

THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS IN
COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN MICHIGAN

by

Michael A. Couch II

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Has been approved

May 2019

APPROVED:

John Cowles, PhD

Committee Chair

Donald Mitchell Jr., PhD

Committee Member

Kathryn Mullins, EdD

Committee Member

Dissertation Committee

ACCEPTED:

Roberta C. Teahen, PhD, Director

Community College Leadership Program

ABSTRACT

This study examines the experiences of eleven African American male senior administrators (dean's level or above) in higher education in Michigan. The participants currently hold or have held positions ranging from dean to president in Michigan community colleges.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of African American senior-level higher education administrators by using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview process allowed the researcher to correlate the lived experiences of the participants into common themes related to African American males in community college leadership positions. Each interview was recorded and transcribed to accurately capture the perceptions of each participant. Common themes from the interviews were used to provide other African American males with insights, strategies, opportunities, or support systems that may help them move successfully into positions of leadership.

Keywords: African American male senior administrators, executives, obstacles, opportunities, leadership, community college, higher education, lived experiences

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends, mentors, students, faculty, colleagues, and supervisors who impacted and supported me in the pursuit of my goals educationally, spiritually, personally, and professionally. I dedicate this to my grandparents who have gone to Heaven and continue to look down upon me and cover me; I miss you and thank you for helping me achieve this goal. To my wife, Janean: I could not have done this without your support and dedication. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and my motivation when I wanted to stop. This degree is as much yours as it is mine. Lastly, I dedicate this my African American brothers who are students and continuing their pursuit of higher education. Keep going; the world needs us. To my brothers currently doing the work in higher education who have come before me and cleared a path so that I am able to reach this point. To the future brothers who will come behind me: I dedicate this work to you with the understanding that I stand on the shoulders of previous giants, and one day you will be able to stand on my shoulders to continue the work of changing our narrative in the field of higher education.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The study of African Americans in college and university administration has traditionally focused on lower to mid-level positions. From a practical perspective, little is known about what happens to African American administrators once they reach senior administrator positions. Jackson (2001) states an institution's diversification of students on campus should be reflective in the diversification of its faculty, staff, and administrators. Despite literature emphasizing the importance of their presence on college campuses to improve minority student success, African American male senior administrators are severely underrepresented in higher education. A factor that has been associated with the underrepresentation of senior administrators of color has been the focus of educational institutions that seek to diversify their campuses by focusing only on increasing the diversity of their student body and faculty. This narrow focus negates the importance of increasing their administrators of color (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). It is hoped that by examining both challenges and opportunities, men aspiring to senior leadership positions can use this information to overcome these barriers and advance to senior level leadership positions. Often, researchers focus on the barriers and ignore the opportunities leaders took to combat the challenges that they faced. The importance of this study is to illustrate the challenges and opportunities that African American male senior administrators face on the

leadership journey and shed light on the experiences of these leaders to prepare future African American male leaders who aspire to executive roles.

As a Black male administrator, my experiences have greatly influenced the way in which I view the career mobility and progression of Black administrators in comparison to their White counterparts. My perception of the executive-level career disparities in higher education is influenced by my own experiences and, thus, is subjective and personal.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This study emerges from a concern about whether or not African American male administrators in higher education who serve in executive leadership positions can overcome barriers to elevate their careers. Looking primarily at the community college level, I wanted to highlight the existing barriers as well as what some of the opportunities or experiences the participants had to overcome in order to obtain and be successful in their current positions. Because of the lack of African American men in senior-level administrator roles, this study brings awareness to the complex challenges of individual journeys to these positions, while also highlighting positive experiences that can contribute to success. Considering the small body of literature on African American male administrators in higher education and the absence of their voice in leadership literature, this study also addresses some of the positive opportunities that some individuals have encountered and examines whether or not those opportunities helped prepare them for executive level roles. Lewis (2007) speaks to the issues that African American male administrators may face. He states the following:

African American male administrators must navigate the perceived barrier that they are equally represented in the field of higher education administration, specifically at mainstream institutions of higher education by non-minority professionals. Placement of African American male administrators is usually in staff positions with minute budget

and supervisory responsibilities that are not visibly recognized as important to the campus community. They must navigate the barrier of constantly proving their self-worth and abilities within the dominant culture of higher education for their career advancement. (p. 8)

It is hoped that sharing the experiences of a select group of successful African American male leaders will create new opportunities for research around this topic and for other minority groups in the future.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question for this study was: *What are the influences that enable or serve as barriers to the success of African American male senior administrators?* In this study, eight sub-questions or subthemes were identified for this research:

1. What are some of the challenges you experienced during your journey to secure a senior level leadership position?
2. What strategies have you developed to deal with these challenges?
3. What were the significant opportunities that were presented to you and how did you take advantage of them?
4. What coping mechanisms and strategies do African American male administrators at mainstream institutions of education utilize to succeed?
5. What perceived barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in executive leadership positions?
6. What challenges do you feel are unique to African American males attempting to secure an executive leadership position?
7. What advice would you offer to aspiring African American males that are interested in obtaining senior level leadership positions?
8. What personal characteristics contribute to the resilience of African American male executives?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- African American male senior administrators – citizens or residents of the United States who have at least partial sub-Saharan ancestry from Africa. Holding one of the following leadership positions consistent with the dean, president, vice president, provost, chancellor, or vice chancellor role of an institution.
- Minority – a subordinate group whose members have significantly less control or power over their own lives than the members of a dominant or majority group have over theirs.
- Obstacles – something that impedes progress or achievement.
- Opportunities – a set of circumstances that improves possibilities to act or do something.
- Lived experiences – personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research on African American male administrators in higher education is very minimal, and research that examines executive level administrators, even more miniscule. In fact, African American male leaders in executive leadership positions is limited. Most of the research is focused on unique challenges and concerns faced by African American women. Jerlando F. L. Jackson (2001, 2004) discussed retaining African American administrators; in 2004, he specifically explored retaining African Americans in executive-level positions. J. F. L. Jackson and Flowers (2003) again focused on research about retaining African Americans. Jackson conducted a considerable amount of research on the retention of administrators of color in higher education, but the work lacked specificity on the challenges, needs, and leadership characteristics present for African American women in senior- and executive-level administrative roles at predominantly White institutions.

While the experiences of men discussed in the literature varies from study to study, there has been little to no research conducted to examine the obstacles that these men face. Learning

from others' experiences and their success in overcoming obstacles is especially valuable for men who are in the gap of administration. Some might be vice presidents, deans, provosts, and other senior administrator roles: those are the men who are important to this research. Examining their stories and the obstacles they have faced, along with exploring the opportunities that have allowed them to obtain the positions that they currently hold, will benefit the research in this area greatly. The lack of empirical data derived from studies of African American administrators contributes directly to the scarcity of relevant literature about career disparities across racial lines (Jackson, 2001).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016), only 24,671 African American employees worked in an executive, administrative, or managerial role, compared to 196,132 White employees. This means that out of the 252,615 executive, administrative, and managerial positions in higher education, only 9.7% were held by African Americans. Considering the small percentage of African Americans in these positions, the literature reflects that this population is underrepresented, and it can be concluded that this is possibly a reason that the research on this group is minimal. Cross and Slater (2000) estimated that it could take more than 200 years before African Americans are able to achieve parity with their White counterparts. Even with major initiatives for institutions to incorporate diversity and inclusion into their vision and mission statements and their hiring practices, the data (NCES, 2016) does not show that we are making the type of progress that Cross and Slater (2000) estimated. Therefore, this study was poised to bring voice to the leadership experiences of African American male senior administrators with the hope that these men will have voice and continue on a trajectory of success in their professional careers in higher education.

Obstacles surrounding career advancement for Blacks in higher education are countless. One of the most noticeable disparities in higher education is the lingering inability of Blacks to advance in their careers at the same rate as their White counterparts (Bennefield, 1999; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Throughout the history of higher education, Black administrators have been disproportionately underrepresented in comparison to their White counterparts (Valverde, 2003). Konrad and Pfeffer (1991) found that women and people of color are less likely to be hired in administrative and managerial positions, and when hired, assume lower level positions. African American male administrators in higher education, specifically at mainstream institutions of higher learning, are constantly challenged to prove their professional ability within the dominant culture in U.S. society. African American male administrators must navigate the perceived barrier that they are equally represented in the field of higher education administration, specifically at mainstream institutions of higher education by nonminority professionals (Lewis, 2007). These administrators must navigate the barrier of constantly proving their self-worth and abilities within the dominant culture of higher education for their career advancement.

Some areas for success that I hope to shed greater light on from a lived experience position are mentoring relationships and leadership training programs to help prepare future African American male leaders. This research can provide African American male graduate students, as well as early- and mid-level professionals who will be entering the field of student affairs, a profile of experiences that senior-level African American male professionals have reported. Subsequently, these new leaders will have a guide to reference as to how others have achieved their professional goals, learning from the positive and negative experiences these men have encountered. There is a need to study the accessibility and attainment of executive-level leadership roles among Black administrators so that discriminatory barriers can be addressed and

removed. Ideally, eliminating those factors would enable Black administrators to be able to serve at any administrative level within higher education for which they are qualified.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This dissertation explores this topic from multiple perspectives, with the first being the theory of representative bureaucracy. Flowers (2003) explored the theory of representative bureaucracy. Representative bureaucracy is the notion that the leadership of an organization should be a representation of the demographics of the organization: “Based on the theory of representative bureaucracy, the more diverse the constituent group is, the greater the diversity required of the leaders or persons making policy decisions on behalf of the constituent group” (Flowers, 2003, p. 38). Flowers (2003) concluded “additional African American student affairs administrators are needed to ensure that the concerns of African American students are being fully considered, understood, and acted upon by university leaders and administrators” (p. 39).

This dissertation also looks at this topic from the lens of social capital. Bourdieu’s (1986) analysis of social capital places emphasis on the benefits accrued by an individual. Originally theorized by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, social capital consists of the relationships in a person’s life that provide guidance and support in obtaining socially valued resources such as education, as cited in Stanton-Salazar (2011). Focusing on these two perspectives helps to frame the study from the viewpoint of representation, focusing on opportunities or the obtainment of social capital, to help future African American male administrators on a leadership path.

Lastly, this study uses the theory of resilience. Resilience theory is defined by Richardson (2002) as “the motivational force within everyone that drives them to pursue wisdom, self-

actualization, and altruism and to be in harmony with a special source of strength” (p. 309).

Resilience has been used to understand how individuals overcome adversity (Richardson, 2002).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study was limited to executive level African American male higher education administrators.
2. The study was limited to community colleges in Michigan; therefore, the study findings may not be transferable to community colleges outside the state of Michigan.
3. The study was limited to community colleges; therefore, the study findings may not support the profiles of African American executives at four-year, private, or for-profit institutions.
4. The study was limited to African American executives at community colleges in Michigan; therefore, the study findings may not be transferable to all African American executives.

As an African American male who aspires to lead in community college setting, I have spent over eight years working within a variety of predominantly White institutions within the for-profit, four-year, and community college sectors, and my objectivity may be hindered by the extent of this experience. I am aware of my biases and have gone to great measures to ensure that personal biases do not skew the results.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter Two explores relevant literature regarding the obstacles and opportunities of African American male senior administrators in higher education, relevant literature of programs, and mentoring practices in regard to African American males. Chapter Three focuses on the methodology and theoretical framework of the study. In Chapter Four, the findings are presented. Chapter Five, the final chapter, will discuss

the analysis of the major findings, implications and recommendations for future study, and reflections on the current study.

CONCLUSION

The higher education research literature is replete with studies about retaining and advancing students and faculty of color (Fleming, 1984; Gregory, 1995; Harvey, 1999; Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2001), but little empirical knowledge is available about engaging, retaining, and advancing administrators of color, specifically African American males. African American men are underrepresented at every point along the educational pipeline. Because the obstacles for African American male college administrators are so profound for those in pursuit of senior-level administrative positions, it helps to study specific individuals to examine what particular factors contributed to their success. By sharing these stories in a qualitative way, hopefully those who are up and coming can avoid the pitfalls and negative experiences that these men have faced.

This research makes an important contribution to the limited body of scholarship pertaining to African American males in senior administrative positions at community colleges. The study informs the higher education community on the experiences of these men as institutional leaders.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The review and synthesis of this literature is relevant to the status of the community college leadership pipeline for minorities, specifically African American community college leaders in senior-level administrative positions. By reviewing research on the status of community college leadership, specifically, of African American leadership in community colleges, this literature provides background knowledge that is necessary to answer the following research questions:

- What barriers have prevented African American men from accessing the community college leadership pipeline?
- What policies, programs, and activities have proven effective in increasing African American male leadership in America's community colleges?

Literature relevant to these research questions: (a) defines the barriers African Americans encounter in achieving college leadership positions, (b) examines the role of African American leaders in producing African American student success; and (c) documents the best practices that result in increased African American representation in leadership positions in community colleges.

The chapter also includes a review of literature pertaining to resiliency, representative bureaucracy, social capital, representative bureaucracy, social capital, and strategic diversity leadership (SDL) theories that were selected to address this leadership challenge and facilitate an understanding of the factors that may contribute to the underrepresentation of African American

administrators in community colleges. Keywords specific to this study were used to locate information on the following themes:

- Community college leadership
- Minority leadership in the community college
- African American leadership in the community college
- Barriers to leadership for African Americans in the community college
- Professional development for minority leaders

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The study of African Americans in college and university administration has traditionally focused on lower to mid-level positions (Jackson, 2004; Ball, 1995; Bower, 1996; Mosley, 1980), or the extreme opposite, which focuses on the presidency. Recently, research has concentrated on equity of African Americans in senior-level administrative positions that generally lead to the role of college president (Harvey, 1999; Jackson, 2004; Slater, 1995). This literature essentially looked at the rise of both African American males, and females, to the role of community college president. Another area that has solid research directs attention to African Americans in diversity-related positions (Abney & Richey, 1991; Marcus, 2000; Smith, 1993). More specifically, this literature base is especially situated within student affairs and student personnel research (Brown & Globetti, 1991; Flowers, 2003; Holmes, 2003; Reason, 2003; Watson, 2001).

From an empirical perspective, little is known about what happens to African American administrators once they reach executive-level administrative positions. The research presents both sides of the spectrum: lower to mid-level and then the presidency as well. According to Jackson (2001), this gap in research stems from data limitations. Harvey (2001) believes that the

gap is due to the promising nature and presence of African Americans in executive-level administrative positions. Overall, the gap in research literature is a challenge for the field of higher education, not the least since diversity is needed in all levels of the educational system in order to meet the needs of the diverse student populations they serve (Watson et al., 2002; Wilson, 1989). It is this gap in the research literature that this study will begin to address.

Vaughan (1989) suggested that minority leadership at the community college level is essential in seeking to serve a diverse local community. Historically, it has been well documented that community colleges serve a very large proportion of minority, low-income, and first-generation students. The identification and development of promising African Americans for leadership roles is relevant, as a number of community colleges have an increasing number of African Americans and other ethnic minorities enrolling at their institution. Concomitantly, subsequent research suggests that some technical and community colleges have increased efforts to ensure that quality minority applicants are prepared to fill leadership roles that will become available (Bumphus & Neal, 2008). Nevertheless, African Americans represent 13% of community college student enrollments while only 10% of the executive, administrative and managerial positions in these organizations are occupied by African Americans (Walker-Anderson, 2007).

Most of the literature to date is focused on the barriers that these men encountered but neglected to point out how these men overcame those barriers or what opportunities presented themselves in their journey to help them navigate to the rank of a senior administrator.

MINORITY LEADERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The underrepresentation of minorities in leadership positions in the community college is an ongoing challenge that has been met with only limited progress (Gardner, Barrett, & Pearson, 2014; Rolle, Davies, & Banning, 2000; Williams, 2013). To explain the experiences of African American administrators in higher education institutions, Rolle et al. (2000), Gardner et al. (2014), and Williams (2013) each conducted qualitative studies using a phenomenological approach in their methodology to guide their research.

Rolle et al. (2000) conducted a qualitative study that focused on the career experiences of eight executive-level higher education administrators. The purposeful sample included six college presidents and two chancellors, all of whom were African American. Through personal interviews, participants were initially asked the same three questions:

- What experiences led you to a career in administrative work in predominantly white institutions?
- What is your experience today as an African American administrator working in a predominantly white institution?
- What advice would you give future African Americans who may be seeking leadership positions in predominantly white institutions? (p. 82)

The findings of their study indicated that although academic preparation, self-assurance, leadership qualities, good communication skills, and the ability to be politically savvy were important and key to the participants' career mobility, the overall consensus of participants was that their race was a significant characteristic (p. 87). The participants' responses were categorized into four themes that included the following:

- Race as an issue early in their career, meaning they were the first African American administrator on the campus.
- Race as an ongoing issue throughout their career, meaning they have endured institutional racism.

- Race in relation to their role, meaning their positions were relegated to addressing the issues of mainly Black students.
- The struggle their race created in the campus environment, meaning they did not feel supported. (p. 87)

Gardner et al. (2014) and Williams (2013) investigated the experiences of successful African American administrators at predominantly White institutions to identify factors that influenced the career successes, or career failures, of African Americans in community college leadership positions. Similar to Gardner et al., Williams (2013) reported results related to barriers and enablers of retention of African American administrators, and both studies concluded that due to the limited availability of literature on the topic, more research in the area is necessary.

BARRIERS FACED BY AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS

W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) stated in his famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, “that the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color line, which refers to a divide or barrier preventing African Americans from having equal access to opportunity” (p. 42). There are many barriers that African American men face, such as racism, that have already been the subject of research. Other areas that have appeared frequently are tokenism, color ceiling, hiring practices, working conditions, career dynamics, and overall adjustment issues to unfamiliar territory in higher education administration. Harden (2016) references previous barriers from other authors:

African American men in the academic workforce share some racial barriers that African American women experience, and as Jackson’s study entitled *Race Segregation across the Academic Workforce* reveals, there are other workforce factors that serve as barriers to their career success. African American men have been found to face barriers different from those faced by their White male counterparts, and even by African American women. (p. 23)

While there are many barriers, most of them would fall under the categories of the four listed above. Most of the literature is focused on students, faculty and women, and mostly at predominantly White institutions. One could attribute the lack of research on this topic to the limited number of African American male senior administrators in these positions.

Barriers to Leadership for African American Male Senior Administrators

There are many barriers for African Americans in higher education in general. In this section, the focus will be on just a few of the barriers that consistently showed up in research. Bowen (1996) completed a monograph titled, *From the Projects to the Presidency: An African American Odyssey*. In this monograph, he shares a personal account of his experience as an African American male and his pursuit of obtaining a leadership position in higher education. One of the first things Bowen explains is, “there are no easy pathways for minorities seeking presidency positions due to numerous barriers such as college access, financial aid, and attacks on affirmative action that African Americans have faced” (p. 13). Bowen’s monograph sparked Holmes to conduct a study in 2004. Holmes’ study focused on the concept of holding a faculty position prior to an administrative one to move up the leadership ladder.

Lovell, Alexander and Kirkpatrick (2002) state, “A central barrier to minority recruitment in leadership positions is that members of the majority take for granted the privilege of being in power” (p. 20). Prior to Lovell et al., they cite Tschetelin’s statement that “society must move away from self-interest and, instead, deal honestly with the racial and ethnic problems that threaten the social, economic, and political stability of the nation” as cited in (Lovell et al., 2002, p. 20). Lovell et al. (2002) also identified more barriers that have an effect on African American men seeking leadership positions. Additionally, Lovell et al. reported that two factors, structural

and attitudinal, were main barriers to the lack of minorities in the community college. From their research, the following list of barriers was identified:

- The low numbers of minority students in doctoral programs
- Lack of readiness among faculty to reorganize around issues of cultural diversity
- An ingrained resistance to change
- Stereotypes held by White faculty members that minority administrators are not psychologically and cogitatively competent to perform high-level administrative tasks. (pp. 21–22)

Williams (2013) highlighted the work of Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) in reporting the double burden of African American women in higher administration. Williams reported that, similar to African American women, African American men face some of the same racial barriers, including lack of mentors, segregated networks and lack of post-graduate or terminal degrees.

For the purpose of this research, tokenism and the color ceiling were the targeted topics, as well as looking at social, institutional and pipeline barriers. These barriers will help to provide a deeper context of barriers facing African American male senior administrators seeking to achieve positions of leadership within higher education institutions, specifically community colleges. By providing a deeper context, the goal was validation of what has been identified as barriers and to ascertain in the interviews with African American male senior administrators if these still exist.

Social Barriers

Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) asserted that educational organizations are infused with social barriers that include sexism and racism, which are rooted in value structures of persons of authority. They further suggested that sexism and racism are expressed by the frequency of a

male managerial model and situations in which the voices of people are not heard or have had their views ignored. Social barriers are often addressed by policies that can often be linked to the frustration experienced by administrators of color. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) stated, "Rather than being recognized as racism or sexism on a grand scale, these barriers are often made manifest by policies, practices and dicta influenced by greater social pressures" (p. 41).

Institutional Barriers

Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) stated, "In a society that values the leadership and contributions of a particular majority group, no policies may be in place to assist other minority groups in making inroads to leadership positions" (p. 41). Organizational and institutional barriers, such as lack of access to leadership roles and lack of role models, contribute to the underrepresentation of people of color in administrative positions (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Jackson and Harris (2007) also identified organizational barriers such as exclusion from promotions, hiring practices, and lack of professional development as the top three organizational barriers. In another study seeking to identify enablers and barriers to the career success of African American student affairs administrators, Gardner, Barrett and Pearson (2014) found that discrimination, lack of clear career pathways and the level of compensation and working conditions were three key institutional barriers that impeded their career advancement.

Pipeline Barriers

An additional barrier is the low number of African Americans enrolling in and completing graduate and doctoral programs. In their exploration of the higher education pipeline, Abraham and Jacobs (2006) reported that, despite an increase in African Americans in higher education, there continues to be an insufficient number to meet the needs of a growing American

society. In their analysis of enrollment and degree attainment for African Americans, Abraham and Jacobs (2006) discovered that the percentage of undergraduate degrees awarded does not match the patterns of professional degrees awarded. Moreover, they concluded that the block in the pipeline occurs between graduate school enrollment and degree completion. This is significant because it further validates the need for increased support throughout graduate school for African Americans.

Tschechtelin (1999, as cited in Lovell et al., 2002) stated, “A central barrier to minority recruitment in leadership positions is that members of the majority take for granted the privilege of being in power” (p. 20). Tschechtelin (1999) argued that “society must move away from self-interest and, instead, deal honestly with the racial and ethnic problems that threaten the social, economic, and political stability of the nation” (Lovell et al., 2002, p. 20). Lovell et al.’s (2002) research identified additional barriers influencing African American access to leadership positions and reported that structural and attitudinal barriers were central to the underrepresentation of minorities in the community college. J. F. L. Jackson (2008) concluded that for the academic pipeline of African American male college administrators,

A serious breakdown occurs for this group at the higher education level, such as their level of participation places them in jeopardy in the remaining phases of the pipeline. In other words, because African American males have difficulty persisting through graduation in various phases of the educational pipeline, the likelihood of their completing graduate degrees, which ultimately qualifies them to participate in executive-level administrative positions, is at risk (pp. 54–55).

Tokenism

Tokenism can be described as a perfunctory effort or symbolic gesture toward racial integration (Kanter, 1977). Historically, Kanter continued to explore issues encountered by token hires and the negative effects such status has on an individual’s ability to succeed in the

workplace. Others, along with Kanter, considered the concept of tokens to be based on percentages (i.e., less than 15% of the population) (Kanter, 1977; McDonald, Touissant, & Schweiger, 2004; Witherspoon, 2009). Kanter's research suggested that token hires received heightened attention, which created added pressure to perform well on the job. Token status also creates feelings of isolation from informal social and professional networks. Moses (1997) contended that any time there is a small number of ethnic or racial minorities among a majority group, there is high likelihood that they will be viewed by members of the dominant group as "tokens, and thus, treated as representatives of their group or as symbols rather than individuals" (p. 26).

Historically, the token status and representation have been targeted by minorities, with the understanding that the individuals were chosen because of quotas that needed to be filled and to speak for an entire race. Racial tokenism has many shapes and forms; the one that most researchers use is based upon a minority individual and the given environment. According to Hall and Stevenson (2007), "Tokenism is likely to be found wherever a dominant group is under pressure to share privilege, power or other desirable commodities with a group which is excluded" (p. 2). By this definition, African American male senior administrators are tokens, given that they are "functioning in skewed groups (numerical scarcity of African Americans) and have non-privileged status (as minorities in a predominantly White setting)" (Hall & Stevenson, 2007, p. 9).

African American male senior administrators in a predominantly White college or university is the foundation of Black racial tokenism. In these positions, African Americans in general experience high visibility, assimilation and contrast (Hasberry, 2013; Kanter 1977). Visibility refers to the clear distinction of race based upon skin color and physical features.

Assimilation happens when the token, in this case the African American male senior administrators, is seen representing all things African American and adapting to preexisting stereotypes and generalizations. Kanter (1977) stated as a result, tokens are forced to take on characteristics that deny their individuality.

Contrast focuses on feelings of being excluded due to being a token or the need to fit in. When the token tries to assimilate and focus on the commonalities with the dominant group, a division between the token and the dominant group is created. While trying to be a part of the in-crowd or “the good ol’ boys club,” the token can subsequently create a separation from his own race. This then leads to isolation of the token from the racial or cultural group and the group from which he is trying to gain acceptance.

Historically, writings on African American men as tokens tend to deal with predominantly white institutions where there are several other African American men in similar roles as students, faculty or administrators (Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Hasberry, 2013). Overall, tokenism creates isolation because the chosen individual is working in two areas that have no immediate social or cultural connection, and he cannot function in the same manner within both groups.

The Color Ceiling

Coleman (1998) defined the glass ceiling as “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in organizations into management-level positions” (p. 5). Being added and considered an afterthought is why Airen (2017) created the term and definition of the color ceiling. Airen (2017) defines this as:

The invisible barriers that impede financial equity, employment equity, and promotional advancement for African Americans in the workforce. In arenas where equality should be

the end result, prejudicial and indomitable barriers, which have resulted in financial and promotional gaps, persist for African Americans. (p. 3)

Freixas and Abbot (2018) state the following quote relating to diversity:

Even though black Americans could make a major contribution to the life of the country, it depends upon the creation of effective policies and programs to advance the social and economic equity. Diversity and inclusion can no longer be buzz words in America, but must equate with the results obtained through policy, power and action. (p. 215)

With more access to information and opportunities, we now see a more diverse group of professionals along with the necessity to continue to broaden the horizons for a mixture of races in varying degrees of achievement. While most research focuses on the negative, the upcoming section is focused on the opportunities African American men have to help navigate the areas of senior leadership.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS

One of the positives for African American male senior administrators is that the landscape of higher education is continuously changing. One of the main catalysts for this perpetual change is the demographic of the country's population. Data from the U.S. Census indicates that minorities may very well be the majority by 2050. Bowen (1996) shares with us that the importance and future of the United States closely connects to the community colleges' commitment to effective minority leadership. Also, Gillett-Karam, Roueche, and Roueche, (1991) declared the 21st century mission and focus of community colleges would be to recognize racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in leadership roles of administrators, faculty, and support staff. In addition, Gillet-Karam et al. (1991) asserted that "this evolving era, in which new leadership must be developed for a rapidly changing nation and world, once again places the community college at the forefront of higher education in meeting the future needs of our

society” (p. 7). While this was in the past, these researchers had the vision to know that because the population is ever-evolving, thus leadership must evolve as well to meet the needs of the students served.

Cultural Agility

One of the ways for African American males to succeed is to have a high level of adaptability; being able to move in and out of different circles and be comfortable without feeling a loss of sense of self offers great advantages. The Bush Foundation (“What do we mean,” n.d.) defines cultural agility in this way. Cultural agility is viewed as the attitude, skills and knowledge necessary to provide effective leadership in an ever-changing, diverse community. Understanding one’s own culture and how it shapes experiences, incorporating that cultural knowledge into interactions and decision making, and exploring and appreciating cultural differences help to accomplish adaptability when with people outside of one’s own personal culture.

Caliguiri (2012) comments on this theory, noting that, “Culturally agile professionals succeed in contexts where the successful outcome of their jobs, roles, positions, or tasks depends on dealing with an unfamiliar set or multiple sets of cultural norms” (p. 5). Caliguiri further noted, “Cultural agility is a practice, not an achievement, and building it is a process, not an event” (p. 5). This is important for African American men to achieve, because having the ability to understand one’s own culture and be able to share that experience with others outside of the culture helps future leaders to be authentic and communicate with others without feeling compromised.

Professional Development

One constant theme that surfaced in the research interviews with African American men was a focus on professional development. Gardner et al. (2014) state, “Professional preparation is, obviously, important to African Americans seeking to be successful in higher education administration” (p. 244). There are many opportunities for professional development but being intentional is key to the success of African American males. This development helps to create and build mentoring or sponsoring relationships, as well as support systems that will help combat potential barriers in leadership journeys.

Another area of professional development that is vital to growth is having a professional network or support system available. While there might not be many opportunities that help climbing the career ladder, the most recent focus has been on innovative ways for African American men to connect. Examples include social media groups, email listservs, and e-mail relationships to help create a space for African American men to feel comfortable. Jackson’s 2004 Emerging model provides context on how to engage, retain and advance African American administrators. He states in the third stage the following,

The advancement is very important in providing growth for, and ultimately retaining, African American administrators. Institutions should support and endorse professional development for their African American administrators. During this phase institutions should provide professional experiences beyond the diversity mission of the institution. This is a factor that can be quite critical in future professional advancement. Often times African American administrators get stuck in positions in which they must devote a significant portion of their time on diversity-related issues. Moving beyond diversity experiences will help the administrator gain a better understanding of operations on the whole campus. (p. 217-218)

By creating and offering professional development experiences, African American administrators are more likely to stay and grow because they feel a sense of investment in them

as professionals which may create a feeling of a potential for opportunities to grow and advance in their careers.

Mentoring/Sponsoring

During the past decade, American universities have made concerted efforts to develop campus environments that represent the diversity of the general population. Blackwell (1989) defined mentoring as “a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements and prestige, instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as program participants” (p. 9). Busch (1985) and the National Education Association (1993) use the terms *protégé* or *mentee* to describe persons being mentored and indicate that the mentor generally has more experience and serves as a sponsor and support for the protégé’s personal and professional development.

Maxwell (1995) emphasized the importance of leaders developing other potential leaders through mentorship, arguing that there is no success without a successor. Mentors play a key role in any person’s success but play an even bigger role with African American male senior administrators. With the growing diversity of students attending our institutions, efforts to recruit and retain students, faculty and staff from underrepresented minorities have intensified on college and university campuses (Barrett & Smith, 2008). Mentoring has been identified as a method to both facilitate retention of minority students and promote professional growth and development of minority professionals (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Patton, 2002; Tillman, 2001). Gardner et al. (2014) share the following enablers of success for African American male senior administrators: “mentoring relationships, commitment to diversity, and stages of career development, recruitment strategies, and professional preparation” (p. 245).

Those areas of mentorship are vital in helping future leaders avoid barriers and missed opportunities along their leadership journeys. Ensher (2013) talks about how mentoring has shifted and provides references to new ways to mentor electronically:

With computer-mediated communication, including forms such as e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, social networking such as Facebook and LinkedIn, as well as video conferencing, mentors and mentees can easily communicate with one another from a distance. Electronic mentoring opens up avenues of mentoring for demographic groups such as for women and people of color that may be underrepresented in certain careers and echelons and who may find it difficult to find face to face mentors. (p. 9)

Professional development, mentorship, and sponsorship are all keys to help African American men navigate around barriers and gain access to opportunities that might not be widely and publicly advertised. These opportunities are just a few that have continually come up in research studies when African American men are asked questions about what strategies are used when dealing with barriers. Much of the literature reviewed showed that the barriers for African American men have remained consistent over time. Internal and external barriers from race, stereotypes, education and social barriers are some that have been mentioned. Also, the literature has shown that professional development and mentoring are two of the major ways to help African American men face unknown, uncharted territory. The literature for the barriers and opportunities confirmed that African American males in these roles need more research in order to continue to provide strategies for development and opportunities for future programs to help create a pipeline of future African American male leaders.

VALUE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE LEADERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Although the focus of this dissertation is on African American leadership, this section cites research on the importance of increasing African American faculty. Attention is given to

this aspect because the research cited below indicates that diverse leadership is a factor in attracting diverse faculty. Secondly, the research indicates that a diverse faculty is important for encouraging the success of African American students. Finally, the studies cited previously have indicated that administrative leadership often emerges from the faculty; therefore, underrepresentation of African Americans/Blacks among the faculty is a factor that impedes their access to leadership positions. According to Holmes (2004),

Thus, the majority of the current pool of African American administrators may never realize their full potential because they are not perceived as qualified by their white counterparts; even though their educational training and professional experiences are comparable. This finding suggests that governing board officials must become more open to administrators of color in diverse institutional settings when making hiring decisions in order to expand the pool of qualified applicants. This means hiring officials and their representatives who are generally responsible for hiring administrators at the chief executive level will need to work closely with presidents of historical Black colleges and universities and two-year community colleges to identify persons who could be candidates for future employment opportunities. Overall, the primary finding of this study is that African Americans are characteristically similar to their White counterparts on factors that distinguish individuals as viable candidates for presidential positions. This means that the continued underrepresentation of African American college and university presidents must be viewed as the choice of governing board officials who would rather maintain homogeneous cultures as opposed to communities of difference. (pp. 34–35)

In summary, a review of current literature indicates that there are critical challenges for African American male community college leaders. This review revealed many obstacles that these men face, including very little opportunity or areas to advance. The lived experiences of these men provide vital information to help begin creating a more diverse pipeline of community college leaders and that is why this research is critical.

CONCLUSION

It is imperative to develop leadership theories, practices, and programs that include a gendered and racial perspective to combat the many barriers that African American men face.

Literature supports that most community college leaders are more likely to come from within the institution through a succession of promotions. Leaders are more likely to hire and mentor those who reflect their own identities or who are more like them. Understanding marginalized groups and developing diversity and inclusion competencies will assist those in a position of power to lead the efforts to respond to the crisis and critical shortage in leadership through inclusion of African American men. The aspirant leader must start early and develop other skills such as the American Association of Community College (AACC) competencies that would assist men seeking these roles. Further research is required on these men and hiring institutions to better understand how to develop and recruit more African American male leaders.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the research methodology and design. This study is qualitative in nature and employs a phenomenological approach as a means to understand the lived experience of African American men currently serving in senior leadership positions at community colleges in Michigan. The reason for choosing a phenomenological approach was to best reflect the thoughts of the participants in this study. Also, based on Moustakas (1994), this causes the researcher to approach the topic without preconceived ideas or suppositions and be focused on a topic or idea that will lead to further research on that topic. Using this approach allows the researcher to effectively focus on a topic to lead to future research and to use the experiences, thoughts, and reactions to create common themes to help organize the data provided.

SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

This study employed purposive sampling to identify eleven participants, and sampling concluded once a point of saturation was attained. Within a qualitative methodology, specifically phenomenology, it was important to seek depth of insight of the participants lived experiences and their phenomenon as leaders at community colleges. Creswell (2009) stated, “The procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (p. 13). Therefore, a research pool of eleven for this study is fitting via the use of multiple methods of data collection such as document analysis

and formal interviews. Also, given that I traveled to visit these men on their respective campuses, this research study required a smaller sample to offer depth, rather than breadth, on the unique leadership experiences. The men identified for this study were strategically selected to represent diversity in the academy. They hold senior- and executive-level positions from the community college through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009). Groenewald (2004) considers purposive sampling as, “the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants” (p. 8).

The target population for this study was African American male administrators in senior-level positions at community colleges in Michigan. The men in this study represented eight out of the 28 community colleges in the state. The process to identify potential participants for the study began with seeking data from professional organizations, the main sources were the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) and reviewing the institutional website. From that point, the research began to review each of the 28 school’s websites, looking for organizational charts and then searching those names, to find photos in order to verify whether or not anyone fit the description of subjects I was looking for. Using websites such as Google Images and LinkedIn afforded the opportunity to view photos of the subjects. A large majority were not African American males, but I was able to identify those that were. This process was used while searching each of the 28 community colleges for potential participants.

The interviews did not represent a random sample. Interview participants were recruited using a purposive sampling technique, defined as “a procedure by which researchers select a subject or subjects based on predetermined criteria about the extent to which the selected subjects could contribute to the research study” (Vaughn, Schumm, & Singagub, 1996, p. 58). All focus group conversations were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants, and

transcripts were made of each taped interview. Additionally, extensive field notes, research memos and information from debriefing meetings were compiled for each focus group. The transcripts were later coded and subjected to a thematic analysis.

Once the potential participants were identified, the recruitment process began by gathering e-mail addresses for the participant pool by searching the college website (Appendix C). A message was sent to introduce the researcher and provide an overview of this study (Appendix A). The Informed Consent form and a request to participate in this study were also included (Appendix B). Over the course of multiple e-mails and follow up requests, I was able to confirm eleven men who were available to participate in the study. The confirmed men in this study proportionally represent a large portion of the African American men in the state who currently serve in these types of positions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question for this study was, “What are the influences that enable or serve as barriers to the success of African American male senior administrators?” In this study, eight sub questions or subthemes were identified for this research:

1. What are some of the challenges you experienced during your journey to secure a senior level leadership position?
2. What strategies have you developed to deal with these challenges?
3. What were the significant opportunities that were presented to you and how did you take advantage of them?
4. What coping mechanisms and strategies do African American male administrators at mainstream institutions of education utilize to succeed?
5. What perceived barriers contribute to the under-representation of African American males in executive leadership positions?

6. What challenges do you feel are unique to African American males attempting to secure an executive leadership position?
7. What advice would you offer to aspiring African American males that are interested in obtaining senior level leadership positions?
8. What personal characteristics contribute to the resilience of African American male executives?

DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative methods were employed in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used and an interview protocol (Patton, 2002) was designed to be used in collaboration with the face-to-face interviews for clarity. Although the interview protocol was followed, it was not the sole tool for inquiries. Documents were collected, including curriculum vitae, website information, publications, and other related documents related to the research participants. When permission was granted, the research also included observations of the individuals in their administrative roles.

The interviews were recorded via cellular phone and later transcribed. The interview dates and times were based on the availability of the participants. Interviews were conducted in-person at each participant's institution or at a commonly agreed-upon location based on their preference. Phone or Google Hangout (video) interviews were also conducted as necessary. Careful consideration was given to protect individuals' confidentiality when selecting a meeting location. During each interview, notes were taken of the discussions in addition to recording the conversation. Those conversations were emailed to a transcription service provider (Appendix E) and followed all confidential agreements that were set by the researcher. Once the recordings were transcribed, they were immediately deleted from phone and cloud and asked that the servicer showed proof of deletion as well. The transcripts will be stored on an encrypted flash drive for a minimum of three years after study has ended.

Interview Protocol

Once an individual agreed to participate in the study, he received an introductory email along with the consent form. If the participant declined participation, that prospect was sent a thank you email. Once a potential participant returned a signed copy of the consent form, that person was emailed or contacted via telephone to set up an interview. After the interview was confirmed, an email of the interview questions (Appendix A) and informed consent (Appendix B) was sent to each participant for signature.

Prior to the interview, the researcher provided an abstract of the study as well as interview questions so that the subject was prepared for the interview. Once interviews were complete, the stories of each participant were written and included in Chapter Four. Using the phenomenological process, the researcher identified themes and patterns within the stories and included them in Chapter Five. Lastly, the participants were sent emails that thanked them for participation in the research.

Human Subjects

Prior to beginning this study, the researcher obtained Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) approval from Ferris State University (Appendix D). The participants in this study were notified that they were not obligated to participate in this research and if something changed, they could withdraw at any time, without affecting their relationships with Ferris State University or the researcher. The individual, institutional, and state identifier associated with the interviewees was protected. Once the participants agreed to participate, each person was asked to sign a copy of the consent form. The participants were informed that the quotes obtained from the interviews would be used to support general themes. The interview materials and audio recordings were stored in a safe place and destroyed after the data had been transcribed.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

The data analysis process entailed transcribing the tapes of each interview. Once in transcript form, each interview was categorized based on the respondent comments, perspectives, and stories from the eleven interviewees. During the data collection process, I maintained a research journal. The journal was used to record important notes that emerged during the participant interviews. It is important to mention that the journal notes were not collected during the interviews. At the end of each interview, the notes were captured. The journal was used to note where epoché may need to be referenced and where common themes developed.

The first stage of analysis entailed reviewing each transcript repeatedly and flagging items that may have potential significance to interpretative conclusions (Ratner, 2001). During the second stage, the flagged items were grouped or coded into topics of importance. Bednall (2006) mentioned that during this stage, epoché is still in place. In the third stage of the process, I identified thematic linkages or common ideas and referred to my feelings audit to reframe from personal bias. It is during the fourth stage that I examined my past experiences, feelings audit and research journal for meaning. In stage five, I began the process of what Bednall (2006) referred to as reintegration or debracketing epoché. In this stage, the items I held in epoché were selectively placed into bracketed relationships with data obtained from the respondents. During this stage, I also questioned if my past experiences either reduced or augmented the meaning of the data. In the last stage, I wrote a draft of how I interpreted the lived experiences of African American male executives within community colleges. In this stage, I utilized direct quotations from transcripts to highlight significance.

Validation of Data

To ensure the validity of this study, the researcher employed member checking and thick, rich description to address credibility within a qualitative lens once the data was collected from the participants. During the second interview with the participants, I shared the transcripts of their first interview to ensure that their ideas and statements were accurately recorded. During this time, the participants had the opportunity to retract or add comments to clarify their statements (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Glesne, 2006).

Through thick, rich description of the data, credibility is addressed to those external to the study, such as readers and reviewers. As Creswell & Miller (2000) stated, “The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study” (p. 129).

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to the eleven participants who were interviewed. This study does not intend to represent the views of the majority of African American men leading in community colleges in Michigan. Furthermore, this study was only conducted with individuals leading in community colleges in Michigan and does not provide insight into the experiences of those African American men leading at four-year institutions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter describes the methodology used to interview eleven African American male senior administrators for this study. The participants all currently hold positions in community colleges within state of Michigan ranging from dean to president. Chapter Four provides

narratives from the interviews. Chapter Five reviews the findings of the interviews and provides recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the lived experiences of eleven African American male senior administrators in the following positions: President, Chancellor, Chief of Staff, Executive Vice President, Chief Academic Officer (CAO)/Provost, Central Senior Academic Affairs Officer, Dean of Academic College, Senior Administrative Officer, Senior External Affairs Officer and Chief Enrollment Management Officer, or any administrator with titles similar to these in higher education at community colleges throughout Michigan. An interpretation of the data collected through interviews with each participant is also provided.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. In section one, details are provided about the eleven participants. In the second section shares answers and emerging themes to the eight research questions used for this study. This research will serve as an informative blueprint to current and future African American male administrators to provide baseline resources for developing and persisting to leadership positions in higher education.

According to the IRB guidelines, there was no mention of the institutions at which the participants were employed. Any information that could potentially identify the participants has been omitted. The first part of the results section presents the participants' responses to the eight research questions asked during their interviews. The second part presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from coding the interview transcriptions.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Eleven African American male senior administrators with experience at community colleges in the state of Michigan volunteered to participate in this study. All participants met the selection criteria as identifying as African American male and having one of the following positions: (President, Chancellor, Chief of Staff, Executive Vice President, Chief Academic Officer (CAO)/Provost, Central Senior Academic Affairs Officer, Dean of Academic College, Senior Administrative Officer, Senior External Affairs Officer and Chief Enrollment Management Officer, or any administrator with titles similar to these). The following table lists the participants' current position to give better understanding and to put their reported experiences into context.

Table 1: Participant Descriptions

PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYM	PARTICIPANT POSITION
Martin	President
Malcom	President
Thurgood	President
Frederick	President
Barack	President
Jesse	Vice President
Oliver	Dean
Marcus	Dean
Carl	Dean
Kyle	Dean
John	Dean

ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section of this chapter addresses the answers to the eight research questions that served as the foundation of this study. The eight research questions were used to gather valuable information about the personal and professional struggles, obstacles and opportunities, coping

mechanisms, leadership characteristics, and advice. The research questions analyzed and answered are as follows:

1. What are some of the challenges you experienced during your journey to secure a senior-level leadership position?
2. What strategies have you developed to deal with these challenges?
3. What are some of the opportunities you experienced during your journey to secure a senior-level leadership position?
4. What coping mechanisms and strategies do African American male administrators at mainstream institutions of education utilize to succeed?
5. What perceived barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in senior leadership positions?
6. What challenges do you feel are unique to African American males attempting to secure a senior-level leadership position?
7. What advice would you offer to aspiring African American males that are interested in obtaining senior-level leadership positions?
8. What cultural qualities do you feel African American males bring to senior-level leadership position?

Research Question 1

What are some of the challenges you experienced during your journey to secure a senior-level leadership position?

Acceptance and Belonging

Sense of belonging and acceptance were also among the terms used when talking about challenges. The feeling of being accepted and belonging in the position from what some participants stated can make the position easier, more difficult or for the opportunity to even advance in the first place. One participant stated the following:

One thing is being accepted by your colleagues. What I mean by that, if you're in predominantly white institutions and moving to positions where people don't feel that you should be there. They think you're not qualified enough and all that stuff, so you've

got to deal with that stuff, and you can counter it just by, you know, like making sure you've got your skill sets and your credentials in place. But it can be challenging when you have three or four colleagues in key positions that reject you, so you've got to deal with that.

You've got to counter it by being confident and committed to what you're doing and just being smart, and those are challenging in a sense. I always try to be ahead of the game. And that's a reality for African Americans in the workplace African American males in particular because you've got to know there are going to be people that aren't going to accept you. "He isn't qualified. He's been given everything." You know, something like that. "He hasn't had to do work for it." I mean, you'll hear all that and probably more, but I'd say just be confident and sharp in your abilities. That means learning new stuff, getting smarter on the job, and stuff like that, because you're going to have to be better than some other folks in the workplace. So, those are all things you will encounter. Also, these are things that will hopefully help people accept you which is by showing your abilities and your work ethic. (*Thurgood*)

Understand and embrace these inequities and know that acceptance and belonging are challenges one will encounter on the journey to a leadership position. These things are challenges because one cannot feel supported. It will be a challenge continuing to move up unless a person can deal with these challenges that African American males face.

Educational Credentials

Having the credentials is sometimes what affords a person the opportunity to lead. As stated with acceptance and belonging, sometimes the educational obtainment is a path traveled to help combat some of the challenges these men have faced. To have credibility is highly important for African American males. It proves they have been academically prepared and academically qualified to be eligible to obtain the positions they aspire to. One of the participants stated:

Now just to outline a few, you have to ensure you have the education the highest level of education, because there are times when because of your color or sometimes your name will hinder you. And so, without even knowing what your color is, sometimes they see your name on the resume and say, "Well, that might be a person of color," and that could be a basis for discrimination. And so, without even knowing what your color is,

sometimes they see your name on the resume and say, “Well, that might be a person of color,” and that could be a basis for discrimination if your name is Tyrone. You know, names of that nature, so that could be a challenge.

The education level matters, especially in this day and age where you have a proliferation of Ph.D. programs. My doctorate was earned in the 80s, and I’m not that old. In the 80s where I was on a campus, a full-time student, I earned a degree in an academic field. A challenge now is that you have individuals who are earning degrees. And, nothing against the higher education or community college leadership degrees or what have you, but they’re earning degrees in higher education, community college leadership, or what have you. Mine is in economics. So, when you’re juxtaposed, your credentials are juxtaposed with someone with a degree in community college leadership or higher education, and it could be a challenge, because the assumption could be, well someone who has a degree in a doctorate in higher education may be more qualified because they focused in that area than someone with a degree in economics. (*Malcom*)

The participants talked about education as a bridge or as a way to make oneself a viable candidate when seeking leadership positions. As stated, things will be counted against a person that are out of one’s control, but earning the credentials is something in control of African American males to help combat the default challenges and scrutiny they may face.

Understanding of Culture and Expectations

As a challenge, the theme of understanding the culture and expectations of the job came up frequently among the participants. Things such as campus, office, leadership culture, and clear expectations were things sometimes not presented on the job description or even once employment begins. Learning the culture of one’s campus and office is a very critical part of being successful in leadership in general, but it is much more magnified being an African American male because of things such as being the only person of color in that position, the only person of color in the office, or on the leadership team. That pressure can be stressful from what participants express, but they are consistent in affirming that the key to being successful is

making sure one understands the culture they are entering and the expectations of the job one is hired to do. One participant stated:

Okay. I would say in a nutshell one of the very first challenges I experienced when I started pursuing a senior-level leadership position within the community college arena was understanding the culture of community colleges from a post-secondary standpoint. A lot of my previous experience had come from industrial work, so when I came in, I came in with nothing but an industry perspective. So, the leadership development programs and training I had taken part in and had been groomed by were mostly industry-specific: heavy manufacturing and some retail. The only higher education sort of experience I had was working in a financial aid office as a financial aid counselor while I was a grad student.

So, really learning about how decisions are made, how to navigate some of the internal politics, learning about who the voices of influence are, etc., those were all some of my biggest challenges because it's an awareness thing. You didn't know what's what and who's who. So, I think one of the first challenges I had was learning the landscape, seeking mentors, and finding out who's willing to share information with you for you to be successful.

The immediate dynamic I picked up and it's not necessarily a negative, but I realized the predominant culture seemed to be middle class Caucasian women who seemed to be sitting in key roles, whether it be faculty positions, some administrative positions, and of course they were kind of spread out throughout other areas of the college. I saw that that group seemed to be represented more than anyone else. (*Kyle*)

Understanding that the culture might not be welcoming or having different expectations than one's counterparts is something the participants talked about. One of the things with expectations was the pressure of potentially being the first African American in a senior leadership position and how one performs could potentially shape the views and opinions of others who are looking at the person in the position to see if African American males can handle the pressure and perform in senior leadership positions.

Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome is a topic of increased research when looking at African Americans. Impostor syndrome results from a person's inability to allow career accomplishments to

correspond to his or her capabilities. The result is a fear of failure that is more complicated than just insecurity. It describes the feeling like what one accomplishes is always under scrutiny from society, as well as internally. Some of the participants talked about this in a way that gave some insights on what African American men may think being in senior leadership positions. One participant stated:

I think honestly the biggest impediment or the challenge that we face is internal. As an African American male in higher education, it's easy to fall into the impostor syndrome hole or pitfall because the academy is a very pretentious environment. You know, we're constantly scrutinizing, evaluating, assessing and I was a struggling college student myself, and so after getting over the hurdle from almost being removed from the university I was attending in undergrad and graduating with a low GPA from undergrad, I had to first get out of the mindset that I didn't necessarily belong in this environment.

Even though I had gotten the credentials with my master's degree and worked in the academy and I've been doing so for several years, that doubt will sometimes still creep into your head and you start to believe that perhaps you're not quite ready for these opportunities. Or, if you are presented the opportunity, you sought the opportunity that others would believe you don't belong. And if you were to secure the opportunity, others would essentially poke holes in everything that you do that perhaps doesn't meet the standards that they, you know, set forth for you or put in place for you. So I think honestly the biggest impediment, the biggest challenge has all been internal. (*John*)

Internal challenges are something being looked at more, things such as racial battle fatigue and imposter syndrome are just a few things internally African American males deal with as a challenge to leadership position. Thinking if one really belongs in the position or deserves the opportunity seems to affect many African American males.

Willingness to Move for Opportunity

Another challenge that came to the forefront from the participants talked about relocating or the willingness to move for the right opportunity. Leaving one's comfort zone, family, and friends to go after a position is sometimes hard to do for some people. Being flexible and willing

to move is something the participants talked about because the path to a leadership position may have many different stops. This participant gave the following insight:

I think one of the biggest challenges I experienced has been kind of the moving around for me to advance and do some of the things that I've been blessed to do. So, I knew based upon what some of the things that were going on and on to that growing up there that I needed to probably just stretch my wings. This is what some of mentors were even saying. Even the first president that hired me when I first got there (and he has since retired) a nice guy, a wonderful guy. He's been one of my mentors over the years and certainly I've enjoyed, you know, that kind of mentorship that I've had. But I had to move and he kind of stressed that. He said, "You know, you may have to move and then be able to get your experience, so that folks can see that it's not just the institution but it's you who is making these advances, using the skills you've learned, the talents that you've gained, and you establishing kind of a larger network," than what was here in Michigan at that time. (*Barack*)

The willingness to move to ascend to the leadership ranks is something a majority of the participants talked about. They shared during the interviews that being willing to move opens different doors and opportunities. The mentality of "stay and wait your turn" from the conversations has not worked out in any of these men's favor, so the notion of moving is something all of them stated as a potential challenge because of factors such as family, career, and leaving their comfort zone to go to something new and unknown.

Research Question 2

What strategies have you developed to deal with these challenges?

The themes for this question indicated the following strategies, gaining trust, learn how to be political when necessary, don't be outworked, diverse experiences, sponsors and mentors. Each of these items were identified as a potential strategy to deal with some of the above challenges. Throughout the interviews the value of these items was confirmed and supported by rich dialog directly from each of the participants.

Gaining Trust

A culture of gaining trust to overcome challenges is essential for African American males. The values of service, equity and respect assist in establishing a culture of respect and acceptance. By gaining trust, there is a major piece of being accountable for the positive things and the negative things, which will help those around peers to gain trust and confidence in one's abilities. Leaders must exhibit high moral and ethical standards to show others that one is capable of distinguishing oneself as a leader. Also, gaining trust might be doing things outside of the job description to help build and create relationships. One particular participant elaborates on gaining trust from colleagues:

You know, so I can say this. My work history goes back to working at UPS, coming to work every day, doing the best job, and working my butt off. But I noticed that I kind of wasn't being recognized or anything in terms of any promotion, and I was watching the guys that were being promoted. The guys that were being promoted were the guys who went out drinking with their leadership, their buddies or pals or what have you. So, I said, "Well, how could I incorporate that? And looking at my own reality as an African American male. How could I incorporate that into my game plan, so to speak?"

So, I started to get to know people and got to know people outside of the job. I learned what sort of things were important to them, whether it was their family.

They had guys that liked to drink and I'm not a big-time drinker. Maybe I could go out and have one beer. But, you know, just being able to get to know you outside of work was a task for me. I carried this forward into all my jobs, just trying befriend people and getting to know them.

Again, whether it is people who go to church, people who have significant others, people who like to travel, you're not always going to love what they like. But at the very least, you can be empathetic and understanding of what's important to them and, you know, maybe ask them a question or something. For instance, if the person likes to work on art projects, you can ask them, "Well, how is your latest project going?" That goes a long way. (*Carl*)

Gaining trust is one of the things that will help minorities combat challenges by working harder, being empathetic, and doing things outside of the workplace. These were the things

participants talked about when trying to gain trust as a leader. Gaining trust is an asset to help when dealing with challenges, because people feel like they know if someone is being authentic or not. Based on these interviews, it seems like an additional task that African American males must do in order to be successful in leadership positions.

Learn How to be Political When Necessary

One of the constant things that arose when talking to the participants is the discussion of understanding politics of offices and institutions. The term mostly used was “being political,” which meant one needs to know and understand how situations will affect them. This includes knowing when to show up to an event to ensure representation or showing supportiveness to others at the college. Basically, one has to know when to be present at something versus when it is not necessary. One of the statements that stood out the most with this particular challenge was:

I think some of the other strategies you do is you speak to any and everybody you can at varying levels. You don't want to just make things peer-to-peer. While you and I hold these particular titles, I'm only going to talk to people that are directors or deans or VPs.

No, you talk to everyone from the janitor to the guys that work within grounds, to the public safety officers, all the way up to the president. And if you have a relationship where you can talk to some of the members of the board, I would even talk to the members of the board, because some of it is about relationship building. But, other pieces of it is about getting a pulse. What's what, who's who, because what you find is that there are varying political dynamics that exist. I know faculty who could call the board and create disturbances because of the relationships they have with certain board members, just like I knew people from grounds who could call guys at public safety to have certain things done when we felt like we were going to have a situation on campus where there was a student and a staff disturbance.

So, I think in many ways those things were critical for me being successful. But I think those are the other – the things that you do. Michigan has, I think, 28 community colleges across the state. I think right within Southeast Michigan, it's probably anywhere between eight to ten within a 30-to-50-mile radius. It doesn't hurt to build some relationships with your sister colleges to find out if some of the things you're experiencing as it relates to the inner-workings of the college are being experienced at the other institutions. And so, you know, you have a lot of different cross-collaborations that go on within the different

respective departments and divisions, and you get a chance to kind of do some pulse checking. You know, “Hey, you know, this person may be from this particular college. You’re from another. But you guys are within 30 miles. Hey, are you guys doing something very similar?” So, you get a chance to find out about commonality.

You learn the history of the institution and how it was started, because some of those individuals are still around that have an influence. And so I could tell you the current college I’m at now, I think the founder of the college in the 90s or so, but he still shows up at varying events, Board of Trustee meetings, and his voice is still one of influence when people are having challenges. You know, for me those are the strategies, but you try to transcend the things you think are unhealthy or toxic, and then you work with the people you recognize are doing that, so you can have some success. Always be respectful and always try to be cordial. Of course, we know sometimes there’s this stigma of the ‘angry black man’ and, you know, I think there are some who try to provoke.

You know, I’ve definitely had that experience, but I’ve also been able to demonstrate how not all of us behave a certain way. Not all of us are explosive. Not all of us carry the – you know, the ‘hate everybody, trust nobody’ kind of philosophy. Sometimes, you actually have to know who to trust and sometimes you’re going to have people you’re not going to trust. But a lot of that, you’ll base it off of the relationship and the interactions you’ve had with that person. (*Jesse*)

Learning to be political when necessary is highly important for African American males because, as the participant talked about, one does not need to feed into any of the negative stereotypes that others may already have. By using one’s network and speaking to everyone, one has the ability to create allies and support networks to help combat the challenge of politics that African American males will face.

Do Not Be Outworked

Another challenge that arose was not being outworked and having to do more than one’s colleagues. This is in regard to opportunities, committees, building relationships, meetings, and other things that are viewed as other duties as assigned. Some of the participants talked about the preconceived notion that some non-African American staff may have, such as “You got the position because of your race,” “You’re lazy,” or “You’re incompetent.” All of these were

mentioned as challenges by the participants in this study. Each participant mentioned how one has to outwork their counterparts because one is up against the thoughts of those who don't look similar or feel that someone may not belong in a given position. The point is that one constantly has to prove people wrong. One participant stated it like this:

One of the things I have always expressed more than anything else is how to build meaningful relationships with colleagues. Because here in a multi-campus system, we're always asking people to do things that we don't interact with them on a daily basis. "Oh, I have to do a program out at another campus, but I spend 90% of my time at my campus. Who can I connect to?" So, he knew everybody. He had already worked at all the other campuses. He was doing recruitment, so everybody was feeding him information to feed to the community.

So he said, "One of the best things you can do is just go out to the various campuses, even if it's a meeting you don't really want to go to. Even if it takes you out of your daily routine, just go meet people," and so that's what I did. I just started building relationships and he said, "You know, very few people here at the college ever tell me no," and he said, "That's because I've always presented myself as a resource to them, and people have a tendency to want to reciprocate that."

And so that's kind of been the secret sauce, if you will, to any success I've been able to experience here is that I build relationships to where people feel guilty telling me no because I'm always willing when they come to me to say, "Hey, what can I do to assist?" You know, "How can I be a resource to you, your students, your faculty, and your staff?" and, you know, they've reciprocated. *(Kyle)*

Going out of the way to help others and building relationships with as many people as possible has served as a way to deal with some of the above challenges. Working harder and doing little things such as building meaningful relationships will help one to combat those challenges African American males face in the professional sphere.

Sponsors and Mentors

Most of the men talked about sponsors and mentors that they have in their lives to be able to help them navigate the uncharted territory of leadership. Most of the time research has shown there are not many African American males in senior leadership positions, so to having a sponsor

or a mentor to talk to, get ideas from, and sometimes just vent to, was one of the things all these men talked about. One participant stated it in the following way:

Yeah, mentorship from other college presidents and in some cases, they weren't even presidents. They're just leaders. Really looking at the mentorship that I have, that person didn't even agree to be my mentor. I'm just paying attention, all right? And I'm just watching and noticing and taking notes. I would say one of my strongest mentors I have gleaned from when I went to visit him several years ago just to hang out with him for half a day and see some things that he said is going on there, and talked to some of his people. So, last summer he was here Michigan and I just sat down and talked to him for a while before he was getting ready to go on to speak. We just sat and talked for a while. Those kinds of opportunities and noticing those people, that's helpful. That's always been helpful to me. (*Frederick*)

These men discussed the ability to find people, formally and informally, who can support you as an African American male is critical to facing the challenges one will face. In my discussions with the participants, this topic was one that all of them spoke on.

These strategies to combat the challenges are just a few tools to help African American males. Accomplished African American leaders must be willing to look out for young African American males trying to get into positions similar to the ones they occupy. They must be willing to spend time talking to the next generation about their experiences and encouraging them to consider pursuing more than just administrative careers but looking for opportunities to lead.

Research Question 3

What are some of the opportunities you experienced during your journey to secure a senior-level leadership position?

When asked about opportunities, some of the emerging themes that came from the interviews were professional development, presenting at and attending conferences, leadership academies and fellowships, diverse experiences, and opportunity to continue education. These

themes continuously arose in the interviews from participants. Each of these helps to provide some suggestions and guidance for future African American males to look into to create opportunities and present them as well-rounded candidates for senior leadership positions.

Professional Development

When looking for opportunities presented, the participants talked about being very particular about the professional development one should select. They insisted that leaders must be strategic about opportunities because each opportunity gives one access and connections to different administrators, offices, and potentially new job opportunities. Of all the participants, this statement stood out the most on this topic:

With professional development you have all these different elements, but you find that the more you are again, sort of availing yourself, staying abreast of things, opportunities for you to serve on committees, taskforce, your ability to meet other people those all become great opportunities for you. You don't miss that opportunity to add tools to the toolbox for yourself because every rung on the ladder is a new opportunity. Every skill and bit of knowledge you can get helps lead to greater decision-making down the line or better strategizing for a particular project or for yourself. (*Martin*)

Being selective in professional development helps to ensure one adds the right tools in their toolbox. Participating in professional development programs allows for meeting people and developing professional networks. These opportunities to showcase talents or one's ability to learn new things can serve as an opportunity to help African American males.

Presenting at and Attending Conferences

When considering opportunities, the participants talked about exposure and being in front of the right people. One of the things that came up was presenting and attending conferences. This opportunity gives someone a chance to meet with other African American males they may have heard about or wanted to meet, as well as give African American males the opportunity to

network and present their work on a local, regional and national levels. One participant stated the following about presenting at and attending conferences:

I would say I've also had the opportunity to do presentations at different conferences, because you have to put yourself out there and it wasn't necessarily just to advance my career. It was to speak about some of the subjects I excelled in. You do all this content work on your own and you want to be sure to put the best practices out there, and you want to present at conferences, so I did that.

So then, people kind of tap you on the shoulder about, "Hey, we have this opportunity going on for you, such as to go jointly present with us at another conference." That has also afforded me other opportunities. This type of vast network out there is how people came to know about the work I was doing. (*Malcom*)

Conferences serve as a quick way of networking, collecting business cards, and developing professional relationships through education, work, and to share experiences. These opportunities create exposure and the opportunity to connect with other African American male senior administrations, and these opportunities can begin to create support networks and groups.

Leadership Academies and Fellowships

Participating in leadership academies and fellowships go a step above conferences and professional development. These things reflect an institutions' investment in an employee, because there is normally a cost to attend and required time off work. These academies and fellowships from the interviewees seem to be local, regional and national opportunities. These are similar to professional development and conferences because of the opportunity of exposure and showcasing one's skills. One participant shares:

To be considered as a leader, you have to be in places and spaces that show you are a leader. If I had to say there's a skill set, its leadership, and I try to develop mine. I've gone to a lot of the leadership training. Right now, I'm in the Michigan Community College Leadership Academy and that's all year. And then I've been to Harvard's Management Development Program. I've been to the Association for Colleges & Universities Leadership Training. I'm applying for the Aspen Institute right now, so every year I try to do something along the lines of leadership. I'm also trying to get on

the Higher Learning Commission Board of Trustees, and so I'm always looking at leadership kind of training, because that's the critical piece is the leadership and how to lead, mainly senior leaders. (*Oliver*)

To be a part of these academies and fellowships shows leadership potential, and it also creates a different network that will be able to help in one's journey. This opportunity is one that African American males must seek to help create opportunities when opportunities on campus may not be present.

Diverse Experiences

The participants talked about the importance of having a diverse range of experiences such as teaching, budgeting, and leadership. Having as many experiences as one can get will help make them a more marketable candidate, because it shows the ability to exceed a given job description. One participant stated the importance of diverse experiences as follows:

I had a chance to be a part of a lot of different cross-functional teams. So, here I was coming into a division where it was sort of focused on nontraditional higher education, workforce training, continuing education, and industry-based certification. I got a chance to sit with faculty groups and attend some of their advisory board meetings within the industry.

I also got a chance to become a part of what some colleges call a 'crisis management team'. So, you get a chance to become a part of these different committees, and so those opportunities helped me to do a couple of things. One, find out again what the institution was investing in for the greater community. (*Marcus*)

These experiences make a person better-rounded, because when applying to a job, checking off as many questions as possible is more desirable. One participant shares:

I try to set myself apart from others, and I spoke to this a bit within my answer to the first question. So, how do I set myself from others? Well, in my classroom experience, I was a VP for advancement in terms of fundraising I did that. I have been involved with the student services. I have managed areas like athletics and other areas. So, what I try to do throughout my career is get a taste of all the different areas at an institution of this nature. And dealing with that also, I have an experience at different types of institutions. (*Frederick*)

Having a diverse range of experience helps combat the challenges to be faced, and it also helps create opportunities to increase one's campus capital and reputation. While it may be extra work at times, these things are what will help set African American males up for success when they begin to look for senior-level leadership positions.

Opportunity to Continue Education

Another one of the major things discussed was idea of continuing education, with education being an investment, both in time and money. Working at an institution that is willing to assist or pay for an employee to further one's education or information is always a benefit. Furthering education provides the credentials to be in the conversation and the ability to be in the preferred qualification section of a job listing, versus barely meeting the job criteria. The two things participants talked about in regard to this was:

One of the opportunities that was offered was to continue my education so that I could not have that barrier work against me. It was a great opportunity and I was able to work toward leadership and stuff like that, so that's incredible as well. And then I was a well-suited candidate for different positions, and they could be more strategic. So, the opportunity to have my education paid for while working on my leadership skills was a major benefit and reason for my success today. *(John)*

Another participant stated:

There's very few of us that have opportunities to get graduate degrees and doctoral degrees, fewer of us that go into the professoriate and can survive academia, and then there are even fewer of us that move into leadership roles. When looking at the opportunity to continue education, this opportunity is key to assist African American males when looking to persist to leadership positions. These opportunities that were discussed were all ways to create exposure and opportunities for advancement. Also, they are vital for consideration when looking at opportunities to advancing to a senior leadership position. *(Malcom)*

Research Question 4

What coping mechanisms and strategies do African American male administrators at mainstream institutions of education utilize to succeed?

When asked about coping mechanisms and strategies, some of the emerging themes that came from the interviews were resilience, support networks, immersion into the campus community, self-care, and self-confidence. These themes continued to be talked about during the interview process.

Resilience

Having resilience or *thick skin*, as some of the men coined, was a term used in regard to a coping mechanism needed to overcome insults, doubt, and microaggressions to advance professionally to become the highest-level leaders of their organizations. In spite of organizational cultures and systems and untraditional career pathways, the African American men in this study yield complex coping skills that transforms their adversity into resilience.

Two of the participants share their thoughts on resilience:

The other important thing is to develop a thick skin if you don't have it already. You must have thick skin and know there are always going to be people who either disagree with you, don't like you, or both. You must be okay with the fact that's going to be the case. And also have a thick skin in knowing that during the tenure and leadership, there will be things you decide that not everybody is going to agree with or like, because you've got to do what you believe is best for the institution. That's what they hired you for. And so, make sure that thick skin is in place, accept that not everybody is going to be jumping up and down and thrilled about you all the time. And as long as you're doing what's right, that's okay. (*Carl*)

Another participant stated:

I had several interviews about, "Wow, so you're a black dude. You're leading this institution." This constantly happens most of the people they expect to see should be white. Some have asked, "How did you get this position?" in a very tactful way. I knew they would ask the question. Well, at a certain level it's not any different than anyone

else. But it's also means you must be very patient with people for the most part and impatient when necessary.

But there are many who would not expect to see someone like me as a college president, so I explained it this way: I've dealt with that my entire life. I've dealt with it since before I was an academic, so you have to make sure you recognize when someone's coming from a good place or an interesting place, as opposed to them being unable to imagine how a black guy could be, you know, Research Director of the Boston Police Department or a college president. (*Barack*)

Resilience is one of coping mechanism and strategies used to help African American men in senior leadership positions. Just having the ability to move forward and having patience to answer questions or deal with pressures other senior-level administrators might not have to deal with is a talent. From the interviews, this skill appeared to be something developed over time. The higher the position, the higher level of resilience needed to be successful.

Support Networks

Support networks was another prevalent theme being essential to success. Having a support network to help a person cope and combat the negative things they may face seems like a standard theme among all the participants. Family, friends, and colleagues seemed to be the networks most of these men talked about in regard to coping mechanisms. One participant stated the following:

One thing for me is finding some time for myself. Sometimes, I just have to refresh myself and I must do that sometimes by taking some time off. At times, being at a predominantly white institution and sometimes living in a predominantly white environment, I have to go back home to my urban environment to get reenergized. That has helped significantly. (*Malcom*)

Another participant stated:

You have to make sure you have people you can confide in. Having other African American men that you can confide in is helpful. It's nice to be able to sit down and say, "Okay, guess what happened today?" and he'd be able to say the same thing with you. You can sit down, share candidly, and not feel threatened. You just know that it's not

going to go and be plastered on the news tomorrow. It's reassuring that you can just have someone you can just spill with and say, "Here's what's going through my mind."

I had a meeting yesterday with the new City Manager. We've talked on several occasions, but we met yesterday, and we were talking about that very thing, about being able to get together on a regular basis after work, after hours. Just sitting down with a glass of wine or whatever, and just be able to say, "What in the heck do these people think about?" (*Martin*)

Support networks in the form of family and colleagues are one of the essential strategies for coping mechanism. Being able to talk and vent to another person in a similar position or someone who will provide a different perspective seems to have helped the participants of this study be successful.

Immersion into the Campus Community

Immersing oneself into the campus community is also a coping mechanism and strategy that has helped these men be successful. Being accessible, living in the community where one works, and letting people see you as a human outside of your position all work together to strengthen each professional. These things are skills one particular participant talked about which has helped to show this tactic is one some leaders might not always consider. The participant stated the following about being connected to the community:

I'm all for immersion in the community. I'm involved in everything. I think it's important if you're going to be a leader in the community; you live in that community. I think it's important. I think you and I talked briefly about that earlier, and so I live in the city, here in the community. I live in a multi-working-class neighborhood. I don't live in any of the golf courses or what have you, but this is just me and the way I am. I attend church in the local community. I go once a month to Grand Rapids, but I do when I'm here. I go to church here. Anyway, so you try to show up and be counted. Immerse yourself in your community. Make sure you're visible on campus, make sure you're interacting with everybody to the extent that you can, so they don't see you as this aloof person. So, it's not when I go into the community "Oh, that's the college president. He's one of us." You know, so for me that's been a coping mechanism. (*Thurgood*)

Being able to connect and immerse oneself in a community helps to create allies and support networks. Sometimes being a part of the community and being seen as an equal by others helps to create a sense of community. That sense of community helps to create a coping mechanism and strategy to be successful.

Self-care

Self-care is one of the coping mechanisms often overlooked, because it seems to be something one would naturally do. With family, personal issues, and job stress, sometimes the thought of self-care is hardly viewed as helpful. These men all express how it is extremely important as an African American male, because they understand that a person is no good to anyone unless one can take care of oneself, keep a clear mind, and always manage the stress in a positive way. One participant talked about the importance of self-care. He stated:

You know, just being able to go home and have a good cooked meal my aunts, my mom or my cousins have put together is important to me. You know, I do that to help me cope to get through. I know this experience will come back around in another probably six months. I'm always looking forward to the next reunion or looking forward to the next event to bring around family. Family really helps me get myself together and church does, too. I would say meditation, prayer you know, trying my best to make sure those things which have helped center me and my journey that I continue to use those.
(Frederick)

Having the self-care and the work-life balance is needed to be successful. Having the ability to take care of oneself and be able to do things not focused on work, so that way a person can bring the best version of themselves to the job is a coping mechanics strategy.

Self-confidence

Having self-confidence is a highly important coping mechanism. Each of the participants have all talked how negativity is going to come at some point, but how does one handle it? By

being confident in oneself and one's abilities is a mechanism; that is a tool for success. One participant stated it in this way:

You know, you're not going to eat the elephant overnight. This is going to be a day-to-day and you've got to keep chopping at this thing before it falls. And my encouragement is that, you know, we manage, and we self-govern. You know, you don't allow your anger and your feelings of being either mistreated, misunderstood, or unappreciated. You know, you don't let that get to you – because you have to always kind of have sort of a game plan. What am I here for? What am I trying to achieve? Because sometimes, the college may just be not necessarily a career move; it may be a pass-through. You don't know if you're going to stay or go. But you recognize that there's some promising things that you think that you can benefit from and you get into those things. (*Oliver*)

Having self-confidence and understanding of one's goals is vital to helping African American males be successful. The participants talked about how others will doubt a person's abilities, credentials, and a host of other things. The men talked about this as a coping mechanism in the sense of when a person walks into the room, it is important to check every negative box. Look and do everything opposite of what others may have preconceived. Having self-confidence is what these men talked about carrying around on a daily basis.

The items above are listed as coping mechanism these men have used to help them become successful in gaining and holding senior leadership positions. These tools help to understand how to interact in the dominant cultures these men work and participate in daily. These strategies help create ways to vent and relieve stress African American males will face on their respective leadership position journeys.

Research Question 5

What perceived barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in senior leadership positions?

When asked about the perceived barriers, some of the emerging themes from the interviews were intrinsic barriers, stereotypes, not able to lead, pressure to succeed, underrepresentation. These themes continuously arose in the interviews from participants. Each of these helps to provide some suggestions for future African American males to look at when developing skills and work experience.

Intrinsic Barriers

Having the motivation and confidence to think one can do something is vital for any leader. One particular participant talked about how African American males have to internally overcome issues. For some people, being or feeling like one has no outlet except for themselves can create a barrier in their mind and create doubt in the one's ability to do the job. One participant stated the following:

I think some of the intrinsic barriers we may have may be because we don't have the ability to see ourselves in positions of authority. Maybe we just don't strive for it ourselves or don't really have the faith that we have what it takes. The truth is, though, we have the potential, even though it may not be distributed widely or shown widely. The potential is there, and the opportunities are there; we just have to be able to be willing to take advantage of it and make the sacrifices that are necessary to get there. (*Kyle*)

Dealing with external barriers is something all the participants talked about in a variety of ways. Additionally, dealing with those same issues internally can create a lot of negative issues. By sharing this as a perceived barrier, it becomes something African American males can begin to work on developing a plan of action to combat this perceived barrier.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes have a deep-seated longevity with African American males, especially things such as attack on character, competence, co-workers, and Affirmative Action. This perceived barrier is something the participants talked about in great detail. All the participants shared in

some way, shape, or form, how they had all battled the stereotype of how others perceived of them. A few of the participants shared the following on stereotypes:

I can complain about stereotypes all day long, but if I look at myself and find that I'm actually doing it, then what have I done? And so being able to identify the things I just mentioned and then say because that's what they have in mind we know it's far from the truth for many of us, but it's still the stereotype. That's the perception some people don't and in our community especially I say, "our community especially," because many people in our community, I think one of the major issues in Michigan is that many people many white people in this community and this region, they just haven't spent much time with black people. They haven't been around us. And so, if you haven't been around them and all you know is what you see on TV, read in a magazine, or see on the Internet, that's all you know. You gained your own little stereotype or perception. You know, you may have known two of us during your elementary years maybe and so you become an adult and you're on a college campus and while I don't excuse it, I kind of understand why you probably look the other way when one of us walk by you, because you don't know how to receive us. *(Thurgood)*

Another participant talked about stereotypes in this way:

I think the other barriers could be again, you've got a predominantly, you know, middle class, Caucasian woman kind of environment. I think that you're going to have some cultural things that are going to probably prevent, because again, we've heard about the negative stories. You know, for me it is disappointing to know that there's this stigma out there that African American men want to rape, molest, pummel or pillage Caucasian women. I mean, you think back to the old movies of the 1950s and 1960s where they would show these images of African American men targeting Caucasian women because we just had this insatiable lust that couldn't be quelled, and we had to have this particular woman and what have you. I think some of that still plays around in the minds and in the consciousness of many people, because it's not that long ago that those things were reality on the television. Certainly, things like that were being taught in peoples' homes. *(Oliver)*

Combating the thoughts and stereotypes that are preconceived takes time and energy. As a perceived barrier, stereotypes can lead to negative feelings because internally how can an African American male deal with something that someone thinks? Dealing with stereotypes is a barrier to leadership, but the participants talked about how knowing this going in can help an individual be better prepared.

Not Able to Lead

This perceived barrier focuses on the thoughts of others and how they feel, think and sometimes talk to others about African American males not being able to lead. Some people will not have confidence in a person's abilities to lead because of limited interactions with African American males. The participants discussed this as a perceived barrier because they have all experienced this in a negative way. One participant surmises:

Yeah, perceived barriers. I think there is this assumption that maybe I'm not as qualified, but all things being equal, you want to be able to sell the fact that you are a diverse candidate. A lot of times, we're not able to sell that and sometimes I remember when I was hired here. A friend asked me, "Do you think they hired you because you're black?" What an insult. And when I mentioned that to another friend of mine, that friend said, "What the heck? Why would they hire you because you're black at the very highest level? If they wanted to hire somebody just because they're black, they would hire the person at a lower level. It doesn't make any sense for them to hire a black person and not you." (*John*)

Another participant elaborates:

There are a lot of negative perceptions, and not just of African American males, but African American males in general, but then especially African American males. You're going to go into some jobs where people don't expect you to be able to deliver a concrete speech, that you're not going to speak well, and that you're not going to be prepared, which is one of the great shortcomings I think of all people, regardless of color. (*Kyle*)

Limited interaction and thoughts of not being able to lead is a perceived barrier for African American males. Many male participants talked about being called to lead initiatives dealing with African American faculty staff and students; however, when it came to larger projects, the thoughts of being able to handle these projects tied in directly to the discussion on perceived barriers. African American males deal with this because of the perceived assumptions about not being able to lead. This is something future leaders must figure out how to address.

Pressure to Succeed

The pressure to succeed in the leadership role poses a harsh reality for African American males. The participants talked about this in a matter that specified it was a normal occurrence. The pressure to succeed seems to have come from an assumption that African American men because they are smaller in number in these positions have to be successful in order for subsequent African American men to be given similar opportunities. Two of the participants talked about this during the interviews:

If I fail, it just doesn't affect a man going for a higher-level position. I fail for the whole African American male population. That's just the reality, sometimes. I don't care what people say. At the end of the day, that's how you're judged. Black people are not like their other racial counterparts who may have just had a bad experience or a job. They're going to say, "All of you." Our folks do I mean; our counterparts do that. But if it's a white guy, as you know, it's just him; he's bad. They don't say, "All white people," but all blacks are put in the category of bad. (*Martin*)

Another participant shares his experience on corporate pressure:

When you walk into a room, you're not only representing yourself. You're representing your race. Let's face it. If you're the only one, how you behave is representing your race, so we have to take on that mantle. That's a different kind of pressure I don't think our white counterparts have to overcome because they are the majority in these spaces. (*Barack*)

The pressure to succeed seems to come because the men feel it as a weight to carry for other African American males in senior leadership. Thoughts of their failures could limit the opportunities of others like them, so a heightened sense to perform at the highest level is a pressure many African American males have to face. This barrier is one these men take on themselves because they are fighting this along with the other perceived barriers in this section.

Underrepresentation

The final perceived barrier is underrepresentation. The participants during the interviews expressed feelings of increased visibility, pressure, and attention. The feeling of not only representing themselves but also the entire African American race at times can be overwhelming. There is a shared feeling that there are already too few African American males in these positions, so finding advocates and role models to help is a difficult task. One of the participants talked about it in this way:

In terms of African American males, their underrepresentation, I definitely feel that and that's what actually all of this is addressing. I definitely feel that we are like unicorns in this space, so not having a pipeline and so if you don't build the pipeline then you're not going to have the representation, and so we as a culture have to be comfortable in saying, "Let's take this individual and bring him or her in the pipeline."

Whether it's African American males or females, whatever, it takes one person to lift up another person, someone that's strong. That's as powerful as it gets. And if you're not willing to participate in that, then there will not be any one you know, it's like a succession. We all talk about succession plan. I had to be part of a succession plan and I had to be able to groom someone else who looks like me and maybe has off-the-wall thinking like me, but I had to groom this individual to come into more status quo 'this is what leadership is like and this is how leaders think.' That's a real challenge. (*Carl*)

Another participant shares in regard to underrepresentation:

I think some of the other existing perceptions that can contribute to the underrepresentation is that I don't know if we're sought by you know, even though I know we have these diversity initiatives to bring in more African American male teachers, African American male representatives in different departments, it's not uncommon to hear, "Well, you know what? We could put a few feelers out on LinkedIn, or we put a little feeler out on this particular job site. Nobody applied, so therefore, nobody is looking for these roles. African American men and/or women aren't looking for these roles," And that's not necessarily true. I just don't think that the recruiting efforts have always been there.

So, for example, did we ever go to, you know, historically black colleges to find out *hey, what are they producing in some of the educational programs?* Some of their Ph.D. programs? Some of their master's degree programs? I don't know if we go and recruit in those areas. And so, if you're in an area like Michigan, well, we feel like we've got enough institutions right here; we can find them, and that lack of recruiting effort shows

in some of the institutions here in Michigan and around the country, in my opinion.
(Frederick)

This barrier is one that can be argued as perceived as all of the participants talked about a lack of African American males in senior leadership positions. The small sample of men talked about how the perception of being underrepresented is a barrier because the individual might not want to be the only African American in the department or on the leadership team. I think as a perceived barrier going into a situation underrepresented may cause African American males to approach institutions and opportunities differently.

The items above are listed as perceived barriers these men feel African American senior leaders may potentially face. These barriers are factors and ideologies that these men have faced and feel others will face trying to obtain senior leadership positions. These encounters of internal and external factors require a particular set of strengths and skills to overcome these perceived barriers.

Research Question 6

What challenges do you feel are unique to African American males attempting to secure a senior-level leadership position?

When asked about the perceived barriers, some of the emerging themes that came from the interviews were being authentic, perceptions, self-doubt, making others comfortable, and lack of opportunities. These themes continuously arose in the interviews from participants. Each of these helps to provide some suggestions about particular challenges that are unique to current and future African American males looking to secure senior-level leadership positions.

Being Your Authentic Self

When working with any job, it is important to make sure someone is being their authentic self. Feeling like someone can be themselves and not be judged by what they may say, think, or have opinions about is crucial to job performance. One of the challenges unique to African American males was the fact many do not feel comfortable being their authentic self. Some make failed attempts at being different versions of themselves to fit the spaces they are in such as a work personality, a home personality, and having to separate those things because of how people may view them. One participant talked about it in this way:

I think you have to know when to be your authentic self and when to be your political self. One thing about being in higher education is there is a certain academic freedom to express yourself, to express your beliefs, to express your political views, and to do it in such a way where it doesn't create hostility, or it generates unhealthy discussion. So, I think that there are some challenges where if you come from sort of an activist environment and you carry certain strong convictions, you've got to know that there's a time and place for those things, and maybe you don't bring those things up at a staff meeting. Maybe you don't bring that up at a trustees meeting. You don't bring that up in mixed company, if you will. (*Marcus*)

Understanding when to bring the authentic you versus the work/political you poses a challenge for African American males. When someone is not the majority and perhaps the only person who is a group's contact for African Americans, that individual has to know how to navigate those situations delicately, because you could be potentially speaking for a group of people and creating a perception which could be taken positively or negatively. Knowing when and where to bring the *authentic you* is a skill that these men talked about in regard to this challenge.

Perceptions

Perceptions of African American males have such a wide vast range of thoughts and opinions. This challenge is something participants talked about during the interviews in the sense

of working in an area where they are the minority and have no idea what prior experiences, situations and encounters others have had with African American males. Also, realizing for some in the area of higher education, it could potentially be the first real authentic interaction some may have with an African American, and this can lead to challenges, people have no idea what preconceived thoughts co-workers may have. A few of the participants talked about perceptions in this way. One participant stated:

Sometimes, you've got to be the voice for the voiceless, because I also look at different institutions and the African American male population at that school and who is the voice amongst the student body. If there isn't one, then you have to be the voice, or you have to find the voice, and I feel like I'm always trying to identify like campus leaders who could be that voice here at my campus. So yeah, I think you'd be actively seeking those opportunities because you feel like hey, if you don't, then that voice will die out or no one will be able to hear the perspective of that particular population. *(Martin)*

Another participant gave the following insight:

I think we have that same challenge because before we even get to the table, people already have an idea what's going on. It doesn't help when people and you see this quite often. Just as when if a black man does something, you know, I'm sure you're probably the same way, Mike. Sometimes you see something on TV and you're going, "Please Lord, I hope he isn't black."

"I hope he wasn't black," because you know what that does for the perception as a whole, and you know you just don't want to give anyone ammunition to speak more against what they really don't know about. And so, I think one of those challenges exists in us making sure we show people how to see me as a person first. Learn the person before you decide what the color is all about, because you'll find out both are very different than what you think. I think that's a big challenge for us right now, making sure we show people just because this may be what you think you know, that was a person that did that; that wasn't a color or anything like that. We are people just like you are. *(John)*

Another participant stated:

Yeah. I think certainly some of what I just mentioned, people painting us with this broad brushstroke, you know, as if we are all like so we are monolithic, as if all African Americans are the same. All African American males are the same; this is the way they behave. This is the way they act. This is well, you bring one of them folks in here and he's going to do this. He's going to know that you're unique, and so we need to try to ensure that we are able to sell ourselves, market ourselves when we apply for these

positions. That's not just African Americans but the best people or the best you want the person that's the best person for the job. (*Malcom*)

Participants shared having to deal with negative and limiting perceptions of what African American males represent as professionals is a true challenge. Some of the men shared examples of feeling obligated to support campus initiatives to be viewed as a professional capable contributing to the college. Perceptions can shape the workplace culture one enters, which can be viewed as a challenge when coming into a position.

Self-doubt

Another challenge mentioned was self-doubt. Among the challenges and obstacles, this surprisingly was a common theme among participants. Self-doubt from the participants' perspectives was associated with feelings of isolation and just overall thinking one is unqualified to do the job. One participant gave the following description of self-doubt:

One challenge is how you're perceived. I can say that at an institution, and I'm not naming any institutions. But an institution I worked at, just because I was at an institution that was predominantly Caucasian, and I became the leader there. I was perceived it was the perceptions of black males received a dream of coming in the door. And so it took me maybe a year and a half to two years to kind of quell that energy of, wait a minute. I'm just like everybody else. I put my boots on, my pants on, and whatever else the same way everybody else does. And I have ideas that some are good, some are bad. I mean, I'm just like everybody else. So, that's the real challenge is having you understand that. I'm just like everybody else. And there are preconceived notions as to who you are, then you (a) have to spend your energy trying to help everyone see it another way, or (b) you can walk away. (*Kyle*)

Self-doubt is a challenge where it seems a little voice speaks out for a quick second and tries to infiltrate one's thoughts about their abilities. The participants talked about how some situations a person will face will create this feeling but not to dwell in those moments of self-doubt. The men talked about this how it can come from internal and external factors, so

understanding the possibility of facing this moment is a challenge for which African American males will need to prepare.

Making Others Comfortable

Making others comfortable is a challenge for African American males that goes along with the perceptions challenge. The challenge of making others feel comfortable is a challenge because if people do not feel comfortable or feel like they can relate to or understand someone, they are probably not going to work for that person. Having credentials and other people validating one's abilities and effectiveness as a leader is a challenge. Hence, participants expressed how this was a real challenge for African American males. One of the participants talked about making others comfortable in this way:

I think we've kind of been talking around that stuff, but it may be because the colors you can't you can't change that, and so there's some people that don't like African Americans. I don't care how good they are. They don't like them, and they don't support them, and they won't go out of their way to help support. I think that's a unique challenge because especially when you have a predominately white organization you're working in. So that's unique, because they don't have to invite you to stuff outside of work. For instance, there is a football game on Saturday at their house and everybody from work is there but you. Do you know what I'm saying? Then on Monday, they're talking about it. "They were over at Gary's house, and we were this and that. Our wives were together," so to me that's it's so part of making people feel comfortable. Letting the people see you outside of work and see that you are human like them. These are challenges because it's still part of the workplace not at work, but it's still part of the culture, the way that we do things around here, and so you get excluded and so you're still in isolation, because people don't feel comfortable with you around. (*Thurgood*)

Making others feel comfortable is a challenge in the sense of coming into a culture or trying to be a part of a culture. This challenge is a reality and some people will never be able to master how to make others feel comfortable. The participant talked about how doing things outside of work is one method to help. He discussed how it is a challenge because the thought of

working for African American males is a new concept for some of the people individuals may encounter.

Lack of Opportunities

Lack of opportunities was discussed as a challenge. This was unique to higher education because there is often no direct advancement track for senior leadership positions. They talked about timing, willingness to move, and the issue of the 'good ole boys' club.' Also, the mix of demographics, cohorts of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z all working in the higher education space complicates things. The Baby Boomers have been working for years and are nearing retirement, then there are the Generation X professionals who are just settling into leadership positions. Millennials and Generation Z professionals do not see the opportunities coming as quickly as they would like. One of the participants stated the following:

I do think that if you're looking to secure positions, the relationship component has got to be there. Your knowledge, your background, your experiences, and your ability to do certain things have to be there. And I think sometimes there's a certain level of patience you've got to exercise. If you truly are someone that wants to be in the world of higher education, post-secondary, or especially at a community college, you've got to weather some of those storms, because some doors aren't going to open fast. You know, there are running jokes that the next time you may get an opportunity is because someone had to die for you to get it.

And some of that's true, you know. I mean, some of the men and women that work at our institution, they've been there a long time, and sometimes you do have to wait. I think there are also times where you may have to create your role, create something you think is needed in order to insert yourself into a possibility, and that's where things like writing grants and being part of certain initiatives to where the capacity-building kind of things are happening. Hey, insert yourself into those things, so you can be a part of some future growth.

Because it may start off as something that's strategic, but after a while if it's done in such a way where the college realizes, "Hey, I can't do without it," now it's operational. You know, it's now a part of the day-to-day and you've got to find ways to keep it, sustain it,

grow it, and keep it fresh and vibrant. If you think your gifts, talents, abilities, job knowledge, previous work experiences will be suited somewhere else, hey, thank that institution and the folks that gave you the opportunity for coming onboard and then go elsewhere. Because you are faced with the decision of waiting for someone to retire or die or going elsewhere for the position you want. (*Carl*)

Lack of opportunity is a challenge for African American males. The phrase that was often used during the interviews was, “It is not your time yet.” This creates that feeling of, “There is no opportunity here for me because someone may feel I have not been at the institution long enough to earn the opportunity to lead.”

The challenges the participants talked about were ones they felt that were common for African American men. When interviewing them it almost felt as if someone did not face any of these challenges then that person should consider themselves lucky. In contrast was a warning that African American men may not deal with it early, but the participants talked about a high probability of encountering one of these challenges.

Research Question 7

What advice would you offer to aspiring African American males that are interested in obtaining senior level leadership positions?

When asked about the advice they would offer to aspiring African American males, some of the emerging themes that came from the interviews were: build and leveraging relationships, be a good listener, be able to take criticism, understand the big picture, and take advantage of opportunities. These themes were very consistent with the responses about the opportunities that the participants had along their careers. Each of these helps to provide some career advice that is helpful to African American men.

Build and Leveraging Relationships

When I asked about advice the participants talked about the ability to build and leverage relationships in order to be successful. The men talked about how is imperative to build relationships with key people to be able to share important information and general aspects about a position or institution that one will need to know. Also, they talked about how having the right relationships can help when it is time for a promotion, or a new opportunity arises. Having a strong relationship and someone that can vouch for one's character and work ethic will benefit because it adds a voice in a space where one is potentially trying to get to. One of the participants talked about it in this way:

Leverage what you have in terms of some of the people that you know who are in these leadership positions men of color who are in these and women of color in these leadership positions. Build and leverage those relationships. Leverage them in ways to learn more and to meet more people that way, because what happens is that the more people you meet, the wider the network and the more they know your name. That network knows who you are and what you can do.

Continuing to leverage those things and, you know, leveraging the fact that there are – if it's in higher ed., there are institutions that are starving for more diverse leadership and stepping in those phases and showing those institutions what – I used to say there are times when a search that you know in a search that they are wanting to have a diverse candidate pool. So, I used to say this fairly often and I still think it. If I can get into that pool because of my color, that's what gets me into the pool. (*Frederick*)

Participants overwhelmingly shared that building and leveraging relationships had great influence on perceptions of success, promotion, and satisfaction in the workplace. Understanding that African Americans will face some of challenges listed earlier to be able to build relationships and leverage they sometimes will be able to help others navigate and get past those challenges.

Be a Good Listener

Participants talked about the ability not only to listen to criticism well but also have an ear to what is going on around them. What changes are coming? What opportunities are coming that a person might be interested in? Being engaged is key in demonstrating ability to lead is what the participants emphasized. One participant referred to listening in the following way:

That speaks to another major issue is listening. I did have one person tell me at one time I was horrible listener and I took it to heart. From that point on, I worked on listening and listening and listening, which is the same as when you read and interpret something. But being able to listen – and this person meant well. I mean, he meant well, and they were giving me a critique that was constructive in nature, but it was up to me being able to say, “Okay, I’m going to take this critique. I’m going to digest it. I’m going to wrap myself around it and then maybe it’ll take some time when I might come away and say I’m a better listener.” (*Marcus*)

Being able to listen is a necessary skill that current leaders and future leaders must have. Because listening can be something like the participant talked about, it was a critique he needed to fix in order to successfully move up. In other instances, participants talked about listening in the way of being aware of one’s surroundings and what is going on.

Be Able to Take Criticism

Being able to take criticism was a common thing that this interviewer did not expect. The conversation around this advice was to listen in a variety of ways. Having an awareness of what is going on around oneself, what people are saying? Also, participants talked about sharing information and advice and making sure when someone is being negative and when someone is trying to share something with a person will help them be better. It could potentially help, so listening and assessing what is being said will help African American men be successful. One participant talked about taking criticism in this way:

And probably the other thing is spoken and unspoken criticism, and what I mean by that is you’re in predominantly white institutions and moving to positions where people don’t

feel that you should be there you're not qualified enough and all that stuff, so you've got to deal with that stuff and you can counter it just by, you know, like making sure you've got your skill sets and your credentials in place. But it can be challenging when you have three or four colleagues in key positions that reject you and so you've got to deal with that you've got to counter it by being confident and committed to what you're doing and just being smart, and those are challenging in a sense, so but I always read. I always try to be ahead of the game. And so that's a reality for African Americans in the workplace African American males in particular. (*Barack*)

Being able to take criticism is the piece of advice that seemed highly important to the participants. One of the things they talked about was being able to differentiate between negative and positive criticism. Being able to listen and take criticism well is something that African American males must deal with and be able to handle it in order to grow as professionals.

Understand the Big Picture

A couple of participants discussed understanding the big picture and talking about one's big picture with this position. Is this a short-term opportunity to prepare for the next opportunity? Is this opportunity one that you are going to be at for a period of time due to outside factors? This included being able to see if you are a part of plans to be developed or groomed for leadership, or if you are simply hired to do the job the institution hired you for. Two of the participants talked about it in this way:

You don't want to go into a place where all of a sudden somebody comes calling, because we're being solicited every day. I'm sitting here, and I get solicitations by mail, by email, by phone. I get all kinds of solicitations all the time to go somewhere else. All the time. And so you just get up and say, "Well, okay. I've been here for five years. Time for me to leave." Well, how comfortable are you where you are? Is it the right place for you? And when the Lord decides I'm going to leave, it's going to happen. (*Oliver*)

Another participant talked about it in this way:

Spend some time knowing that you're going to have to spend some time in the trenches working, that it may be 15, 20 years that you have to do the work. I think sometimes people are looking for instant gratification or instant, "After I get that degree," and I may have only worked five years in the field and thinking you're going to be a president. It

doesn't come along that way. I would say the ranks of higher education are still slow and that you've got to put the time in, and you've got to do the necessary work because once you get to that level, you're going to still have to be accountable for understanding some things and having the content knowledge people are looking for you for a broad spectrum of knowledge and expertise. And not necessarily that you have to know every single nuance, but you certainly have to bring something to the game and be able to help direct people to other resources that may be available, so that would be one of my advice. (Jesse)

Understanding one's big picture as advice was something that the participants talked about in order to help strategize regarding what someone wants to do long run. The conversations focused on strategic moves that African American men must make throughout the entire job process.

Take Advantage of Your Opportunities

This piece of advice was very consistent among the participants. Being able to position oneself to obtain opportunities outside of one's direct area is a key to success. Being able to diversify and show oneself as being able to do more than one thing helps marketability to those in leadership. All of the participants talked about opportunities they had along their respective leadership journeys. The big piece of advice was when a person gets the opportunity take advantage and show their skills and talents, that individual should do more than what the institution initially hired them to do. Two of the participants talked about this piece of advice in this way:

So, you know, speaking of which, you wanted to talk about strategies. The same HR the Vice Chancellor of HR that reached out to me about being on the search committee he called me two years ago now and asked me if I wanted to be a Title IX investigator. I think we may have talked about it. I said yes. He kind of bribed me with the conferences in Orlando every year where we get trained, so he kind of bribed me with that. So, I'm like, "All right, you got me." But anyway, there's four levels of training, so now I've been through three, so that was one of the benefits that I got in my third level sooner than I thought I was going to get it. And at that point, you could start training to be a Title IX coordinator, which is his position. (John)

Another participant stated the following:

Prepare yourself to the nth degree. Get a mentor. Get some fellowships. If you can get into a fellowship, do it. Get experience in a variety of areas. If you can, publish some articles in different areas, even if it's not in a refereed journal. Get it in some publication somewhere so you're viewed as an expert of some sort. You want to, as I said you know, everywhere you go, you want to make sure you've made an impact before you leave so take advantage of the committees, volunteer projects, anything that will get you exposure with senior leaders you should heavily consider doing. (*Jesse*)

When looking at this piece of advice, it seems like when one takes and does well when an opportunity is presented, more opportunities to serve or lead begin to manifest. As leaders, the participants talked about the importance of gaining diverse experience.

Research Question 8

What cultural qualities do you feel African American males bring to senior-level leadership position?

Cultural qualities were a part of this study to see what the participants felt outside of training and education what qualities do African American males have that others do not. Some of the themes that came from this particular question were, resourceful, different perspective, ability to deal with different people, boldness, and managing emotions. These themes help to provide insight on some of the cultural qualities that these men feel African American men bring to the leadership table.

Resourcefulness

Being resourceful is essential to taking any position on. African American males need to be resourceful not only in a professional way, but also in a personal way as well. Taking a role sometimes is based upon if the role has the resources/support to be successful. At times, not knowing about the resources available or having the ability to be resourceful to get things done

can work against you as an African American male senior leader. One of the participants talked about being resourceful in this way:

So, they're very, very mission-driven, they're very, very resilient, they're extremely intelligent, but they're extremely resourceful. I've seen where many African American men not only knew how to go find the big corporate dollars, hell, they found the stage to the small business donors to help do certain things that supported community college initiatives. They have relationships across the spectrum. They work with the women, they work with other men, and they are a part of different fraternities, sororities, and/or social groups. They use their networks. You know, they realize they have to have a multiplicity of tools to work with. You can't just grab a set of pliers and a hammer. I might need a saw, a chisel, or a few screwdrivers. I may have to go buy a ratchet set. But whatever it is, there's a certain level of resourcefulness where you want to see a certain outcome come to reality, and for me, I love that. (*Marcus*)

Being resourceful is advice that was shared by a few of the participants. Being able to go and do other things and using one's resources helps African American males do more than what is required of the job. This also speaks to the theme of not allowing oneself to be outworked, because if a person is resourceful, one will be able to not only work smarter not harder, but will be able to assist in things the institution may not expect them to, thus shining a light on their skills and resources as an asset to the institution.

Different Perspectives

Another piece of advice mentioned by participants from the perspective of being a minority and bringing different experiences to the equation was having the ability to adjust to environment, possessing cultural agility, and being comfortable in spaces to where one can adapt to co-workers. Functioning and having the ability to bring a different perspective is something that assists African American senior leaders in attaining success.

Some of the participants elaborate:

I think they bring a whole nuance of their own experience they have as an African American in the communities they grew up in. And they certainly can share cultural experiences they've had with their team and with their institution. It could be how we

sometimes make a connection with people in a different way, and that means we may connect personally about something going on with us and not just something we may have intellectually. *(Thurgood)*

Another participant asserts:

I think, particularly at the community college, it's understanding the plight of the underdog. Like understanding what it means to come into an environment where people have great expectations and you're being forced to rise to that level of expectation just by perhaps a less than ideal preparation period. *(Carl)*

Different perspectives will help to provide different ways to approach problems, staff, students, and almost anything one would encounter on the job. This is a piece of an advice because when talking about diversity, inclusive excellence, and the changing landscape of higher education, a different perspective is needed to help institutions be successful.

Ability to Deal with Different People

The ability to deal with different people was another common thing among participants talked about at some point during the interviews. It must be understood that a person may come into an area where not many people look like them; the ability to quickly adjust to unfamiliar surroundings is crucial to being successful from the cultural perspective. Dealing with people is something all successful professionals must face. African American males have to be able to deal with people in a way that goes against the stereotypes and premeditated thoughts people may have about them. One participant's perspective was as follows:

I think to that quality, because you've got a cultural experience that's different, your response is going to be different. Your answers are going to be different, and that's okay to be different, and that's what diversity is about: how are we different? I mean, we know that, so our thoughts are different. Dealing with different people is a skill because you are coming into a situation, meeting, or group, and you are the outsider. You are the one that is different. *(Malcom)*

Dealing with different people is something these men talked about as a cultural quality to deal with the problems and challenges African American males will face along their leadership journey. Within a group of people, there is always someone who can take on the role of advocate or adversary. Learning how to deal with people is an art in itself. Perfecting people skills may seem to be a miniscule piece of advice; however, it is a highly important skill. It was definitely a factor the participants in this study elaborated on.

Boldness

Having a sense of boldness stood out as another key competency African American males must possess in order to be successful. Being bold in areas for which one stands for personally and professionally is something that can either help or hurt African American males. In order to get to these positions, one has to have a high level of boldness to unapologetically be who they are in their quest for leadership. One participant surmises:

I think there is a certain amount of boldness we all typically get. It doesn't mean that no other president has it. I just think more African American men bring a boldness to the table, a boldness in terms of in how we go about our work. Some of the things we can control are the messages and perspectives we can share, there are some platforms I can speak freely on, and I would say if I was someone else, I probably couldn't speak as freely.

And so that boldness, really leveraging that boldness not in a foolish way, because if you do it foolishly, you'll lose your job. But a boldness that is leveraged through saying as an African American man, I know disparities that happen in our community, so let me speak to disparities. I can speak to that because of my background, because of what I came from. And so, leveraging the opportunities to speak boldly, I think we have that opportunity. *(John)*

The cultural quality of having boldness is one much needed by African American males to be successful. Being able to be yourself, bringing your talents, treasure, and energy to a position without fear is something necessary for anyone going into leadership. African American

males must have a high level of boldness to go into places and spaces where they sometimes know they are not welcomed. Developing that quality at an early age will help to navigate the field of higher education.

Manage Your Emotions

The cultural quality of managing one's emotions is something the participants talked about during interviews. This theme came about because of the struggles they faced and how mismanaging emotions can hurt one's career. The participants discussed that with the obstacles and challenges and the things people will face, managing emotions is a quality that they have had to use in order to be successful. One of the participants reflects on the topic:

But we have a certain pride and we try to stand up even when we want to sit down, even when we want to lay down. There's just a certain pride that I think African American men have had to learn to manage their emotions from an early age due to, coming from a history of being told you were nothing but chattel property, being mistreated, being killed, murdered, abused – you know, this race construct, it's done a job on everybody, even those that helped create it. Because the idea of walking around saying that "I'm supreme because my hue is different than yours," is insanity.

For me, personally, I think there's many of us African American men who recognize that even with all the things happening and even with all of the negative history still on the fabric of America's soil, there's still a certain level of pride, decency, and humility that we exercise and manage our emotions. We just stay the course.

But I've talked to many African American men who were serving in senior-level positions and early in my career before coming into higher education, I was told, "If I were you, I would lose those expectations, because they may not come." But it doesn't excuse you from doing everything necessary to become successful. So, if they don't treat you fair, that's okay. If they're not going to support you, that's okay. If you're not going to get recognition, it's okay. If you're not going to be invited to certain events and certain activities or being called upon to do certain things, it's okay. (*Martin*)

Managing emotions is a cultural quality that is needed for African American males to be successful. From this participants' perspective looking at the history African American males have faced, and enduring criticism and stereotypes, this something one has to manage. It can be

emotionally draining, but going into leadership positions with these qualities will help during the difficult times that these men have faced.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the themes of the research questions presented to the study's participants. Some of the challenges and obstacles were mentioned in previous research and some of them were validated. Looking at the coping mechanisms, cultural advice, and opportunities discussed must take place in order to combat the negative themes that were also mentioned. As leaders at their respective institutions, all the participants freely shared about their lived experiences through their leadership journeys.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four provided the reader with an in-depth analysis of the eleven interviews that were conducted. The previous chapter was also used to answer the eight research questions that served as the foundation for this research study. Moving forward, Chapter Five is focused on final reflections, recommendations, and conclusions based on the researcher's perspective. I must caution the reader that these reflections, recommendations, and conclusions may be biased due to my own background. All eleven African American male senior administrators had very different life experiences to the researcher, and this may have had a significant impact on how things were interpreted in this chapter. In order to ensure the validity of the study, various techniques mentioned in Chapter Three were utilized.

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of African American male senior administrators in higher education working within community colleges in the state of Michigan. Using what was learned from the eleven administrators who informed this study, this chapter discusses how the findings connect to the conceptual frameworks and previous research. During the data analysis process, 38 themes emerged from the eight sub questions posed during interviews that were used to answer the main research question for this study:

- What are the influences that enable or serve as barriers to the success of African American male senior administrators?

To shape this study, I used the theory of representative bureaucracy (Flowers, 2003), Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital, and Richardson's (2002) theory of resiliency. As the participants shared their lived experiences, they discussed being represented at the senior administrator level by providing details of what African Americans bring to these positions. Secondly, they shared information about being resilient as the experiences they have faced and overcome to ascend to senior leadership. Finally, the theory of social capital provides helpful insight on how to position oneself to be successful in leadership. In this chapter, I discuss the themes that came from the interviews and how those answer the main research question posed in this study.

DISCUSSION

The 38 themes that came from the interviews talk about influences that serve as barriers or enablers to the success of African American male senior administrators. These themes came from the experiences of the African American males in this study. The barriers and enablers of success of African American males provides valuable data that may inform current and future African American males looking to ascend to a senior administrator position. This study determined factors that impact the ability to lead at the highest level in higher education the study found 14 barriers and 14 enablers of success that are discussed in this section.

Barriers

The following list of barriers are themes that emerged from the interviews:

- *Acceptance and Belonging*
- *Educational Credentials*
- *Willingness to Move for Opportunity*
- *Understanding of Culture and Expectations*
- *Imposter Syndrome*
- *Underrepresentation*

- *Intrinsic Barriers*
- *Stereotypes*
- *Not able to lead*
- *Pressure to Succeed*
- *Being your authentic self*
- *Perceptions*
- *Making Others Comfortable*
- *Lack of Opportunities*

These 14 themes tie into the previous research highlighting barriers faced by African American males in higher education. The participants more specifically talked about these barriers that they have faced during their careers. These themes aligned with literature from Chapter Two about the barriers to success. Bowen (1996) notes “there is no easy pathway for minorities seeking presidency positions due to numerous barriers” (p.13). Specifically tied to the men in this study, Lovell et al. (2012) talks about barriers in the community college setting. Lovell et al. state that two major factors are structural and attitudinal. From their research, the following list of barriers was identified:

- The low numbers of minority students in doctoral programs
- Lack of readiness among faculty to reorganize around issues of cultural diversity
- An ingrained resistance to change
- Stereotypes held by White faculty members that minority administrators are not psychologically and cogitatively competent to perform high-level administrative tasks. (Lovell et al., 2012, pp. 21-22)

Jackson and O’Callaghan (2009) write about the “policies, practices and dicta influenced by greater social pressures” (p. 41). Also, they stated, “In a society that values the leadership and contributions of a particular majority group, no policies may be in place to assist other minority groups in making inroads to leadership positions” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 41). Which as from the interviews these policies are still in place today as the list of barriers supports this notion.

When examining the themes of educational credentials and underrepresentation those deal with the pipeline issue. Tschechtelin (1999, as cited in Lovell et al., 2002) stated, “A central barrier to minority recruitment in leadership positions is that members of the majority take for granted the privilege of being in power” (p. 20). If African American males are not in power positions, the pipeline to support and build is not present. Because these barriers are a reality in the pursuit of senior leadership positions, it helps to look at how the three theories help African American administrators overcome these barriers. Having the social capital and representation of leadership that were African American males and females helped these men during their professional journeys. During the interviews, these barriers deal primarily with Richardson’s (2002) theory of resiliency, because a majority of the participants talked about having thick skin, and the mentality of not being outworked. Also, while battling internal pressures among many other things. Being resilient is the only way that they have succeeded in their careers. Resilience has been used to understand how individuals overcome adversity and is often applied in research (Richardson, 2002). The researcher considers these barriers as adversity and things that current and future administrators must overcome to be successful.

Enablers of Success

The following list of enablers of success are themes that came out of the interviews:

- *Gaining Trust*
- *Learn how to be Political when Necessary*
- *Presenting at and attending Conferences*
- *Leadership Academies and Fellowships*
- *Diverse Experiences*
- *Do not be outworked*
- *Sponsors and Mentors*
- *Professional Development*
- *Support Networks*
- *Immersion into the Campus Community*

- *Opportunity to Continue Education*
- *Resilience*
- *Self-care*
- *Self-confidence*

These 14 themes tie into the previous research highlighting enablers of success that the participants used in order to overcome the barriers from the previous section. These themes aligned with literature from Chapter Two about the enablers of success to help African American males obtain senior administrator positions. When looking at this list of themes one thing from the literature that stands out was from Caliguri (2012): “Culturally agile professionals succeed in contexts where the successful outcome of their jobs, roles, positions, or tasks depends on dealing with an unfamiliar set or multiple sets of cultural norms” (p. 5). African American males have to be able to succeed not only in the professional role but outside of the role there are factors that relate to these themes that the participants highlighted.

One of the major things all the participants talked about was the piece about sponsoring and helping other African American males or being mentors to those who are wanting to be in positions similar to one they currently occupy. Maxwell (1995) emphasized the importance of leaders developing other potential leaders through mentorship, arguing that there is no success without a successor. Gardner et al. (2014) share the following enablers of success for African American male senior administrators: “mentoring relationships, commitment to diversity, and stages of career development, recruitment strategies, and professional preparation” (p. 245). Those areas of mentorship are vital in helping future leaders avoid barriers and missed opportunities along their leadership journeys.

Lastly with the enablers of success, all of them talked about the diversity of having different experiences and consistently developing one’s skills. One way of doing that is through professional development, as Gardner et al. (2014) state, “Professional preparation is, obviously,

important to African Americans seeking to be successful in higher education administration” (p. 244). Jackson (2004) provides more context about this as he states, “He states institutions should do the following, the advancement is very important in providing growth for, and ultimately retaining, African American administrators. Institutions should support and endorse professional development for their African American administrators” (p. 217).

These enablers of success tie into the other two theories of representative bureaucracy (Flowers, 2003) and Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of social capital. By having representation and social capital, current leaders have the ability to shape and create pipelines and support networks to African American males who are seeking to move to the senior administrator level. Holmes (2004) shares with us why having representation and social capital is important to the success of African American males. He states:

The majority of the current pool of African American administrators may never realize their full potential because they are not perceived as qualified by their white counterparts; even though their educational training and professional experiences are comparable. This finding suggests that governing board officials must become more open to administrators of color in diverse institutional settings when making hiring decisions in order to expand the pool of qualified applicants. (p. 34)

Being able to overcome and use these tools that the participants talk about assists men in seeking these roles. Gardner et al. (2014) share the following enablers of success for African American male senior administrators are “mentoring relationships, commitment to diversity, stages of career development, recruitment strategies, and professional preparation” (p. 245). Gardner et al. and other researchers talk about the enablers of success and those from Gardner et al. and the ones that surfaced during the interviews align as enablers of success for African American Males.

SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCES

The experiences of African American males within this study are similar to other minorities working within community college and non-doctoral grant institutions. The participants in this study provided needed insight on how they have managed to overcome obstacles and challenges to obtain a leadership position. The participants talked about the lived experiences they have faced during their careers while also offering advice to future African American males.

While some of the participants have experienced some challenges, many of them have maintained a positive outlook. The participants found it particularly easy to recall obstacles, challenges and negative experiences they have encountered. The participants in this study display acts of resiliency. The participants also actively advocated for more mentorship and pursuit of leadership positions by African American males.

These stories provide a roadmap for others looking to gain access to some of the most prestigious positions in higher education. Each participant is an accomplished scholar that serves as change agents within their respective institutions. The participants are resilient and very confident in the work in which they are engaged. I felt that, while many of the participants have achieved a high level of success, there was very much discussion about how to overcome the future challenges and opportunities that I would face. All of the men offered insight and suggestions on how to prepare for the journey of leadership that is ahead.

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to African American male senior administrators in higher education working within community colleges in the state of Michigan. As a result of the limited number of African American male executives working within community colleges in Michigan,

it was a challenge to identify participants for this study. The lack of an adequate database on African American males working within higher education presented a unique challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

This section provided recommendations for future research as a result of conducting this study. The previous chapters of this study provided support for the recommendations made in this section. Additionally, this section suggested recommendations for those who create, implement, work, and practice in higher education and student affairs. Recommendations for research include:

1. Research university-wide the career profile of senior-level African American administrators.
2. Each research question posed in the study served as a basis on which to focus future research specifically related to this topic.
3. African American senior administrators consistently wrote about the challenges and obstacles they faced. Most of them had very similar stories and were confident that future leaders will face some of the same struggles. Thus, future research on challenges and obstacles would be interesting to see if those things have remained consistent over time.
4. Opportunities and cultural qualities were areas to overcome challenges and obstacles. Future research on the opportunities and suggestions for overcoming barriers would be interesting to see how those things change.
5. The study should be conducted using different institutional types (i.e., four-year public.)
6. Examine the career profiles of other races and ethnicities of male senior administrators (i.e., Hispanics, Asians, etc.)

CONCLUSION

This researcher has determined that the participants have achieved a high level of success in the field of higher education. This study was to gain a better understanding of the obstacles and opportunities to advancement of African American male senior administrators in higher

education at community colleges in the state of Michigan. The conclusions of the study were supported by the review of literature in Chapter Two. The responses of this study were used in Chapter Four to suggest recommendations for future research and for utilization by higher education student affairs leaders and African American males. The findings of this study brought about themes that were collected from the study to relate to the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter One and in the current chapter.

While the participants had a variety of experiences, shared obstacles of race and opportunities were still a part of their experiences. The participants found it particularly easy to recall obstacles that they faced and assured me that obstacles are still a real issue. The participants in this study confirmed the perspectives of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Two. The need for representative bureaucracy is not only important to student achievement, but to professional achievement as well. The idea of social capital to help and support other African American men who are looking to be in positions similar to the participants of this study. Most importantly, the participants confirmed the theory of resilience and having a motivation that is going to drive you to achieve one's goals. The participants were supportive advocates of other African American men but were very firm in stating that the journey would have some obstacles, but resilience is something that is needed in order to make it into a leadership position.

Those that are looking to lead in senior administrator roles will need to understand the obstacles ahead that were shared in the participant stories. With this study, the opportunities that were stated from the stories is what future African American males may need to leverage and consider in order to overcome the obstacles they may face. Success looks different for each

person but having some ideas of what the participants have done in order to be successful can future leaders avoid obstacles that these men have already faced and overcome.

The participants mentioned the need that because there is so few leaders that look like them the importance and pressure to succeed and excel is at a vastly high level. These men discussed the need of not only being successful for themselves, but also helping other men like me with support and mentorship because the lack of resources in these spaces that African American men have. By supporting each other, these men have talked about the ability to begin creating a pipeline of future leaders and sharing these stories and experiences is way to help create relationships and spaces for dialogue about what senior administration looks like. These participants in this study are beacons of hope who have shown that African American males can be successful in leadership at community colleges in the state of Michigan. Their stories provide a roadmap for others who are looking to gain access to some of the most prestigious positions in higher education.

As America becomes more diverse in the 21st century, it is important that the face of educational leadership reflect the diversity of students that are aggressively recruited. The importance of that diversity in mentoring, being role models, and examples to those who might follow into leadership positions cannot be measured. The participants in this study have demonstrated the importance of sharing lived experiences in order to provide insight on what African American men face and overcome to obtain senior administrator positions. In addition to opportunities that were mentioned, the cultural qualities that African American males bring provides an insight to skills that might contribute to the resilience of African American males. It is time that we continue to research and take a deeper look at African American males in positions of educational leadership.

As the researcher, I identify as an African American male working at a community college in Michigan. Because of this, I had a point of entry to build rapport with the participants in the study. Through my experiences working within higher education, I am on a journey to obtain a position that these men have obtained. I learned a great deal about the important of listening and gaining understanding before rushing to make judgements regarding any situation. My connection to this research is deeply connected to who I am and my current experiences and future experiences as an African American male in the higher educational system in the United States. As an African American male in higher education, I hope to follow in the footsteps of these men to become a role model, mentor, sponsor, and help other African American males obtain leadership positions.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



Interview Questions

1. What are some of the challenges you experienced during your journey to secure a senior level leadership position?
2. What strategies have you developed to deal with these challenges?
3. What are some of the opportunities you experienced during your journey to secure a senior level leadership position?
4. What coping mechanisms and strategies do African American male administrators at mainstream institutions of education utilize to succeed?
5. What perceived barriers contribute to the under-representation of African American Males in senior leadership positions?
6. What challenges do you feel are unique to African American males attempting to secure a senior level leadership position?
7. What advice would you offer to aspiring African American males that are interested in obtaining senior level leadership positions?
8. What cultural qualities do you feel African American Males bring to senior level leadership positions?

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

RESEARCHER INFORMATION

Project Title: The Experiences of African American Male Senior Administrators in Community Colleges in Michigan

Student Researcher: Michael A. Couch II
Email: couchm@ferris.edu Phone: (616)-378-0440

Study Principal Investigator: Sandra Balkema
Email: sandrabalkema@ferris.edu Phone: (231)591-5631

Faculty Advisor: John Cowles
Email: drjohnrcowles@gmail.com Phone: (616)-808-7057

STUDY PURPOSE

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of African American male senior administrators in community colleges in Michigan. The researcher is interested in learning about the obstacles and opportunities that helped these men matriculate to senior administrator positions.

PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study, and you may end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to answer a few questions about your leadership journey. The interview will be recorded and transcribed so that the researcher is able to summarize and discuss the interview accurately.

The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete and will take place a location that is agreed upon. The researcher may contact you following the interview to clarify questions or to request additional information.

POTENTIAL RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks associated with this study because the data collection process takes place in an informal interview in a setting of your choice. Your identity will be protected, as described in the Confidentiality Section below.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

Although this research is not designed to help you personally, others may benefit from your participation because the information you provide may help community colleges and other institutions benefit from a stronger understanding of your experiences. This study may provide additional insight into creating information and pipelines to advancement for African American males.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Signing this form is required for you to take part in the study and gives the researcher your permission to obtain, use, and share information about you for this study.

In order to keep your information safe, the researcher will maintain your confidentiality. Your identity will not be used; instead you will be given a pseudonym for use in all research documents. Throughout the interview process and in all written documents, the researcher will refer to you and your institution using the pseudonym. Participant names, institutional affiliations, and position titles will not be included in any publication or as a part of this

research. And, if you request at the time of the interview, any sensitive information that you provide will not be used in the dissertation or other publications and presentations developed from the interviews.

Use of audio taping:

Your initials here () indicate your permission for the researcher to audio record the interview. Your audio recording will not be used in any written materials or presentations related to this study. Only the written transcription of the interview information will be used. Only the researcher and a hired transcriptionist will have access to the original audio recordings. Audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

All information from this study will be stored on a dedicated flash drive in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home, and the researcher will retain the information for 3 years following the interviews. At this time, the researchers will dispose of the study information, using accepted procedures. The information will not be made available to other researchers at any time.

There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see the information you provided as part of the study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly, including Ferris State University.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The main researcher conducting this study is Michael A. Couch II, a graduate student at Ferris State University. **Please ask any questions you have now, before beginning the interview.** If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone or email at (616) 378-0440 or couchm@ferris.edu, or the faculty advisor, Dr. John Cowles via phone or email at (616)-808-7057 or drjohnrcowles@gmail.com. You may also contact the study's Principal Investigator, Dr Sandra Balkema at balkemas@ferris.edu

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a subject in this study, please contact: Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants, 1010 Campus Drive, FLITE 410D, Big Rapids, MI 49307, (231) 591-2553, IRB@ferris.edu.

SIGNATURES

Research Subject: I understand the information printed on this form. I have discussed this study, its risks, potential benefits and my other choices with the researcher. My questions so far have been answered. I understand that if I have more questions or concerns about the study or my participation as a research subject, I may contact one of the people listed above in the "Contact Information" section. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form at the time I sign it. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my continued participation.

Signature of Subject: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date of Signature: _____

Principal Investigator: I have given this research subject information about this study that I believe is accurate and complete. The subject has indicated that he understands the nature of the study and the risks and benefits of participating.

Printed Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature: _____

APPENDIX C: EMAIL SOLICITATION



Email Solicitation

Good morning,

My name is Michael Couch. I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Ferris State University. I am conducting a study as part of my dissertation research and would value your participation.

I am studying leadership experiences of African American males in community colleges in the state of Michigan. If you decide to participate in my study, I would appreciate talking with you about your leadership journey and some obstacles and opportunities for advancement that you have faced in your career. Follow up phone calls may be needed to confirm interviews and information regarding the meeting.

Our meeting should last about one hour and will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place. Also, personal names/university/job titles will not be included in any publication or as a part of this research.

Thank you for your consideration. I believe that your story will be extremely valuable to developing future community college leaders. Your experiences, with those of other African American male community college leaders, could be a valuable contribution to our field.

I appreciate your considering my request to participate. Attached are the interview questions for your review. If you are willing to participate in my research study, please contact me via email, or at the number listed below, to arrange an interview time and location. I will also follow up with an email or a telephone call next week.

With kind regards,
Michael Couch
(616)378-0440
couchm@ferris.edu

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL



FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307 | (231) 591-2553 | www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: October 25, 2018

To: Sandra Balkema

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application IRB-FY18-19-10 *The Experiences of African American Male Senior Administrators in Community Colleges in Michigan*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "*The Experiences of African American Male Senior Administrators in Community Colleges in Michigan*" (IRB-FY18-19-10) and Approved this project under Federal Regulations Expedited Review 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

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.

Approval has an expiration date of one year from the date of this letter . **As such, you may collect data according to the procedures outlined in your application until October 25, 2019** . Should additional time be needed to conduct your approved study, a request for extension must be submitted to the IRB a month prior to its expiration.

Your protocol has been assigned project number IRB-FY18-19-10. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights with assurance of participant understanding, followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document and investigators maintain consent records for a minimum of three years.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual reviews during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregory Wellman'.

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX E: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 1010 Campus Drive, FLITE 410G- Big Rapids, MI 49307

Confidentiality Agreement Form for IRB Projects

I, Jennifer A. Peterson (interpreter/transcriptionist), agree to maintain full confidentiality in regard to any and conversation, audiotapes and documentation received from Michael A. Couch II related to his/her research study on the researcher study titled "The Experiences of African American Male Senior Administrators in Community Colleges in Michigan"

Furthermore, I agree:

- To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the conversation, audiotapes and documentation.
- To not make copies of any materials (e.g. audiotapes, transcribed interviews texts), unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.
- To store all study-related materials in a safe, secure location as designated by the Principal Investigator.
- To return all study-related materials to the Principal Investigator in a complete and timely manner.
- To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer/hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Interpreter/Transcriber Name (printed) Jennifer A. Peterson d/b/a Peterson Transcription & Editing Services, LLC

Interpreter/Transcriber's Signature Jennifer A. Peterson

Date 2/18/2019

Investigator's Name (printed) Michael A. Couch II

Investigator's Signature M. A. Couch II

Date 2/18/19

Version 4.2017