



# A Tale of Two Types of Schools: An Exploration of How School Working Conditions Influence Black Male Teacher Turnover

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This phenomenological study draws on semi-structured interviews with 27 Black male teachers across 14 schools in an urban school district—seven schools with three or more Black male teachers and seven schools with one Black male teacher. Consistent with theories about teacher turnover, findings indicate a relationship between organizational characteristics, reasons participants cited for leaving, and participants' actual decisions to stay or leave.

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I'm one voice among eight—one Black voice amongst eight White staff. . . . They don't respect my professional opinion. Is it because I'm Black? Even now it still bugs me. If I'm saying it, are you not hearing me? It really messes with me sometimes. I mean it makes you feel inadequate. Like am I saying something that's crazy? I've been educated. I have a Master's. I pass all these MTELs [the state licensure exams] just like everybody else. It's frustrating, you know?

- Dennis Sangister (The only Black male teacher on school's faculty)

Even if you are trying to do the right thing, you're going to be harassed and treated like a criminal for no reason and I'm just like done with it . . . this isn't a prison. We can't run it like a prison. We can't treat our kids like they are criminals—especially [when] they are not doing anything wrong. . . . It creates tension, nobody really wants to be here. I'm just like done with it, personally I'm over it.”

-Dante Smith (One of nine Black male teachers on school's faculty)

**A Tale of Two Types of Schools:  
An Exploration of How School Working Conditions  
Influence Black Male Teacher Turnover**

**Introduction**

Amidst national (King, 2015), state (New York State Education Department, 2016), and local (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014) policy initiatives to increase the ethnoracial diversity of the country's educator workforce, a troubling trend has emerged: teachers of color, specifically Black male teachers, are leaving the profession at a higher rate than their peers (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010). One premise underlying Black male teacher diversity campaigns, such as “Calling Black Men to the Blackboard” launched by then-Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2011), is that Black male teachers, serving as role models, are uniquely situated to improve Black boys’

schooling outcomes (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Brown, 2012). There is growing evidence that assignment to a demographically similar teacher matters for improving achieving, social, and emotional learning for students of color (Egalite & Kisida, 2017).

Specifically, recent quasi-experimental studies find that Black students perform better on standardized exams when taught by a Black teacher (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015).

However, ongoing teacher diversity campaigns efforts will not increase the net number of teachers of color if policymakers fail to address the disproportionate rate at which teachers of color (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007), and in particular Black male teachers (Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 1999) leave the profession when compared to White teachers.

Given the importance of teacher ethnoracial diversity, it is critical for those designing and implementing teacher diversity policies to understand Black teachers' school-based experiences and how those experiences influence their decisions to stay or leave their schools or the profession. The empirical literature is relatively silent on Black male teacher retention, with the exception of two studies (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kirby et al., 1999) that primarily highlighted the phenomenon: Black male teachers have higher rates of turnover than their peers. However, these studies did not explore *why* Black male teachers have higher rates of turnover than White teachers.

Consequently, this article fills the gap about the mechanisms that influence Black male teacher turnover. I focus on the perceived school-based experiences of Black male teachers. I compare how the experiences vary for Black men who are the only Black male teachers in their schools, whom I term *Loners*, to Black men in schools with multiple Black male teachers, whom I term *Groupers*. I explore how the school's organizational

context, such as how relationships with colleagues and school administration, affect the decisions for Loners and Groupers to stay in their schools or in the teaching profession. Specifically in this article, I explore two questions: (1) In what ways do the school-based experiences vary for *Loners* (Black male teachers in schools employing one Black male teacher) versus *Groupers* (Black male teachers in schools with larger numbers of Black male teachers)? and (2) How does a school's organizational context, such as relationships with colleagues and school administration, affect the decisions of Loners and Groupers to stay in their schools or in the teaching profession?

My study makes three important substantive and theoretical contributions to the research literature. First, this study adds to the burgeoning research on why Black male teachers stay in, move through, and leave the profession. Previous analyses on the experiences of Black male teachers have explored their pathways into the profession and their teaching practices (Bridges, 2011; Brockenbrough, 2012; Bryan & Jett, 2018; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Sealey-Ruiz & Lewis, 2011). This study explored how Black male teachers' school-based experiences influence retention.

Second, the study's sample allowed me to explore the differential effect of the school's organizational context on the experiences for Black men who are the only Black male teachers in their schools, when compared to Black men in schools with multiple Black male teachers. An analysis of the variation in school type builds on previous research that treated Black male teachers as a monolithic group (Bristol & Goings, 2019; Thomas & Warren, 2017) to consider how the school's context shapes these teachers' diverse experiences.

Third, my use of the theory of the association between teacher working conditions and turnover (Simon & Johnson, 2015) allowed me to illustrate differences for Black male teacher turnover, when compared to prior findings that did not explore patterns of turnover by racial subgroups. While previous research found that positive collegial relationships decreased the likelihood of a teacher's decision to leave and negative collegial relationships increased the likelihood of a teacher's decision to stay (Grissom, 2011; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012), this proved less true for the Black male teachers in this study. Neither the presence nor the absence of collegial relationships influenced Black male teachers' retention.

This article begins by reviewing the qualitative and quantitative literature that has explored a relationship between teachers' racial characteristics and students' academic outcomes. The article then focuses on the organizational conditions that influence the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. One trend emerged: teachers of color, in particular Black teachers, are more likely to teach in schools with larger concentrations of Black working-class students than their White peers. Further, these teachers of color, and in particular Black males, have higher rates of turnover than White teachers. I sought to explore the reasons for this pattern. The article uses a recently published framework that attributes teacher turnover to negative collegial relationships and poor working conditions (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Culled from interviews from 27 Black male teachers in one urban school district across 14 schools (seven schools with one Black male teacher and seven schools with three or more Black male teachers), the findings revealed a relationship between the reasons participants cited for leaving, participants' actual decisions to stay or leave, and organizational characteristics. Groupers (Black men in

schools with three or more Black male teachers) moved and left the profession because of the challenging working conditions in their schools (e.g., poor administrative leadership). Counterintuitively, despite having greater challenging collegial relationships often characterized by consistent negative interactions, Loners (the only Black men on the faculty) stayed because of the overall positive working conditions in their schools.

### **Qualitative and Quantitative Research on Added-Value for a Diverse Teaching Force**

Ongoing research has explored the relationship between teacher characteristics and students' academic outcomes. For example, findings from qualitative studies revealed that White teachers in urban areas often have low expectations for their economically disadvantaged Black students (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004; Hyland, 2009; Irvine, 1990; Warren, 2013). Other scholarship has suggested that many White teachers believe Black students are less likely to succeed before entering the classroom (Hale, 2001). Such perceptions are not lost on Black students. They are able to recognize the culture of low expectations that is evidenced by some of their White teachers (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008). White middle-class teachers in an urban school are more likely than Black teachers to project their racialized beliefs on Black students, which inevitably influences how they assess Black students and their class performance (Milner, 2006). Black teachers (Mabokela & Madsen, 2007), particularly Black male teachers (Lynn, 2018), have described more positive beliefs about their Black students' academic abilities when compared to White teachers. It may be reasonable to conclude that, for Black students, having a same-race teacher can increase the likelihood of academic success.

Recent quasi-experimental studies have bolstered claims that educational outcomes improve when students are taught by a same-race teacher. An analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten through Fifth Grade (ECLS-K-5) pointed to increased learning on math and English scores for Black students when they were taught by a Black teacher (Easton-Brooks, Lewis, & Zhang, 2010). Ouazad (2014) found in his analysis of the same nationally representative longitudinal data set that teachers' perceptions about students' academic ability increased when the students were the same race. There were no differences for students' grades based on teachers' gender. Other studies drawing on longitudinal administrative data in North Carolina (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011), Florida (Egalite et al., 2015), and Tennessee (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017) found statistically significant increases in achievement on standardized exams for Black students when their teachers were Black.

Given the potential added-value (i.e., increased learning and potentially greater likelihood of attaining higher levels of education) for students of color when taught by a teacher of color than a White teacher, further research must explore the organizational conditions that influence the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Such research, then, should begin by understanding where teachers of color teach.

### **Racialized Teacher Sorting**

While the number of Black teachers entering the profession have slightly changed (Madkins, 2011; Warner-Griffin et al., 2016), the types of schools where Black teachers teach remain unchanged (White, 2016). Black teachers are more likely than White teachers to teach in urban schools with large percentages of students of color from working-class families (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004).

De jure school segregation begins to explain why the overwhelming majority of Black teachers taught exclusively Black students in the South before *Brown v. Board of Education* (Anderson, 1988; Fultz, 1995; Siddle-Walker, 2000). After public schools began to desegregate with all deliberate speed, with its ruling in *Milliken v. Bradley in 1974*, the Supreme Court maintained de facto school segregation. Specifically, the Court found that the state of Michigan was not willfully segregating its public schools in and around Detroit; therefore, the state was not mandated to desegregate those schools (Milner, Delale-O'Connor, Murray, & Farinde, 2016). Consequently, the teachers and students of Detroit Public Schools remained predominantly Black, while the teachers and students in the Detroit metropolitan area remained predominantly White. Such hyper-segregation characterized most U.S. public schools such that through the 1980s (Richards, 1986) and 1990s (Darling-Hammond, Dilworth, & Bullmaster, 1996) and to the present (Achinstein et al., 2010), Black teachers are still more likely to teach in schools with higher concentrations of Black students than White teachers.

Researchers have provided several explanations for the concentration of Black teachers in schools with larger numbers of Black students. First, schools with larger numbers of Black students actively seek out Black teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Black teachers prefer to work in schools with larger numbers of Black students, hoping to give back to their community (Dixson & Dingus, 2008). Emerging research on cultural matching has explored group bias between selection committees and applicants (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014; Rivera, 2012). Racial bias by White interview committee members in schools with larger concentrations of White students might also begin to explain why Black teachers are not selected (Foster, 1998). The net effect of these



historic and current policies and practices is that Black teachers are more likely to teach Black children.

While there appear to be academic benefits for students of color when they are taught by a same-race teacher and there is a trend that Black teachers are more likely than their White peers to teach in schools with high concentrations of Black students, it is nonetheless of concern that Black teachers have one of the highest rates of turnover (Kirby et al., 1999; Marvel et al., 2007). From the 2008-09 to 2012-13 school year, for example, the turnover rate for teachers of color increased from 18.1% to 18.9% (Ingersoll & May, 2016). During those same periods, the rate of White teacher turnover remained unchanged at 15%. Why do Black teachers exhibit higher rates of turnover than their White colleagues? To answer this question, it may be helpful, first, to explore potential influences on teacher turnover more generally.

### **Theoretical Framework: Teacher Working Conditions and Turnover**

Researchers have long presented one narrative for teacher turnover: teachers are more likely to leave schools with high concentrations of students of color who are from working-class families and achieve at a lower level than their more socioeconomically privileged peers (Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007). According to this theory, teachers move from schools with lower-SES students of color who are challenging to teach into schools with higher-SES students who are often White (Clotfelter et al., 2011). Moreover, researchers concluded there was a positive relationship between teacher turnover and students' underperformance on standardized examinations (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005).

A more recent theory, however, advanced by Simon and Johnson (2015) is that teachers leave high-poverty, low-performing schools with large numbers of students of color because of the poor working conditions in those schools. These poor working conditions, according to teachers, include weak administrative leadership and the absence of positive collegial relationships. Teachers are not abandoning the economically disenfranchised students of color in their schools, but rather the dysfunctional organizational conditions that characterize these schools. For example, teachers reported an increased likelihood of remaining in their schools if they had positive relationships with their colleagues (Johnson et al., 2012). As well, teachers were less likely to leave schools when they respected their colleagues and believed there was a sense of collective responsibility for improving students' learning (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). When researchers accounted for a school's ethnoracial and socioeconomic student composition, teachers reported that their primary reason for leaving was because of poor working conditions, such as inadequate access to textbooks and technology and pressure to administer tests that were inappropriate for their students (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). Teachers who were identified as having both strong content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge cited poor working conditions such as punitive student discipline policies and a lack of administrative leadership; these conditions ultimately influenced their decisions to leave their schools (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012).

In light of the links between teacher turnover and working conditions, one of the strongest predictors of teacher turnover is satisfaction with administrative leadership (Johnson, 2006; Ladd, 2011). For example, an analysis of surveys from teachers who left teaching in New York City public schools during the 2004-05 school year ( $n = 368$  or

61%) revealed that 40% of respondents “identified dissatisfaction with the administration as the most important factor” affecting their decisions to leave (Marinell & Coca, 2013, p. 327). Departing teachers described their principals as unable to: communicate respect for teachers, assist teachers with adopting new methods, facilitate learning for struggling students, or work with staff to devise solutions to some problems in the schools.

### **Turnover Among Teachers of Color**

The growing body of qualitative (Douglas et al., 2008; Milner, 2006; Warren, 2013) and quantitative (Dee, 2004; Fairlie, Hoffmann, & Oreopoulos, 2014; Ouazad, 2014) research serves to bolster the efforts of policymakers to increase the diversity of the U.S. teaching force. However, these efforts will be less effective as they do not take into account the fact that teachers of color are more likely to leave their schools. As noted above, Black teachers (Achinstein et al., 2010), and particularly Black male teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011), have higher rates of turnover than their peers from other subgroups.

During the 1990-91 nationally representative administration of the School and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the 1991-92 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), teachers of color were found to be *no* more likely to leave their schools than White teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997). This finding remained consistent over the following decade. The 1999 TFS data suggested that turnover rates for teachers of color were not higher than their White colleagues (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). However, by the 2004-05 school year, more Black, Latino, and Asian and Pacific Islander teachers left the teaching profession or did not return to their schools when compared to White teachers (Ingersoll & Connor, 2009; Marvel et al., 2007). Turnover was highest for male teachers of color

(Ingersoll & May, 2011). The odds of a male teacher of color leaving were as 50% higher when compared to the odds for a female teacher of color. While little research has explored the turnover rates for Black male teachers, one key study analyzed teacher mobility in Texas between 1979 and 1996, finding that Black male teachers had the highest rate of turnover when compared to other subgroups (Kirby et al., 1999).

Since then, Achinstein et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis on turnover among teachers of color identified several potential influences on this phenomenon that included high concentrations of teachers of color in hard-to-staff schools that were characterized by poor working conditions and a lack of administrative support. These researchers submitted that "Far fewer studies examine turnover among teachers of color, providing even less empirical evidence on the impact of personal backgrounds and school conditions and the interactions of these two factors" (p. 95). Moreover, while researchers are aware of some of the organizational conditions that affect teacher retention (Pallas & Buckley, 2012), little empirical research has gathered information on how those conditions influence the decisions for subgroups (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005), such as Black male teachers. Despite the reality that Black male teachers exhibit higher rates of turnover than their peers (Ingersoll & May, 2011), research on why Black male teachers stay or leave their schools specifically and the profession more generally remains under examined.

Only one recent study, based on analysis from the Black Male Teacher Environment Survey (BMTES), has thus far attempted to examine this relationship between school organizational context and Black male teacher turnover (Bristol, 2018). The survey was administered to each Black male teacher in one urban school district,

Boston Public Schools (N = 266), and findings were based on a small non-representative sample (n = 86). Respondents' experiences differed if they were the *only* Black male teacher on the faculty, compared to respondents who were in schools with three or more Black male teachers. For example, when compared to those Black men teaching in schools with three or more Black male teachers, a higher percentage of respondents who were the only Black men on their faculty reported having more challenging relationships, such as believing that people in their school were afraid of them because of their race. Also, Black men in schools with three or more Black male teachers reported having more influence on shaping school policy, when compared to respondents who were the only Black men on their faculty.

In light of the differences in responses of the Black male teachers based on the number of other Black males in the school, I coined the term *Loner* to describe Black male teachers who were the only Black male in their school. The term *Loner* was appropriated from psychology literature (Svoboda, 2007) to organizational literature to characterize a person in an organization who does not share the same gender and ethnoracial identification as another person with a similar job title. The term *Groupier* can be used to characterize individuals who share the same race and gender identification with individuals of similar job titles.

Given ongoing initiatives to increase the number of Black male teachers in U.S. schools and the recognition that these teachers are most likely to teach in the most challenging schools but have high rates of turnover, this study builds on the literature around teacher turnover and the nascent research on Black male teacher turnover. Specifically, I explore how the organizational conditions (e.g., the number of Black men

on the faculty) in which Black male teachers work affect their experiences in schools and, more importantly, how those experiences influence their decisions to stay or leave. My research questions are:

1. In what ways do the school-based experiences vary for *Loners* (Black male teachers in schools employing one Black male teacher) versus *Groupers* (Black male teachers in schools with larger numbers of Black male teachers)?
2. How does a school's organizational context, such as relationships with colleagues and school administration, affect the decisions of *Loners* and *Groupers* to stay in their schools or in the teaching profession?

### **Method**

An analysis of the BMTES pointed to differences in the school-based experiences for Black male teachers based on the number of other Black men on the faculty. This analysis informed the research design for examining two sets of schools—one with one Black male teacher and the other with many more Black male teachers. As described above, findings from this study came from a larger project conducted during the 2012-13 school year that investigated how organizational conditions, characteristics, and dynamics affected 27 Black male teachers in Boston Public School's (BPS) pathways into the profession, teaching experiences, and retention. These 27 Black male teachers were spread across 14 schools; seven schools had one Black male teacher ( $n = 7$ ) and seven schools had three or more Black male teachers on the faculty ( $n = 20$ ).

### **Phenomenological Inquiry**

Within the qualitative method, phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 2014) is used to explore Black male teachers' decisions to stay at or leave their schools.

Researchers who conduct phenomenological studies are interested in understanding the essence of particular group or individual experiences (von Eckartsberg, 1988). An integral component of phenomenological inquiry is a sense-making process of the research participants' perception of their experiences in the world (Wertz, 1984). Given this inquiry and the study's focus on Black male teachers' retention, rich data were gathered on the experiences of study participants to devise theories about how they navigated the unit of analysis—in this case, schools (Vagle, 2016).

The phenomenological approach allows researchers to describe what and how participants experience, as well as look for the underlying meaning in the ways respondents talk about their experiences (Vagle, 2010). Researchers employing a phenomenological strategy cannot merely listen to respondents' experiences, but must consider how those experiences might inform a burgeoning theory (Husserl, 2001). Thus, the phenomenological method permits a nuanced examination of the relationships between Black male teachers and their students, administrators, and colleagues. Such an examination, in the end, informed an understanding of how the interaction of both race and gender affected Black male teachers' decisions to stay at or leave their schools.

### **Setting and Sample**

**Setting: Boston Public Schools.** Boston Public Schools (BPS) is the country's oldest and one of the largest urban public school systems. BPS is also an ideal setting for studying Black male teachers' school-based experiences. The school district remains under a 1970 federal desegregation court order that prohibited racial discriminatory teacher hiring practices (see *Morgan v. Hennigan*, 379 F. Supp. 410 [D.C. Mass., June 21, 1974]). Commonly referred to as the *Garrity Decision*, Judge Arthur Garrity

mandated that the district be comprised of 25% Black teachers to mirror the student population.

Students' ethnoracial composition has shifted greatly since the federal court ruling. Today, public data have suggested that the student population is approximately 41% Latino, 36% Black, 13% White, and 9% Asian. The district's teaching force, however, has not kept pace with its student diversity. According to publicly available data, teachers self-identified as 62% White, 23% Black,<sup>1</sup> 10% Hispanic, and 5% Asian. Approximately 5.8% of BPS's teachers are Black men. In actual numbers, of the 4,556 teachers in BPS, 266 are Black males. Black male teachers in the district are concentrated in secondary schools (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Out of the approximately 118 BPS schools, there were slightly more schools with Groupers (43) than Loners (28) (see Table 2). Loners were highly concentrated in elementary schools. Schools with three or more Black male teachers were more likely to be high schools (see Table 3).

[Insert Table 2 Here]

[Insert Table 3 Here]

**Sample: School selection.** Schools were purposively selected (Patton, 1990) using both publicly available data, as well as human resource data provided to the researcher by the district (see Table 4). To focus the comparison of how the school-based experiences influenced the decisions of Loners and Groupers to stay at or leave their schools, I selected an equal number of schools with one Black male teacher and schools

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<sup>1</sup> The district characterizes teachers as Black if they self-report as African American or of African descent from the Caribbean (e.g., Haiti) or from Cape Verde, an archipelago off Africa's northwestern coast.



with three or more Black male teachers. In total, 14 schools were chosen: seven out of a possible of 28 schools based on whether one Black male teacher was on the faculty and the other seven out of a possible 43 schools based on whether three or more Black male teachers were on the faculty.

[Insert Table 4 Here]

Selected sites capture a range of schools in which BPS teachers could teach—traditional district; turnaround (reconstituted); pilot (semi-autonomous); innovation (federally funded, autonomous); and exam schools. It is important to note that traditional district schools have little flexibility with central office regulations and thus are less able to exercise discretion around choosing curriculum, budgeting, and selecting students and teachers. The state gave schools designated as turnaround 5 years to “improve,” which meant increasing performance on one measure—a standardized exam; failure to improve meant the state would take over the school. To avoid state takeover, a state law passed in 2010 gave districts greater authority to improve learning. Boston adopted a policy of replacing principals and requiring teachers to reapply for their jobs. Innovation schools received initial funding from the state’s department of education. Both pilot and innovation schools have great flexibility in choosing curriculum, budgeting, and selecting teachers and students (often screening students through an application process). The three BPS exam schools require students to receive a qualifying score on the Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE) to gain admission.

After identifying schools, I sent an email to Grouper principals and included a recruitment letter for participants. I asked principal’s permission to participate in the study. For those principals who did not respond to my email, I visited the schools and

asked participants directly if they would like to participate. I used a similar recruitment strategy for Loners, except in this case I visited selected schools and asked participants directly. My decision to approach Loners, as opposed to contacting their principals first, was an attempt to decrease the likelihood that they would be easily identified.

In my sample, schools with one Black male teacher screened their students, were not tied to district regulations with staff hiring, had more White students, and were more likely to be led by a White administrator than schools with many more Black male teachers (see Table 4). Schools with many more Black male teachers, for example, had recently replaced at least half of the staff and administrators because of students' poor performance on state standardized exams or were in the process of doing so. They also tended to be larger schools, had more Black students, and were led by a Black administrator.

Finally, as I began purposively selecting schools, I realized that many schools in which Groupers taught were designated as turnaround by the district. Consequently, I selected one school, Crispus Attucks Elementary, which was not undergoing turnaround. However, during data collection, the district identified Crispus Attucks as a turnaround school.

**Sample: Participants.** Given my interest in understanding how schooling experiences and decisions to leave varied by the number of Black male teachers on the faculty, I interviewed all Black male teacher Loners. In schools with more than three Black male teachers, I again used purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) to capture a range of teacher characteristics in each school, including age, years of teaching, and subject area. The 27 Black male teachers across 14 schools were diverse in several ways (see Table 5).

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 56 years old, and taught math, Spanish, English, physical education, physics, and performing arts. They had a diverse set of experiences from being in their first year of teaching to having more than 20 years of teaching experience. There was also socioeconomic diversity during childhood and adolescence: participants ranged from being upper-middle class to living with a single mother and relying on government assistance. While seven participants were born in Boston or its environs, the majority were Boston transplants. They were born and raised in several cities across the United States and the African Diaspora (e.g., Caribbean and West Africa). All schools and participants were given a pseudonym.

[Insert Table 5 Here]

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The phenomenon I explored was Black male teachers' decisions to stay or leave two types of organizations: schools with one Black male teacher on the faculty and schools with three or more Black male teachers on the faculty. To explore how the school organizational context influenced Black male teacher retention, I used an adapted form of the in-depth phenomenologically-based interview structure created by Schuman (1982) and improved upon by Seidman (2006). Specifically, I conducted two waves of approximately 60-minute audio-recorded interviews with 24 participants: 51 interviews in total. While there were 27 Black male teachers in my study, I only interviewed 24 participants twice due to staffing changes during data collection.

Given the phenomenological approach, questions were open-ended (Giorgi, 1997). For example, during the first round of interviews, I asked questions across seven dimensions, namely A. Job Placement; B. School as an Organization; C. Interactions with

Colleagues; D. Interactions with Students and Male Students of Color; E. School Demographics; F. Retention; G. Background Characteristics. Given this article's focus on teacher turnover, my analysis centered on questions in the Retention domain such as "Do you intend to stay at this school next year? What factors are influencing your decision to stay/leave? If you had an opportunity to teach at another school in Boston Public Schools, would you do so? (Probe: Why? Why not?).

I designed the second round of interviews based on an analysis of emerging themes from the first round of interviews. Consequently, questions fell across 11 domains: A) Pathways into the Profession and Preparation; B) Hiring; C) School as an Organization; D) Interactions with Colleagues; E) Small Learning Community Demographics; F) School-based Specific Questions for Groupers; G) School-based Specific Questions for Loners; H) Experience of Being a Black Male Teacher; I) Retention; J) Experiences with Teacher Certification Exams. Again, based on this article's focus on teacher turnover and some initial themes from the first-round interviews in which Loners and Groupers shared different intentions about remaining in their schools, some second-round interview questions in the Retention domain were:

"Previously, I asked you whether you were considering changing schools and you said [insert]. Has that changed? What factors are influencing your decision to stay/leave? (For teachers planning to leave) What would it take to keep you at this school longer?"

To direct my analysis toward answering my research questions, I began by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and Contact Summary Forms (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to develop a sense of their overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). Using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, I organized the collected data for analysis by

creating codes. These codes allowed me to ascribe meaning to the data collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As I coded the individual teacher interview data, I employed two approaches: etic and emic coding (Lett, 1990).

First, I drew on the literature from my theoretical framework on teacher turnover to create etic codes (e.g., “admin\_leadership” for quotes referring to participants’ decisions to leave their schools based on challenging relationships with school administrators). For example, I coded the following statement admin\_leadership from Adebayo Adjayi who decided to leave his school the following year: “I don’t think anybody really wants to be coming [to this school]. Myself in particular ‘cause of the lack of appreciation of work and [the principal] coming in and looking at you only to find faults.”

I also used emic codes that emerged from the data (e.g., “boys\_of\_color.stay” for quotes referring to Black male teachers’ decisions to stay at their schools to continue to support male students of color). For example, I coded the following statement boys\_of\_color.stay from Dennis Sangister who decided to remain at his school to continue an after-school for boys of color: “I’ve set up a lot of programs outside of my own teaching that I’m very invested in. My young men’s group is something that I’m very invested in.”

After employing both etic and emic coding, I collapsed codes with the same theme into categories and identified the patterns that emerged (van Manen, 2014). I focused my attention on both similarities and variations in patterns of how participants described their schools’ organizational context and retention. I summarized observed patterns for individual teachers and aggregated them to make claims at the school level.

Specifically, I conducted both a within-school type (e.g., Loner and Grouper) and a cross-school analysis (e.g., Loner compared to Grouper) to identify patterns of how Black male teachers' decisions to stay at or leave the school varied by whether a participant was the only Black male teacher in the building, when compared to being in a school with multiple Black male teachers.

Moreover, to ensure the reliability and validity of codes and given the phenomenological approach, I used bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010), or setting aside assumptions about Black male teachers' retention decisions, to focus on the experiences of Black male teacher participants. Additionally, as first-round interview data and reviewed field notes were collected, we bridled (Dahlberg, 2006) our understanding of how Black male teachers perceived their boundary-heightening experiences until the second wave of interviews. To do this, I drafted preliminary possibilities about the participants' school-based experiences and revised as I collected more data. Moreover, I continued to bridle my data interpretation during the analysis process (Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009). Based on triangulating (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) human resource data from the district's 118 schools, 86 BMTES survey respondents, and semi-structured interviews with 27 Black male teachers, the findings below illustrate how the school-based experiences varied for Loners versus Groupers, as well as how the school's organizational context, such as relationships with colleagues and school administration, affected the decisions of Loners and Groupers to stay at their schools or in the teaching profession.

### **Findings: Black Male Teacher Turnover**

Consistent with previous research that established a relationship between teacher turnover and school working conditions (Achinstein et al., 2010; Simon & Johnson, 2015), the Groupers in this study moved and left their schools. When compared to Loners, Groupers, who were more likely to work in turnaround schools or in schools in the process of becoming turnaround schools, cited challenging working conditions (e.g., weak administrative leadership) as their primary reason for wanting to leave. The following academic year, almost half (9 out of 20) of the Groupers did not return to their schools in the fall. Five teachers who left suggested in the previous academic year that they would leave because of administrative leadership. Three described wanting different professional opportunities. Black male teacher participants in this study who said that they wanted different professional opportunities believed they lacked the skills to teach in their current school context. One teacher was excessed (i.e., the school was unable to fund his position).

Counterintuitively, Loners, despite sometimes having hostile interactions with their White colleagues, stayed. While Simon and Johnson (2015) theorized that the absence of positive collegial relationships increases turnover, this phenomenon proved less true for Loners' decisions to remain at their schools. Although Loners described facing more challenging interactions with their colleagues—most of whom were White—each of the seven Black male teacher Loners returned to their schools in the same positions they held the previous academic year. These Loners who were more likely to work in pilot and innovation schools—organizations with greater flexibility around selecting teachers and students—highlighted positive working conditions as the main

influence for remaining at their schools. Loners acknowledged that while experiencing racism was a consequence of working in predominantly White spaces, it was preferable to working in a school that allowed them to teach free of district constraints, as compared to having fewer negative racial interactions and less autonomy. Additionally, a secondary reason Loners cited for staying was a concern about how the social and emotional needs for students of color might be supported in their absence.

### **Why Groupers Leave**

Approximately half of the Groupers in this study did not return to their school or to their previous position held during the data collection period (see Table 6). Compared to Loners, Groupers were more likely to teach in schools that were either recently or in the process of replacing at least half of the staff and administrators because of poor student performance on state standardized exams. While participants described having positive working relationships with their colleagues—mostly teachers of color, they also suggested that administrators created punitive environments that constrained teacher and student learning. Groupers, particularly those who left, believed that administrators were more focused on controlling student behavior than ensuring teachers had the resources they needed to facilitate learning.

[Insert Table 6 Here]

**Administrative leadership.** Among the nine Groupers who did not return to their schools the following academic year, five cited administrative leadership as influencing their decisions. Of the five teachers, two taught in schools that became turnaround schools the following year and the other three were teaching in turnaround schools. Groupers, such as Adebayo Adjayi who was in his 19th year at Crispus Attucks



Elementary, described an environment of administrative hyper-surveillance around teacher practice. Adjayi described how the working conditions changed after Attucks was designated to become a turnaround school; he believed the principal used classroom observations and negative evaluations to force teachers to leave the school.

So, there is a difference between when the school was not a turnaround school and now, when the other principals were there and now, right now, I don't think anybody really wants to be coming [to this school]. Myself in particular 'cause of the lack of appreciation of work and [the principal] coming in and looking at you only to find faults. In observations, you have two things in mind. What is happening that is good, what is happening that needs correction, so you present them in the same report, but then you come to just write one side of the whole story, negatives, it is demoralizing. You know, I don't believe that you run a school blaming teachers. So, I believe that any administration that wants you to work hard will start by recognizing your efforts and through that encourage you. They say that you can get a million bees by a drop of honey than by drops of vinegar.

Adjayi described a hostile teaching environment in which he and his colleagues were continuously observed. However, the focus of the observations, according to Groupers such as Adjayi, was rarely about improving practice, but more on complying with singular ways of teaching and adhering to a scripted curriculum. Ultimately, Adjayi and his colleague Joseph Nkrumah chose not to reapply for their jobs because of their discontent with school administrators. They both moved to other district schools.

Similar to the discontent for administrative hyper-surveillance of their practice as one influence on decision to leave, Groupers were also troubled by this hyper-surveillance of managing student behavior. Observing the restrictive environments in which their students were forced to learn contributed to the Groupers' decisions to leave. For example, Dante Smith, a fifth-year teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School, described how one of the assistant principals, a Black woman, interrupted students who

were in the middle of taking the state's annual standardized exam (MCAS) to search for cellular phones.

She comes in and asks, "Mr. Smith, did you take all the cellphones?" I'm like "Yeah, I took the phones, they are in the bin right here." I have a great group of freshmen—none of those kids act up. She said, "How many phones do you have?" I said, "I have three," and she was like, "Oh that's unacceptable." She then said, "Everyone stand up, open your bags," and started patting [students' book bags] up and down searching the bags. I feel like that is a microcosm of what it's like to go to school here. Even if you are trying to do the right thing, you're going to be harassed and treated like a criminal for no reason and I'm just like done with it . . . this isn't a prison. We can't run it like a prison. We can't treat our kids like they are criminals—especially [when] they are not doing anything wrong. . . . It creates tension, nobody really wants to be here. I'm just like done with it, personally I'm over it.

Smith resigned from his position at Thomas Jefferson High School at the end of the school year; he also left the teaching profession and is currently pursuing his passion for studio arts. For Groupers such as Smith, the administrators' constant policing of students only increased these teachers' disengagement from the organization.

Of all of the teachers who cited administrative leadership as their primary reason for leaving the school, Slaughter Gibson's relationship appeared the most acrimonious with his principal. Gibson, a 20-year veteran in his ninth year at Clarke High School, described the school's Black male principal as a "bulldog" and suffering from the "Head Negro in Charge (HNIC) Syndrome." HNIC is often described as a Black American who has been given a token leadership position and works systematically to undermine the work of his Black subordinates (Kelley, 2004). Gibson recalled publicly denouncing the principal's Lockout Policy: "If you came 20 minutes late to school, you would not be admitted to school." According to Gibson, this policy affected the school's Black students: "The vast majority of those students that were sent home were African American students coming from Hyde Park, Mattapan, Roxbury, and longer distances. I

had a problem with that.” Gibson suggested that he continued to “oppose” the principal, telling him, “You cannot deny anybody education for any reason under the age of sixteen. It’s illegal . . . you can’t send these kids home.” Finally, according to Gibson, the principal responded, “I’m in charge. Don’t oppose me. I’ll cut your balls off.” The principal’s supposed language around castration and emasculation appeared to undergird the hyper-masculine interactions, or apparent tension, between these two Black men.

Leroy Jackson, another participant at Clarke, described Gibson as “very opinionated . . . here [at Clarke] he’s a threat because he does not bite his tongue with any of them [administrators]. And I kind of feel that, when he put that new system in [teacher evaluation], I think they used this against him. . . .” During the first wave of interviews in December 2012, Gibson suggested that he was looking for another position as a result of his challenges with the principal. Before the second wave of interviews, early March 2013, the principal had placed Gibson on administrative leave. As such, I was unable to conduct a second-round interview. He was terminated at the end of the school year.

In their analysis of the School and Staffing Survey (SASS), Ingersoll and May (2011) found that male teachers of color, most of whom were Black, had the highest rate of turnover when compared to their colleagues. These researchers were less clear about the mechanisms within the schools that contributed to the disproportionate rate at which Black male teachers left the classroom when compared to teachers from other subgroups. Groupers, or Black men in schools with a larger number of Black male teachers, left their schools at a higher rate than Loners, who were the only Black men on their school’s faculty. An exploration of the organizational context in which Groupers taught points, first, to challenging working conditions as being a primary contributor to why they left.

Specifically, Groupers cited administrative leadership focused on a hyper-surveillance of both teachers' practice and managing student behavior that influenced their decisions to leave.

**Misfit.** While a majority (5 out of 9) of Groupers cited administrative leadership as their reason for leaving, four Groupers left to seek out other professional opportunities. Two, in particular, said that their decision to leave was based on their fit with being a teacher of record. These participants believed they did not possess the necessary skills to assume their current positions as teachers of record. Pierce Bond and Kayne Carter did not return to their positions as teachers of record the following academic year. Bond left in the middle of the school year to work for the U.S. government in Central Africa. Carter remained at his school, but transitioned into becoming a student engagement counselor.

Bond was a first-year math high school teacher at Explorations. Before his position at Explorations, Bond was a volunteer with the Peace Corps. Despite being unable to conduct a second-wave interview because he resigned from his position in March, Bond made it clear that coming from a high socioeconomic background proved challenging when working with working-class Black students. Bond, whose father is African and mother is White American, described himself as an “African American in the true sense of the word.” Bond characterized his high school located in a Virginia suburb as a “diverse and yet very affluent sort of old-school money-type environment where it’s [academically] competitive.” However, Bond was unprepared for the systemic challenges that plague urban schools and turned to blaming students and parents. “It’s very hard working with a lot of families that don’t necessarily— . . . almost like the students—you can tell it’s from the top down. There’s just a serious lack of appreciation [in my opinion]

of the opportunity afforded them.” While Bond stopped short of saying Black working-class parents did not “care” about their children’s education, he appeared to perpetuate a belief that education is less valued in historically marginalized communities. Initially, Bond believed that his race would be the primary characteristic ensuring his attachment to the organization. However, as he submitted, “I thought just given the fact I was African American—I grew up in the D.C. area—I could do it. But the environment of schools in urban education is totally different from a college preparatory [environment]. I don’t think I was prepared for that.”

When Bond announced his departure, Lawrence Graham, a Grouper at Explorations, did not seem surprised because “[Pierce] had always wanted to return to Africa and work.” It was not entirely clear what Bond was doing in Africa. The school’s principal intimated that Bond may be working for the intelligence community. On several occasions, I attempted to contact him to conduct the second-wave interview, but to no avail. In our last email correspondence, Bond wrote, “I do have Skype. Due to the nature of my work and location (Cameroon, Congo Basin, Central Africa) Internet connectivity isn’t the most reliable; however, I usually make my weekly trek into town in search of a connection on weekends.”

Like Bond, Kayne Carter moved from the classroom at Washington Irving into a support staff role because of his belief that he was not suited to be a teacher of record. During his tenure as a teacher, Carter said he taught in many different content areas: in addition to teaching English at his first school, he also taught “life skills.” At his second school, he taught students in a self-contained classroom—history, math, and ELA. In 2010, after 7 years of teaching English at two different Boston Public Schools and failing

to acquire state certification because he did not pass the teacher examination exams, Carter applied for a student support position at Irving. Carter described how he enjoyed attending to students' social and emotional development in a one-on-one setting. In 2011, after his first year at Irving, the school's principal encouraged Carter to apply for an English position. He believed the school's principal wanted "strong male figures," most of whom "have discipline roles" at Irving, which is a turnaround school. However, at the end of his third year as a teacher of record, Carter lamented, "I am not in love with teaching. I am just in a wrong pocket. I am in a wrong space." Even though transitioning into the student engagement counselor role required a pay cut, Carter acknowledged that such a position is "what I think I am really good at and what I am passing over." Currently, Carter serves as a full-time student engagement counselor at Washington Irving.

### **Why Loners Stay**

Compared to Groupers, Loners described having more consistent negative interactions with colleagues, most of whom were White colleagues. For Loners, these encounters were often characterized by having their colleagues, who were often White, intimate they were not qualified to teach or hold school leadership positions. In other instances, Loners thought their White colleagues felt emboldened to use racially charged and insensitive language in public without fear of any repercussions. Counterintuitively, despite their challenging relationships with colleagues, Loners stayed (see Table 7). Loners described their current schools as having more positive working conditions than other district schools. Additionally, Loners also expressed uncertainty about how other adults in their school could support students, particularly boys of color, if they left.

[Insert Table 7 Here]

**Feeling alone amid positive working conditions.** The experiences of Wole Achebe, Peter Baldwin, Kurt Sharpton, and Dennis Sangister captured the counterintuitive decision that informs why the Loners chose to remain in their schools. Similar to other Loners in this study, Wole Achebe worked at a pilot school where administrators had the autonomy to choose teachers and students, hold decision-making power over the budget, and could freely choose the curriculum. Achebe, now in his sixth year, chaired the English department at Grand Case Pilot School.

Achebe described being “constantly on guard because I’m the only person of color. I’m the only Black teacher at the school.” Despite holding a leadership position in the school, he believed that his colleagues, most of whom were White, were unwilling to give credence to his ideas. Achebe, a Loner, believed that he was an “outsider” in his school. He described his school-based experiences this way:

I’m not part of the group. There is this community and I’m an outsider and I feel that the reason why I’m not part of it . . . is that people think I’m pompous and I’m full of myself. If I convey that air around me I—it’s not intentional. I mean—I feel that there is this—a certain way that a Black person is expected to speak and I don’t fit that boat apparently. The way I dress, it’s cool very professional.

Given his perception of feeling “constantly on guard” and “not part of the group” of other teachers, Achebe’s decision to remain at his school was surprising. Despite feeling socially isolated from their challenges with colleagues, Achebe, like the other Loners in this study, chose to stay. These teachers cited positive working conditions as their primary reasons for doing so. Specifically, the Loners were aware of the less-than-favorable working conditions in other district schools, when compared to their current schools. As Achebe noted: “I taught ninety kids when I was teaching at my first two

schools, and I had so much grading to do . . . right now I teach only about fifty kids. We call our school the Country Club.”

Even though Achebe described feeling disconnected from his colleagues, he said he would remain at his school because of its relatively positive working conditions. At Grand Case, which he characterized as a country club, Achebe has smaller class sizes—a teaching load that is almost half of what he taught at his previous school.

Achebe also went on to describe the importance of being able to design what and how he taught in deciding to stay at his school. Teachers at Grand Case, which is similar to other pilot schools across Boston, have much greater flexibility than teachers at traditional district schools in designing curriculum. Achebe cited how it was critical to his job satisfaction that he “spent the entire summer developing a twelfth-grade curriculum.” Having the space, time, and liberty to develop his own course material also contributed to Achebe’s decision to return to Grand Case: “I don’t want to just teach it once and then call it a day,” he noted.

Peter Baldwin, a first-year third-grade teacher at Apple Elementary School (a pilot school) who was the only Black male teacher on his faculty, described his heightened sense of isolation primarily in terms of gender. Baldwin described being the only Black male teacher at his school as “strange”: “It feels a little strange to look around this is so different. And you are like the only one that feels a little strange.” However, being a male in a predominantly female setting had the greatest influence on why Baldwin saw himself as “in someone else’s house intruding.”

For Baldwin, this perception of “intruding” was apparent when the formal conversations about work transitioned to the informal conversations about life outside of



school. Baldwin recalled one lunchroom conversation in which several female colleagues discussed childbirth and another shared that her daughter recently began her menstrual cycle.

I just feel like because they're females, because they're a little older, maybe some of it has to do with race, but like the conversations all tend to take on the same tone. I don't have anything to add to it. I don't really feel like I can contribute to the conversation, so I'm mostly silent. It almost feels like I'm in someone else's house like intruding. Like you guys are having this conversation about these things and you're all like sort of connected and I'm kind of just here because I have to be here because I have to eat my lunch. My other option is eating in my classroom. I don't really want to be in my classroom right now. I don't feel part of what's happening unless it is a conversation about work which no one wants to have. That's a boring way to interact with people.

Baldwin's perception of "intruding" and "being in someone else's house" may well be the consequence of his social isolation in the organization. Here, in an informal setting—the teacher lunchroom—where the lines between the professional and the personal conflate, Baldwin's awareness was that his female colleagues are "all like sort of connected" and he was not included.

While Baldwin acknowledged there may be a range of reasons why he felt as if he was "intruding" during informal conversations among his colleagues in the lunchroom—reasons which included differences in age, race, and gender when compared to his colleagues—such feelings of social isolation /were not enough to influence his decision to leave Apple Elementary. Baldwin described the school's overall working conditions, namely teaching alongside colleagues whose vision he shared around supporting student learning, as trumping his perception of being socially disconnected from colleagues: "Outside of like being the only one and that weirdness that's minimal to feeling like I'm in a place where most people share the same values and think about the kids the same

way. So I feel like it would be a bad decision trying to skip and find something else.” Similar to other Loners, Baldwin returned to his school the following academic year.

It is important to note that there was one other teacher of color at Apple Elementary: a first-year Black woman who taught kindergarten. Baldwin mentioned that because he and his Black female colleague were not on the same planning team, he rarely interacted with her over the course of the school day. Additionally, since he and his Black colleague were not on the same planning team, they did not share a common lunch period.

Like his Loner peers, Kurt Sharpton, a physical education teacher at South Pilot High School, highlighted the positive working conditions as his primary reasons for staying, despite admitting to several negative encounters with his colleagues. Having worked previously at several schools in the district, Sharpton described needing to “tiptoe around enough different places” to recognize that certain aspects of the working conditions at South did support teaching and learning. While “it’s [South’s] not a test school—they are able to kind of screen their students . . . and able to get more serious students,” or students who are more motivated academically when compared to students in traditional schools. Also, for Sharpton, working in a high school with less than 500 students allowed him to develop meaningful relationships with the students. Sharpton submitted: “I enjoy my job; it’s a good job.”

While acknowledging the benefits of working at a pilot school such as South, Sharpton also described challenging experiences with his predominantly White colleagues. After Sharpton had suffered urinary incontinence after a bout with prostate cancer, a colleague sprayed perfume on him during a faculty meeting. In recounting this

experience, Sharpton said, “Maybe they wanted to tell me, hey, you need to go wash yourself up and that’s all right. But it was humiliating. I suffered some bad depression just from that experience and from the symptoms.”

In another incident, the same colleague, Sharpton believed, filled out an anonymous staff survey on his behalf and referred to him as “Shirley Depressed.” Moreover, during a conversation with one of the school’s Black male paraprofessionals, he learned that a White colleague referred to Black students as “monkeys out of a cage.” When pressed about why he intended to return given these experiences at South, Sharpton asserted:

I suspect I’m going to have some sort of challenges no matter where I go because I’m a Black male. Do I change universes or what? Why did our people stay in this country and stay doing what they’re doing? Because that’s what we do. We fight for that. I mean you’re not just going to let people run you away, right? When you run, it’s just the same trap for the next person, you know, because nobody speaks out on it.

Sharpton, like many Loners, appeared to suffer in silence, accepting the reality that being a Black male teacher meant he would have negative, racially charged experiences with colleagues. Additionally, Loners also expressed uncertainty about how other adults in their school could support students, particularly boys of color, if they left.

**Continuing to support male students of color.** While some Loners described staying at their school because the working conditions were more positive there than at other district schools, other Loners who remained, like James Price and Dennis Sangister, cited a concern that if they left, no other adults in the building would attend to the social and emotional needs of the students, particularly boys of color.

James Price teaches second grade at the Race to the Top Innovation School, one of the district’s first innovation schools where administrators and teachers have even

greater flexibility in student and teacher selection as well as curricular decisions than pilot schools do. Price volunteered to co-lead a “10 Boys” program with a Latino male paraprofessional at his school. The district encouraged schools to create an afterschool program for the 10 males who struggled the most academically and socially when compared to their peers. Price said his impetus for working with the “10 Boys” program, all of whom were of color, was to look at these students’ “assessments . . . they have challenges academically, and I just wanted to support them—I just want to give them the opportunity to really help them achieve success. In the classroom and also as a person in general.” James’ interest in supporting boys of color also included advocating on their behalf during grade team meetings. When the faculty reviewed students’ scores on the MCAS, the state’s standardized exam, Price pointed out that Black males underperformed when compared to all other subgroups at Race to the Top. He asked his colleagues, “Why is this happening?” One colleague, according to Price, responded flippantly, “I don’t know. Do you know?” Price said he took little offense at his colleague’s question, but, in turn, encouraged his peers to reflect on how they supported Black boys.

Maybe you know it’s the way you deliver instructions. Maybe—you may be used to having students sit down and listen. Well, maybe you know Black males—you can’t just say all Black males, but they may learn a different way [I’m] just thinking like outside the box. How can we as a school move students to meet the benchmark? It shouldn’t be just these certain students not doing well and all others seem to be doing well.

While Price said he did entertain leaving because the school’s principal did not appear to value teachers’ input in shaping school policy, he asserted, “I decided to stay because of the students. I really like the community, I like the students.” Price added that he intended to return to Race to the Top for “two main reasons”: (a) to ensure that students,

particularly those who struggled the most, were “progressing,” and (b) to check that the school was “implementing” needed reform for students to improve.

Dennis Sangister, like James Price, also mentioned his commitment to ensuring the programs he created for students, especially boys of color, as his primary reason for staying at his school. Sangister is a middle school English teacher at Marcus Garvey, a K-8 school. When asked what it was like to be a member of the school faculty, Sangister responded, “It sucks. And if I could swear, I would.” He believed many of his colleagues, most of whom were White, operated under an “invisible liberal identity.” Sangister added, “I’m not saying that the people themselves are racists. However, their interactions and their choices for things that involve our children are slightly racist.” For example, according to Sangister, school administrators and colleagues refused to consider his ideas on implementing restorative justice practices in light of current discipline policies that continue to target Black and Latino male students at the school. Sangister lamented, “I’m one voice among eight—one Black voice amongst eight White staff.” When his colleagues continually decided not to give credence to his ideas during faculty meetings, Sangister said:

They don’t respect my professional opinion. Is it because I’m Black? Even now it still bugs me. If I’m saying it, are you not hearing me? It really messes with me sometimes. I mean it makes you feel inadequate. Like am I saying something that’s crazy? I’ve been educated. I have a Master’s. I pass all these MTELs [the state licensure exams] just like everybody else. It’s frustrating, you know?

Despite challenging interactions with his White colleagues, Sangister said he would return to his school the following year—and he did. Sangister, like Price, also directed Marcus Garvey’s “10 Boys” program. At Garvey, Sangister was the group’s sole

director. Sangister cited his investment in maintaining the student initiatives he created as the primary contributing factor for remaining at Garvey.

I've set up a lot of programs outside of my own teaching that I'm very invested in. My young men's group is something that I'm very invested in. And that's extra. I don't get paid extra for that. That's just something that I do that I feel is a need.

In the end, Loners appeared resolved to remain in their schools and endure these challenging professional relationships. They believed that their White colleagues demonstrated sincere altruism in entering the teaching profession to improve social and learning outcomes for students of color. But, according to participants, their White colleagues also brought to the organization some of the same racial stereotypes about Blacks that operate in the larger society. These views created seemingly hostile collegial relationships. Despite these challenging experiences, Loners remained at their schools because of the overall positive working conditions, as defined, for example, by smaller class sizes, which gave them the opportunity to know students more closely and the flexibility to design curriculum. Ultimately, their knowledge—and previous experience—of the more challenging working conditions in other schools dissuaded Loners from leaving.

### **Discussion**

This article expanded on Simon and Johnson's (2015) theoretical framework around the relationship between school working conditions and collegial relationships and teacher turnover. While Simon and Johnson theorized that the absence of positive collegial relationships increases turnover, this phenomenon proved less true for Loners—the only Black men on the faculty—who decided to remain at their schools despite ongoing racist interactions. It is this counterintuitive finding—that Loners chose to

remain in their schools amid such toxic personal relationships with their colleagues—that warrants further discussion.

For Loners, there was a professional trade-off: working in a school where district and building administrators enabled the conditions for teaching and learning while experiencing racial microaggressions or moving to a school that constrained their ability to teach. In this study, Loners chose the former. As Black men living in a country that continues to grapple with the historical legacy of the subjugation of people of African descent, Loners expected to experience racist encounters. The priority, then, for these Black male teachers who were the only Black men on their faculty was to be in an environment that allowed them to teach. For Loners, that environment also included working in an urban context to teach students of color.

Moreover, Loners also appeared to grapple with the recognition that if they exited their schools, there would be a void in leadership around supporting male students of color. While previous research has documented the perverse positioning of Black male teachers as father-figures in urban schools (Brockenbrough, 2012), Loners in this study set out to create mentoring programs exclusively for the boys and young men of color in their schools. It may have been the case that as Loners attempted to provide their students with strategies to navigate the realistic challenges of being a male of color in society, these Black male teachers found renewed inspiration to resist their school-based challenges. What is clear, however, is that in addition to citing the overall positive working conditions to remaining in their schools, Loners also worried about who would support the male of color as another reason for staying in their schools.

### **Limitations**

This study had some limitations. The first is that by solely interviewing Black male teachers, the findings were based on these teachers' perceptions of their environment. When they described challenging relationships with their school principal or believed that school administrators had created hostile environments for teaching and learning, no data had been gathered from administrators to qualify or refute the Black male teachers' claims. However, this article attempted to understand the perceptions of Black male teachers about the organization and the decisions they made based on those perceptions. The findings, then, can only be attributed to the 27 Black male teachers across 14 schools who participated in this study. However, if patterns such as turnover, which are more characteristic in schools with many more Black male teachers when compared to schools with one Black male teacher, also exist in other settings, these findings could influence research, policy, and practice.

### **Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice**

Findings from this study on the school-based experiences and turnover of Black male teachers have important implications for policymakers interested in developing and bolstering teacher diversity initiatives; researchers exploring the enabling and constraining school-based conditions for recruiting and retaining teachers of color; and practitioners interested in supporting teachers of color.

#### **Policy**

Given that Groupers were more likely to leave when compared to Loners, policymakers who are interested in increasing the number of Black male teachers may wish to give attention to retention. Such a focus on retention has the capacity to improve



working conditions in the schools where Groupers teach. In the Groupers' schools, where the focus on improving was tied to one single metric (a state standardized exam), policymakers would be well advised to develop a more expansive understanding of accountability. In these schools, officials may consider an accountability system that provides adequate resources to support and improve learning for adults in schools with challenging working conditions (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). Such an accountability system requires that schools have the resources they need to address the varied socio-emotional and academic challenges students bring with them to the classroom. Principals would also receive ongoing support from district leaders on how to develop teacher learning and create school environments that are conducive to student learning.

### **Research**

Future research should compare the school-based experiences and influences of turnover of Black male Loners and Groupers to other ethnoracial minorities, such as Latinx and Asian teachers. These findings highlighted that Black male Loners and Groupers experienced the organization in distinct ways. Might this be true of other ethnoracial groups? Do findings from this study on Black male Loners and Groupers also apply to Black women Loners and Groupers? Such questions should inform future research on teacher turnover more broadly, and the retention of teachers of color more specifically. Additionally, future research should also explore the school-based experiences of Black male teachers in suburban and rural contexts. Much of the research to date has focused on Black male teachers in urban contexts. There is less empirical work on the experiences of these teachers in non-urban contexts.

**Practice**

Practitioners, or specifically principals, may also want to become more attentive to interpersonal relationships in schools, particularly between Black male teachers and their White colleagues. While Loners stayed because of what they described as positive working conditions, they also highlighted more negative collegial relationships than Groupers. Principals may want to disaggregate available teacher environment surveys by race and gender to develop a more nuanced understanding of teachers' perceptions of the organization. Also, district leaders may want to develop professional development efforts that address the unique socio-emotional needs of male educators of color, similar to those efforts occurring in urban school districts across the United States (Bristol, 2015).

Finally, teacher preparation programs would be well advised to support White preservice teachers' understanding of how their White privilege can constrain relationships with colleagues of color. To do this, preparation programs may include in their curriculum articles, similar to this one, that draw attention to the challenging social dynamics between teachers of color and their White peers. Moreover, induction programs may consider providing opportunities for White novice teachers to develop further their capacity to create positive working environments with peers of color. For example, during mentoring sessions, induction coaches might consider allowing White novices to reflect on the social dynamics between teachers of color and their White peers, as well as provide these beginning teachers with strategies for addressing challenging dynamics as they arise.

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Table 1

**BPS Distribution of Black Male Teachers Across Grade Spans by Percentage**

	K - 5	K-8	6-8	9-12
Blake Male Teachers	6%	17%	16%	61%

Table 2

**BPS Schools that have 0, 1, 2 or 3 or more Black Teachers**

Black Male Teachers	Number of Schools
0 <sup>1</sup>	32
1	28
2	15
3 or more	43

Table 3

**Percentage of BPS Schools that have 0, 1, 2 or 3 or more Black Teachers Distributed Across Grade Spans**

Black Male Teachers	%K - 5	%K-8	%6-8	% 9-12
0 <sup>1</sup>	66	28	3	3
1	50	18	4	28
2	53	31	7	33
3 or more	19	9	19	53

Table 4

*2012-2013 School Demographic Data for Sample Schools*

School Name	School Type	School Composition	# Teachers	% Black Male Teachers	% Black Teachers	% White Teachers	% White Students	% Black Students <sup>4</sup>	% SES <sup>4</sup>
Race to the Top Elementary	Innovation <sup>1</sup>	Loner	18	6	22	67	30	24	63
Roseville Elementary	Pilot <sup>2</sup>	Loner	51	2	22	57	3	51	80
Alberto Schomburg High	Dual Language	Loner	27	4	15	41	6	2	72
South High	Pilot <sup>2</sup>	Loner	40	3	15	65	7	38	85
Grand Case Pilot High	Pilot <sup>2</sup>	Loner	12	8	15	75	30	28	57
Marcus Garvey K-8	Regular District	Loner	38	3	24	50	3	25	87
Apple Elementary	Pilot <sup>2</sup>	Loner	30	3	20	63	26	36	54

Cross Roads K -8	Regular District	Grouper	35	12	40	60	3	53	80
Crispus Attucks Elementary	Converting to Turn- around <sup>3</sup>	Grouper	52	8	44	48	2	72	78
Clarke High	Regular District	Grouper	102	5	10	70	16	14	84
Ralph Emerson High	Exam	Grouper	78	5	14	68	29	29	53
Washington Irving High	Turnaround <sup>3</sup>	Grouper	72	6	47	39	1	68	76
Explorations Charter	Charter	Grouper	17	12	59	24	1	70	N/A
Thomas Jefferson High	Turnaround <sup>3</sup>	Grouper	95	10	41	31	3	37	77

Note: All names of schools are pseudonyms. SES = socioeconomic status

<sup>1</sup>Innovation schools received initial funding from state's Race to the Top allotment.

Schools have flexibility in hiring/budgeting.

<sup>2</sup>Pilot schools have autonomy over hiring/budgeting. Teachers are unionized.

<sup>3</sup>Reconstituted based on student under-performance on standardized exam.

<sup>4</sup>Percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch.

Table 5

*Participants' School, School Type, and Grade Level, and Content Area, and Age Range*

Participant	School Name	School Composition	Grade Level	Content	Age Range
James Price	Race to the Top Elementary	Loner	Elementary	All subjects	26-31
Josiah Washington	Roseville Elementary	Loner	Middle	Math	26-31
Benjamin Young	Alberto Schomburg K – 8	Loner	Elementary	Physical Education	55+
Kurt Sharpton	South High	Loner	High	Physical Education	49-54
Dennis Sangster	Marcus Garvey K - 8	Loner	Middle	English	26-31
Wole Achebe	Grand Case Pilot	Loner	High	English	32-37
Peter Baldwin	Apple Elementary	Loner	Elementary	All subjects	32-37
Jacob Collins	Cross Roads K -8	Grouper	Elementary	All subjects	32-37
Amilcar Depina	Cross Roads K -8	Grouper	Elementary/Mi ddle	Physical Education	49-54
Eddie Rock	Cross Roads K -8	Grouper	Elementary	Theatre Arts	38-42
Joseph Nkrumah	Crispus Attucks Elementary	Grouper	Elementary	All subjects	38-42

Adebayo Adjayi	Crispus Attucks Elementary	Grouper	Elementary	All subjects	49-54
Henry Groover	Crispus Attucks Elementary	Grouper	Elementary	Physical Education	49-54
Leroy Jackson	Clarke High	Grouper	High	Physical Education	55+
Slaughter Gibson	Clarke High	Grouper	High	Social Studies	55+
Kendall Robeson	Clarke High	Grouper	High	Spanish	32-37
Samuel Soyinka	Clarke High	Grouper	High	Physics	38-42
Roger Manley	Ralph Emerson Exam High	Grouper	High	Physics	55+
Hugh Ferguson	Ralph Emerson Exam High	Grouper	High	Math	49-54
Matthew Morial	Washington Irving High	Grouper	High	English	26-31
Kanye Carter	Washington Irving High	Grouper	High	English	32-37
Pierce Bond	Explorations Charter	Grouper	High	Math	20-25
Okonkwo Sutton	Explorations Charter	Grouper	High	English	20-25

Lawrence Graham	Explorations Charter	Grouper	High	Physical Education	20-25
Christopher Brooks	Thomas Jefferson	Grouper	High	Math	20-25
George Little	Thomas Jefferson	Grouper	High	Social Studies	26-31
Dante Smith	Thomas Jefferson	Grouper	High	English	26-31

Note: All names of participants are pseudonyms.



Table 6

*Grouped Movers and Leavers by School, School Type and Reported Reasons for Moving**Schools and Leaving the Profession*

Participant	School	School Type	Reason for Leaving	Moved to a Different District School	BPS Education Related Position	Left the Teaching Profession
Joseph Nkrumah	Crispus Attucks Elementary	Converted to Turnaround	Administrative Leadership	Yes	Yes	No
Adebayo Adjayi	Crispus Attucks Elementary	Converted to Turnaround	Administrative Leadership	Yes	Yes	No
Kanye Carter	Washington Irving High	Turnaround	Professional Opportunities	No	Yes	No
Christopher Brooks	Thomas Jefferson High	Turnaround	Administrative Leadership	No	No	Yes
Dante Smith	Thomas Jefferson High	Turnaround	Administrative Leadership	No	No	Yes

Slaughter Gibson	John Clarke High	Regular District	Administrati ve Leadership	No	No	Yes
Jacob Collins	Cross Roads Elementary K- 8	Regular District	Professional Opportunitie s	No	Yes	No
Hugh Ferguson	Ralph Emerson High	Exam	Excessed	No	Yes	No
Pierce Bond	Explorations High	Charter	Professional Opportunitie s	No	No	Yes

Table 7

Loners' Name, School Type, Factors Influencing Decisions to Leave and Reasons for Staying

Participant	School Name	School Type	Why I Might Leave	Actively Looked for Jobs	Stayed Because of Students	Stayed Because of the School Environment
Josiah Washington	Roseville Elementary	Pilot	Administrative Leadership	Yes		X
Kurt Sharpton	South High	Pilot	Administrative Leadership	Yes		X
James Price	Race to the Top Elementary	Innovation	Administrative Leadership	No	X	X
Benjamin Young	Alberto Schomburg K -8	Dual Language	Relationship with Colleagues	No	X	
Peter Baldwin	Apple Elementary	Pilot	Lack of curricular support	No	X	X

Wole Achebe	Grand Case Pilot	Pilot	Relationship with Colleagues	Yes	X	X
Dennis Sangister	Marcus Garvey K- 8	Regular District	Relationship with Colleagues	Yes	X	