switching and going to Dowling for the rest of my sixth grade year... I remember being there bruh and I would...and I would see my old classmates... but the mentality was that I had betrayed them some kind of way...

So I was really cool with certain people... Even my best friend was a chick named her [withheld] ...I just reconnected with recently and she was like you got to find new friends... Told me that straight up in the cafeteria when I was going to speak to her... She was like you gotta find new friends... I never understood why... And you know that was it ...you know just started from the bottom...being the smart kid at the hood school and that just made it even worse...  
because I was really getting into brawls...

The same old bully started popping up and it was like "oh you're back" you know"...new target new me" and I still hadn't understood the concept of fighting back then...I was trying but it wasn't working... And my parents were like we're going to switch you around one more time...So they got me out of that school as soon as possible and I had them going to... this is what I was going to miss...

There was a coach...black coach named Mr Johnson my dad knew and he went to Dowling... and I remember a fight that I got into... my first time was actually winning a fight in middle school... And I had put this dude down and I was swinging... I was about to start swinging on him and this coach came around and he stopped and he looked at me I was looking at him like ...you know... you gonna say something ...you gone tell me to get off this dude... and he

didn't say nothing...in my head I was saying that you're not gonna stop me from putting my hands on this child? You're not gonna say nothing? This completely shocked me... Like I didn't know if he was testing me... I didn't know if it was a sign... So I just got off the dude and was like don't mess with me or I'll beat you up and I left it at that...

But I went home to my parents and they didn't really know what to say... I was just shocked like why didn't he stop me...why didn't he say something...why didn't something occur and at that moment in my head... I was just like you really out here on your own like these teachers don't care...

[Kevin] So let me shift gears here, because it seems like everyone has very vivid memories about their time in school. So how did these memories influence your decision to pursue or not pursue a career in education?

[Vernon] Well, for me when I got out of high school, my main focus was business and that's all I thought about. I thought about...I don't know what got me into that mode, but my main focus was business. That's all I thought about...what can I do to...have ownership or something.

And so that... that was my main focus, so I never thought about you know actually you know...

said I never had a male teacher like you know really..a male teacher...I only had like I think was one and he was...ummm...from...umm...the Phillippines.

[Kevin] So when you say male...Black male teachers...so most of the teachers you had were all female?

[Vernon] Were all female. Yep. I had all female teachers, so ,you know, that was never something I looked up to is a male teacher. All my...all the male black people I seen were mostly principals. They were principals and...

[Craig] coaches...

[Vernon] yeah, coaches like that...I'd had no [unintelligible].

[Muhammad] Can you ask the question again?

[Kevin] Well, the question was how did these memories, the ones you all just explained, influence your decision to pursue or not pursue a career in education.

[Robbie] I was going to say...and I remember what really changed my mind, because I know it fluctuated with me, and occasionally like you know do I wanna teach kids, do I want to give back to my community and things like that.

I think and I remember that in high school I had a teacher named Commander Johnson and he was my ROTC instructor. I had you know when my principal changed and that was an upstanding type of dude, actually became and made a good impact. And the mentors that I had here at the church with Boys Rights of Passage.

In my head, was telling myself I could do that I want to get back I wanna help but on the flip side it was like, do I really want to carry that burden? Because I knew that teaching wasn't just teaching, like for a black man.

I knew from that point on it I was basically mentoring like I was having to teach these kids how to be men, how to grow up. I was gonna have to teach some how to learn, how to just have the mindset.

And I just asked myself like man, you're barely figuring yourself out or even just do you really want to come back years from now trying to fix the same problem that seems nobody else could fix or nobody else cares to fix.

Do you really want to hop on that by yourself? Because I knew that that it was just going to be a struggle. You was barely gonna get paid. It just wasn't gonna be a lifestyle that...that that...you wasn't gon' be...I could say I would be happy to trying to make a change. I'd be comfortable trying to make a change at that. So that's really what cut me off from it. To this day, I think about being a counselor or something like that.

[Vernon] I can say...umm to this day now my thing is more focused on mentorship than actually teaching. I feel like when you're a teacher you kind of restricted, you got follow a certain ,you know, a curriculum they want you to do.

For as in being a mentorship or coming something that's you know, uh that's like a 501c3....or business-wise, you got to you know, know you, have the option of creating something that that something that impacted yourself and you might want to provide for the kids.

Like I know I wanted to have a mentorship me and my friend we thought about having a mentorship, with a gym we was going to do and then provide little kids with sports stuff, you know, helping them in sports and after that, after helping them with sports, we'd have little talks with them about you know, life in general.

Just so they can get, you know, not just the sports aspect of it but also you know the real life aspect as well...as you know, you know combine those two together, because as you see, you will see like you know black guys in sports now, they are kinda wild, you know.

It's like they never had mentorship on the way to becoming great. They just had that great athleticism and you know, they just used that to get to where they are. So that was something, you know, I thought about, you know, this past year.

Me and my friend we thought about doing and that's something we're still thinking about doing.

[Muhammad] My memory is kinda...kinda shape it in a way. My memories helped kind of...I guess you can say...because when I saw how these these guys was taken me under their wing, umm..just like he was saying you know you kinda want to give back.

When I realized the stamp they was putting my life, I wanted to do that for somebody, because I know the stuff that I was going through, you know. If they weren't there, the influence that they had, probably would have altered some...some of my decisions and I probably would have did different things. But because they showed me stuff and talk to me, I made other decisions. So, I wanted to do that. I wanted to do that.

But, I knew you had to be a teacher to do that. Because of the same reason like he was saying you have to follow those guidelines. And I knew a few years later that my eighth-grade teacher could have gotten in trouble for we he did. You know especially taking us up to college parties and stuff like that...you know what I'm saying, he could have gotten in trouble for that, but it was the risk that he took, you know what I'm saying.

Yeah, so they made me like I wanna I wanna do that. I want to help a young brother out. So, I will always do that. Little kids, like this little kid in the hood has to come past my job at Firestone, we started talking on him, keep him out of the streets, buy him something to eat so yes so he wouldn't go steal out of the store, you know what I'm saying? Try to be that guy for some of those kids that those guys was for me.

But, like they was I'm gonna have to go to school and get a degree. Bruh, I was not trying to go to school and get a degree. I didn't want to go to school period.

Uh...I was actually going to drop out of school my junior year. I was gonna drop out of school...I wasn't gonna graduate...I was like this is kinda for the birds. I was just going to stay in the streets, like between catching fast money trapping and the ratchet females that came with it? Oh my god, I was like this is about to be my life. I'm about to be hood rich.

But I was always stuck between you know this is my life. Like you at school for what eight hours? Ten? Exactly! How long you at home? Four hours maybe? 2 in the morning and 2 when you get home? You know, you wake up, get ready, and go to school. Now you're already out in the world for this many hours.

When you come home, you do homework, go to bed [while pounding on the table]. You ain't really getting taught by your parents...you know what I'm saying? Like I mean they teach you and you're learning some stuff, but the majority of your time you're likely in school learning from your friends and things that you're in stuff like that and then I walk home. I don't do my

homework ...I'm going out in the streets..you know what I'm saying? You know...I'm out of control.

That's my influence, but I see, you know what I'm saying, my family I see...uh the ones that's teaching. Yeah I got some...African American people in my family that teach. And I say that because I got white people in my family too. But, uh...I got some uncles that teach and I see the influence that they make. I see the all that stuff but it's like I gotta do this to get that and I'm not trying to do this.

So seeing...having the memories of what they did for me kind of gave me that push...it like...let me go ahead and just go to school. Then if I wanted to honor my dad with that when he passed. So I was like let me...let me go to school and let me get a degree and maybe I'll try it. Maybe I'll try it out for a year so and see what it goes.

It was the money factor, because I heard one of my teachers and he was like I don't get paid for this and I love y'all, you know what I'm saying? And I wanna see y'all excel, but I don't get paid for this.

So, I was like "what?" Hell naw. [laughter ensues] Hell naw. Man naw. You ain't got no money ,then you gotta have the responsibility and I'm wanting to whoop a kid? Like, naw. They memories did...they did help. It did help out too.

[Thad] So, mine is a little different. I was actually waiting for another job and I had a friend that was a principal. And he was like you know what? You can come work at my school until. And so uhh...I was a mentor or a tutor at the school.

My first year I taught math class...a remedial math course so getting the kids that didn't understand. These are these are seventh and eighth graders that don't know how to subtract or add. And so...and it's like the smart kids didn't know how to subtract, you know, at this school. It was a grade school. So first year taught them and that.

And so you know we spent September...so in Maryland, you know school starts in September and I think y'all start in like August...y'all start stupid early. For the first half, it was like teaching them how to subtract. So for six months...teaching them how to subtract ...uh finally got that...and then it was you know...multiplication, division...uhh...fractions and this is going on.

And then the next year, the principal pulled me back into the office and is like I want you to teach...'cause I want to put you in school and I want you teach. I was like I'm not going to school, because like...I saw the teachers stressing and I knew how much they made and I wasn't going to go to school for two... you know...a summer.

It was a six-week program and then you become a teacher. But if you go to it, you have to stay in the school for two and a half years. So I was like...I'll just...I'll just teach a resource. I don't know what you all would call it, but it's like the gym class...the electives...the arts because I taught an elective. I taught a tech class.

So I taught them how to type...taught them how to use the computers and do research. Long story short, I actually stayed there for four more years teaching, so I should have just went to school [laughter], you know?

But, after the four years, he was like, "do you want to go teach?" I said no I don't want to do it because of all this stress. Uhh, I was there from 7:30, no not 7:30...I was there from seven o'clock...school started at seven thirty and I didn't leave until eight o'clock, because I was in an after school program too.

So I was in an after-school Mentor Program... take the same kids that I saw today...I was the only one in the school that stayed there that late, because I was the only teacher on staff for the after school program. And so I had to see these...these little kids [laughter and chatter]...

The good thing is that you do develop relationships...like I...like the fifth graders that I met when I got there I told myself I wouldn't leave until they graduated. So I got to see them graduate...some...uhh some of them I still keep in contact with just to make sure they're okay, you know?

We got to take them to college, so a lot of the ones... one kid [withheld] who's like somehow he removed but his family line leads to the real [withheld] so they actually named him after him. I mean like this kid...he's got it made. But he was... he was horrible in fifth grade, like uhh one time I dragged him to wrestling practice just like to put him on his neck [laughter]. Yeah, we're good, we're going there.

But, took them to a college...he was fifth grade and their minds are already on girls. Took him to college...took him to UMBC...to him to Towson University, he saw the girls and was like how do I get here? You got to have good grades. 6th, 7th, and 8th grades he was top of his class. Like, it was rewarding.

But, the other side of it, like the regulations, the testing, all that stress...that wasn't for me. So, I...I said no and I moved to another another career.

[Brian] I think two things kept me from...from ever having a desire to become a teacher. One of them was their evaluations. I can't stand this stuff. Like I'm a habitual rule breaker when it comes to like having a teacher...or breakdown coursework anything like that...

I'm creative and I'm animated and I'm expressive. So if you can find me within a textbook or curriculum that doesn't work for me...like I have to break it down in a way that I can explain it to them where it will pique their interest in wanting to learn.

So, just seeing...like I remember distinctly been in my world geography class or world history class whatever it is in temporary, I forgot...where the teacher was actually a first year teacher and he was... he was a really good teacher and I remember like they would come in and they would do these evaluations in the class you know they don't really say anything to the class and address them but you got the principal and whoever else it is...and I couldn't stand that stuff...because I was like that's taking him out of his comfort zone his ability to reach us because he he's confined he has the following distinctly what it is and say what it is that he knows would appease you guys...he can't be hisself.

And I remember he would always like tense up and tighten up and [pounding the table] that memory never left me and I said I could never do that, because first...I'm not going to change who I am and reaching these...if I were to be a teacher and reaching the students how I get the message across to them would be how it is and if you know that causes me to lose the job because of it then that's probably not the profession for me.

The second thing would be homework. I hated homework. I hated group projects. So I'm thinking if I have to... if I'm learning this stuff and I don't like it and I have to teach it and give it to these kids they're probably not going to like it and I'm going to have to come up with a substitute to get them to want to buy in to my class.

Like...homework a lot it was just insensitive and ridiculous... like especially like group projects, I hated that stuff.

Umm especially when I got to high school like I was that student if I got put in your group you were doing the work. I'd be there the day of the class and you know y'all kind of refresh me on what it was [laughter], but as far as me contributing...[somebody says the guy I hated]...I'm the guy you hated....yeah that's me.

If you expect me to contribute...I'll put my name on it and that's probably about it. [chatter]...and I'm getting the same grade as you...[chatter] I always got paired with smarty artys...so I was like this is your lane...so you do it... [unintelligible] how you do it...I'ma stick to my lane... which is taking the grade as you [laughter].

[Kevin] So, let me ask you all this. So what other factors played a role in a decision making?

[Thad] Money.

[Kevin] Ok.

[other guys agree]

[Thad] ... the stress factor didn't equal the pay



[Craig] Yeah.

[Thad] ...and plus uhh I grew up thinking, you know teachers were for women... like if you were a teacher you know you were nurturing and stuff and so like when I was growing up you know they were telling you could be anything you want ,so I wanted to be an engineer.

Shoot, I wanted to be somebody that made a lot of money and you know thirty-five thousand forty thousand dollars a year wasn't a lot of money and so... I was...I wanted to be a professor...I heard they made a lot of money. You know the kids who that came there, you might as well as told them not to come. You fail them during the midterm or the final but uh not teaching...teaching was feminine.

[Robbie] The other factor for me was when he said that uhh...the evaluation...it wasn't...it wasn't the actual processing on coming in there, it was the whole, you know, that was only so many ways that you can...you're allowed to take the concept to a certain child the same time so if a child wasn't getting it, and you've exhausted all those concepts, they were just out of luck.

I couldn't live with the fact knowing that I had a way of teaching you but I can't teach you. Because, it's just I don't [unintelligible] and then when I saw everybody getting in trouble for stuff that didn't make no sense to me like you know the stuff that teachers...I always dreamed and wished I had a teacher like...

you know I remember when recess was taken away. I remember when field trips were taken away. I didn't have another field trip until I got the high school and that was because I was in the engineering program. Other than that, we didn't go off campus. That was sad. They don't get no real world experience...I stay in this classroom all day.

I remember what I'd grad [graduated]...my senior year, the only thing that the thing that I can remember learning importantly [untelligible] was ROTC, history class, and I took a financial literacy classes probably helped out for the rest of my life my senior year.

And I took it to graduate... it was an extra credit for me. That was it! It wasn't even recommen [recommended]... it wasn't even a required course. It was something I went and selectively asked for because I needed extra credit. She was like, oh yeah, our financial literacy class and I learned stuff in there that I'll use for rest of my life budgeting and accounting...taxes...or when I found out they don't do workshop... they don't do auto mechanics.

[Craig] ...yeah they took all that away.

[Robbie] When I found out that that the curriculum was just education based...like okay that's fine that you know how to write a sentence...that you know how to do two plus two but do you know how to build this door...do you know how to hit a hammer, like. Do you know how to put this table together? Do you know how to talk to this person...Or write a professional email...

[Muhammad] One of the things contribute to me for a good minute...my dad worked security in the school and then when like the responsive team come in with like the drugs and dogs and stuff...but when he was security...I'd come up to the school when I got out. And it was stuff like this...they...uhh...his partner,they were real tight with the with the students because it's not many African-American male teachers. So, with his presence alone, uhh...left a stamp on people...and so they really took to him...

so like almost all the kids would call my dad...dad and his partner dad...you know what I'm saying...one day they got into a fight and uh my dad's partner grabbed a dude that was like his son...trying to stop him from knocking this girl out...he was about to knock this girl out... he grabbed him and was like "man stop" and set him down...slammed him down like "chill out"...the police about to come get you and...and the assistant principal saw he stopped the fight from old girl getting knocked out... and it was a big old broad...and he got suspended from work without pay

[Robbie] the cop?

[Muhammad] my dad's partner that he was securing with...

[group chatter about the justification or lack thereof for suspending the partner]

[Brian]...were they looking at the manner in which...the aggression like

[Muhammad]...right

[Brian]that's how they saw it...that's how they interpreted it...

[Muhammad] And the thing is...If you see something like that with your son... You probably just gonna knock his behind out you know what I'm saying...but he just grabbed him and was like "what are you doing?" and sat him down.

And that that was that was it for me because I know that I will build that relationship...I know I would take to them kids like that...that I will have that same personality of my dad and I would end up getting in trouble for that... and then you got some kids that just don't care and don't have the respect and they will try to fight you...like me.

I tried to fight my teacher... and I swung on him and everything and he put me up on a locker room you know what I'm saying...with the forearm in my throat...put me on my behind... and I know that would be me... especially in these days

...you know when [withheld] was working at Yates...bruh, I would go pick her up bruh,it was dudes up there like 6'6"...6'3"...got all this [referring to facial hair, beards, etc.]

I mean kids in high school looking like grown men...And you coming at me like that? Boy, I'll forget you're a kid... You're bigger than me...trying to swing on me...so stuff like that.

You got...you got those problems...you got the problems like you said...you're gone develop that relationship...and you're gonna want to treat them like they're your kids...but you can't because the school is gonna be like they not your kids...regardless if you got permission from the parents...

[Craig] the kids got all the power...

[Muhammad] Regardless of any of that...because...man it was some parents who came up there like Mr. [withheld] beat his behind and call me let me know if he tripping... or if she get like...if you see her with this boy you snatch her up...even if you got permission from the parents...it don't...it don't matter...it don't matter...

[Robbie]...if I was going to do...uh... 'cuz I actually am planning on doing this when I get done with military. I want to come back to be a ROTC instructor in high school, because that was probably the most influential class I've ever had...because we actually did field trips. We actually went out and saw real world experiences...and it was an alternative way of applying those same principles but, it was legal...like making people do push-ups...march in the sun...run in the rain...things like that.

And it was just the mentality to me was, man if we...if this was required curriculum like it's required at [Carnegie] but you never hear about...name a time you ever heard about Carnegie Vanguard on the news? Every student at Carnegie Vanguard is required to take ROTC...it's there only elective...you'll never hear about them on the news.

I knew after experiencing that and seeing that and being in the ROTC...because he would take bad kids...I'm talking about straight... straight gangster...straight people that would...you'd never catch in class and they put on that uniform, man, and he would turn them into boys to men overnight.

He would sit there and have methodologies of breaking this person down day after day...week after week...month after month...until eventually...they went from being "oh, I'ma fight somebody" to "I'ma chill...Commander [withheld] here." That was just...the amount of respect and the amount of things I see that is such a way of being successful.

Kevin: So let me ask this question. I hear a lot of thoughts on what kept us from teaching because I was one of those guys myself, you know. I wanted to make money...I want to get my bread together and teaching was not in it for me.

My mom was a teacher...my dad was a teacher...my sister was a teacher. Uh, my great-grandfather, no, my great uncle...my grandfather...they all taught. But, that was not in the cards for me.

I heard the horror stories. I saw the check stubs. I've seen it all. But, let me give you a stat first. In America, last report that i read showed that it was roughly 3.5 million teachers. Guess how many of those teachers were black men?

\*group chatter...throwing out numbers\*

Brian: 5000?

Kevin: ...no..not quite that low, but□ roughly one to two percent...so roughly sixty thousand roughly.

\*whistles...seemed to be amazed at the number\*

Kevin: ...one to two percent and we are leaving the classroom at an accelerated rate. So, what do you all think that we need to do as society, as academicians, as policymakers, to get more black men to teach?

Robbie: reverse the last ten years

Thad: well, one thing schools now are geared towards raising girls...there you know you take out recess...you take out the things that boys like to do you're not allowed to you know be active, so. Like, you have to sit at your desk...if you can't sit at your desk they put you on medication.

Uhh, you know boys like to be rowdy. you know they like to draw pictures of guys with guns and if you draw a picture of a gun, you're seen as violent.

Kevin: mm-hmm

Thad: ...you know? So one thing is to...to actually focus back on raising boys, not saying that we have to dismiss girls, but you know stop focusing on girls.

And then the other thing is just generational...we have to get we have to get black males to be the head of the community again.

Thad (cont): so right now like like whenever I look at the news you know now...it's a lot of black women but not really black males.

And so we don't have that like a lot of us we don't have that black male to look up to...maybe your father may be an uncle...umm and if you if you look at these kids' role models it's rappers and sports cars. So, that's what they want to be.

Like, when I was teaching...what do you want to be...football player...basketball player or rapper. And if you told them...you know...what does it take to get there then I...like I had a parent tell me don't ever tell their kid what they can't do. And I was like I didn't tell your kid

was they couldn't do I just told your kid to look at how much work it takes to get there. You know only maybe one percent of people that want to get in NFL actually get in there.

So this was the mentality that I had to fight. I was like all right, your kid's going to be an NFL star. Get your kid on the neighborhood team so...

Robbie: We have to stop criminalizing kids...

Thad: yeah that too...

Robbie: I remember what this changed everything...I remember the one thing that pushed me to even think about teaching was Commander Johnson...was ROTC...giving back...

I remember when all that was stripped away from me because I found out that when you turn 17, you was an adult...and you, basically... and then I found out that anything and everything like...the little bitty lies...little bitty tidbits...threatening like when I found out that all that stuff falls under criminal jurisdiction?

and I this is stuff that is stuff that it wasn't like you know I was being serious it was just stuff that was going on in my life where I might threaten somebody and I used to get threatened all the time like I'm gonna beat you up...such and such...and such and such...that's it but if you said that and I was going to a [preparatory?] school, I got pulled it out of class...in the principal's office he was like you threatened this child...I said you acting like I said I was going to kill him...like seriously? He was like you can get expelled for that don't do it again. Wow!

And I remember when I had to go to court after I'd graduated...I'm like man I'm supposed to go to college and I go to court for a lie... Yall got no proof...Yall got nothing...Yall just got her word versus mine and I gotta go to court for this? And then she didn't even show up for court? Seriously?

Robbie (cont.): so then when that hit me I was like..nah...I couldn't see myself putting somebody who looks like him..him..him...or any of yall...snitching on any child...no matter what the problem was at that point because I knew that there was another way...

I knew there's something was going on at home or some mindset or some mentality that lead to that situation being occurred. I remember my parents sitting down when I got to high school and I was like Mama I don't I can't keep believing in this not putting hands on women thing... and things got changed or this will happen.

And she sat there and she said you got the three strike rule...a woman has three times to swing at you. If she connects at the third time you have the right to put your hands on her.

And she said that because in her mind a woman believes she's big and bad enough to beat then she is a man in her eyes and that she...you were no longer a threat. she told me that and I realized that this was the world we're living in and that it was a double standard no matter how you looked at it and then we was bound no matter how you looked at it...that I was gonna get in trouble no matter what...

I didn't want to be no teacher...I couldn't see myself taking a little Tommy or Jonathan or whatever and or go to the police...or go to the police station...or go sit in the principal's office so you can get kicked out of school.....go to juvie for something as small as an argument or an altercation...or brawl...that happens...that's a part of growing up.

Craig: Can you repeat the question one time?

Kevin: ...what do you think we need to do to get more black men to teach?

Craig: I think for more Black men...they need to realize realize the impact that they truly have. Umm...I think as a teacher you don't expect for your [unintelligible] because it's not glorified or is not entertained like you know...a entertainer...a rapper...basketball player...

I think for black men to go back into teaching you have to realize the impact that you're going to create for that child, because they mean even as I say here here like a lot of us have said that we didn't have many black teachers but the ones we did...it affected and molded us in our lives.

And for me as in my experience, I said I was a teacher last year...for me my biggest thing as a teacher and as a black male teacher for me is that you have to have a prior you have to take the stereotype off of it ...oh only women do this or you know this doesn't seem important or this isn't as macho as I'm a football player but when you think about it...your teacher molds you for the rest of your life...

so the Black male...first you got to understand first of all a lot of these kids are not gone see...first of all you are a male teacher at that... being that teachers are predominantly women...so for instance um when you come as a male at that...or a Black male at that...you know they they're going to realize...okay hey this is different this is different...I don't see this...and for black men to understand... hey your impact goes further than just being a football player...being a rapper...being...you know...your influence is strong...

I mean that's why we can say as Black men...we can go to our barber shops and talk to our barbers...you know... get life lessons from them...you know...we can go to the church you know talk to you know mentors there...we can get those lessons as a black man...as a teacher it's no different.

The thing is you know society portrays like I said teaching as less macho... not as important umm...you know they see it as they say um you know most men don't want to deal with the politics of it...

I mean as myself as a teacher when I said I didn't...I... one of the things that I strayed away from teaching from was the politics...because for me in my personal opinion um let's say I care about my I cared about my kids... and so when I wanted to teach I wanted to go on a tour trying to make an impact...I could you know yes...I wanted my pay to be good because you know I had responsibilities and things take over but you gotta understand that my impact was to be worth more than this paycheck that I'm getting...

my impact was going to be worth more than you know...like I said worried about than what this observation is going to do for me because for me I think it got to a point where I knew I felt like I wasn't doing it by their standards but still impacted these kids...

I mean for me I saw as a black man I was a teacher who went to the students baseball game and I you know it was like I was a student [teacher] that cared about them personally...I cared about them as children... as kids...and I think as black men we just got us some time to go to consider teaching...you got to understand the impact that it is going to have more... in multiple levels of their lives...

because as you can start off in elementary but the things you teach at elementary is gonna move towards them when they get in middle school...when they get in middle school they gon' take this up to the high school... then when they become an adult....they'll be like dang that's what Mr. Young was talking about back when I was in the third grade fourth grade you know he was fussing me then I didn't get it in but now I understand it now...

and so I think for you know a black man to consider teaching... I think the biggest thing he has to realize that your impact is more so than the paper...the check that you get in this deal you know just the funds you getting on your impact is going to be spread across that person life and possibly that next generation of children that they may have.

Kevin: So let me ask this question...so how would you...

Muhammad: Can address that real quick?

Brian: I got something to...

Muhammad: I'm gon' come at it from a few different angles. Uhh...one, who all got kids? Alright. If you don't got kids, think about think about a lil brother a lil sister, but for yall who got kids...all right let's say they are one... all right you need to find a daycare I come to you and I'm like "aye, I run a daycare service", are you gonna let me watch your kid?

\*laughter\*

Muhammad: Hell no [laughter]...you ain't about to let no...you ain't about to let me watch yo' kid...it don't matter who she is...how she looked but if some other chick come up and say...hey how you doing...I run a daycare service too...she can charge more than I do...yall gon' be like...am I right...or am I wrong?

Group: [collective yes]

Brian: ...there is a stigma that comes with it...

Muhammad: Okay?!

Robbie: ...you're seen as a pedophile almost...

Muhammad: point taken...to answer that question...next thing...umm...it's propaganda as well...for a black man...the only time you see you see these clips of these Black teachers teaching their kids the the curriculum off of Beyonce lyrics and stuff like this and all that stuff it's a lot of male teachers like that to float around Facebook...you gon' see it on social media...You're no gonna see that on the news

Craig: ...not until it gets on Ellen or somebody...

Muhammad: ...you're not going to see that...that's gonna be on social media..not actual Channel 5...you know what I'm saying... they're not going to glorify us like that they're not gonna give us that power, but you gon' see all of our mug shots...you gon' see our highlight films...you're gonna hear our latest album coming out... that's part of it...

now if you in school...I mean what its going to take to get more african-american teachers...it's not gonna start with the ones in college right now...It's not gon' start with the ones of age right now...it's going to start with the kids...our kids their ages... putting it into their heads now...hey you can be a teacher...it's okay you got to put it into them now and show them the value...that it's not just a check...

you got to teach them now coming up so they can see it glorified now and try to you know praise it more than just the typical things that you don't see...

next and last angle...umm kind of going on with one you have to get it the next generation because as a culture you tryna you trying to get african-american men to teach a class of a whole bunch of kids? how many african-american...African-American men is in a household of just they kids...and you're trying to get them to teach a whole classroom full of them? Let him worry about that four before you...one two three four before you a whole 30, you know what I'm saying? It's a cultural problem...outside of the propaganda and those things you know?



As a culture, we got to become better as men, as fathers before we can be a father of a whole classroom... so when we as men start raising our sons...

Brian: I disagree with that...

Muhammad: into...into men...I don't know... i'm quite sure some teachers that's not taking care of their own kids but taking care of a whole classroom; I'm not saying it aint...but I mean that's just where my mind is...if you not even taking care of your own kids...you're not gonna take care of a whole classroom full of them...your whole thought process is probably not even...but that's just me like that's just one of the angles that I feel plays into the all of other ones that I presented.

Brian: The reason I disagree with with that last tidbit is because I've been in that position just here alone...doing what Craig said and going to basketball games and going to track meets...I'm nobody's parent...I'm not obligated to do any of that but I understand the need for a male presence African American presence in their lives...

so I don't need a mother...or you know somebody down there to say hey we need you to step up and take on a leadership role or go talk to that child... I see it because I came from it...so it is not about me...you know actually having my loins in there...it's me understanding that hey they need somebody who can relate to them...that can talk to them...that's walked a mile in a shoes and that's what it got me in that mindset...that a lot of them don't have that...

so when they see me...I am a representation of that father figure they wish they had at home so I had to take it upon myself...and once that registered in my mind you know...I...I embraced it and I walked with it...so it's not then...

you can put me in a classroom right now with 45 kids and some way somehow in some manner I'm going to find a way to so affect every one of them and get them to buy into the system...they don't...yes they need a male role model at home but...they can come to me and I can kind of be a confidant...just let them listen and vent and give them advice... now is it...will there be a bigger ...uh change in their behavior or them applying themselves as toward just academics...yeah absolutely if they have a consistent role model there...but at the same time it's still one up to them to put in the work...

and you know also a lot of times is the black man as well just get obliterated by black women...so if you put that in that child's mind, it's like okay this is...this is what I've been told so that's just kinda what it is and you know you have to take...you have to step outside of that to say that's not the name we can hear (?)

Vernon: Just to piggyback off what you just said...you said...and what you said...it's more of...the label...the stigmatism and the restriction...all those three combined is like...it's a major part of why we're not in the school system for you ...you know tag these children with all these symptoms...all this stuff...it makes it hard to teach because now it is like whatever a child does NATURALLY we want to put a label on it...

and then now...the restriction is now is like the teachers are not over the school... the kids are...so now it is making it even harder to even teach and then now you have the stigmatism of...okay...black women want a certain type of man...especially in the black community...for that certain type of man...teaching is not that ideal place to get that...you know...that...that...uh recognition from...

so all those combined is kind of like a guy...black man is you know...is kind of stuck...it almost has to be a passion for him to want to actually be a teacher...other than that I don't see no reason why they would want to be a teacher.

Muhammad: So I was gone kinda make clear of what I was saying...because you kind of proved my point...I'm not saying that you got to be a dad and a good dad to be a teacher...but I'm saying is that...it's a good portion of the men in our community that's not there in the household...and for somebody that's not there in the household...wouldn't be present in the you know...the other kids...and when you saying...well I'm not a dad...you're not a dad but I guarantee when you become a dad...you're gonna be an excellent father because that's in you...you know because of whatever you went through in life....

Brian: [interjects] ...no it's that experience that i got from teaching...that's what's going to contribute to me being a dad because I've already had somebody to trust me with their child...so when it comes to me having my own it's like...you know I have that experience to lean on...so I didn't need to have my own to...

Muhammad: [interjects] ...but...but... you're not part of that great portion that i'm talking about that that's...you're here...you're good...you're not part of that great portion that it is...now outside of that anytime you see I feel like when people hear teacher...that's why i use analogy when I said you know would you hire me to be the babysitter because...when people here teachers...it is an association with females because they're going to be nurturing...

now a big old macho man ain't really considered nurturing...when you do see African American teachers...they're not heterosexual for the most part...they're not...they're not...

I mean for it to be accepted...for it to be okay...for somebody to just walk to school if we're at this all white school...predominantly all white school...all diverse school...you walk into there and you see the African American teacher and you see that he's straight...ehh...okay...but when you see he's gay, you're almost like...the parent kinda relieved...it's like they cool you know...

and it's a total flip in African American community...you go in there and see an African American teacher and you're like cool...but if he's gay, you're like ahh man I don't want him teaching my kid...you know what I'm saying....

Thad: so one thing that has to change though is...is...the discipline style...

so what I've seen is...so that school where i worked at...it was me...so I'm half black and there was another black teacher... so there was one and a half black teachers male teachers after school right...

[extreme laughter]

I'm half Filipino...So I'm mixed...but uhh...the discipline style...so when you are a male, right... when you're a male and you're in the classroom first of all you're...just the bass in your voice...

like I could go...I go in a room of a teacher...so I was a resource teacher and one time this this kid...he was new to the school...and he was giving it...like he was cussing this teacher out just because she was like I need you to push in your chair and he went in... so I went in there like what's the problem... you know and I bassed on him...he was like man whatever and he pushed the chair and I was like that's all you needed to do and everybody's quiet...you know ...so you're the male presence in a classroom is very noticeable

...but the other thing now is all these disorders...one disorder I don't know if its scientific or not... it's called opposition defiance disorder...this kid had it and they said he doesn't take well to authority...so I said how are you supposed to discipline him and they said you have to come in at his level...you have to be his friend

[laughter]

...and I say he's in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and I'm a grown man...you know...how am I supposed...like no

...and then when you talk to the dad...dad is black...you know...dad and mom were together...dad is black, but dad is passive...he's like you know this is what...you know the mom was the one clearly leading this family...

he [dad] would come in the meetings and just sit there...he told his son...so me and his son would get in to it often...the son would listen to music and I'm like take off your headphones...he'd be like no...I'm like fine...called dad...dad would talk to him...can you please take off your headphones...mom found out...dad...dad you know... just wants to be his friend and all this other stuff so...

Somebody: a friend?

Thad: ...so to both of your points... you are definitely in the...the smaller percentile of actually wanting to be active, right?

There...they're more males I would think just...just by looking at the statistics... there are...there are many black males that 1) don't know how to be men because they don't have

men in their lives so how do they know how to raise other men...and then a lot of them are trying to figure it out and they're just trying to get by  
 ...and so the other point was the one where you said if you were in a class of 40... I'm pretty sure you could do it...but i know for me i was like that...I was like you know what I'm going to affect every kid that I get...I had 800 kids right...I have to teach 800 kids because I have to teach every grade kindergarten through eighth and they all came through me and I only have them for 30 minutes

...and the biggest thing was differentiation ...differentiation basically means you teach in different ways so that all the kids can learn you...sometimes that's impossible

Brian: I'm not gonna even try to spread myself that thin...

Thad: 25 kids is a lot right...for one person to handle right and then for you to have to break up a lesson for each of them

Craig: on their level....

Thad: ...and then you know you have all these things you have to teach to a test...like you don't learn your life skills from a test, but I love math...but math ain't like really helped me...you know

...it was more the other stuff that my engineering class where I got to...you know...do weight bearing on...on bridges or physics where you got to actually do stuff...

that's the other thing I think black males...we like working with our hands...we like analyzing...but we like to do stuff...that's why we're great at sports...

Muhammad: ...courtesy of 300 years...

Thad: right and so that doesn't happen anymore...it was taken out...recess...

me and the other black guy black teacher...we had to argue for like three and a half hours to get 20 minutes of recess...to put it back in... and the reason why recess didn't count is because it didn't help test grades...

Robbie: ...what you said was right on it...you talked about teachers in their place...in the things that can basically occur to them...

this just happened I swear this is like right on time for you...in this thing... is my coach...this is one of  
 my coaches from high school...his name is [withheld]...and if you've seen him on the news recently it's because he's got prosecuted...he's going to court because they claimed he touched on a little girl...

I highly doubt that...but in high school...you know...this person was influential and he wasn't even a teacher for me...

he helped special ed. kids...didn't teach not a... he would stop by me in the hallway man i remember I would be going through it some days and somebody teacher...for the life of me...my senior... my senior junior year...you never saw him with a female...i promise you he was probably in the category... English...black male teacher...and it actually made me as a student feel more comfortable...and I was uncomfortable for a minute because I was like "aww man he gay" but I was only gonna have him for a year...so I ain't trippin...

that was sad that that played a role in my education...in my mind and I was just there go to school...and when you point out just how well...um...teaching those kids and it had...recess...and having to deal with that mindset of a male teacher being there...

I remember after my freshman year...I stopped getting into fights because they would start...what they started doing was bringing Commander Johnson down there to every single one of my office meetings...every single time they bring him in and in my head it went from just a regular principal or whatever...I wasn't getting wrote up...because 9 times out of 10 it was self-defense...but it was...even though it was self-defense...it went from that to I'm going to military tribunal...I might lose my life just because this man showed up...so I refused to get into fights refused to...because it took it to a whole other level in my head ...like I wanted to gain rank...I want to do this...I want to be a drill sergeant...I want to be this and I can't look bad in front of him...I can't look bad in front of the other people around me... we don't have that mentality on campus...

I remember why...was through my...the first time we had a team leadership class and my senior year...I was actually helping...it was teen lead...I was king of team leadership and I was actually trying to teach to the other seniors and juniors on campus and stuff about why it's so informational that they talk and give back to the people below them [in rank] why they help them out and things like that...anyway so we call and the rest of them they were just what it was and that was sad because it was a black teacher

...Coach [withheld] was helping me do this and it was just him and me hitting it... back and forth with these kids...kind of trying to do something trying to make something out of nothing...and ain't...and it's just like you said...it takes...because he had kids at home...he used to take kids in left and right from orphanage...he took kids in all the time and raised them all the way until they were adults...he had already did it with like seven kids and all of them came to Booker T. ...and he kept doing it...

...and his mindset... the effect he had...he could he...anytime no matter how difficult he can make it work...and it was crazy because I knew I always told him, "say if you leave man this school will never be same" ... and I know later on...i'm actually thinking about...i'm trying to get my brother...he's about to start high school and he's just a [unintelligible] at Booker T

...and I'm trying to get him in there while some of these teachers are still there...I'm trying my hardest to get him in there and he's smarter than all outdoors...I'm like my man if these teachers leave before you get in there... you got to go somewhere else...you got to and it's sad 'cause I'm like man I don't want you to go nowhere else because I know these people will make a change on your life that will blow you away...

Muhammad: he said something that...[chatter unintelligible] ...you were saying how...he was...was taking kids in and stuff like that...umm I guess it's like a sexist mindset...

like kind of going back to the whole thing like when I was talking about...like you gonna let me watch your kid...had a teacher who...you know the one I was talking about with the annoying voice he got in trouble for offering me a ride home...he lived around the corner from my mama's house...I already knew him...played basketball with his son... offered me a ride home and I was like "nah", you don't have to give me a ride home...you can just take me to the bus stop...got in trouble

...all right...now my computer lab teacher...this uhh...it was a woman...fine as all get out...I messed around with my computer lab teacher...And she would take me to the crib...take me to her house...drop me off...all kind of stuff...you know... what I'm saying...and I'm fooling around with my teacher...so because it's a female...they cool with it...

...the principal of the school...real cool with her son...she'd...we'll leave after school...in her car and we'd go to her house...ride with her to the games...nothing...nothing... no scrutiny

...my mans offered...my mans dropped me off at the bus stop...that's it...but because he's a male...black male...he gonna get that trouble...they got a teacher fooling around with a student...nobody looked at that...like nothing happened so...it's kinda out of our hands...somewhat...you know what I'm saying...like what can you do about that...

Robbie: ...i'm looking at from today's perspective now...like all these teachers doing it to the students and students doing it to the teachers...I actually wish we could go back to the time period when kids were snitching on kids...because I got a feeling that was a part of growing up...

Muhammad: ...that's the whole thing with social media...the thing is it should...should not be okay for I'm...don't get me wrong...I didn't get in trouble for it...it shouldn't be the fact that it's not that bad if a woman is messing with a male student and vice versa but just for the fact that you got that going on...and you're a black man [added emphasis]

...aww man it's kinda like when we were watching the 13<sup>th</sup> on Netflix and how they painted that picture of the black man being this..this "[wild] cavemen rapists", you know what I'm

saying...it's like that still goes on today and now you put that same picture of a black man around kids...like hell naw...

Kevin: so fellas I thank yall...

Brian: I wanted to ask you a question...

Kevin: yeah go ahead....

Brian: I wanted to ask you a question off tape though...so to answer your question with what it is that we can do to get more African American males as far as teaching...

I think two things...the first one would be that it would be among our generation after us to be the change we want to see because when I reflect on it...a lot of the African american males I saw...the very few that weren't teachers...

they were always janitors or maintenance guys or something like that or...or coaches...for example...like that was a real hot thing...and if you look at it...a lot of times like the coaches would substitute in another class and he's kind of like coach? [with emphasis] ...like that didn't seem like their calling...

[laughter] ...you take that for granted...

[laughter]

I mean we've all been there before...you knew whatever assignment it was, you was gonna get a passing grade on that one...in fact...the teacher...when they got back... they didn't expect the coach to give the best lesson or explain it the best way possible...so you kinda gotta pass on that...I know I'm not lying about that...

I just I think a lot of times that coaches... middle school...high school...they don't explain...I don't think they relate it in a way to where kids can understand "hey, you need something other than you athletics to fall back on"

...I'll give you an example...a football player named Myron Rolle...he's becoming a neurosurgeon...this guy gave up the opportunity to play in the NFL...when he first came out of Florida State, he was a Rhodes Scholar...so you got to participate in that program and then he went and played in the NFL with the Tennessee Titans for like three years okay...he left that and decided he already knew when he graduated with this degree from Florida State that he wanted to be a neurosurgeon...so you know...in a way...it was kinda like the NFL looked down on him for the fact that he would use his intellect to want to make an impact in the world

than to...than to wanna come to be a football player and sacrifice his body for 12 to 15 years...he didn't want to be one of those CTE studies or whatever

...so i think we...there needs to be...there should be more speakers like that...guys who have put themselves in and in that platform...also Dr. Steve Perry...

...a guy who's been an educator for 30 years and you look at his school in hartford every year...every single student in his graduating class gets accepted in a college

...also Ron Clark of the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta...this guy has inner city youth excited to come to school...like really elated because of what...what it is the culture he's created there just within that school

...so I think if we had these guys on panels and they were out in these communities wherever just speaking and giving people that that [unintelligible]...that will go a long way...

Kevin: fellas we went a little over time...but i think we got some really good information and that's cool...so if nothing else...I'll stop the recording