Analysis of the Issue of New Mexico Black Male Educators’ Underrepresentation in Education Within New Mexico

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Increasing the educational profession's racial, gender, and ethnic diversification ensures the intentionality and equity of having more Black male educators serve as role models in U.S. schools. There is a need to understand better the journey and experiences of Black male educators, wherefore greater grassroots recruitment and retention efforts can be implemented to support Black men and young Black males who may aspire to become educators. Research that captures the experiences of Black male youth and educators as they navigate teaching and learning in predominately White educational systems may promote lines of inquiry for further research and intentional dialogue for transformative diversity, social equity, equality, inclusion, and belonging for Black males in the educational workforce. Describing the possible root causes for the lack of diversity among Black male educators equips PK-12 school districts, teacher preparation programs, colleges, and universities with a critical race lens and tools to address the racial inequities within the teaching profession.

The primary significance of this specialist project was to understand the factors affecting Black male underrepresentation in the educational field in New Mexico. This phenomenological research gave voice to Black male educators’ experience in New Mexico through their individual stories and carefully articulated their personal
experiences. Educational research must expand the scope of this specialist project to account for the societal, cultural, and institutional biases and barriers that adversely impact diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for Black male educators.

These individual stories of Black male educators may provide assistance and encouragement for many other Black males to navigate teaching and to learn in our PK-12 schools and interrupt systems that have historically marginalized, oppressed, and failed people of color in this country. Simply hearing or reading that other Black men have had successful teaching experiences in White, suburban settings may build the confidence of Black boys and Black men who may be interested in becoming teachers. The data gathered in this specialist project spoke to the unique perceptions and experiences of Black male educators as attributed to their race and gender in education. This specialist project intends to expand the community dialogue on why Black males and Black male educators are an important demographic in publicly funded PK-12 schools. More importantly, this specialist project can inform policymakers and school districts, colleges, and universities as they engage in policy decisions, strategies, and practices in teaching and recruiting to ensure Black men and young Black males receive adequate resources and equitable support during their educational journeys, PK-20 and beyond.

The results of these specialist project interviews revealed that while the participants are on continuous journeys in the pursuit of healing and liberation from their lived experiences, hope is the constant that inspires them to persist in their journey as Black male educators. This specialist project is a testament to the courageous four Black
male educators who continue to serve and represent their communities as Black men. The specialist project presents a picture of a cycle that will continue unless it is stopped. As noted in this specialist project’s first sentence in the literature review, Du Bois (1903) once asked, “How does it feel to be a problem?” Black boys and men have been positioned in U.S. society as problems to be fixed, subsequently depriving them of their humanity (Warren, 2020). It has been debated that the American educational system is broken. A better question asked: Is it broken, or is it working as it was intended to operate? Du Bois (1903) predicted that the color line would be the greatest problem faced by Americans in the twentieth century, and he was correct. Historical analysis suggests that the problems in Black education are not unfamiliar problems but the same problems that Blacks have had to overcome for centuries. Schools remain more separate and unequal than ever.

Black males in this specialist project understood the ways and methods by which their various school institutions have failed them. The Black male participants in this specialist project articulated extremely well what needs to be done to address the inequities Black children face. This specialist project allowed Black male educators to lead the cause of dismantling anti-Black racism in New Mexico schools. This specialist project empowered Black male educators as contributors and disseminators of knowledge. The interviews with all four participants were cataloged with every expression, ranging from words of affirmation and encouragement, to tears of sadness, to laughter and tears of joy. The experience of seeing Black men share their vulnerabilities with grace to preserve and protect the future of Black children was beautiful.
ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE OF NEW MEXICO BLACK MALE EDUCATORS’ UNDERREPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION WITHIN NEW MEXICO

by

Robert C. Sims, Jr.

A specialist project submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Specialist in Education
Western Michigan University
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Specialist Committee:

Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D., Chair
Brett Geier, Ed.D.
Darice Balizan, Ed.D.
Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge an awesome committee chair, Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer, and the phenomenal committee members, Dr. Brett Geier and Dr. Darice Balizan, for their professional leadership and guidance in helping me realize a childhood dream.

To the participants of this research study, thank you. Their courage, strength, passion, and purpose live on through this specialist project. Without your courage, this specialist project would have been just a dream to say. Despite all this, our voices and stories must be told and heard to make a difference for our Black boys and men who struggle to be Black and male in education. Thank you for trusting me to depict your stories with grace and honor.

To all of my family, friends, schoolmates, mentors—teachers, colleagues, and the students worldwide that I have impacted—especially the ones in Detroit, Michigan—my fraternity brothers and sorority sisters, “we did it.” I represented all of you in this pursuit of Black-boy joy and Black excellence. I thank everyone who supported me with words of encouragement and pride.

Robert C. Sims, Jr.
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Introduction

The Black male educator shortage exacerbates Black students’ issues in classrooms within the United States (Thomas-Lester, 2010). Only 2% of the U.S. national teaching workforce and 0.42% of the New Mexico teaching workforce are Black (Friedman, 2022). Black male educators represented only 0.42% of the New Mexico teaching workforce from 2007 to 2022 (Friedman, 2022). Most students will never have a Black male educator at any point in their PK–12 educational schooling experience, which is particularly significant for Black students (Terada, 2021). This phenomenological specialist project will give voice to Black male educators’ experiences in New Mexico through their individual stories.

This specialist project may provide assistance and encouragement for many other Black males as they navigate teaching and learning in our PK–12 schools and interrupt systems that have historically marginalized, oppressed, and failed people of color in this country. The researcher employed the critical race theory (CRT) established by Bell (1970) as the conceptual framework for this specialist project. Data was collected through semi-structured phenomenological open-ended and probing interviews with four Black male educators in New Mexico to gather individual experiences and reflections and answer the overarching research question: What root causes, factors, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges have motivated Black male educators in New Mexico to enter, stay in, or potentially leave the field of education?

Problem Statement

Black male educators are underrepresented in PK-12 schools and leadership positions (Singh, 2018; Vilson, 2015; Waite et al., 2018), and many Black children are undereducated
during their PK-12 school experiences, leaving them inadequately prepared for today's workforce (Irvine, 1988). Research shows that increasing both the numbers and presence of Black male educators may alleviate many of the societal trends, academic opportunity gaps, and negative experiences that Black male students encounter in school (Anderson, 2015; Andrews, 2016; Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Milner & Howard, 2013). According to Jones et al. (2019), a shift in the cultural demographics throughout United States public school classrooms is rapidly transforming educational settings. Of the nearly four million public school teachers in the United States, almost 82% are White females (Sleeter, 2016).

As a result, Black male educators are invisible in the PK-12 educational experiences of Black children (Bristol, 2018), and for those who are visible, their voices are systemically missing or silenced (Obiakor, 2001, 2018, 2020, 2021). Such realities further marginalize Black male students from their own educational experiences and, ultimately, from careers in education (Annamma et al., 2018). Brown (2009) argues that there is much more to Black male educators' experiences than what has already been identified or typically highlighted.

According to Scott (2016) and Vilson (2015), the current educational system is not supporting Black students, particularly Black boys. One factor shown repeatedly to be effective in supporting Black male students in school is the presence of Black male educators (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Scott, 2016; Vilson, 2015). The background information in this specialist project provides a historical context, offering perspectives regarding factors that contribute to the lack of Black male educators. Social considerations and implications for Black men and young Black males in the K-12 sector are discussed in light of the lack of diversity of Black male educators. The chosen theoretical framework provides a lens through which to analyze philosophical
considerations, the responses of participants, and subsequent steps for New Mexico to remedy the studied phenomenon. The problem and purpose statements present detailed information regarding the areas deficient in the current literature, followed by the significance of the specialist project and its eventual benefit for Black male educator recruitment and retention in New Mexico. The researcher will use a phenomenological approach. One research question will address the phenomenon of Black male educators' lived and professional experiences.

As the State of New Mexico's PK-12 student demographic grows increasingly diverse (Jones et al., 2019), teacher and administrative representation must reflect all learners' diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The general educational problem is a lack of Black male educators in education (Bristol & Goings, 2019). The specific educational problem is a lack of Black male educators as role models for all children, particularly Black children, in the State of New Mexico (Bristol & Goings, 2019). Indeed, Black male educators comprise only 0.42% of the educator population in New Mexico (Friedman, 2022), of which only 0.3% of them graduated from a New Mexico school. Despite being a small number, capturing the lived experiences of these Black males who did become educators within this state can help us better understand the underrepresentation of Black males entering or staying in the teaching field.

Purpose Statement & Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological specialist project aimed to examine the lived experiences of Black male educators who do exist within New Mexico’s educational system. Qualitative research helps unravel and address a phenomenon or social issue which requires further exploration (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 47). Through qualitative phenomenological methodology, this specialist project will explore, describe, and analyze how
Black male educators perceive, describe, understand, recall, make sense of, and give meaning to their lives and lived experiences as former Black male students and now current educators (Barnum, 2018; Bell; 2004; Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Creswell, 2013). The research will focus on four currently employed Black male educators within the New Mexico public school system. The findings from this phenomenological specialist project could impact education by revealing experiences, motivations, and barriers, contributing to the underrepresentation of Black male educators in New Mexico.

To capture the range of narratives from the professional lived experiences of Black male educators, the overarching research question guiding this study is: What factors, root causes, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges have affected Black male educators in New Mexico to enter, stay or potentially leave the field of education?

**Literature Review**

Scholarly giant Du Bois (1903) once asked, “*How does it feel to be a problem?*” According to Warren (2020), Black men and Black boys have been positioned in U.S. society as problems to be fixed, subsequently emasculating them and depriving them of their humanity (p. 372). Black males represented only 0.42% of the New Mexico teaching workforce from 2007 to 2022 (see Table 2), with no evidence of progression (Friedman, 2022). Scholars (Fergus, 2009; Howard, 2008) posit that this underrepresentation of Black males in the New Mexico teacher workforce directly reflects ethno-racial and gendered messages in relation to teaching and learning that Black males encounter in New Mexico schools. Bristol (2014) mirrored this argument, suggesting that the deficiency of Black male educator representation in
PK–12 building(s) is a nexus of the U.S. public education losing another generation of brilliant Black boys.

Through semi-structured interviews with Black male educators in New Mexico, this phenomenological specialist project aimed to analyze what factors, root causes, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges motivate Black males to enter, stay in, or leave the field of education. Very little research has explicitly focused on the root cause(s) of the underrepresentation of Black male educators. This specialist project drew primarily on three of the seven critical race theory tenets: interest convergence, intersectionality, and counter-storytelling. Prior scholarship has utilized CRT to conceptualize and explore racial issues (Obasogie et al., 2017).

There is a need to highlight the Black male educators who have overcome the odds and barriers within the U.S. educational system (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Black educators are often subjected to isolation and ostracization whenever they offer a counter-story to the subjective or fictional viewpoints of their White colleagues (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Parker et al., 2016). Many Black educators understand their assignment and the sense of urgency, regardless of their minimal representation, to protect and defend the humanity of Black children (Milner, 2006, p. 94). According to Cooney and Bittner (2001), having at least one male teacher in every primary grade for male students to see can provide identity and affirmation of a career in education for both the Black male student and the teacher (p. 80).

Because Black males represent only 2% of the U.S. national teaching workforce and 0.42% (see Table 2) of the New Mexico teaching workforce (Friedman, 2022), the chances are that students will never have a Black male educator at any point in their preschool through
twelfth-grade educational schooling experience, which is particularly significant for Black male students (Lewis, 2006). As the U.S. student population increasingly becomes diversified, Black male educators’ presence in schools is gradually fading away, with fewer college-degreed Black males choosing education as a profession (Warren, 2020). Black males endure modern public lynching in society and schools (Alexander, 2019). According to Alexander (2019), the strange fruits of Black males being either physically or spiritually murdered denotes a concerning message that Black male lives are not important to some.

According to Ligocki et al. (2021), the U.S. educational system must address the blood on its hands concerning White supremacist structural practices of racism towards people of color. These inequities in educational access, resources, and excessive disciplinary actions inflicted upon Black and Brown children have exacerbated people of color’s achievement capabilities, lack of college preparation, high dropout rates, and the school-to-prison pipeline (Laura, 2014) for Black males. According to DeHart (2017), there is a cultural disconnect between Black males and the U.S. educational system. Due to their PK–12 lived experiences, Black educators recognize the double-edge duality of serving as advocates and protecting young Black children from either gender or racialized harm, risking their jobs (Love, 2019a, 2019b; McKinney de Royston et al., 2021).

According to McKinney de Royston et al. (2017), Black students need more Black educators to offer the possibility of increased learning and protection in their schooling experience. Black male educators are invisible in the PK–12 educational experiences of Black children and those who are visible are systemically silenced (Obiakor, 2001, 2018, 2020, 2021). Black educators continue to endure substantial crises and dilemmas in today’s U.S. education
and society (Obiakor, 2001, 2018, 2020, 2021). There is a possibility that a Black student may never be taught by a Black teacher of the same race or gender during their PK–12 education (Woodson & Bristol, 2020). The shortage of Black male educators as positive role models exacerbates the issues. Black students endure in classrooms within the United States (Thomas-Lester, 2010).

According to Howard (2014), “To better understand some of the predictive factors that are associated with the larger-than-life challenges for Black males, it is imperative to examine one of the foundational pillars where many of the challenges begin, which is his education” (p. 11). These images often depicted in the news and the classrooms may influence actions and beliefs toward Black men and boys and those beliefs held of oneself and actions taken toward their future. Perceptions held by PK–12 teachers contribute to these assumptions about Black male students’ capabilities, intelligence, and potential present and future success (Howard, 2014).

Inequality and access to diversity among educators are part of the challenge faced by Black students in U.S. public education today (Milner, 2018). Having at least one Black teacher in grades third through fifth reduces a Black student’s probability of dropping out by 29% (Johns Hopkins University, 2017). Research suggests that Black male educators benefit all students and show their value in the classroom (NEA Research, 2019). Diversity imparts strength and resilience. For Black children, the challenge to aspire to be an educator or any other profession becomes unrealistic or unattainable when these same professions have historically lacked images that represent themselves. The career choice of education for young Black males is no different.
Historical Context of Black Education

The history and experiences of oppression, discrimination, segregation, racism and exclusion for many Black male educators help provide context for an understanding of potential resistance for Black males to consider, enter, or stay in the education profession. Black and Rice (2020) contended a need to examine educational inequities experienced by Black males appropriately as students or professionals to learn how to improve educational and social justice for all Black males in education. This research study is essential to a critical look at New Mexico’s history of educational inequalities, inequities, access, inclusion and belonging, and other root causes affecting the lack of Black male educator representation.

The historical context, experiences, and contributions of Black male educators within education and school leadership are critically important in addressing the disparities in the U.S. educational workforce (Smith, 2016; Walker, 2018). Black male educators’ presence in the educational workforce has become rare since the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling. There has been a 66% overall decline in Black educators in public schools since the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling (Andrews et al., 2019), since which Black male students, according to Black and Rice (2020), have pursued other career opportunities besides education. The issues that negatively impacted the recruitment and retention of Black educators then remain unresolved seven decades later.

Yoon (2018) suggested that the drastic removal of Black educators and administrators from U.S. public education has been an unconscionable casualty due to the Brown v Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling. According to Obiakor (2001, 2018, 2020), Black students are poorly taught by culturally and linguistically insensitive teachers from preschool to college.
Many White educators have not acquired the culturally responsive pedagogical education or competence to adequately prepare them for the diverse classrooms they serve (Ladson-Billings, 2002). According to Gay et al. (2003), an increase in Black male educators is needed to repair the breach with Black children in our U.S. public school system, in which 90% of the teachers are White.

The United States has a long history of attempting to address educational inequities through court cases (e.g., Plessy v. Ferguson, United States Supreme Court, 1896; Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954) and policy enactment (e.g., New Mexico House Bill numbers 43, 85, 87, 88, and 90; Black Education Act, 2021), but to little effect. A new law in New Mexico—House Bill 43, the Black Education Act—aiming to create equitable access and educational outcomes for children of color came into effect on July 1, 2021, yet, inequalities and inequities remain. Legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, has failed to protect and support the retention of African American educators (Carter-Andrews et al., 2019).

While critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2014) draws from and extends to a broad literature base in law, sociology, and history, it finds its home in the field of education. According to Milner (2018), authentic alliance and support from society and the academic elite are essential for elevating the voices, stories, and marketability of Black male educators in predominantly White schools. Voices remain missing or systemically silenced in educational scholarship and research (Jones, 2016). By researching and sharing Black male educators’ counter-narratives (Delgado, 2010), the field of education can begin enacting and enforcing new
policies toward effectively supporting, recruiting, and sustaining Black male educators and young Black male students.

The underrepresentation of Black male educators in education has captured national attention (Duncan, 2011). The lack of African American educators has historical roots in the aftermath of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling (Andrews et al., 2019; Rosenthal, 1957), which was a major catalyst in the shortage of Black educators (Andrews et al., 2019). In the 1950s, over half of the American teachers in the south were Black educators (Dinkins & Thomas, 2016). However, after the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling, Black educators were systematically phased out of the teaching profession to appease White family’s interests in school integration (Pollard, 2020). According to Andrews et al. (2019), this intentional extinguishing of Black educators to make desegregation more palatable has seen lasting effects in the educational system today, with only 2% of teachers being Black males.

The landmark Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) Supreme Court decision has proven to have a lingering devastating effect on the mental and physical supply of Black educators for decades (Bristol & Goings, 2019). The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling changed the educational path of Black teacher candidates, and Black educators as tens of thousands of Black educators were demoted or laid off (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). According to Carver-Thomas (2018), in 1975, 23.7% of Black college attendees majored in education. Forty years later, only 5.4% of Black college attendees chose to major in education (Black & Rice, 2020). The United States teacher workforce has not recovered from this professional devastation.
(see Table 3), as evidenced by the current and limited supply of Black teachers (Ayscue & Orfeld, 2016; Brown et al., 2018).

Before desegregation, Black teachers and principals served their communities (Bryant, 2016). According to Peterson (2014), some Black teachers of a particular hue were asked to integrate into White public schools along with their students, generally those who were considered to be the most effective in the Black school and possessed a lighter complexion. Lighter-skinned Black educators were chosen because lighter skin makes teachers more relatable to White students, parents, and the community (Palmer et al., 2009). Dark-skinned Black teachers, however, were deemed different and remained at the Black schools or were forced to change careers (Palmer et al., 2009). Regrettably, integration goals would compromise the rich legacy enjoyed by teachers before Brown.

**New Mexico Public Education History**

Bristol and Goings (2019) and Pabon (2016) highlighted the center of a paradox within public schools that presents a gap in research about how Black educators, particularly in New Mexico, may describe their experiences as a marginalized subgroup within a professional organization dominated by the master narrative of White educators. Coffey and Farinde-Wu (2016) argued that the state and local government failed to establish a cultural balance in educator demographics due to neglect and are responsible for poor funding and resource allocation to address the needs of Black males. Peart (2018) contended that the education of Black males is due to periods of social and political resistance by those in political power and authority. Education and government leaders on both the state and federal levels acknowledge a need to increase the representation of Black males in education (Black & Rice, 2020).
Table 1 demonstrates the number of Black male teachers and their percentages in each district, the total average statewide compared to the Black students, and their percentages in each district. Due to federal regulations, cells with an asterisk “*” are “masked.” Cells are masked if
the number of students within a cell is too small to uniquely identify students within the given set (Friedman, 2022).

Table 2

2007-2022 State of New Mexico Black Male PK-12 Educator Demographics

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Table 2 demonstrates 15 years from 2007 to 2022, the number of Black male teachers and their percentages in each district, and the total average (Friedman, 2022).

New Mexico Black residents are known for their legacy of resistance and resilience, driven by courageous leaders, activists, organizers, and community members (Race to Lead, 2016). Various stakeholders and organizations are tirelessly collaborating to dismantle and address the racial and systemic inequities in New Mexico. The work for racial equity, transformation, diversity, and inclusion has been led by nonprofits, organizations, consultants, educators, and community leaders (Silva, 2022). According to Bannerman (2021), antiblackness, equitable educational access, and resources shall be central to balancing the scales of racial justice for education in New Mexico and achieving true racial equity.

**Yazzie-Martinez Lawsuit**

According to Nott (2022), on July 20, 2018, Judge Sarah Singleton issued an initial decision and order on the consolidated Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico (2018) education sufficiency lawsuit. The lawsuit found that New Mexico’s public education system had failed to provide sufficient education for at-risk, English-language learner (ELL), Native American, and special education students. Judge Singleton ruled that all New Mexico students have a right to be college and career ready. On December 20, 2018, the court released a report detailing its final findings and conclusions of law in the consolidated lawsuits (Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico, 2018). On February 14, 2019, the court issued its final judgment, compelling the state to “take immediate steps by April 15, 2019, to ensure that New Mexico schools have the resources necessary to allow at-risk students to obtain a uniform and sufficient education that prepares them for college and career readiness.” Black students are not
named in the 608 pages of the Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico County (2018) case. Instead, Black students are grouped under “at-risk or low-performing poverty students” (Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico, 2018).

**New Mexico Black Education Act**

In 2021, the New Mexico state legislature passed House Bill 43, the Black Education Act (2021), which, among other things, required the New Mexico Public Education Department to establish training, tools, and an advisory council to assure educational equity for Black students in New Mexico. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed the bill into law on April 5, 2021, and the law took effect on July 1, 2021 (Bannerman, 2021). The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) (Silva, 2021b) found a 20% proficiency gap in reading and math between Black and non-Black students in the state.

Implementing the Black Education Act (2021) was assigned to the NMPED’s Identity, Equity, and Transformation division. Black male educators comprise only 0.42% of the educator population in New Mexico (Friedman, 2022). Of the 0.42% representation in New Mexico, only 0.3% have graduated from New Mexico public, private, or charter schools. As shown in Table 3, most Black students in New Mexico will never have a Black male educator at any point in their preschool through twelfth-grade educational schooling experience (Lewis, 2006).

In 28 of the 34 counties in New Mexico listed in Table 4, there is less than one Black male teacher in the school districts. Black educators’ pursuit of racial equality in the United States has been inextricably linked to its quest for quality education; thus, many Black educators’ stories remain unseen and untold (Walker & Byas, 2003). Black voices and perspectives offer diverse understandings of their Black excellence (Goings et al., 2018; Khalifa, 2018; Walker &
Byas, 2003). This reality has resulted in Black children being limited or denied the opportunity to have teachers who look like them (Siddle-Walker, 2001).

Table 3

2022 State of New Mexico Black Male Educator Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Black Male Teacher %</th>
<th>Black Male Admin %</th>
<th>Black Male Super %</th>
<th>Black Male NM Grad %</th>
<th>Black Male Total</th>
<th>Black Male Principal</th>
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Note. Table of demographic data from the 34 counties in New Mexico. According to Table 3, 0.3% of Black male educators graduated from a New Mexico school system.
According to Table 3, 0.3% of Black male educators graduated from a New Mexico school system. Mordechay and Orfield (2017) state that from 2014 to the present, U.S. education minority students are the majority student subgroup. A combined 89% of White teachers remain the dominant teaching subgroup (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017). More than ever, Black children are being taught by a White teaching majority who often do not share a common cultural or racial identity with their students (McGee & Pearman, 2015). Black and Rice (2020) suggest that very little attention is offered to the sociocultural consciousness of Black male educators’ presence in schools and the attribution of this subgroup's persistent demise in the education field. According to Bannerman (2021), Black children and Black educators in New Mexico teach and learn in a state that has openly and historically excluded their entire culture. Black children and educators also live in a state that overtly minimizes, modifies, or erases the intersectionality that should connect them rather than divide them (Bannerman, 2021). Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are consistently the lowest-achieving groups in the state (Silva, 2021b).

The Black Education Act (2021) state statutes aim to hold PreK-12 schools and college institutions accountable for ensuring all children, specifically Black children, have equitable access to resources and supports, including Black teacher representation, in order to combat racial inequities and racism in New Mexico schools (Silva, 2022). Silva (2022) states that the statutory language includes a wealth of support to eradicate racist behavior and school policies. The Black Education Act (2021) exists to identify and actively remove barriers hindering New Mexico's achievement (Silver, 2021a). In addition, House Bill 43 (2021) set forth language to improve job opportunities for Black educators in public schools and higher
education, requiring an annual statewide status report for transparency and accountability (Bannerman, 2021).

House Bill 43 (2021), the Black Education Act (2021), required the implementation of a culturally inclusive curriculum, combating discrimination and racism in the public school system, and improving the PK-12 education experience of Black students, including the recruitment and retention of Black teachers. House Bill 43 aims to hold all New Mexico school employees, school districts, and college institutions accountable for racialized aggression. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) defines racialized aggression as discriminatory or violent behavior towards a vulnerable person or subgroup. House Bill 43 (2021) was passed unanimously by the New Mexico Legislature.

**Black Male Experiences in Education**

Black male students are statistically underperforming in the classroom compared to White and Asian students, a factor that lessens Black males’ opportunities to enter the field of education (Johnson, 2019). Black males are failing in school (Milner, 2016). Young Black males are often mislabeled, miseducated, or misdiagnosed for special education in the U.S. education system and publicly dying at an alarming rate (Jackson & Kohli, 2016). According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) (2019), Black males often arrive at kindergarten or first grade with a much lower level of school readiness in comparison to White students. Black males are more than two and a half times as likely as White students to be retained in school. In fourth grade, 85% of Black males cannot adequately read or solve math equations appropriate for their grade level (NCDPI, 2019).
The NCDPI (2019) indicated that, in the eighth grade, 87% of Black males could not read at their grade level, and 88% could not solve math equations appropriate for the same grade level. In twelfth grade, 84% of Black males who have not dropped out of high school cannot read at their grade level, and 94% cannot solve math equations appropriate for the same grade level (NCDPI, 2019). The NCDPI (2019) emphasized that a Black male student is only half as likely as a White student to be placed within an academically gifted and talented class. Black male students are more than one and a half times as likely as White students to be placed in a classroom for students with emotional disturbances (NCDPI, 2019). Furthermore, Black male students are twice as likely as White students to be placed in a classroom for students with mental retardation (NCDPI, 2019). Although Black male students comprise less than 17% of the overall student population within public schools, they account for almost half of those students who are given corporal punishment, suspended, or expelled (NCDPI, 2019). According to Lynn (2002), Black male students often feel unheard, misunderstood, and undervalued (p. 8).

Johnson (2019) contended that Black children are, on average, two grade levels behind White children in terms of academic achievement and, on average, four grade levels behind those in the wealthiest districts (p. 3). Black male students are also three times more likely to be suspended from school than White students (Cholewa et al., 2018). A nexus correlation exists between lower academic achievement, disproportionate discipline rates for Black students and the negative perception of Black males in society.

For some African American students, school is no longer a pipeline to opportunity but one that leads to prison (Alexander, 2019). These culminating factors subsequently impact the trajectory of Black males considering teaching as a viable professional option (Anderson, 2018).
According to Bryan and Jett (2018), efforts must begin in the early childhood educational years to inspire and expose young Black males to become teachers (p. 100). Children develop their ideas of who and what they might become in early childhood. Children are inspired by who and what they see during these critical years. For Black boys, in particular, future professional identities through their lenses—including positive and negative impressionable roles such as rappers, basketball and football players, police officers, doctors, and drug dealers—are visibly present (Bryan & Jett, 2018).

Anyon et al. (2018) argued that at-risk Black male students would continue to have high academic failure rates, disciplinary actions, and fewer sociocultural supports and preparations under the dominant care of European and European-American teaching staff. As Black students begin forming their identity, having positive Black role models who represent their culture in the school setting, curriculum, and society is important (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Rogers et al. (2015) suggested that Black children develop healthier identities, higher educational aspirations, and greater interest in being like their Black teachers when exposed to positive images and messages about themselves in school. The lack of Black male educators can potentially lead to further isolation of African American students, particularly Black boys, in our nation’s schools, further contributing to potential negative student outcomes (Dee, 2005). The best way to continue to increase academic success for African American students lies in recruiting more Black educators to educate and support their social-emotional needs (Dee, 2005).

Research suggests that diversifying teaching and leadership personnel in schools to reflect their students’ demographics provides various cultural benefits for all children’s educational experiences (Hanushek et al., 2019; Love, 2019a). Ethnic matching—pairing young
scholars with teachers of the same racial origin (Barshay, 2016; Milner, 2020; Redding, 2019)—serves as an inspiring source of racial identity for Black students and rectifies the educational injustices imparted by years of inequitable practices in schooling. Same-race teacher and student matching have positive impacts beyond the classroom for students of color (Bristol, 2020); for example, teachers who share the same culture as students tend to take pride in guiding Black students to become better individuals (Klopfenstein, 2005).

Historically, Black educators have established the cultural capital of displaying positive and nurturing standards of excellence with Black children in contrast to non-Black educators (Klopfenstein, 2005, p. 417). Black male educators are more than role models (Lewis, 2013). Black male educators share similar experiences about social communities with their students and, thus, can naturally and effectively connect with students by drawing connections between their students’ everyday lives and the curriculum (Pabon, 2016). Black male educators are likely to see the opportunity to teach as a means to change the trajectory of Black children and communities (Goings & Bianco, 2016).

**Black Male Educator Representation**

Black men’s stories are often untold, underreported, and undervalued (Bryan & Browder, 2013). For many Black boys and male teachers in predominantly White schools, their experiences in their buildings mirror the mistreatment of Black boys and men outside their school (Ekwelum, 2019; Jones, 2016). Research has found it extremely rare to find a Black male, particularly a Black male educator (teacher or administrator), within an elementary school (Stewart et al., 2016). Educational scholars agree that more Black male educators are needed to lead America’s classrooms (Gaspard, 2019). According to Kamenetz (2017), having Black
educators in the classroom allows Black students to “see themselves” in a successful, professional setting. This representation of a successful and professional Black individual, often not portrayed in the media, creates a positive learning environment for Black students. However, there is a gap in the literature that focuses on the historical root causes of why there is a lack of Black male educators.

The lack of racial and gender diversity within the teaching profession causes significant disproportionality among minority teachers and minority students. Black boys rarely see themselves reflected as educators. Young Black males cannot imagine a tangible future career opportunity in education when they rarely, if ever, encounter a Black male educator (Preston, 2017, p. 6). In 2022, the following question will exist in various professional careers for Black men: Do Black males matter in education? The unspoken question is whether there is an actual desire to increase the percentage of Black male educators. The perverse low representation of Black male educators is a disheartening and grim reality for Black children. According to Bristol and Goings (2019), unless there is a progressive shift in the recruitment and retention of Black male educators, Black male educators will ultimately disappear from public education.

Toldson (2018, 2019) emphasized the need to authentically document the lived experiences, barriers, and understandings of Black male school educators, asserting (2019), “It takes courage to enter a space where you are not sure you belong.” Black educators “must never leave the total education of our Black children in the hands of others!” (Hilliard & Sizemore, 1984, p. 21). Hilliard (1991a) argued that Black educators could not accept the failure of African American children, presenting a persuasive argument that when teachers, leaders, parents, and communities decide that African American children will receive an education that facilitates
academic and social excellence, the teaching and learning paradigm changes in fundamental ways (1999a). Black educators are gap-closers who exemplify academic and social excellence, encouraging the students they serve to ascend from low achievers to high achievers (Hilliard, 1999a).

According to Duncan (2010), “It is not good for any of our country’s children that only one in 50 teachers is a Black man” (p. 3). Milner (2016) suggested that changing the education culture and increasing the Black male teacher population must be prioritized. Black male elementary students will not often have the experience or see a successful representation of a Black male educator daily in school (Woodson & Bristol, 2020). Black male educators comprise only 0.42% of the educator population in New Mexico (Friedman, 2022); only 0.3% of this group graduated from a New Mexico school.

The lack of Black male teacher representation creates a self-fulfilling prophecy in which students of color—particularly young Black males—might not view teaching as a career choice for them (Ekwelum, 2019). African American male educators have comprised only 2% or less of this figure for the last 20 years (Riser-Kositsky, 2020). Black male teachers are underrepresented in all elementary and secondary areas of public schooling (Singh, 2018). However, an African American student with at least one Black teacher in grades three through five has a 39% decreased risk of dropping out of school (Hobbs, 2020).

According to Kunjufu (1995), Black boys effectively begin losing interest in school around the end of elementary school. During the third–fourth grade, some teachers stop promoting positive academic achievement and nurturance toward Black males. During an eight-year period, researcher Kunjufu (1995) visited an average of four schools per week across the
world. During his visits, Kunjufu (1995) never encountered a Black male teacher in a classroom. The men in the building were typically observed working as a janitor, gym teachers, or administrators (Kunjufu, 1995, p. 38).

Black male educators can relate to African American males socially and culturally due to their life experiences and the pressure from social, institutional, and systemic oppressions leading to perceptions of them as third-class citizens (Andrews, 2016). Black male educators play a crucial role in bringing about change for African American students, especially if Black male educators view their culture as significant (Lomotey, 1989, 1993). Some findings have indicated that Black male educators “did more with less” (Trinder, 2020) regarding providing education for Black students. According to El-Mekki (2018), Black students with Black teachers have access to more rigorous coursework—an Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or honors class—and display better attendance, grades, and test scores and a higher sense of belongingness.

Increasing the diversity of Black male educators within schools could influence student performance and the perception of schools (Miller, 2018). However, black male educators in predominantly White school settings often feel unappreciated and undervalued (Bristol, 2018). Milner (2006) examined Black male educators’ success with Black students. The methodology for the study consisted of qualitative data from interviews with six participants. The study found that increasing the number of Black teachers could be advantageous to schools and that Black teachers could positively influence all students. The author found that Black teachers were successful with Black students and could use that influence to be successful with all students.
Equity, diversity, and inclusion in our U.S. public schools can benefit students, specifically racial diversity among educators. According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2020), hiring more educators who match the race of the student population is critical to the academic success of students of color. Students of color (Hispanic, Black, Asian, Pacific-Islander, or non-White) benefit from having teachers of the same race or ethnicity. Research has asserted that the possibilities for an academic performance increase when students are matched with a teacher who shares the same racial and cultural background (Dee, 2005; Egalite et al., 2015). This may increase test scores and reduce the likelihood of disciplinary issues (Goldhaber et al., 2015). Students of color also benefit from equitable teaching representation in school leadership roles. White students also benefit from a diverse teaching and learning community (Phillips, 2014). Teachers from multiple backgrounds improved White students’ sense of civic engagement while offering significant cognitive, social, and emotional benefits (Wells et al., 2016).

**Stereotypes and Barriers in Education for Black Males**

Black male students are in dire need of being protected from the negative stereotypes and misperceptions that ultimately equate to Black male students’ academic failure and societal demise (Morgan et al., 2017). Acquiring a greater understanding of the lived experiences of Black male educators, both as students and educators, creates an opportunity to reverse the negative connotations and meet the academic and social-emotional needs of Black male students (Young et al., 2015). Black male teachers’ presence disrupts the negative stereotype narratives and enhances the social justice commitment toward empowering and educating at-risk Black male students (Rodriguez & Greer, 2017).
Confronting the problem regarding Black males as an “American” issue would mean addressing it like a pandemic, cancer, or global warming, urging an entire nation to address this problem (Allen, 2015). Due to societal biases, barriers, stereotypes, and ideologies, Black males, due to their gender, are discouraged from teaching young children (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Black male educators are marginalized by others’ perceptions of the stereotypical characteristics of being Black and male (Woodson & Pabon, 2016). Race and gender stereotypes contribute to the shortage of male educators, specifically Black male educators. Stereotypes that cast Black men as a threat, incompetent or disciplinarian, or angry or homosexual are central to discriminatory thinking about Black men (Bristol, 2020; Embrick & Henricks, 2013).

Scholars suggest that U.S. schools are hostile toward loving and educating Black men and boys (Carey, 2018; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Wallace, 2017). Black male students are stereotyped and encounter racism and sexism as early as preschool (Gilliam et al., 2016). Often, because of these social constructs, young Black males are adversely impacted. According to Carrington and McPhee (2008), Black boys pretending to “play” school teachers are viewed as displaying feminine traits and thus discouraged by teachers and family members from this form of pretend play. This stereotype extends into the adult years for Black men who consider working with young children, wherefore they are perceived as perverts, gay, suspicious, weird, or pedophiles (Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Lynn, 2006).

American culture and politics remain skeptical about embracing Black excellence. According to Crisp and King (2016), the career field of education is no exception, as many still consider education a monopoly for White women. Black male educators who express interest in teaching must overcome gender stereotyping and obstacles like a higher loan burden,
discouraging many Black men from pursuing a teaching career (Meidl, 2019). Black male educators tend to also avoid the education profession because of the low salaries (Graham & Erwin, 2011). It is worth noting here that teachers’ salaries are not comparable to other professions (Allegretto & Tojerow, 2014).

Barriers

Black male educators have survived systemic barriers within their public school experience that need to be told (Vinkenburg, 2017). Many adversities and barriers Black males encounter in education originate from their classroom experiences due to the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy (Howard, 2008). African American males face many barriers preventing or minimizing shared successes equal to their White counterparts. Researchers have argued that African American males lack the power needed in organizations to effect change in policies that perpetuate discrimination (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). This lack of power may contribute to the racism faced by African American males from kindergarten into adulthood (Hotchins, 2016; Pitcan et al., 2018).

Professional educators who have pledged an oath to educate and support children are, at times, the actual perpetrators of racial assault on Black children in schools (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021). Many Black children are undereducated during their PK–12 school experiences, leaving them inadequately prepared for higher education (Irvine, 1988). Black students are less likely to have positive relationships with their teachers than White students (Superville, 2019). Superville (2019) suggested that most White teachers do not or will not encourage students of color to become teachers.
Hill (2016) contended that these mistreatments of Black boys by their White teachers make them feel unloved and as if they are “nobodies” in both school and society. Early childhood teachers inflict racial biases and prejudices against Black children, especially Black boys, in preschool (Gilliam et al., 2016). These lived school experiences of feeling disposable and devalued at an early age for young Black boys by the professionals who are deemed their teachers present realistic challenges and barriers for Black males to positively consider teaching as a profession (Goings & Bianco, 2016).

Data from cross-cultural studies frequently supports the contention that more significant numbers of Black male teachers in the elementary school systems would reduce academic problems, such as reading difficulties, for Black boys (Gold & Reis, 1982). According to Gilliam et al. (2016), the early school years of the child are a period when attitudes towards school and sex roles are in the process of rapid and crucial development, and thus should presumably be open to the influence of the male student. Hanson and Mulholland (2005) conducted a study in Australia focusing on the perceptions of male teachers in a predominately female profession. Research suggests how western culture constructs masculinity in such a way that linking men and caring is quite contentious (Hanson & Mulholland, 2005).

Society’s willingness to embrace the social, political, and academic norms and the intersection of being both Black and male in education is critical. U.S. educational systems must recognize Black males as teachers and not only Black bodies (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Bryan, 2017; Bryan & Jett, 2018; Egalite & Kisida, 2017). As Black male teachers build their counter-narratives, they consider how their behavior and experiences become examples to the children they teach (Brockenbrough, 2012). Bristol (2017) posited that in order for U.S. schools
and institutions to possibly see a renewed aspiration or resurgence of Black males entering the field of education, equitable systems of support need to be established to aid Black males in navigating the pitfalls, barriers, and experiences they face in education. Furthermore, equitable systems of practice and protection must be in place to help Black male teachers navigate their identity as Black male teachers (Bristol, 2017).

**Black Male Educators as Role Models**

According to Tatum (2017), the intersection of Blackness and maleness creates a construct informed by more than race alone (p. 796). Immersing Black boys in an educational environment with real role models who look like them and share their cultural experiences and values with their cultural capital may help eliminate gender and racial disparities for Black boys (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Positive Black male educator representation affords a counter-narrative and social-emotional uplift for young Black Boys (Lynn, 2006), thus improving the academic success and experiences of Black males in their PK–12 experience.

A teacher is considered a role model for students based on their racial identity (Dee, 2005). A role model is a high-quality person who exhibits appropriate behavior for others to follow (Cushman, 2005). Black male educators are essential role models to Black students (Bell, 2017; Lewis, 2013). Frequently, Black students do not have many positive examples of male role models at home (Warren, 2017; Yarnell & Bohrstedt, 2018); for many Black children, a school might be the only place where they will have the opportunity to consistently see successful and positively influential Black males (Cushman, 2005).

Many Black male educators who enter or stay in the teaching field do so to become change agents (Brown, 2009). Black male educators must play a more significant role in
educating students of color, particularly Black children (Warren, 2017). Exposure to even one Black teacher has meaningful long-term effects on students (Gershenson et al., 2018). Black students must have at least one Black male educator, particularly during their upper elementary and lower middle school years (Gladwell, 2017); yet most Black students do not have access to this opportunity because of the severe lack of Black male educators (Milner & Howard, 2004).

During elementary school, young Black boys can benefit from having at least one Black male teacher, rendering them less likely to drop out of high school (Johnson, 2021). According to Bristol (2014), Black boys, especially those who struggle with poverty, who experienced having a positive Black male teacher in their PK–12 academia, are both 39% less likely to drop out of high school and 29% more likely to go to college. Warren (2017) supported Bristol’s (2014) research asserting that Black male teachers could reverse some of these negative academic and social-emotional trends.

Overall, there is a belief that Black male teachers relate better to the experiences of Black male students (Bristol, 2015). Many students benefited in the academic setting when there was a racial and gender match between teachers and students (Dee, 2004). According to Warren (2017), when young men had several Black male teachers, those teachers provided the extra motivation the students needed to succeed in school (Howard et al., 2016, p. 3). Many Black male teachers teach using culturally relevant strategies (Bristol, 2015; Bryan & Milton-Williams, 2017; Emdin, 2013). The problem is a lack of Black male teachers in the field (Bristol, 2020; Bryan & Milton-Williams, 2017; El-Mekki, 2018; Milner, 2016; Pabon, 2016).
Recruitment and Retention of Black Male Educators

Diversifying the administrative personnel in U.S. schools, particularly in New Mexico, can increase recruitment and retention opportunities for Black educators (D’amico et al., 2017). Improving racial diversity in the teaching profession is essential to providing quality educational experiences for our underserved student communities. Black educators place significance on teaching and caring for the whole child (Harper & Wood, 2016). The recruitment and retention of Black male educators is one factor that might help to attract and retain a more diverse student body. Furthermore, a better understanding of the experiences of Black male educators may lead to improved efforts in recruiting and supporting a more diverse teaching profession.

There is a growing need to increase the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers (Bell, 2015; Bryan & Milton-Williams, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011), particularly in schools with a high percentage of Black students (Warren, 2017). Despite local and national recruitment efforts, the number of Black male educators remains at 2% nationally (Bass, 2019). Black male teachers are also leaving the profession at a much higher rate than their White counterparts, which is profoundly concerning (Duncan, 2019). The National Education Association (2017) reported that the shortage of minority teachers becomes more apparent each year. Ingersoll and May (2011) also emphasized that minority teachers leave the education profession at a much higher rate. Furthermore, Black educators are often recruited into White spaces where they are limited, dehumanized, and alienated from their professional identity and goals (Kohli, 2019).

Black male teachers recruited into the profession are often not equitably supported, retained, or given the autonomy to demonstrate their teaching capabilities within the profession (Grissom et al., 2016; Konoske-Graf et al., 2016). Significant steps must be taken to recruit and
retain teachers of color to overcome the shortage of Black male teachers. According to Scott (2016), educational institutions must think outside of the box when recruiting Black male educators. Ideas circulating among cultural circles include student loan forgiveness, critical shortage signing bonuses, cultural mentorship, increase in teacher starting salaries, which may counteract financial barriers for Black males when considering education as a viable profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Methods

**Population Involved & Recruitment**

This specialist project used multiple recruitment strategies to maximize the number of interested qualified participants, as Black male educators only represent 0.42% of the educator workforce in New Mexico. Participant selection will be those individuals who have lived experience that is the focus of the study and are willing to share their experiences. An attempt was made to select participants who are diverse enough from one another to enhance the possibilities of rich and unique stories of the experience (Laverty, 2003, p. 29; Van Manen, 1997). This project focused on four currently employed certified Black male educators (teachers, principals, district-level administrators, or superintendents) serving students in New Mexico public, private, charter, and independent schools. Conversations with the four participants were integral for this research project, mainly because the project was to explore, describe, and analyze how Black male educators perceive, describe, understand, recall, make sense of, and give meaning to their lives and lived experiences as both Black male students and educators.

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows for selection of participants who know and understand the research question (Creswell, 2013).
According to Gall et al. (2007), purposeful sampling entails the selection of participants that will render a significant amount of information about the project's purpose. This purposeful sampling aimed to understand a particular group of participants (Bryman, 2008). Participants were limited to category membership of being male; self-identifying as being Black, of African, African American, Caribbean, or Afro Latino heritage; taught three or more years in education, currently employed certified Black male educators (teachers, principals, district-level administrators, and superintendents) serving students within the New Mexico public, private, charter, and independent schools; and voluntarily willing to participate in 60-120 minute interview(s) based on the research study topic.

Participants who met all requirements for participation in the project were invited to participate. All participants were interviewed in person or via a Zoom video conferencing tool. The Zoom video conferencing tool collected anecdotal, perceptual information to supplement survey data. Each interview was conducted during a time that was convenient for each participant. Various strategies and forums were utilized to network and obtain participants for this specialist project. First, this specialist project solicited referral recommendations from professional educational associations within New Mexico. Secondly, this specialist project solicited referral recommendations from various Black community organizations in New Mexico. Thirdly, this specialist project solicited referral recommendations from all Black Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities in New Mexico. Fourth, this specialist project solicited referral recommendations from Black churches and faith-based organizations in New Mexico. Fifth this specialist project solicited referral recommendations from the researcher's social media
networks- LinkedIn, Facebook, GroupMe, and other social media forums. Lastly, this specialist project solicited referral recommendations from personal recommendations, word of mouth, snowballing, and educational conferences (district, state, regional, and national) attended by this project.

The participants were requested to choose the most convenient communication and data collection approach- face-to-face interviews or online using Zoom's web-conferencing tool. Participants identified a day and time that fit their schedule for participating in an interview. Ethical procedures protected the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Identification of participants was completed using pseudonyms. Other identifying information to help assure privacy and confidentiality was removed.

Data Collection Instruments

The objective of data collection in a qualitative phenomenological specialist project was to obtain information on a given phenomenon from the participants' viewpoint (Creswell, 2014). In a phenomenological approach, interviews are the recommended primary source for data collection (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2013) allow studies to explore a matter in-depth, unique to participants' experiences (McGrath et al., 2019). Qualitative interviews benefit from being interactive and allowing for unanticipated topics to emerge and be taken up by the researcher.

According to Maxwell (2013), conducting semi-structured interviews also alleviates a researcher-centered bias often discovered in written surveys. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to gather individual experiences and reflections regarding PK–12 Black male educators. The semi-structured interviews were characterized by open-ended questions and the
use of an interview protocol (Appendix A). The researcher sent the transcriptions back to participants for approval and member checking to ensure correct transcription and improve the specialist project's accuracy, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing software for interviews to collect anecdotal, perceptual data and information. Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing tool that allows the user to host virtual one-on-one interviews with participants. Archibald et al. (2019) found that Zoom was a valuable platform for conducting interviews. In the context of this study, Zoom video interviews were expected to last between 60 and 120 minutes and were digitally recorded. As a backup, the interviews were also audio recorded. The interviews were transcribed with Zoom's Verbit software into themes. Verbit's Zoom integration allows researchers to automatically caption Zoom sessions with 99% accuracy to meet compliance requirements while engaging with participants (Archibald et al., 2019). All data collected from all participants was secured in a private location throughout the project (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) and will be stored in a password-protected computer for five years, after which it will be destroyed appropriately to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

**Results**

This qualitative phenomenological specialist project aimed to examine, explore, describe, and analyze how Black male educators in New Mexico perceived, described, understood, recalled, made sense of, and gave meaning to their lives and experiences as both Black male students and educators. A total of four Black male educators in New Mexico responded to the email or phone message invitation to participate in the project. The phenomenological design provided readers with a more meaningful connection and experience to the personal journey and
lived experiences of the four participants’ narratives (Van Manen, 2017). The research question that guided this phenomenological project is: What factors, root causes, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges motivate Black male educators to enter, stay in, or leave the field of education? According to Carter et al. (2019), obtaining new knowledge regarding this phenomenon from minority teachers can contribute to the limited body of literature and inform teacher education programs, school districts, and stakeholders as they seek to achieve positive outcomes by increasing the presence of Black male educators.

The findings provide information about the data collected from the phenomenological semi-structured open-ended interviews. Details regarding the themes that emerged that address the research questions were: (1) representation matters, (2) Black in White spaces, (3) race and racism, and (4) barriers and factors. The initial themes and subthemes were then identified to create the final theme (see Figure 1). The findings identified during the interviews manifest in the root causes that systemically affect the academic and professional lived experiences of Black males in New Mexico. Furthermore, reading and re-reading each interview response assisted in identifying re-occurring themes and patterns based on the CRT framework for looking at the permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, and intersectionality.
Figure 1

Main Themes Identified from the Thematic Analysis Process

- Systemic Inequality and Oppression
- Segregation
- Police Encounter
- Racism (cultural, Institutional and Systemic)
- Low Expectations of Black Students and Educators
- Racial Politics
- Mentoring and Support
- Lack of Intentional Recruitment and Retention of Black Educators
- Lack of Promotion and Opportunity
- Duality
- Code-switching
- Microaggressions and Invalidations
- Tokenism
- Gender and Sex Discrimination
- Systemic Inequality and Oppression
- Segregation
- Police Encounter
- Racism (cultural, Institutional and Systemic)
- Low Expectations of Black Students and Educators
- Racial Politics
- Mentoring and Support
- Lack of Intentional Recruitment and Retention of Black Educators
- Lack of Promotion and Opportunity
- Duality
- Code-switching
- Microaggressions and Invalidations
- Tokenism
- Gender and Sex Discrimination

Note. A total of four themes were identified from the thematic analysis process. Examples of the specific experiences are noted within each theme. The themes help in understanding the research problem and answering the research question.
The theory guiding this specialist project was critical race theory (Bell, 1970), as CRT respectively relates to how race and symbolic status inform the lived and professional experiences of Black male educators in New Mexico. CRT is a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The CRT framework guided the examination of how the history of racial depiction embedded in the national psyche of society steers discussions about preconceptions that marginalize Black male educators. The project’s findings indicate that participants experienced race, racism, and inequality as standard constructs in their public school experience(s). The intersection of race and gender impacted the daily lived experiences of project participants (Barnum, 2018). Project participants could leverage their experiences to provide a counter-story to the current narrative about Black males in education.

**Participant Narratives**

This section offers individual profiles of the project participants’ semi-structured interviews. This section aims to explain the root causes, factors, barriers, lived experience(s), or challenges affecting Black males to enter, stay, or leave the field of education. In this section, the lived experiences of four Black male educators in New Mexico are analyzed and understood from four emerging themes: Representation matters, Being Black in White spaces, Race and Racism, and Barriers and Factors. None of the four Black male educator participants’ experienced being taught by a Black male educator from preschool through fifth grade. None of the participants experienced more than one Black male teacher in their K-12 educational
experience. Each participant concluded their narratives with words of wisdom for other Black male students and educators in New Mexico.

Pseudonyms were provided for each participant to protect the identities of each participant. The sample includes four Black male educators in New Mexico (one superintendent, one district-level administrator, one school principal, and one classroom teacher). These participants met the criterion of being male, Black, African American, Caribbean, of African or Afro Latino heritage; three or more years as an educator; currently employed certified Black male educators (teachers, principals, district-level administrators, or superintendents) serving students within the New Mexico public, private, charter, or independent schools; and voluntarily willing to participate in 60-120 minute semi-structured interview. The following table summarizes some critical demographics for the four participants. Following the table, there is a graphic representation of its content to understand better the differences among the categories of a pseudonym, age, years of experience, high degree obtained, position, and school district.

Table 4

Description of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Position/District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educator 1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Teacher/Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator 2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Principal/Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator 3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Director/Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator 4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Superintendent/Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educator 1

Educator 1 is a 32-year-old Black male teacher in New Mexico. He has 3-years of educator experience in education with a master's degree. Educator 1 was raised in a single-parent household. Teaching is this educator's third career. Educator 1's first and only exposure to being
taught by a Black male educator came in the twelfth grade. Educator 1 prior professions were serving previously in the military and as a cyber-security expert. He is one of five Black male educators in his school district.

**Representation Matters**

Educator 1 left his first profession as a cyber-security professional making nearly six figures to make a difference in the education profession. Educator 1 saw a big problem with Black male representation in schools for Black youth. Educator 1 hopes his presence as a Black male provides representation that helps guide and teaches minority youth life skills towards navigating the school system. His role models were gangsters, drug dealers, rappers, and professional athletes without a Black male presence at home and in school. That was his perception of a successful Black man. Saving at least one Black child in school was educator 1s initial goal. Educator 1 recounts that as a child attending child where 75% of the teachers were White females, and the remaining staff was Hispanic. Educator 1 did not experience seeing a Black male teacher that looked like him until he reached the twelfth grade.

As a student, Educator 1 recalls a time as a high school senior observing the only Black male teacher in school. Educator 1 states,

I saw him passing by in the hallway. Not having a class with him, I never had the opportunity to build a relationship with him. He always looked like he was dealing with so much. It seems like he was battling the same struggles as Black kids. I never seen him smile. He was never happy at work. Occasionally we would me a fist pump to acknowledge that he saw, however he never looked happy. He looked overwhelmed. They treated him like crap, yet he never gave up. Looking at him, I would not want to
become a teacher. He was a real strong Black man who was just outnumbered. Wow, in hindsight I am experiencing some of the same things he experienced. I can’t give up on my students, they need me.

Educator 1 understands that his presence and perseverance is the best lesson he can teach his students. Through all the nuances Educator 1 endures daily, he understands that quitting in the face of racism would speak louder volumes. As Educator 1 asserts, “If I quit, I am not just failing myself, I am failing all these kids. I am putting back into a cycle that perpetuates that a Black man never stays and will eventually leave them.” Educator 1 hopes that his character and showing kids how to be positive role models during adverse times encourages children to help others with similar experiences. According to Educator 1, this is Black excellence.

**Black in White Spaces**

As a young Black Male Educator 1 often feels like an outlier in the education system in New Mexico. Upon obtaining his alternative teaching licensure in New Mexico, Educator 1 has never felt supported. As tall, Black, and muscular, Educator 1 believes he is perceived more as a threat to the school culture and climate than as an asset. Educator 1 accounts,

They act as if I am going to rally these Black and minority kids against them in protest. They are not happy that these kids are willing to work harder for me, respect me and run through a brick wall for me. At the same time, they need me to be the muscle for them, because they do not have classroom management with our Black kids. I feel like most of the time they only see me as a disciplinarian instead of a teacher.
Educator 1 recalls growing up as a Black male in a racially segregated learning environment in the south. According to educator 1, there was little hope for Black kids going to school. Educator 1 explains,

We didn’t have any representation that looked like us. Half of the students in the district was Black however there were zero Black teachers to protect us. White teachers ingrained certain things into our heads that wanted us to never forget. Growing up as a Black male in K-12 schools, I often felt oppressed by my teachers. I never felt understood by my teachers. Often, I felt as my teachers looked through me instead of at me. If you were not an athlete bringing profit or positive attention to the school, as a Black child you were dismissed or perceived as future jailbird.

**Race and Racism**

As a Black male, Educator 1 contends that he has experienced racism all of his life both as a student, and now as an educator. Railroad tracks separated the all-White community from the all-Black community. Educator 1 asserts,

In the late 2000s, for Blacks students to enjoy any form of recreation as child, you risked being profiled and followed by police just to play like kids. As a student, being called a nigger by White teachers and students was normal treatment for educator 1 growing up. Black children are always on edge not knowing what form of racism or discrimination they will face from day-to-day from White teachers and students. As a Black child, it is difficult to learn effectively with joy when you’re always stressed out at school, on defense and not valued by the ones teaching you.
From a cultural perspective, growing up, according to educator 1, White teachers and Black students did not like each other in K-12 schools. Educator 1 recalls the frequent experience of if one Black student got into trouble, all Black students were viewed through the same lens by White educators. Breaking the cycle of despair for Black children and providing a social community of support and mentorship for students who look like educators have become his quest. As a teacher, the cycle of racism has not been easy. In his young career, Educator 1 has been called a nigger twice by his colleagues during his time in New Mexico. Having co-workers blatantly provoke and ostracize him is normal.

**Barriers and Factors**

As a Black educator in New Mexico, Educator 1 feels disrespected. He possesses equal educational credentials as his colleagues yet feels as if he must constantly prove his qualifications to be valid and accepted. Educator 1 is convinced that for a Black male educator to survive in New Mexico, you must have thick skin. Educator 1 expresses,

> They act like I am illiterate and can’t teach. For most of these teachers, there core courses in college were foundational methods and passing a culturally favored teacher certification exam. Not only did I take some of the same coursework, but I also took calculus, data analysis, statistical methods, etc. I have the natural ability to teach all students, not just Black students applicable life skills that connect with the curriculum.

> The problem is Black educators do not receive the same supports as White and Hispanic colleagues.

Upon probing educator 1 on the barriers, stereotypes, or factors he perceives Black male educators to experience, educator 1 expounded on the racial politics in education. Educator 1
maintains the perception that Black educators are not welcomed and accepted as equals. He provided several examples of how race and racism factor into his lack of support from his school district. Educator 1 posits that if he were White, he would receive a plethora of support from his colleagues and supervisors. Educator 1 explains,

As a Black man we don’t feel supported. They say with a grin, Black man you don’t need any help, you are strong, you got this. As a Black man, not only do I need help, I want help. I’m asking for guidance and mentorship. I tell my principal I am short 100 textbooks for my students. I am immediately told to improvise by using the internet or go make Xerox copies of a whole book. The next day, a new White teacher comes into the main office requesting 3000 copies for the week for all her classes, and the principal stops what he is doing and tells her I will make them right now for you. I have been asking for three years for a mentor, yet these new White teachers have two assigned mentors and an instructional coach who comes into their class twice a week to support them. As a Black man, I feel like quitting however I can’t leave these Black kids by themselves. So, I must go seek help on my own wherefore I don’t fall too far behind on my professional development.

**Words of Wisdom for Other Black Male Students and Educators**

Educator 1’s closing words of wisdom to Black male students and educators is,

Your representation matters. Don’t ever give up. You can be your worst enemy or your greatest success. I did not always take advantage of every opportunity made available to me. Did I have a father figure in my life? No. Did I have positive male role models? No. Did I have teachers and coworkers who disliked me simply of my skin color and race?
All my life. But I never gave up either. Things may never be easy for you here in New Mexico. Seek to become something bigger than you. My goal and my message are to have my fellow Black males; my brothers understand that you must adjust your mindset. Becoming and being a teacher is a great career. You can earn good money, have plenty of school breaks to vacation with friends and family. Most importantly, you have an opportunity to save lives and change lives of kids who look just like you. As long as I am in this profession, use me up Black man. Get everything you can get out of me. Take every piece of the game from me. I am here for you. You are not alone.

**Educator 2**

Educator 2 is a 34-year-old Black male principal in New Mexico. He has 13 years of educator experience in education with a master’s degree. Educator 2 comes from a two-parent bi-racial household. He graduated from a historically Black college and university. Educator 2 has a host of Black educators in his family who lives out of state. Educator 2 has wanted to be a teacher since he was a child. Educator 2 first and only exposure to being taught by a Black male educator came in the sixth grade. He is the only Black male principal and one of three Black male educators in his entire school district.

**Representation Matters**

Educator 2 was insightful and transparent regarding his experiences as a Black male student and educator. Educator 2 always knew that he was going to be a teacher. According to his interview, he has wanted to be a teacher since he learned to walk. It was his calling. Educator 2 was surrounded by Black educators in his community as a child in his home state. Educator 2s first experience with having a Black male teacher was in the fifth grade. However, he did not
experience having a Black male teacher throughout middle and high school. Educator 2 shared his only experience with a Black male teacher,

I had a 5th-grade teacher; he was the only teacher I felt a sense of belonging with. I just felt like he was a phenomenal teacher. And I had already liked social studies and I just feel like he further strengthens my interest to be like him. When I grew up to become a teacher, I wanted to teach fifth grade.

From this experience, Educator 2 ultimately became an educator himself. As a school principal, Educator 2 has four Black students on his campus. Educator 2 believes he is very fortunate to be in their presence and for them to be in his presence. He feels they have made a great connection due to their racial identity. Educator 2 intentionally strives to ensure that diversity is reflected throughout his school. He tries to ensure that all his students and their culture are recognized. Before he arrived in the district, there was no Black male or female teacher representation. There are now three Black teachers. Educator 2 shared an experience of what it is like to be a Black educator on his school campus:

I have a young lady who was part Native American and part Black, and I am her first Black educator. When I talked to my students, I always tell them my story. Even my staff, I tell them my story. I help my students see that we have similar backgrounds and experiences as people of color. If I do not share my story with my students, how do I expect them to be able to see themselves in the position such as mine?

Educator 2 voiced his mission to break the narrative of what White people think of Black students and educators. He is proud to be Black and does not allow anyone to put him down
because of my skin. Educator 2 aims to represent and show all children, especially Black children, that Black male teachers are here. According to Educator 2,

I stay true to who I am; I represent my culture; I represent my race. I celebrate everything there is to celebrate about Black people. I try to represent and show all children, especially Black children that we are here, we are in this profession, we're not all in jail, we're not always in the cemetery in the ground, that Black men are strong, they are excellent, they're educated, they can do great things. We are trendsetters. Everything that we do is on the shoulders of a Black male.

**Black in White Spaces**

Educator 2 believes that to change the predicted trajectory of Black male youth, they must be exposed to Black educational leaders who look like them. When Educator 2 was hired into the New Mexico school system, he felt something was not right with how Black children were being treated. Educator 2 personally recalls when his assistant principal saw him coming down the hall and heard the assistant principal say, "here comes that faggot, you know, a Black male." For Educator 2 to hear this commentary was hurtful to him. Educator 2 believes that as a Black man, he cannot react or respond to another educator who is being disrespected in public. He also does not want Black male students to encounter similar experiences on his watch. Educator 2 recalls a Black male student taking a standardized test and having to mark White, Black, or multiracial. Educator 2 stated he was always marked as multiracial due to his mom being White and his dad being Black. Educator 2 was often called names such as high yellow, White tornado, and White Devil. At school, he always felt like he did not have a sense of
belonging or a seat at the table. He heard things such as colorism and classmates accusing him of being smart only because he looks White.

Educator 2 recalls being told by White colleagues that Black people did not have souls. Educator 2 feels the weight on his character and shoulders to lead with integrity in hopes that people will say not all Black people are whatever negative stereotype they have already developed within their minds about Black people. Educator 2 has had White teachers write a grievance against him, describing him as a big Black male. He states that people often accuse him of being an aggressive and angry Black man. Educator 2 works with several teachers who are racist towards him and students of color.

Educator 2 shared in his interview that he often wonders whether he is a diversity hire due to the state recently passing House Bill-43, Black Education, to improve the teaching and learning conditions of Black students and employees. Educator 2 expressed that although education is utilized as a means for success as a Black person, society often forgets about the traumas Black males must overcome. Educator 2 mentioned that his life and work experiences in schools had been mentally, emotionally, and socially exhausting. Not having any other Black males to work with or build relationships with affects his morale.

**Race and Racism**

According to Educator 2, he has experienced racism in school every single day from elementary through 12th grade. He recalls a time when people would randomly call him a nigger. His school community was racially segregated. Educator 2 recalls that every time he walked over to the White side of town to play as a kid, someone would call the police on him, and the police would come to threaten him and make him go home. Educator 2 feels that because he had
advocated in his corner, he was able to be put on a college prep track. This option was not openly exposed to Black students. Educator 2 recalls during high school choosing his electives. Black students were only offered three electives, home economics, wood shop, or automotive. White students were provided with over twenty electives. Educator 2 remembers that during his high school career, White teachers and school counselors segregated Black students. He recalls Black students were being placed on a vocational track instead of a college-prep track like his White classmates. Educator 2 believed that, as Black kids, they never had a chance to compete and show their excellence. With those experiences, Educator 2 tries to protect himself and his students, regardless of their race or color, from negative police encounters.

As a Black male educator shared multiple instances of racism in New Mexico with community stakeholders. He overheard a parent saying, "Why is that principal Black? Why can't we have a Navajo Principal who is a Native American principal?" As a principal, Educator 2 has witnessed one of his Black female student encounter racism from her White teachers. He believes she has been intentionally excluded from school activities solely because of her race.

Educator 2 shared,

When we were on a field trip, I noticed this young lady was in my group. And I looked at my group, I said, Are you the only girl in my group? I realized why she was in my group, simply because this year, we have had some instances where the parents have come in, and they pretty much just kind of call out the teachers for being racist and for excluding the young lady. So, I looked at the situation and said, well, wow, this is another opportunity for that teacher to exclude that student from the rest of the classroom. And so, I felt that not only did the teacher put this young lady in my group, because she was
Black, but I also felt like she put it as she feels like this child is problematic for her. The White teacher intentionally wanted to exclude that Black student from having that opportunity to be with her friends on the field trip. But the good thing about it, was a great opportunity for me and that young lady to bond, and we had a really nice time, and she enjoyed herself. Because of our mutual experience, I don't think she realized that she was being excluded.

**Barriers and Factors**

When taking into consideration what barriers and factors may affect Black males from entering or staying in the education profession, Educator 2 feels like he was shortchanged in life as a Black male simply because of his skin color. According to Educator 2, the teachers within the school community that he came from did not invest in Black children. Black students were often labeled and not expected to be or do much. Educator 2 expressed that he does not want his students to have the same experiences as him. As a Black male educator, Educator 2 has never had a mentor. As a new administrator, he often feels that his colleagues, staff, and parents frequently question his qualifications and competency. During his interview, Educator 2 opened up regarding what it is like to be both a Black and male educator in the state of New Mexico stating,

When I walked the hallway, no one even spoke to me. I sit in my office every day trying to figure out what it is I am supposed to do with mentoring or support. I am trying to figure things out, and I don't know who to call. As Black male, we need to feel visible. We need to feel included and accepted. I do not think New Mexico shows a whole lot of appreciation for Black people. Our voices need to be heard and valued. Who wants to
come to New Mexico? I think people don't really consider New Mexico when they want to relocate. When it comes to hiring or recruiting Black educators is very low. I believe the human resources mindset is like Oh well we don't have pure Black children; therefore, we don’t need to recruit Black teachers. Yes, we have half-Black and half-Native American children. But we don't just have a large significant population of just Black children. Therefore, therefore, when it comes to recruitment, I don't think they look for Black educators to serve in their New Mexico schools.

Educator 2 continued his perception that with so few Black male educators in New Mexico, Black males here lack a sense of belonging. Educator 2 contends that both Black male students and educators lack visual representation that looks like them. In addition, educator 2 posits that Black males are here for a short period due to stakeholders' lack of support and respect. Lastly, Educator 2 expressed that an increase in competitive salaries would possibly attract more Black male educators into the state of New Mexico.

**Words of Wisdom for Other Black Male Students and Educators**

As Educator 2 concluded by sharing his lived experiences as a Black male educator, he took time to offer words of wisdom for K-12 Black male students, aspiring Black male educators and present Black male educators within the state of New Mexico. Educator 2 expresses the following sentiments to Black male youths,

I will tell my Black youth that you matter, even in those moments when you feel like you are invisible. There are a lot of you out there doing awesome things. Do not allow yourself to be defined by someone else's opinions of you. Do not allow yourself to be determined by someone else's perception of you. Do not react to other people’s
stereotypes about you. For my young Black men who are in college, we need you. Our students of color need you. The pursuit of social justice in education is a marathon, not a sprint. Keep your eye on the grand prize. Know that you are doing something positive in your life to represent the entire culture. Our kids are looking at you as a role model. Just continue to live your dream. And then, once you're living your dream, make sure you give back to others. Stay true to yourself, stay true to who you are. Embrace other Black male educators because you are not alone. Always embrace your brothers and welcome your sisters whenever you see them. We need one another, and we need to support one another. Thank you, Black males, for being here in New Mexico, and whether they're native or transient, thank you for being here. In addition, I know that you may not see someone like you very often, and you may not have that opportunity to interact. You may feel like you are on an island by yourself; you may feel isolated, but you’re not alone, you have me.

Educator 3

Educator 3 is a 55-year-old Black male athletic director in New Mexico. He has 24 years of educator experience in education with a master’s degree. He is the only Black male educator in his school district. Educator 3 first and only exposure to being taught by a Black male educator came in the tenth grade. Educator 3 was raised by his grandparents. He has attended schools and worked in New Mexico his entire educational career. Teaching was Educator 3 first career choice.
**Representation Matters**

Due to a lack of Black representation within the district, Educator 3 feels a sense of duty to make sure that he makes the pathway better for the next African American male educator that wants to step into his role or any education leadership role. For the vast majority of his career, when an educator looked into a mirror, he knew he was the lone ranger and that there would be no one in the room or building that looked like him. As a K-12 student, Educator 3 never experienced having a Black male role model. They were not any to choose from. As far as Educator 3 can remember, he has always wanted to teach and help kids that look like him. His goal has been to save at least one Black kid each year. Educator 3 only experience with a Black male educator was in the tenth grade. Being the only Black male educators in his district, Educator 3 is compelled to embrace every Black child he sees. Wherefore, they have the opportunity within their educational journey in New Mexico to know what it is like to see and be cared for by a Black male teacher.

As the only Black male educator, Educator 3 has had to take more than his fair share for the team. He has always had to present himself as a productive, articulate, competent educator and administrator for his school district to consider hiring other Blacks.

Educator 3 believes that all his sacrifices in his early years as an educator are beginning to pay off. He believes that for the country to have Barack Obama as president, there had to be countless sacrifices from Black people to set the stage for him. Educator 3 believes that his representation has sparked an interest in some Black kids to want to consider education as a profession. Educator 3 understands that the pathway to lead and represent your race and culture in New Mexico taxes his mental health.
**Black in White Spaces**

As a student and professional, Educator 3 has grown accustomed to being one of few and often the only Black male in attendance. Although accustomed to being the only Black male educator, Educator 3 emphasized that this responsibility does not come with comfort or without a price. The elephant in the room has always been how does he navigate the racism and prejudice as a Black male without sacrificing his soul. There are many days at which Educator 3 feels like he is walking on eggshells trying to balance a dual consciousness of how his Non-Black colleagues perceive his level of performance and excellence in contrast to his expectations as a professional. Educator 3 asserts, “I take pride in my work; however, I feel like no matter how good of an employee I am, someone always finds something to critique about me.”

Educator 3 contends that if he were any race other than Black, his professional and academic achievements and credentials would highly regard and respect. Being a decorated Black male educator within his school district, Educator 3 maintains that his race is a curse and blessing. Being the only Black male for Educator 3 has afforded him a natural connection with all students. He believes that his ability to apply culturally responsive real-life experiences and empathy for all students gives him an edge over his colleagues. On the contrary, there are moments throughout his 24-year career in New Mexico in which Educator 3 consciously wonders why there has not been growth in the number of Black male educators. Educator 3 expressed,

As a Black male educator, you must be really, really good to get an opportunity to work here. You must be talented in your code-switching and ability to assimilate within the environment you are at. I never wanted to be hired just because I was Black. I also knew
that affirmative action was needed to break racial barriers. We have a law for me, our
kids to have an opportunity to be considered as an equal. This is not a guaranteed
birthright of equality, just a case-by-case consideration.

According to Educator 3, racial politics is the backbone of New Mexico. You do not
advance or receive promotions based on hard work and educational attainment. The color of your
skin, your family name, and whom you know are the ticket to a seat at the table. For Black
educators, obtaining an opportunity to get in the house has been the pursuit. Sitting at the table
for some has become a badge of honor. Educator 3 believes that Black educators must mask their
real emotions and be subservient to pave a better pathway.

**Race and Racism**

Racism has many levels, according to educator 3. From a racial perspective Educator 3
believes that if a Black male makes it into the profession, they are given a very short leash and
margin of error. Educator 3 asserts, “I can go out and get a DUI, and I’m done, forever. Let a
White male educator commit the same offense, and they might get a slap on the wrist or offered
counseling. As a Black male educator, he always contends that he must be better than his non-
Black counterparts just to be accepted. Educator 3 works 12-hour shifts, not eight-hour shifts like
his White colleagues. He sometimes is on his school campus on the weekends, sacrificing family
time to stay afloat. Receiving respect from these same colleagues is a daunting expectation.
Regardless of how much money he earns, degrees hanging on his office wall, fancy cars, houses,
or position within the district, according to Educator 3, “for many, he is still just a nigger in a
suit.” As a Black professional in New Mexico, this is a norm you must quickly assimilate to
survive.
As a Black male educator, Educator 3 maintains that as a Black male in New Mexico he did not afford the same leash or margin of error for excuses. Educator 3 explains, I feel like I have to be 20 times better than my counterparts because the next time the human resource hiring committee considers hiring another Black educator for our school district, they will have a good taste in their mouth in regard to the last African American they hired. There’s so much prejudice and racism here that gets in the way of us having a fair opportunity.

Whenever Educator 3 confronts race and racism in his school district, he recounts the numerous times he is accused of using the race card by his peers. A colleague expressing that they do not see color when interacting with Educator 3 frustrates him. Educator 3 asserts, "Unless you are legally blind, if you do not see color, you are not truly acknowledging me as a Black man and my struggles for racial equality." Being married to a White woman with political ties has been the golden ticket for Educator 3. However, it did not always guarantee Educator 3 equity and equality in promotional opportunities. Educator recalls a time when he had a school board president tell him, Oh gosh, if you were a White or Hispanic male, we could make you a school principal right now. I just wish you were a White or Hispanic male. Educator 3 responded to the school board member expressing that there are civil right laws that prevent this type of discrimination. The school board member reminded Educator 3 that when you have connections in high places, money and the right race, some rules do not apply to you.
Although Educator 3 considered legal actions, Educator 3 also understood that his pursuit of racial justice would have blackballed his career and made it even harder for the following Black educator in the district. Educator 3 felt that his representation, even as the only Black male educator was more important than no representation. Thus, Educator 3 stifled his voice and accepted his superiors' racism and visible covert conduct to achieve the goal of losing many battles to win a future war of equity.

**Barriers and Factors**

Educator 3 maintains numerous stereotypes, barriers, and factors that a Black male may encounter teaching and learning in New Mexico. The first is the reality of hardly ever seeing another Black male educator at work, in your district, at professional conferences, or within the state. Even with the proper credentials, having the wrong skin tone makes it extremely challenging to navigate the written and unwritten social, political, and racial nuances in New Mexico. New Mexico public education, according to Educator 3 is not intentionally seeking to recruit or retain Black educators. There is a feeling of preserving the community’s culture by only hiring teachers that look like the majority population.

Black males have only been recruited in New Mexico to coach a sport. Feeling like you are on an island alone is not easy for everyone. Educator 3 posits that not overreacting to being viewed as an angry Black man or acting White just to fit in will be challenging and frustrating. Regardless of your title or position, Black males, according to Educator 3 must remain conscious of their voice tone and facial expressions. Due to its unfamiliarity in New Mexico, the professionalism of a Black male educator is often scrutinized and analyzed. Educator 3 perceives the barriers as an opportunity. Educator 3 explains,
We have an opportunity to influence minorities like never before here. Our kids are not accustomed to seeing Black men in school leadership. Most of us never saw a Black teacher, only Black coaches. I feel like I must pave the way to help Black kids overcome the obstacles that they are going to run into in the near future. Some of the obstacles are hidden which could impact their natural innocence as Black kids if you do not have anyone to help navigate racism in New Mexico. There’s a lot of racial politics here. You must learn how to play the game if you want to survive.

From a student perspective, educator 3 recalls that a Black male growing up in New Mexico was hard. Educator 3 was a famous football and basketball athlete. As a Black athlete, contrary to cultural and racial stereotypes, Educator 3 was not a fast runner or high jumper. Educator 3 learned early that nothing would ever be given to him as a Black athlete. Educator 3 practiced and worked ten times harder on his techniques and mechanics to be seen as a value to his coaches. Athletics afforded Educator 3 perks and benefits as a Black male that minority students who did not bring media attention to their school or school district were never afforded. Educator 3 recalls K-12 experiences as a Black male student stating,

White teachers made us hate ourselves in school. They made us feel so inferior to them. The sad part is we did not have any other choice. We did not have Black teachers who looked like us that could give us the escape or hope we needed. My only experience of a Black male teacher was our gym teacher in junior high school. We didn’t have any other learning options as a Black kid growing up. Schools growing up very segregated. Teachers did not mince words with Black kids. Being called by your real name was a treat. As a Black male you were typically called “boy”, “hey you” or a “nigga”. You had
to take the mental, emotional, and racial degradation and try to capture the instructional concepts conveyed to you all at the same time. All of these experiences drove me to become a teacher to save as many Black kids as possible from racism and oppression in school.

Educator 3 has used racism to teach others that all Black males are not as depicted on television. For Educator 3, systemic and cultural racism in New Mexico schools is difficult to navigate. Not reacting and ignoring being called the “N” word or subtle micro-aggressions as a Black male in school creates a disconnect for Black males to consider education a profession. Educator 3 posits that Black males teaching and learning in New Mexico do not have the natural freedom or options to be free with their emotions without being perceived as angry, loud, unintelligible, or an animal needing to be medicated or caged. Even as a Black male school administrator, Educator 3 still experiences being racially profiled while driving a nice car and shopping in stores deemed for only upper-class patrons. Educator 3 has experienced White and Hispanic women clutching their purses as he goes for a friendly walk or jogs in neighborhoods. The scene of White women grabbing their children when he is near them creates a prime opportunity for Educator 3 to smile, wave, and say hello to a child. As emotionally taxing as the moment itself, Educator 3 seizes the opportunity to show non-Black stakeholders in his community that Black people are nice people and that you are safe around us.

Educator 3 concluded his assessment of the barriers, stereotypes, and factors affecting the low representation of Black male educators in New Mexico with the grim reality that there are not a lot of Black people in New Mexico. Of the Black people in New Mexico, Educator 3 perceives their academic and social-emotional racial experiences in schools as a second
detrimental factor. According to Educator 3, the third detriment that may continue to affect the recruitment and retention of Black males into the education field is the prejudicial process. New Mexico is still accustomed to seeing a strong, articulate, educated Black man. Educator 3 explains,

Why would a Black male want to be an educator here when you don’t see anybody else that looks like you? You go to a job interview here and every single time you sit in front of all White people interviewing you. As a Black man, you walk into this interview and see all other candidates as either being White or Hispanic. Consciously and unconsciously you’re at a disadvantage. Just looking at the interviewers’ facial expressions, they are looking at you differently because you are Black as if you do not belong here. They know right away that they are only going to go through the motions, like the NFL Rooney rule, but they aren’t going to seriously consider hiring you. As a Black male district administrator, I have never been invited to join the interview team as a public relation token to possibly help the district recruit more Black males. This begs the question of do they even want Black male educators here at all.

Educator 3 believes that there is still a lot of fear mongering when he walks into a room of predominately White and Hispanic personnel. As a Black man, this conscious experience can either empower you or succumb you to feel not wanted.

**Words of Wisdom for Other Black Male Students and Educators**

Educator 3’s words of wisdom for other Black males is to stand up and fight any myths, mistruths, or stereotypes you hear about Black males. Educator 3 shares,
It’s okay to be Black. There is no such thing as being too Black. Just be a good person and take care of your business. Celebrate your Blackness and Black history. Keep your composure. You must hold tight to your ancestor’s struggles for equality and advancement by running your best race. Run your race with pride. Sometimes your voice will make you the majority in the room. Use your voice with wisdom and intellect. Because if you do not, you are trusting the truth of your Black history to be solely taught and exemplified by their non-Black parents and grandparents who may have grown up with a misperception of who Black people truly are. Be the change that you wish to see. The good Lord made you Black for a reason. Your Black is beautiful. You have an opportunity to continue the civil rights movement, influence others positively and provide them with a much-needed role model that looks like them. Your knowledge is power; we need you; our kids need you.

Educator 3 concluded his interview with the belief that as a Black male, you must create a brand for yourself that encourages a non-Black colleague, supervisor, or stakeholder to want to step outside of their privileges and take a risk to advocate for equity and equality for Black males. Once your colleagues are willing and able to get past your pigmentation, you may feel supported. But to get that support, you may need to be ten times better, do 50% more work, and be 100% more assertive.

**Educator 4**

Educator 4 is a 44-year-old Black male superintendent in New Mexico. He has 18 years of educator experience in education with a master’s degree. Educator 4 was born and raised in New Mexico. Teaching was not Educator 4’s first career choice. Educator 4 always wanted to be
a basketball coach. For Educator 4 to become a coach, he realized that he had to obtain a teacher certification, which he ultimately obtained a physical education teacher certification. Through coaching and subbing as a teacher, Educator 4 discovered a gift with teaching and serving as a role model to children of color. Educator 4 never experienced being taught by or exposed to a Black male educator in K-12. Educator 4 is the only Black male superintendent in New Mexico and the only Black male educator in his school district.

**Representation Matters**

As a Black male educator, this participant, born and raised in New Mexico, has never seen or worked with another Black male educator. As a 44-year-old, Educator 4 believes the lack of visual representation of Black male educator(s) has many detrimental effects on diversity and inclusion. Educator 4 asserts that being the only Black superintendent in New Mexico is lonely. In the past 35 years, according to Friedman (2022), there have been only two Black superintendents in New Mexico. Educator 4 realizes that his representation is bigger than he is.

Educator 4 acknowledged, at times, that he did long for a Black male teacher growing up due to being raised in a single-parent household and being accustomed to not seeing a Black male. Educator 4 posits, “I did not know growing up in school that we should have Black male teachers. It was not something kids talked about or saw. I grew up believing I would never have a Black teacher in school. No one I knew wanted to become a teacher.” Educator 4 is very cognizant that he will not see another Black male educator whenever he walks into a K-12 school building in his district. He likes to think that if a Black or Hispanic kid sees him as an educated person of color doing this job, they may aspire to be like him. He wants to be a role model to all children, not just Black children. Educator 4 asserts, “I know that the way I carry myself and the
professional way that I do things sets me apart from others, depending on the context of the room I am in.”

Educator 4 recalls a time when he visited an elementary school in his district and the impact of his representation on his students. Educator 4 recaps,

There was a young lady over at one of our elementary schools. She came up to me and hugged me. And she talked to me for a little while. And she's beaming with a huge smile from ear to ear. And you don't have to know what's going on in her mind to know what's going on.

Black in White Spaces

Educator 4 is conscious of certain stereotypes and tries daily to compensate for them. According to Educator 4,

Part of being the only Black educator in his district is always being professional and knowing when to turn and turn off your emotions. I don’t pride myself on being angry. I don’t have outburst or anything of that nature. I try to stay calm in most situations. Don’t get me wrong, I can get stressed however I cannot show weakness in front of them. I want everyone to project stability as a superintendent.

Educator 4 prides himself on wearing a suit and tie every day. The perception of being Black in White spaces comes with a set of microaggressions. Educator 4 recalls often in his interactions with non-Black colleagues and stakeholders their intrigued with his demeanor. Chuckling Educator 4 expressed,

People often say, oh you’re so well spoken. You look so well dressed. I tend to want to ask them, what do you think I was going to show up in shorts and a t-shirt, blasting rap
music in my office or in a staff meeting? In public I must be extra cognizant of my patterns of speech, behavior, and facial expressions.

Educator 4 feels that he must come to work before everyone else and be the very last person to leave to refute the stigma against Blacks. He understands that perception is reality. He believes that he must be the equitable change that he desires, stating,

As an African American male, people look at you the same way as a janitor, teacher, or superintendent. Once you are allowed a seat at the table, you must work harder than everyone else. You must develop a positive reputation in which they can trust you and b willing to consider adding another Black male to the team.

**Race and Racism**

From an educational perspective Educator 4 experienced racism and discrimination as both a student and professional educator. As a student, Educator 4 experienced police brutality and racial profiling as a young teenager in high school. Educator 4 recalls,

I remember a time driving home from school, a police officer pulled me over for no valid reason at all. I told the officer that my driver’s license was under my seat. I asked for permission to get it. Once he gives me permission, as I reach for my license, the police officer kicks my leg up against the seat, pulls out his gun. I now understand just how cold; very cold a gun feels when you think a cop is about to blow your Black brains out.

As a schoolteacher/coach Educator 4 recalls occasions with high student achievement and athletic success he was mistreated by his immediate supervisors and superintendent. Educator 4 recalls leading a girls’ basketball team comprised of poor Hispanic, Navajo, and Black kids to back-to-back basketball titles only to be fired by the school superintendent. Educator 4 later
learned that the reason behind his firing was based on his team defeating the superintendent’s alma mater and the losing team booster clubs pressuring the superintendent to make a change. As the only Black coach and the most successful coach in the district, educator 4 was the only coach to be fired in the district’s history.

From a professional administrator standpoint, Educator 4 recalls a times in which he was denied the opportunity to even interview for a job just because of his name. Educator 4 shares,

You would not believe how hard it is as a Black man just to get an opportunity in this profession. I have more degrees than a thermometer and often more degrees and work experience than the people interviewing me yet cannot get an interview. We’re not even talking about a job, just an interview. The unnecessary barriers are ridiculous. Even with the administrator license, work experience, proven record, as a Black man there is always doubt about you. Having great professional references as Black man means nothing here. Having an obvious Black name doesn’t help us either. There was a point in time here in New Mexico I stopped putting my whole name on my resume because I felt that if I could shorten my name to appear White, I had a better chance getting in the door. I always felt like if I can get an interview, I can get the job. Even as a superintendent, I am not naïve enough to believe that my degrees, skills, and experience are enough to get me a new job that I am overly qualified for here in New Mexico.

**Barriers and Factors**

Educator 4 contends that one of the factors affecting the percentage of Black male educators in New Mexico is the low percentage of Black residents in the state. Educator 4 believes the historical out-of-sight-out-of-mind affects students of color through the aspiration to see themselves as an educator and potential employers to see the value of hiring minority
educators. Educator 4 believes that New Mexico must do a better job marketing and recruiting Black males to consider working as an educator in New Mexico. He also believes that the few Black males presently working in the teaching profession in New Mexico need to become actively visible by sharing their stories and experiences. Educator 4 posits that intentionality must become the norm to establish diversity in all school communities for all student learners.

Educator 4 asserts,

> Often times we tell students that you can be a lawyer, doctor, and athlete, whatever you want to become yet fail to promote our own profession to children of color, in particularly Black children. We must change how we talk to our kids about going into our profession. We’ve got to have those conversations with our students saying, have you ever thought about going into teaching? What is your favorite subject? Is this something you could see yourself doing as a career? These conversations do not exit with Black children at all.

Another barrier or factor impeding Black children from considering the profession of education, according to Educator 4, is the lack of equitable education. Educator 4’s mom had to make financial sacrifices and decide to transport him to school on the other side of town where most White kids attended just to receive a quality education. Educator 4 believes that one of the biggest hurdles is academic equity and equality. He asserts, “Without a quality education, Black children are starting off behind the eight-ball in obtaining a basic education.”

Educator 4 continued his perspective of the barriers and factors resulting in the shortage of Black male educators with the belief in the over-punishment of Black males. He believes from personal experience that a Black male receives a harsher punishment for doing the same
infraction as a White student at the same time. Educator 4 contends that this bias at an early age sends a message to Black children that they are not equal or wanted in school. As an educator, Educator 4 follows this assessment by adding,

No one is sincerely rooting for the Black male to succeed in education unless it benefits them. Black males do not have mentors. We can ask until we are blue in the face and never get one. The opportunity for promotion is almost impossible. Thus, we wonder why there isn’t a lot of Black males entering or staying in the profession. On top of that, you want us to go to into debt to go to college to work in the same environment, in the same profession that mistreated us as a kid. Nope good luck with that. You must make college free for us to attend and offer a salary while student teaching.

Words of Wisdom for Other Black Male Students and Educators

Educator 4 words of encouragement for aspiring Black educators to be willing to let your defenses down. Not all White people hate Black people. He contends that there is a good amount of White people who like Black people and embraces diversity. Educator 4 highlights this point expressing,

Sometimes we tend to pre-judge why they’re doing something to help us ascend. Keep your eyes on the bigger prize, which is younger Black kids having an opportunity to see themselves in a leadership role such as yours. We need more role models. Join us. You will be on an island by yourself. However, don’t give up. We need you.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This absence of Black educator representation perpetuates a psychologically isolating perception that Black lives do not matter in school. For Black educators, being at times the only
one or one of the very few Black faces in a professional setting infuses a psychological level of isolation according to which they must cautiously navigate spaces to survive. Black educators should not have to negotiate their racial identity or subject themselves to a cultural sacrifice to earn a living and have a seat at the table. How authentic can a Black male be in the education profession if their plate is pulled from the table? This a delicate dance many Black educators are negotiating daily in New Mexico.

The Black males in this project may have survived the K–12 experience; however, they have not recovered from the trauma many are still quietly enduring. Protection is needed for Black boys’ racial identity in New Mexico classrooms. Similar to the movie Black Panther, there will be a spirit of liberation for Black boys if they are fortunate enough to witness several Black males in their K–12 schooling experience. Black students will have the opportunity to experience a Black curriculum taught by certified professional educators who not only look like them but also provide a unique social-emotional cultural understanding of their life and educational journey. There may be hope for our Black youth in elementary school if New Mexico and the United States of America act now and declare a public education emergency. Suppose we are not creating a supportive environment where Black men and Black boys feel accepted, valued, not stereotyped, comfortable, and loved within their educational setting. Why would a Black male want to stay or ever come back to teach here in New Mexico?

This specialist project displays the added pressure and the unique barriers and issues most Black educators face while teaching and learning in New Mexico school systems. One implication of this project is that it is inevitable that Black males within their K–12 learning or work journey will experience some form of racism in New Mexico. These displays of
microaggression towards Black males by staff, parents, peers, or community stakeholders are issues that are commonplace and unfortunately ingrained in some members of American society. None of the participants' experiences in this project require a new bill to be passed, a change policy, or a check to be written; they require a shift in how society and U.S. schools perceive, treat, and value Black bodies. As noted by Coffman and Gordian (2021), since the deaths of Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, and Ahmad Arbery, organizations are still struggling with the topic of how to address the racial inequities endured by Black males.

The path forward requires organizations to examine their organizational and institutional cultures and hold uncomfortable conversations. Organizations must transform their cultures to fit their students and employees to eliminate structural, systemic, systematic, institutional, and individual racism. White school stakeholders must do more than respond to a problem's systemic inequities and consequences with the idea of training and changed behavior. They must recognize how the problem came to be. According to Fergus (2017b), White biases, preconceived notions, and privileges all interfere with the idea of understanding and accepting Black students and Black culture.

Non-Black leaders and advocates throughout New Mexico must be willing to exercise their privileges and get into some good and necessary trouble for the sake of the Black child. Educational leaders must also provide spaces where Black male children and educators can feel safe to voice their concerns about issues within the school. Waiting for policies to change or leadership to make the "tough decisions" is not the answer. Change can occur in our school districts, schools, and classrooms once we become intentional about how we build relationships with Black males. Political efficacy is paramount for the Black voice, Black child, and Black
education quest for social justice and hope of change for the better. Political efficacy will always inspire oppressed and marginalized groups to continue to fight.

School superintendents are instrumental in increasing the number of quality Black male educators in their school districts. This message can be clearly shown by acknowledging their current Black male students in every classroom. This approach would be significant in helping U.S. school institutions recruit and retain more Black males in the field of education. In order to see a future in teaching, Black males need to identify with the profession culturally (Goings & Bianco, 2016). This progress must first be made by increasing the number of Black male educators working within the New Mexico schools and providing them with a safe, accepting environment. The diversity that Black male educators bring must be viewed as an asset to the school environment, with schools also acknowledging the academic and professional skills that Black educators possess.

Black male educators in this project are still experiencing the generational impacts of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling. The U.S. government needs to address the historical impact of this ruling on the teacher workforce and Black educators (Underwood, 2019). This will begin the healing of generational trauma on Black people. A recommendation for action is for the state of New Mexico public education and policymakers to continue to increase funding allocations to address the systemic and implicit bias in recruitment and promote the retention of Black male educators serving as educators in New Mexico. As a matter of public policy, the racial mismatch between Black students and educators is worth investing in and addressing.
Black male educators are protectors of young Black bodies as they navigate and negotiate their way through school (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). The researcher hopes that through this specialist project, programs will be implemented that could increase the number of Black male educators and facilitate more positive relationships between teachers and students of all races and cultures. If Black male students continue having terrible experiences in school, they will never want to become teachers. The harmful K–12 experiences that many Black males currently face could begin to change if school districts acknowledged the current issues of racism and bias that Black boys face daily. School systems need to acknowledge that they are partly responsible for the absence of Black male educators in today's schools, and they need to seek out and listen to the opinions of Black male educators if they genuinely want to understand why Black males are not present and what can be done to address this. Establishing a school community where Black students love being a part will hopefully encourage students to one day lend their experiences and care in a classroom of their own. Educational leaders, administrators, and teachers should have ongoing data-monitoring practices in place to analyze discrepancies in the behavioral and academic referrals of Black boys.

As outlined in the literature review and the findings of this specialist project, Black male educators face unparalleled difficulties in the field of education. There is an underrepresentation of Black educators in New Mexico due to unethical hiring practices, implicit/unconscious bias, and discrimination from colleagues, parents, and (at times) supervisors, up to and including school board members and superintendents. The eradication of this problem of the underrepresentation of Black educators in New Mexico will not happen instantly. However, the issue will improve with consistency, open dialogue, and a strategic plan to recruit and retain
more Black educators. Equitable education, access, Black curriculum, Black educator representation, and opportunity are plausible. Furthermore, the policy would need to ensure the protection of engagement of the topic as it is integrated into the curriculum ethically. This project guides educational stakeholders in New Mexico to develop the cultural competence and policies necessary to successfully diversify its public education systems.

Recruitment efforts should start as early as preschool, so Black boys can see the benefits of becoming teachers. Black male educators can influence Black male students to the point where they may consider following in their footsteps career-wise (Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). Waiting until these Black boys are almost finished with high school or entering college will be detrimental to getting this marginalized group interested and excited about becoming K–12 Black male educators (Ellis et al., 2020).

One of the deceitful mistruths promoted within the American education system is a pure meritocracy—that if two students work equally hard for the same amount of time, both students will receive the same rewards at the end, no matter their race, gender, or neighborhood. Another action that has been taken against the Black culture in 2022 is the petition to ban critical race theory (CRT) or the teaching of CRT in states such as New Mexico (Andrews & Marzano, 2021). This further illustrates according to the four participants lived experiences that some White and Hispanic Americans in New Mexico do not want their children to be exposed to truths of the historical, systemic, and oppressive policies and practices upon which this country has built institutions that have affected Black children and communities for centuries.

Two participants debunked this theory, stating how those candidates are not recruited and are often overlooked in favor of White candidates when they apply. The New Mexico public
education department and the governor of New Mexico must commit to funding the Black Education Act HB-43 legislation to diversify the teacher workforce and hold all state and district school leaders accountable for the funds committed. This must be accomplished alongside specific policy reforms for teacher preparation programs and curricula that prioritize anti-racism pedagogies. Given the impact of HBCUs on several of the participants in this study, it is recommended that school districts, colleges, and universities throughout New Mexico establish a meaningful life-long partnership with several HBCU teacher preparation programs to recruit and retain Black scholars in New Mexico.

School districts should consider individually investing in their current Black male educators’ professional development and offering training in culturally responsive teaching. The data and discussion of the findings would benefit district leaders seeking to diversify their educator workforce with highly qualified Black male educators, retain and professionally build their current Black male educators, and close the academic and opportunity gaps between the academic performances of Black male students and their peers. Career days in elementary, middle, and high schools need to occur throughout the entire state of New Mexico, where Black male educators can collectively unify and have an opportunity to be visibly present together to market the benefits of Black-boy joy in education. The action steps include offering substantial financial and monetary incentives and providing essential support for Black males to thrive in nurturing and safe teaching and learning environments.

The seven tenets of CRT were interwoven throughout this specialist project. CRT allowed this study to examine the appearance of race and racism in education from the lens of Black male educators in New Mexico. CRT offered a critical lens for race, class, and gender to be the
centerpiece for examining the root problems and experiences of Black male educators who were subject to racism throughout their educational experiences. The tenant of intersectionality focused on the acknowledgment that people of color experience oppression because of the color of their skin and based on their gender, class, religion, ability/disability, and other factors. As highlighted earlier, racism is a permanent fixture of American society. Many of the practices that are put in place to disenfranchise and marginalize Black children have a direct effect on Black education.

As a result, Black children often end up in schools and classrooms being led and taught by individuals that do not understand Black communities or culture, allowing young Black children to be exposed to early dehumanization and oppression. A Black male child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him. This same Black male child cannot afford to be fooled. A Black child cannot be taught by anyone who demands that the child repudiate their experiences and all that gives them sustenance. Most importantly, Black children cannot be what they cannot see. The counter-narratives offered by the participants are needed to begin the process of dispelling mistruths or misinformation from the dominant narrative regarding Black males in education.

The courage displayed by the participants may support another Black male student or Black male educator in the midst of adversity. As presented in both the literature review and participant narratives, the increase of representation and progress of Black male representation within the U.S. educational system required both the desired interest and support of the race(s) in power (White or Hispanics) to realize the value of Black educator representation at the table. The commitment of the four participants to share their stories, be role models as well as persevere as Black male Pk-12 students and educators in spite of the negative lived experiences to pursue
social justice and equality for the present and next generation of Black children is to greatly appreciated.

A limitation of this project was the lack of Black male educators in New Mexico, which made it incredibly challenging to obtain the minimum needed for a phenomenological specialist project. The project was conducted with a small sample of Black male educators. Therefore, due to the nature of this research project, not all conclusions based on the data collected regarding the researched phenomena can be generalized to the larger population. The next limitation was that the research project only included one semi-structured interview as a data source. While the semi-structured interviews provided participants the opportunity to explain their thoughts on the underrepresentation of African American educators in New Mexico through their own words and lived experiences, utilizing different forms of data collection, such as observations or case studies, could provide further insight into the project. Moreover, there is potential for further research using different qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research designs. The final limitation of the project was the exclusion of other known demographics or characteristics, such as female, gay, or transgender individuals, and the attitudes of other non-Black groups, such as Whites, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and Native Americans.

The final remaining question in this specialist project is, "What is next?" I believe this experience would be in vain if I did not explicitly express the importance of using the insight gained from the four Black male educators in this project to inspire and engage in progressive action. School districts must become intentionally creative in their annual marketing to grow, recruit, and retain Black males in the education profession. All national, state, and local stakeholders of all races, cultures, and political affiliations must engage in this work of
interrupting anti-Blackness. As mentioned earlier, this includes the president of the United States, the U.S. Congress, the U.S. secretary of education, state governors, the New Mexico public education department, the New Mexico secretary of education, mayors, law enforcement, school superintendents, district leaders, building principals, teachers, school personnel, parents, and students. Political agency is the internal belief that one can affect social change (Triplett & Ford, 2019). The political agency is the bridge between an individual's critical reflection of oppressive social forces and a willingness and desire to act critically in the best interest of an oppressed subgroup. This action can take a wide range of forms, individual or collective (Mills & Gay, 2019).

Ligocki et al. (2021) conveyed the notion that those Black educators are tasked with sanitizing the malice of the past; diminishing their achievements and contributions; experiencing systematic refusal to accept diversity, equity policies, and mandates; and receiving limited opportunities in teacher education and professional development. Regardless of adversity, Black people have exhibited Black joy, an extension of Black agency, resistance, and perseverance. Black educators have embodied love, collegiality, and collectiveness throughout history as a race. Through this joy, the history of Black excellence encompasses narratives that offer knowledge about a Black culture that diminishes the hardships to sustain their spirits (Love, 2019b). Every participant in this phenomenological study who shared their adversities in the education profession and their conscious decision to persevere and overcome exhibits this Black-boy joy. Black males and men are highly capable of excelling in education when we feel loved, respected, and valued by other races and cultures willing to accept and nurture our gift. Until we
are accepted and treated with equality, however, we will continue to leave or not choose the education profession.

I am alarmed by the current state of education in New Mexico, especially regarding the racial imbalance in the education profession. The evidence of a lack of Black male educators in education is unmistakable. This project's results indicate tangible action steps for all educational stakeholders in New Mexico, allowing them to meticulously plan to attract and retain more Black males in the teaching profession. State government, colleges, universities, and school superintendents in New Mexico can directly influence the policies and practices that lead to increased educator diversity and equity.

Institutional racism manifests racist beliefs indelible in institutional policies and practices and results in inequitable outcomes between racial groups (Lutz, 2017). Cultural racism includes the laws and cultural practices that uphold the historic and modern dominance of the majority group over minority groups (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018). Black educators and voices are very seldom included in making policies and procedures that will affect their lives or school experiences. Therefore, Black students and Black education are often subjected to policies that reflect the prejudice and biases of White supremacy and policies. The importance of political efficacy is paramount in the Black community and Black education because the possibility of change for the better will always inspire oppressed and marginalized groups to continue to fight. Political efficacy is the light for important sociopolitical outcomes such as commitment to activism, social capital, and social trust (Horowitz et al., 2019). Black males lack the cultural, aspirational, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistant capital to be successful in the game of educational politics.
It is, therefore, incumbent upon all stakeholders to acknowledge, course correct, and hold accountable all education stakeholders for ensuring equitable school experiences for Black males and Black children collectively. Collaborating with stakeholders who are not Black on the surface can be challenging and uncomfortable, but meaningful reflection and empathy are needed to show all students they matter. Courageous leadership, advocacy, and social action for Black education are needed now more than ever. All hands must be on deck for this cause. This work requires many to relinquish some of their inherited privileges to make room for social justice and equality in education. This mission and burden are too heavy to shoulder and carry for one race. Having all stakeholders, in particular, the president of the United States, the U.S. Congress, the U.S. secretary of education, state governors, the New Mexico public education department, the New Mexico secretary of education, mayors, law enforcement, school superintendents, district leaders, building principals, teachers, school personnel, and parents all coming to the table to break bread and advocate for the equity and equality of the Black body speaks not only volumes but also validates Malcolm's views and the dream of Dr. King as a realistic reality.

Within this project, Educator 3 echoed the following sentiments:

I will use the Black Lives Matter versus All Lives Matter thing, like it. Unfortunately, you cannot specify race, because then someone is always going to be angry, right. However, if the whole neighborhood is burning, and there is one house burning in the neighborhood; you are going to focus on that one house, right? That is the thing right now. There are not enough Black educators. So right now, there is one house on fire in this in this education field; we need to focus on that fire right now. That is not to say not
all the other houses matter. Right? That is not to say the Asian house does not matter, the White person’s house does not matter, and the Hispanic house does not matter. All we are saying is that the Black house is the one on fire right now. Moreover, we need to focus on that house right now. Then, once that fire is put out . . . we can get back to focusing on everybody.

Given that Black male educators are underrepresented in the literature, this project filled a gap in the literature by highlighting the root causes of the underrepresentation of Black males by investigating what factors, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges have motivated Black male educators in New Mexico to enter, stay in, or leave the field of education. The findings from this qualitative phenomenological study add to the literature that focuses on the dwindling number of Black male educators in school districts across the country. It is important to document the past and present to contextualize where we are today in American and New Mexico history. This specialist project highlighted how Black male educators often have to battle against colorblind district and state education policies that could potentially be detrimental to Black male students and educators.

This project also revealed that while the participants are on continuous journeys in the pursuit of healing and liberation from their experiences, hope is the constant that inspires them to persist in their journeys. This specialist project is a testament to the courageous four Black male educators who continue to serve and represent their communities as Black men. The research presents a picture of a cycle that will continue unless it is stopped. As noted in this study's first sentence in the literature review, Du Bois (1903) once asked, "How does it feel to be a problem?" Black boys and men have been positioned in U.S. society as problems to be fixed, subsequently
depriving them of their humanity (Warren, 2020). It has been debated that the American educational system is broken. A better question could be: Is it broken or working as it was intended to operate? Du Bois (1903) predicted that the color line would be the greatest problem faced by Americans in the twentieth century, and he was correct. Historical analysis suggests that the problems in Black education are not unfamiliar problems but the same problems that Blacks have had to overcome for centuries. Schools remain more separate and unequal than ever.

Black male educators are the solution, not the problem. The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling systematically phased out tens of thousands of brilliant Black male educators. The U.S. public education system has yet to recover from this mass exodus. The teacher shortage in America is greater than ever. However, it appears that the chickens have come home to roost. Black representation matters. Black males can become part of this profession revitalizing if provided the necessary and long-awaited love, respect, appreciation, support, a sense of belonging, and equality. For Black children, by giving them images, they begin to learn what they can become. They develop hope, dreams, and real aspirations in the presence of Black educators who look like them. Visual representation also becomes a shade for young Black children. It is important for Blacks to be educated, maintain their own cultural identity, and seek equity and cultural relevance in the educational system in America. Providing shade to our Black children takes the heat off their journey. White supremacy desires to disrupt that protective covering for Black children in our U.S. schools. Living in the shade of God begets shade to our fellow man. As Black male educators, we must work ten times harder for what was supposed to come naturally. We must collectively recognize the work it costs to create that
image. God's most profound love is sacrifice. Sacrifice multiplies you. I am living for the shade in Black education. We must learn the power of living in the victory of shade.

Black males in this project understood how and how their various school institutions failed them. The Black male participants in this project articulated extremely well what needs to be done to address Black children's inequities. This project allowed Black male educators to lead the cause of dismantling anti-Black racism in New Mexico schools. This project empowered Black male educators as contributors and disseminators of knowledge. The interviews with all four participants were cataloged with every expression, ranging from words of affirmation and encouragement to tears of sadness to laughter and tears of joy. The experience of seeing Black men share their vulnerabilities with grace to preserve and protect the future of Black children was beautiful. Ultimately, I felt like this experience was good for all Black souls.

In conclusion, this project suggests that perceptions become a reality to Black males who have experienced these biases and those who hear about them, thereby experiencing it vicariously. One's perception can be so powerful, solidifying that perception is a reality in the mind of those perceiving the phenomenon. Consistent with critical race theory—which seeks to understand the hidden racial dynamics of a social phenomenon that would otherwise go unrecognized by scholars, educational stakeholders, and society as a whole—this project revealed the perceptions of Black male educators regarding racial bias within the U.S. educational system as a social phenomenon worthy of further investigation.

It was a blessing to have heart-to-heart conversations and the trust of these Black male educators in me to share their stories in a way that reflects their trajectory during a pandemic. The conversations between the participants and myself became a healing time to reflect on what
it means to be a Black male educator. I hope there is a young Black male educator who can feed from this knowledge and continue to strive in the field of education. To change the narratives, the voices of Black male teachers must be listened to and allowed platforms for all to hear. This research builds on the legacy of Black researchers before me. I am committed to building a community for and with Black male teachers around the country. This work represents the first in what I hope will be an extensive line of transformative research serving Black men and boys.
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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions
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<th>Focus of the Research</th>
<th>Sub Focus of the Research</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
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| What factors, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges affect Black males to enter, stay or leave the field of education? | Black Male Educator Representation | 1. Please introduce yourself. Describe your role and professional experience as a Black male educator.  
2. Do you recall having a Black male educator during your elementary, middle, or high school years? If so, did the experience impact feelings of belonging and comfort within your PK-12 school experience?  
3. Describe how you personally represent Black excellence and Black boy joy in education? What impact and message do you believe your representation as a Black male educator brings to the field of education? Impact for Black male students? Other students?  
4. How does your Blackness influence your relationship with students, parents, colleagues, and community stakeholders in education?  
5. What do you think it will take to attract and retain more Black males into the education profession in the state of New Mexico?  
6. As a professional Black male educator, what words of wisdom do you have for young Black males? Aspiring Black male educators? Other Black male educators in New Mexico? |
| What factors, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges affect Black males to enter, stay or leave the field of education? | Black in White Spaces | 7. Please describe in detail what your life, academic, and professional experience(s) have been like for you to live, learn and work as both Black and male in education?  
8. Why did you decide to become an educator? What were some of your motivations to enter the teaching profession?  
9. From your perspective or experience, what are some of the causes of a shortage of Black male teachers in New Mexico?  
10. Have you ever felt supported in the profession due to being a Black male educator? Describe the experience(s).  
11. Have you been afforded a mentor as a Black male educator? If so, describe how these supports have impacted your decision to remain in the profession. |
| What factors, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges affect Black males to enter, stay or leave the field of education? | Race and Racism | 12. As a Black male in education, either as a PK-20 student or employee, have you ever experienced racism? Please describe this incidence(s). How has that experience impacted you as a Black male? |
| What factors, barriers, stereotypes, experience(s), or challenges affect Black males to enter, stay or leave the field of education? | Barriers and Factors | 13. Are there stereotypes, myths, or barriers you overcame as a Black male/Black male educator? In what ways, if any, do you see these stereotypes, myths, or barriers connected to your gender? Blackness?  
14. What challenges or obstacles did you experience as a Black male during your PK-20 schooling that could have prevented you from becoming a teacher? |
Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer
Research Participants Needed for a Study of Black Male Educators (teachers, principals, district-level administrators, or superintendents) serving students in New Mexico public, private, charter, and independent schools

WE HAVE HEARD THE STORIES OF EDUCATION GIANTS LIKE OBAMA, DUBOIS, BELL, BALDWIN, AND MARSHALL. IT’S TIME TO HEAR YOUR VOICE!

I am looking to interview Black/African-American male educators across the state of New Mexico (teachers, principals, district-level administrators, or superintendents) who are working and carrying the torch of Black male excellence to improve the educational outcomes for other Black men and boys.

To be eligible for this phenomenological specialist project, you must:
1. Identify as a Black of African-American, African, Caribbean, or Afro-Latino Heritage Man
2. State-certified and taught three or more years in education
3. Be willing to participate in a 60-120 minute interview based on the research study topic

If you are interested in participating in this study, or if you know someone who you think would be, please contact the researcher. Robert Sims Jr. at (269) 419-7966.
Appendix C

HSIRB Approval
Date: July 26, 2022

To: Louann Bienlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
    [Co-PI], Co-Principal Investigator

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE OF NEW MEXICO BLACK MALE EDUCATORS' UNDERREPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION WITHIN NEW MEXICO

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE OF NEW MEXICO BLACK MALE EDUCATORS' UNDERREPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION WITHIN NEW MEXICO" has been reviewed by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) and approved under the Expedited 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application. **Please note:** This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB or the Associate Director Research Compliance for consultation.

**Stamped Consent Document(s) location - Study Details/Submissions/Initial/Attachments**

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Sincerely,

Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

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WMU IRB

For a study to remain open after one year, a Post Approval Monitoring report (please use the continuing review submission form) is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) **July 25, 2023** and each year thereafter until closing of the study. When this study closes, complete a Closure Submission.

**Note:** All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.