LEE, ALLISON N., Ed.D. Lived Experiences of African American Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (2021)
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The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of African American administrators – particularly in relation to upward mobility, perception of value, and challenges faced – who are employed by predominantly White institutions. In this qualitative study, I interviewed ten administrators from eight different universities. Administrators first addressed how they chose their current institutions, the role that mentorship played in their lives and careers, and challenges that they faced as minority staff members at a PWI. Administrators then shared their perception of value at their respective universities, thoughts pertaining to upward mobility for African American administrators at PWIs, the role that race has played in their work environment, and coping mechanisms.

My research study findings show that largely positive experiences of participants were heavily related to the opportunity for upward mobility, perceptions that they were valued, support through mentoring, and their ability to be authentic in their roles. They experienced surprisingly little overt racism, though they did experience tokenism. Black administrators speak highly of the mentoring, networking, and opportunities for advancement as indicators of success and ways to make their time in current positions easier. The results of my study led me to question the role that racism plays or no longer plays in the experiences of African American administrators, as well as the processes needed to put in place within the United States in order to ensure equitable employment for the aforementioned administrators.

The experiences of African American administrators have implications for education and society. Implications from this research study will impact how universities hire, promote, and all around care for African American administrators. I concluded that if it is our desire to uplift and

grow retention for the purposes of students and those who work within our institutions, universities must collectively work in order to ensure that the needs of minority staff members are met in order to guarantee a work environment where they are valued and a school environment where students are receiving the best that there is to offer.

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADMINISTRATORS AT

PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

Allison N. Lee

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Approved by

_____

Dr. Kathryn Hytten
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Rosalind Blount Lee. "Thank you" feels like an inadequate response, but it is a good starting place! Your calls, reminders, efforts to learn about this process in order to know how to best push me forward, and listening ear have helped to propel me to the finish. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and the truest example of what it is to persevere and achieve. All that you have done to support me does not go unnoticed. I love you!

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Allison N. Lee, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The struggle to obtain liberation is woven into the background of American history. In the words of author Pearl Cleage (2014), "Liberation is a constant struggle." Liberation, defined in the Oxford English Living Dictionary as, "The act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression; release," is what America prides itself in having a rich history of accomplishing – setting people free. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence declared America independent of Great Britain – liberation. In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery in the United States of America – liberation. In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution granted women the right to vote – liberation. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that the segregation of public schools was in violation of the 14th amendment, and therefore unconstitutional. With the myriad of steps toward liberation that we as a country have taken from the very beginning of our existence until now, it is perplexing that in 2021, African Americans are being shot dead in the streets because of the color of our skin in what many would suggest is a modern day form of lynching; women are only paid 82 cents to every dollar that men make (resulting in excess of a $10,000 gender wage gap each year) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019); and, although segregation is illegal, African American administrators within the educational sector still suffer from micro-aggressions that result in isolation, marginalization, and social bondage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). It is perplexing to me that we as a society have not progressed further *and* in the words of Cleage – and appropriately so, it would seem – liberation *is* still a constant struggle.

Though complete liberation is an ongoing battle, there are metaphoric vehicles that can help us as a 21st century society to arrive to the destination faster. In general, I believe in inclusivity and equity in all spheres of life: the church, places of business, work environments,

sports teams, clubs and organizations, K-12 schools, and especially within the realm of higher education. Though vital, creating the conditions for equity and inclusion has proven to be challenging in both theory and in practice higher education, including as it pertains to African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). We are living in a time in which it is popular for both individuals and groups of people to verbally express support for members within society who have traditionally been oppressed, often without backing up that expressed support through effective and consistent action. It is both the civic and moral responsibility of colleges and universities to ensure that people from minority groups are represented in accordance with – at minimum – the proportion of that population at the school within the levels of administration at predominantly White institutions by actively recruiting, advancing, and working to retain these individuals (Jones, 2001).

Institutions of higher learning provide students with a wealth of knowledge that enlightens the mind, discussion that encourages critical thinking, the chance to experience community in order to establish social capital, and the necessary tools to engage in the uplifting of social justice for a better society. What makes time at college so freeing and refreshing for many students is that they are able to express themselves in adulthood in a way that in many cases, they were unable to in their formative years at home with family. While students experience and learn some life lessons from simply being present on college campuses and through peer interaction, much of their young adult rearing is impacted by the higher education professionals who they encounter, for example, professors, academic advisors, counselors, sports coaches, equity and diversity professionals, and housing staff. These professionals are uniquely positioned to impart wisdom and varying perspectives to students out of their lived experiences

and in a way that allows them to take ownership of self without fear of retribution or general rejection.

While typically White higher education professionals are able to go to work and serve their students with relatively little complication related to the color of their skin, an initial exploration of the literature suggests that African American administrators at predominantly White institutions experience a far more demanding and taxing work environment, particularly as they encounter issues of racism on both macro and micro levels (Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, & Hazelwood, 2011; Moore & Toliver, 2010). Aside from racism, some forms of invisibility due to being in the minority contribute to this group's predicament to maintain and uphold awareness of self (Griffin, 2012; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). At the same time, African Americans can also be equally hypervisible, as a result of tokenism and standing out among a sea of White people, which can lead to "heightened scrutiny" (Settles, 2018). While leaders at predominantly White institutions across the United States are overall well-intentioned in ensuring that students have the best possible college experience, that intention sometimes falls short in regards to African American administrators having the freedom and support needed in order to effectively connect with students on a continual basis. Schools often interfere with the totality of student experience due to racism, lack of inclusivity, limited opportunities to advance professionally, and shaming done to African American administrators, thus impeding their ability to provide the best possible experience and education for students (Killough, Killough, Walker, & Williams, 2017).

Statement of Problem

African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions face challenges which can impede their ability to effectively navigate assigned roles and advance professionally. These professionals of color experience obstacles pertaining to marginalization,

underrepresentation, challenges of authority, and micro-aggressions (Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, & Hazelwood, 2011; Moore & Toliver, 2010). A challenging work environment for African American employees yields high attrition rates and places limitations on the level of care, inclusivity, and equity that professionals can provide for minority students (Jones, 2001).

According to the US Census Bureau, African Americans make up roughly 13.1% of the United States population. A report put out by the American Council on Education entitled, *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report* determined that in 2016, students of color made up 45.2% of the undergraduate student population (AAC&U News, 2019). Even with the increased numbers of minority students enrolled in undergraduate institutions (up 29.6% from 1996), "college faculty, staff, and administrators remain predominantly White," according to the report (American Council on Education, 2016). Based on the figures included, the college presidency is made up of only 16.9 percent of people of color – a stark contrast to the remaining 83.1% made up of White men and women. Of existing staff, members of minority groups tend to be in service roles, as opposed to holding faculty or administrative leadership positions. The data shows less than one-fifth of people of color employed in higher education are in roles as senior executives, while a disproportionate 42.2 percent were employed as "maintenance and service staff" and 33% of those employed in the area of campus safety were of color (American Council on Education, 2016).

With a clear disparity in representation among people of color in administrative leadership positions at PWIs, minority students are not being adequately represented at the highest levels. This lack of representation could mean that students are not seeing the full scope of what is possible in terms of having certain needs met. Additionally, seeing administrators of

the same race and ethnicity has been proven to help retain students of color in predominantly White institutions (Hoffman, Blessinger, & Makhanya, 2018).

Aside from the barriers that African American administrators face, there is a limited amount of research regarding the topic. A simple Google scholar search and inquiry through the UNCG library system returned limited results directly related to the study of African American higher education administrators regarding upward mobility and perception of value. Much of the literature relating to African Americans at predominantly White institutions focuses on students; a second significant focus is on African American faculty members. African American administrators have not been researched with the same priority and intensity as other subgroups. Additionally, many of the studies that have been conducted focus on African Americans in leadership inclusive of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and not solely at predominantly White institutions. This is concerning because change agents cannot enact policies to ensure the fair treatment and promotion of African American administrators if they either are unaware of challenges or if they do not find a proposed issue to be backed by research. The gap in the literature suggests that research needs to be conducted in order to further inform the academy at large and future scholars of the experiences of African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions pertaining to upward mobility, perception of value, and how the two affect their ability to aid underserved minority students. These are my areas of concentration based on both my personal interest from experience and the literature, which shows that although administrators of color and women are continuing to grow in larger numbers at PWIs, they are still significantly underrepresented in senior-level positions (Gardner, Barrett, and Pearson, 2014). For those who are employed, a consistent claim is not feeling valued

in their positions by other administrators, staff, faculty, and even students in many cases (Steele, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and perceptions, especially in relation to upward professional mobility, of African American administrators who serve at predominately White institutions of higher learning. Additionally, in this study I sought to understand from the perspective of African American administrators, how a lack of representation at higher levels affects their ability to aid underserved students. Working with a sample of 10 administrators employed at PWIs on the eastern side of the United States, I explored the intersectionality of perceived value of African American administrators and how it influences their ability to effectively serve of minority students.

My goal in conducting this study was to uncover information regarding how African American administrators perceive the role they play at PWIs and how they perceive their impacts on students of color. Do they perceive that their presence at a predominantly White institution is simply to check a "diversity" box, or do they feel valued for what they bring to the campus, especially in relation to contributing to a culturally responsive culture that benefits all? I designed this study to produce meaningful first-person information about the experiences of African American administrators pertaining to perception of value, upward mobility, and influence on minority students.

Research Questions

One overall research question guides this study: What are the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs? I also ask three sub-questions:

- How do African American administrators perceive their role and value in predominantly White institutions?

- What are the experiences and perspectives of African American administrators about the opportunity for upward mobility in predominantly White institutions?

- What are the challenges faced by African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions and how do they affect their ability to support students?

Background Context

In order to understand the experiences and possibilities for upward mobility of African American administrators, it is essential to start with the history of African Americans within in the educational sector. African Americans have always – and still to this day – faced racial discrimination in relation to their profession within the realm of higher education (Jackson, 2000; Turner & Myers, 2000). In this section, I offer a historical overview of the advancement of African American administrators in higher education.

Slavery and Pre-Civil War Education

In the United States of America, there has long been a tie between education and the ability to assert authority or force (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Before the Civil War, African Americans were not allowed to be educated by and large in the South. Originally, slaves were thought to be unintelligent in comparison to their White counterparts and therefore unable to learn (Woodson, 1915). As time went on, slave owners discovered that slaves were not in fact beastly or lacking intelligence, rather, to educate a slave in any way would be to give them awareness to see and know the world, therefore making them ill-suited to be proper slaves and thus difficult to retain and control (Woodson, 1915). Slave owners took the oppression of slaves

so seriously that laws were set – depending on the state - deeming the teaching of any slave to read or write as criminal, for fear that they would one day revolt (McCarty, 2006).

In spite of the efforts to control slaves and keep them in their place, there are instances recorded of school-aged White children teaching school-aged (though unable to attend) Black children how to read and write. White children taught not only the children of slave owners, but the wives did as well (Woodson, 1915). Preachers realized that verbal instruction was not enough and resorted to teaching slaves how to read, while some slaves picked it up literacy skills on their own (Woodson, 1915).

Turn of the 20th Century

As the 20th century dawned, African American administrators and educators were increasingly present on college campuses, though primarily at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which were then the chief institutions of higher learning that offered education and jobs to both students and staff (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006). HBCUs are unique in that they are the only institutions designed specifically to educate African Americans (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). African Americans were largely kept from employment in PWIs before the 1960s in part due to segregation laws, and in part due to leaders in those institutions dismissing the idea that there were any African Americans who were intelligent enough to work there (Ballard, 1973).

African American professors first paved the way when it came to being hired at predominantly White institutions based upon the degrees they held. African Americans were hired to work in PWIs beginning in the 1940s, after an increasing number began to earn their PhDs in the 1930s (Elfman, 2020). During this time period, typically only one African American professor was hired per university, and they did not have a full professorship, but were hired as

an adjunct (Elfman, 2020). Anthropologist W. Allison Davis was an exception to the rule. Davis was hired as a full-time faculty member in 1942 at the University of Chicago (Elfman, 2020). He was later offered tenure in 1947 (Varel, 2017). The hiring of Davis by the University of Chicago is attributed as the reason to which other PWIs – including Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania – began to hire African Americans (Elfman, 2020). Still, the progress in hiring African American scholars and leaders has been slow.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

Well after the Civil War and preceding the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in 1954, African Americans were few and far between in the administrative sector of predominantly White institutions (Jackson & Ladson-Billings, 2007). During that time, HBCUs were the primary avenues by which African Americans were able to explore a career as administrators in higher education (Wilson, 1989). Once the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* Supreme Court case was decided, making it illegal to segregate on the basis of race and requiring integration, there was only slow progress toward change. It was not until *Brown v. Board of Education (1955)*, also known as *Brown II*, when the Supreme Court responded to the fact that public K-12 school institutions were actually refusing to de-segregate, that the Court rolled out a firm response, demanding the public schools immediately integrate, with the implied notion that institutions of higher learning do the same. *Brown II* required colleges who previously only accepted White students to restructure their admissions process so that African American students were considered and admitted as well (Stallion, 2013). As more African American students were admitted into colleges and universities, their requests began to include a diversified staff in order to show representation that was aligned with the student body among the administrative side of the college (Jones, 1977). Although *Brown v. Board of Education of*

Topeka (1954) was not originally determined with the thought of higher education in mind, its effects were far reaching. With minority student requests for college administration that mirrored their identity, and the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision on the agenda of current college administrations, a change had to be made. In order to diversify college campuses, African Americans started to get hired at higher rates at PWIs in the field of higher education beginning in the 1960s, especially African American women (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006).

Civil Rights Act of 1964

After the *Brown v. Board of Education (1955)* ruling, African Americans still struggled to be admitted into undergraduate institutions that were not HBCUs and to be hired to work at PWIs. In part to remedy this issue, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. It is considered to have been largely transformative legislation, having "outlawed discrimination on the basis of color, race, or national origin" (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006). Title VI barred discrimination in the college admissions process, financial aid, and recruitment. This was a large step for African American students to receive the same consideration as their White counterparts for scholarships and/or college education.

Title VI of the Civil Right Act of 1964 paved the way for Title VII, which outlawed discrimination pertaining to employment (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006). Presumably this would have a direct effect on African American educators and administrators who had experienced the discriminatory hiring, firing, and promotion practices, even on the heels of *Brown II* and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Affirmative Action

Despite the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and the Civil Acts Right of 1964, which should have increased the numbers of minority students and higher education professionals while ensuring that the hiring and admittance process for African American students, faculty, staff, and administrators was equitable, there was still a reluctance at many colleges and universities to recruit African American students, and to hire African American staff and administrators (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006). In order to enforce the various statutes of the Civil Rights Act in institutions of higher learning, a measurable concrete set of guidelines was needed. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed an executive order into law that required the consideration of race by colleges and universities in order to completely abolish any remaining covert state-sanctioned segregation on the basis of race (Back & Hsin, 2019). Thus, Affirmative Action was born, with the goal of ensuring equal hiring practices for minority groups and women. This was the first time in history that an Executive Order prohibited discrimination on the basis of race and gender in employment that was financed by federal monies (Chamberlain, 1989).

With the establishment and enforcement of affirmative action, and in conjunction with the *Adams v. Richardson* case (which alleged that the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare neglected to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which was created to eradicate discrimination on the basis of race in institutions of higher learning), the United States started to see an increase in the number of African Americans hired to serve in administrative roles at colleges and universities (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006). This increase in African American hiring began in the 1970s and continued through the early 1980s. During this time frame, African American student enrollment at institutions of higher learning increased from

522,000 to approximately 1.1 million (Rolle et al., 2000). Glazer (2000) posits that due to the 4% increase in students at that time, there was subsequently an increase in African American administrators.

Regardless of the positive goals of affirmative action, it was met with resistance and opposition. Individuals with a meritocratic point of view voiced concern over administrative positions in institutions of higher learning not being widely available for all qualified candidates – regardless of race – to receive equal hiring opportunity (Brown, 1994). Birch (2007) also found issue with members of the majority perhaps being more qualified in work experience or formal education, but still being disregarded relating to hiring due to the position being offered to a minority individual. The mention and hatred of what some White people perceived to be reverse discrimination by opponents of affirmative action was highlighted in protests, newspaper articles, media coverage, and talk shows on television (Deslippe, 2012).

Challenges Upon Hire

Though the hiring of African Americans in predominantly White institutions was an overdue change, it did not come without obstacles and rarely have we achieved genuine inclusivity in institutions of higher education. Beginning in the 1960s, the United States began to see African Americans hired as administrators of "Black studies programs," targeted minority recruitment programs, and as consultants for matters dealing with "minority relations" (Jackson & Ladson-Billings, 2007). The positions, though open and available, often limited African Americans to serving only students of color. The push to have individuals hired to deal with minority matters, coupled with federal mandates to employ more African Americans, lead to the hiring of African Americans to fill particular roles that came with responsibilities, though often with little actual authority and means to carry out requested duties (Kitano & Miller, 1970). Due

to the perceived need for African Americans to cover the specific previously mentioned roles – and quickly – those hired were often not experienced in the roles that they were to fill. It was often the case that these individuals were hired to do jobs that they had to partake in on-the-job training for and were even pulled from faculty roles in order to serve on the administrative side of the college (Cunningham, 1992).

What still remains to be seen is whether or not African American higher education professionals are still hired as token members of faculty/staff in 2021, whether they have more experience from the time of hire, and whether or not positions with significant responsibilities but limited power are still the norm. I plan to address these questions in my study. In the next section, I will cover an overview of the methods to be used in this qualitative research study.

Overview of Methods

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and challenges of African American administrators who serve at predominately White institutions of higher learning in relation to upward professional mobility, as well as how they perceive their value and how their roles and barriers affect their ability to effectively serve minority students. Due to the in-depth information that I hoped to obtain regarding experiences and the thoughts of African American administrators, I chose to use a basic qualitative methodology for the design of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I chose a qualitative study because of my interest in learning about the first-hand experiences of African American administrators at predominantly White institutions, and how those experiences shape their perception of self and ability to advocate for minority students. Qualitative researchers are interested in how individuals make meaning of their experiences. Taylor (2013) argues that "Qualitative research invites researchers to inquire about the human condition, because it explores the meaning of human experiences and creates

the possibilities of change through raised awareness and purposeful action" (p. 24). As important as it is to, "inquire about the human condition," I am also drawn to "the possibilities of change through raised awareness and purposeful action," because I believe that leading with the intent to make or inspire a change through action and awareness is a key to at least alleviating, if not solving, most problems.

In order to answer the research questions that drive this study, I facilitated ten interviews with African American administrators at predominantly White institutions with questions related to upward mobility and perception of self. My interview guide is based on my review of the literature, as well as insights I gained from conducting a pilot study. Following typical qualitative research protocol, I had the interviews transcribed once completed. I then reviewed them for accuracy, and then proceeded with analysis of the data in order to identify themes. As the qualitative method of research is expositive (Merriam, 2009), I hoped to gain a better understanding through this study of how individuals experience their worlds and make sense of their experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Theory is an important component to research of any kind. The theoretical approach that researchers take helps to guide thought processes and decisions. I draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT) in framing this study and analyzing my data. From a practical standpoint, this theory has elements that can help to provide answers to the research questions posed and help researchers to develop equitable practices with reference to upward mobility and eliminating barriers for African American administrators within predominantly White institutions. I also draw on the Theory of Representative Bureaucracy and Social Network Theory. The Theory of Representative Bureaucracy is relevant to my study because a correlation can be made between

the theory and employing an equitable representation of minority higher education professionals at PWIs to ensure that the needs of all groups are seen, heard, and addressed. Social Network Theory is pertinent to the study of African American higher educational administrators because it deals with the influence of relationships which can cause individuals to either thrive or struggle at PWIs.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory initially arose in the 1970s in the legal field, particularly developing from the scholarship of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman who were dissatisfied with the slow speed of racial transformation within the United States of America (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Specifically, CRT emerged from the law and legal scholarship, which at the time didn't adequately address the ramifications of race and racism within the United States (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT "…analyzes the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups" (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54). Critical race theorists work to shine a light on the intersections of racism and privilege, as well as unpack the routine ways that people of color are isolated and excluded within the United States (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Scholars of CRT suggest that there are several essential tenets of this theory: the view that racism is ordinary which makes it difficult to spot and eliminate, interest convergence, race as a social construct, differential rationalization, and including the voices of persons of color through counter storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical Race theorists highlight the realities of systemic power, organizational superiority and inferiority on the basis of race, and favor (privilege) as opposed to disadvantage.

Critical Race Theory is not simply an abstract theory, rather it compels us to understand how systems operate in order to dismantle privilege and affect change (Delgado & Stefancic,

2017). Racial discrimination is ubiquitous and thus it is imperative that society condemn discriminatory structures while deliberately searching for opportunities to create more equity and justice. Critical Race Theory plays a role in higher education and particularly in efforts at predominantly White institutions to create inclusivity and diversity (Hiraldo, 2010). One of the aspects of Critical Race Theory that supports the creation of inclusivity and diversity is interest convergence, which is related to material determinism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Interest convergence suggests that the freedoms or rights of African Americans are only able to progress when they are aligned with those of White Americans. According to the idea of interested convergence, PWIs only hire African American professionals when Whites or the institution stands to gain in some way. In an era when diversity is celebrated, for example, hiring African Americans in leadership roles can show institutions to be inclusive and progressive, even when people are hired into positions with minimal power and influence.

Counter storytelling is a second tenet of Critical Race Theory that is important to this study. Counter storytelling involves soliciting and sharing the experiences and stories of marginalized people as a means to challenge dominant cultural understandings and to uncover and confront the "majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 7). Offering a counter narrative entails creating space for people of color to communicate their experiences of oppression to their White counterparts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Within the context of this study, I hope to shine a light on the counter narratives of African American administrators at PWIs through interviewing at least 10 African American administrators in order understand the challenges and enablers they experience in their jobs.

Critical Race Theory was useful while conducting my research and analyzing my data. I shaped my interview guide in part by drawing on Critical Race Theory since I was seeking first-

hand accounts. Additionally, I explored whether interest convergence played a role in the hiring of African American administrators at institutions of higher learning currently. Perhaps most importantly, I sought out counter stories from the interviewees. Counter storytelling is a useful tool that puts the power back in the hands of African American administrators to speak truth to what may be occurring in their places of work.

Theory of Representative Bureaucracy

A key aspect of the theory of representative democracy is the argument that a public work environment that is illustrative of its employees with respect to race, ethnic background, and gender will aid in making certain that the concerns of all groups are sufficiently addressed in bureaucratic decisions (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011). One of the earliest theorists on this topic, Kingsley (1946) coined the term representative bureaucracy, maintaining that both the social and administrative layouts of a community should consistently reflect one another. At the time of his writing, the structure of the Commonwealth of Nations was rooted in a class system, and as such, it was Kinglsey's belief that each nation's leadership should emulate its predominant citizenry (Meier, 1975). When the concept of representative bureaucracy was initially discussed in America, it was thought of as a substitute technique for surveilling executive authority or informal policing of the behavior of others to ensure that norms were kept. Representativeness was defined as all branches of the United States government and each level from the top to the bottom being demonstrative of the American public (Levitan, 1946).

Two vital elements of the theory of representative bureaucracy are active and passive representation. Studies conducted on passive representation investigate the demographic structure of population(s) with the typical conclusion that representation for minorities and women pales in comparison to their male and White counterparts (Riccucci, 2009). As for active

representation, this component of the theory deals with whether or not values are shared between bureaucrats and clientele and how decisions are influenced based on said shared values (Meier & Nigro 1976; Mosher, 1968). The active element of representative bureaucracy has been studied through the lens of how women and minorities profit from being served by administrators of the same background (Wilkins & Keiser, 2006). The two elements of active and passive representation combined, demonstrate a dangerous and inequitable bureaucracy when women and minorities are not equitably represented.

If the theory of representative bureaucracy were to be applied to universities and not solely the government, a fair assumption would be that if schools were staffed with individuals reflective of the student population, sufficient consideration would be given to all groups when making bureaucratic decisions. This theory has broad applications that can be used to support why it is essential to both employ and retain African American administrators at predominantly White institutions. Two concerns of this theory are that women and minority groups often think on the same wavelengths as White men which would make this theory null and void, and that advancing the concerns of pro-minority policy and procedure may isolate bureaucrats or administrators who are against the ideals (Anderson & Jacobsen, 2017).

Social Network Theory

Social network theory is about the influence of relationships, particularly how interpersonal bonds influence the movement of intelligence, confidence, connection with others, ability to build social and physical capital, and one's impact on any given organization or group of people (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999). The way that individuals relate to one another, as well as the institution that they are working for directly motivates who will be promoted or hired to manage at a higher level, simply because relationship and influence within higher education are

significant factors that help shape whether goals and desires are accomplished or whether they are left by the wayside (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006).

Social networks in institutions of higher learning, particularly in terms of providing a foundation for leadership positions, are often influenced by race and gender which can be problematic (Jernigan, Dudley, & Hatch, 2020). African American women are much more likely to be successful in their pursuit of building relationship and attaining leadership if they are well connected, both professionally and personally, and can break down barriers of culture and organizational systems in order to reach those who hold the keys to power (Jernigan, 2019). For African American men, race and gender are very influential regarding their path to leadership (Hatch, 2018). Development of social networks is integral to the success of African American administrators employed at PWIs; these networks provide individuals with the means to achieve positions on the senior level through mentoring, sponsorship, and leadership development (Jernigan, Dudley, & Hatch, 2020).

Positionality

I am an educator. Although I am currently and temporarily serving as a 7th grade middle school English Language Arts Teacher, the majority of my professional experience, and the location of my passion, is in the realm of Higher Education. Having only worked for predominantly White institutions, and my most salient identities being first an African American and secondly a female, I have experienced firsthand some of the challenges that come with working in an environment where one is the minority. I have also experienced a lack of African American administrators in high-level roles. I have seen the challenges Black administrators face in being promoted, even though they are typically qualified for more advanced positions. I noticed differential treatment between Whites and non-Whites who held the same level positions

and did not see an equitable process of career ascension and value for African-Americans in predominantly White institutions. For example, at the smaller private institution where I worked as the Assistant Director of Admissions, it was common for African Americans to be hired in helping roles – Assistant Director, Coordinator, etc. – that looked like they were on the path to career advancement by title, but in function had very little authority. These roles often did not come with the opportunity to supervise or be present "at the table" in vital decision-making meetings. Instead, these people were weighted down by many projects that seemed to be busy work. On the other hand, White administrators who were of the same level typically received seats at decision-making tables, and their roles progressed into opportunities to supervise, lead faculty and staff meetings, and network with faculty and staff who would become mentors in the field.

My initial interest in this research was retention of African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions. While reviewing the literature for that topic, I came across information on upward mobility and perception of value. In a study of the experiences of African American higher education professionals and the toxicity of their work environments done by Steele (2018), the bulk of participants interviewed expressed opinions of not being valued for a variety of reasons, from perceived lack of influence due to not being in true positions of power, to consistent remarks that seemed to question competency and capability. Gardner, Barrett, and Pearson (2014) describe three institutional barriers to the success and upward mobility of African American administrators: discrimination, lack of career path and professional identity, and lack of understanding or knowledge about relevant skillsets needed to ascend the hiring ladder. The idea for this dissertation research stems from both my own experiences, as well as existing research on the African Americans in higher education. The

two colleges/universities that I worked for were predominantly White institutions in the state of North Carolina; one a small (less than 2,000 students) private school, and the other a large public school (greater than 33,000 students). Each has a relatively low number of African Americans employed overall, and an even lower percentage of African Americans employed at higher tier administrative levels. I witnessed African Americans working the same job as their White counterparts while being paid drastically less. Also, I experienced African Americans overlooked for promotions, even as the person eventually hired looked comparable or less experienced for the job they were seeking than their overlooked African American colleague. These life experiences helped to shape my interest in this study.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that I offer an in-depth look at the experiences of African American leaders at PWIs. I hope both current and future educators will be able to use this research as a resource to ensure support and equity for African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions of higher learning. Findings from my research may help PWIs to diversify leadership staff and to ensure a fair and inclusive working environment for African American administrators.

Overview of Chapters

In this first chapter, I provided a brief introduction to this study. I included the problem statement and some background on the history of issues that African American administrators at PWIs have experienced, as well as discussed the purpose of this study in exploring common barriers to upward mobility, perception of value, and the affect that challenges faced by this population have on how they are able to assist minority students. I also discussed the theoretical frame for this study, my positionality, and why the study is important.

In the second chapter, I review relevant literature. I discuss the purposes and beginnings of African Americans being employed in predominately White institutions, as well as the meanings and implications of being labeled a PWI. Next, I discuss barriers that African American administrators in institutions of higher learning face, such as racism, retention, challenges with job security, and workplace micro-aggressions. I also discuss research on the methods put in place throughout the hiring process and early employment to assist in the hiring of African Americans at PWIs. In this chapter, I also review the criticisms that surround support for African American administrators.

In the third chapter, I explain the methodology of this basic qualitative study. I interviewed 10 African American administrators from eight different predominantly White institutions of higher learning, situated on the east coast of the United States. I describe how I selected and recruited my participants, the interview procedures I used, and how I analyzed the findings. I also discuss issues related to ethics and trustworthiness.

In chapter 4, I describe the findings from the study and in chapter 5, I analyze these findings in more depth and provide direct answers to each research question. I also discuss the implications of the study and offer recommendations for additional research and for practice. I conclude this chapter with a reflection on what I learned by conducting this study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

As the world becomes increasingly diversified, higher learning institutions are transforming to respond to the changing trends, affirming the role of diversity in promoting learning in universities and colleges (Milem, 2002). Studies have been conducted on the experiences of African American students and faculty who are situated at predominantly White institutions of higher learning (Steele, 2018), however, while searching for literature on the experiences of African American administrators hired to serve students at PWIs, I found there to be a lack of rich accounts of experiences. There are hierarchical levels in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) where professionals of color are often not in strategic positions of decision making to influence change. Though change is occurring, as predominantly White institutions strive to establish programs to support and promote minority students, creating an environment within the institution that is inclusive may be challenging due to systemic obstacles experienced by African American administrators.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relevant to this qualitative study on the experiences of African American administrators working at predominantly White institutions on the east coast of the United States and how those experiences affect upward mobility, perception of value, and approaches to working with minority students. In this chapter, I address several strands of pertinent literature on the topic, including the history of African American administrators and the role they tend to play at PWIs, challenges facing African American administrators at PWIs, and coping and career advancement strategies utilzed by African American adminsitratrors. I also cover the intersectionality of race and higher education. I conclude by identifying gaps in the literature and summarizing what we know about this topic.

Emergence of the African-American Administrator

In the late 1700s, a former slave by the name of Catherine Ferguson bought her freedom and became the very first African American teacher (Bell, 2018). Ferguson founded the 'Kathy Ferguson's School for the Poor' which at the time was able to service a total of forty-eight children (Mosley, 1980). Following Catherine Ferguson's example, and determined to uphold her legacy, an African American woman by the name of Lucy Diggs Slowe is acknowledged as having become the first Black woman to serve in higher education as an administrative dean. Slowe was appointed Dean of Women at Howard University in Washington DC in 1922 (Bell, 2018). While under Slowe's direction, a professional organization known as, 'The National Association of Women' fought to handle business that advocated for the involvement of standards and recommendations, as well as, leadership opportunities for female African American administrators (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006). Due to Slowe's courage, determination, and management, two groups emerged that focused on advocacy and support for African American women in college: The National Association of College Women (NACW) and the National Association of Women's Deans and Advisors of Colored Schools (NAWDACS) (Perkins, 1996). Slowe is remembered as the first Dean of Women at Howard University from 1922 to 1937, but she was also a leader in more than one arena. She was transformative in African American history as the cofounder of several organizations, including the first Greek-letter sorority for African-American women called Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc (Bell-Scott, 1997). Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. was founded in 1908 and over 100 years later has over 300,000 members.

African American administrators throughout history, and still today, have been hired most frequently to staff support roles, instead of that of "line" positions which carry significant

leadership responsibilities, such as Director, Provost, and Dean, for example (Bell, 2018). By 1974, more than 3,000 African American professionals worked in predominately White institutions of higher learning (Bell, 2018). In the 1970s, more than 33% of participants, in a study conducted about the roles of higher education administrators, identified themselves as administrators in higher education, when in actuality, 94% held support staff positions (Smith, 1980). The difference between line and support staff (administrators and staff) within the university setting is major: Line officers have a degree of organizational authority tied to their position, whereas a staff member's authority is very limited to their specific knowledge about their job in particular (Smith, 1978). Additionally, administrators (line officers), typically have staff members who report directly to them.

The shortage of African Americans in administrative roles can cause major problems for the functioning of higher education institutions. With the lack of minority higher education administrators, it is likely that a large number of minority students will not be served in the manner that best suits them (Moore, 1983). While some research exists describing the retention of African American students and faculty, there is a gap in knowledge pertaining to the retention of African American administrators (Jackson, 2001). A significant amount of research has been conducted on female administrators, in particular White women deans, during the the late 19th and early 20th century. However, less can be found about the African American post-secondary administrators during the same period (McConner, 2014). Current day, more research has been conducted regarding African American adminstrators (Steele, 2018). Much of the research today divides administrators up into roles of men and women by the study (Jernigan, Dudley, & Hatch, 2020). This is important because it seems as though researchers are much more focused on

studying experiences, challenges, and impact in relation to gender rather than focusing primarily on race.

Functions of the African American Administrator Today

The inadequate representation of African American administrators in institutions of higher learning can cause marginalization in regards to opportunity and access to senior level leadership within higher education (Jernigan, Dudley, & Hatch, 2020). The largest group of African American administrators working in higher education are in mid-level positions (Rosser, 2000). Mid-level administrators within higher education hold a range of titles, including Director, Associate Director, Assistant Director, Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, and Dean (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000; Mills, 1993). This group is not only the largest leadership group, but they often are the glue that hold an institution together, due to their wide range of positions and expertise.

Administrators in the middle tier often report to the highest individual in their department and are responsible for ensuring that they relay communication both to the people that they supervise, and to the people that supervise them due to serving as the in-between person (Mills, 1993). Job functions for these individuals are typically inclusive of supervising entry-level or new staff, facilitating training sessions, providing counsel to their colleagues, and thinking critically while seeking to proactively problem solve so as to lift some of the stress from senior level administration (Fey, 1991; Mills, 2000). Administrators in the middle tier are additionally responsible for overseeing broad institutional issues, serving on committees, building interdepartmental dynamics, and keeping senior level administrators up to date as to what is taking place within the day-to-day aspects of the office (Mills, 2000). Due to typically having more responsibility than entry-level individuals and less than senior level administrators, they

often end up handling a range of miscellaneous tasks with little recognition for frequently picking up extra duties.

Positve Impacts of African American Administrators at PWIs

There are a number of reasons African American leaders at PWIs are valuable to the institution and worthy of research. While African American leadership can add diversity to the culture of a predominately White institution of higher learning, their value goes much deeper than that. Students of color have traditionally not performed as well in PWIs as their White counterparts, nor have they felt as included, due to both the educational materials and general culture of the school being something that many students of color are neither familiar nor comfortable with (Harper, 2013; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2004). Due these challenges, having leadership or simply personnel on campus who are able to connect to a particular group of individuals or each individual student in one way or another, due to shared identities in terms of race, mindset, and similar cultural practices, is important in terms of the success and willingness of minority students to want to continue in a place that does not always seem welcoming (Jones, 2001). African American higher education administrators are vital players at predominately White Institutions in part because they aid in helping minority students feel at home and included. Moreover, the presence and mentoring of minority personnel can aid in increased retention rates among students of color at PWIs (Moore & Toliver, 2010).

Outside of increased retention rates and student mentorship, African American administrative leadership at PWIs is important because it can help to promote an environment of cultural awareness. It is important to note that the presence of Black bodies does not automatically mean that cultural awareness is a deeply embedded feature of the institution. According to Martinez-Acosta and Favero (2018), one of the most important institutional

qualities to emerge as related to student and staff success is a perception that the institution is committed to diversity, though the mere perception is not enough to bring about change. Without this perception, from the beginning students who are in the minority can easily feel overlooked, and subsequently unmotivated to continue. Wolfe and Dilworth (2013) argue for the value of diversity in higher education. They define diversity as,

> …an all-inclusive concept used to recognize differences via race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and other backgrounds. Ideally in higher education, diversity promotes a positive attitude toward accepting, tolerating, embracing, and ultimately respecting diffrerences. As a driving force, diversity evolves into the practice of valuing all humanity, a means of increasing access and inclusion, a framework for creating a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members, and an individual and collective responsibility for combating prejudice and discrimination through a gained understanding of these issues during education, training, and engagement with others. (p. 671)

Diversity is needed overall on college campuses due to the positive impact that it has in spaces where differences among individuals or groups is common. Additionally, diversity is essential generally, though specifically in predominately White institutions of higher learning because the people who value it will concurrently call for the implementation or expansion of access and inclusion. Without minority leadership in spaces of higher education, students are in some cases receiving a less broad understanding and view of the racial and perhaps cultural differences between different groups of people. Also, as Dilworth and Wolfe (2013) suggest, it is the presense of diversity that helps institutions to remain accountable for both proactively and retroactively dealing with issues of prejudice and discrimination through both teaching and

learning. While racial disparity on the college/university level is still prevalent today in terms of

retention rates, graduation rates, and salaries for example, researchers have acknowledged

increased commitment by higher education institutions to diversity initiatives, and to putting into

practice "…institutional policy statements, broadly conceived as 'diversity agendas,' which aim

to signal a commitment towards organizing diversity-related strategies" (Arday, 2018, pp. 194-

195).

  Positve impacts of African American administrators situated at predominantly White

instiutions include increased enrollment, higher retention rates, and the possibility of increased

cultural awareness. At the same time, these administrators often have challenges at PWIs. In the

next section, I discuss the barriers faced by African American administrators in this context.

<div align="center">**Barriers for the African American Administrator**</div>

  African Americans working at predominantly White institutions often experience

challenges, such as, few same race peers, lack of opportunity for upward mobility, exclusion, and

issues of racism (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009). These challenges can hamper the

ability of professionals of color to perform effectively in their positions. Scholars studying the

plight of African American administrators at PWIs argue that these barriers can lead to feelings

of seclusion and discontentment (Antonio, 2003). In this section, I discuss some of the barriers

enountered by African American administrators in order to support the contention that these

challenges can prevent them from advancing professionally and productively executing their

roles.

Issues of Racism

  According to Thompson (2016), it is primarily in historically Black colleges and

universities (HBCUs) where there are opportunities for African American professionals to be

hired and promoted. Before the Civil Rights Movement, there were deliberate policies at PWIs that restricted professionals and administrators of color on their campuses. Policies that were racially motivated made professionals of color hesitant to pursue available opportunities for fear of discrimination and eventual dismissal. In the event they were considered, often it was to fill multicultural positions. Though African American administrators no longer experience the exact same obstacles, nor do they experience discrimination and tokenism to the same degree, as evident in the fact that they are serving in a range of administrative positions at PWIs, practices that are discriminatory to professionals of color are still present inside and outside of college campuses. In a qualitative research study conducted through a questionnaire of 22 individuals at public schools in Texas, Crayton (2019) notes that administrators of color often feel that they need to work extra hard as they are presumed to be incompetent by their colleagues. In addition, since they are deemed to be representing a particular group, they tend to be overly cautious about their performance and behavior. The fact that they are considered as outsiders affects them psychologically, which undermines their effort to achieve professional goals. Parker and Neville (2019) observe that although African American administrators are needed in the university setting, many institutions of higher learning find it difficult to address cross-racial interactions such as White students not respecting the expertise or authority of African American staff and professors, or, when African American professionals teach in a student-centered style (through classes, clubs, and organizations) with experiences and life lessons at the forefront. Furthermore, a majority of the professorate is White, which means that many students have limited or no interaction with minority faculty and thus, when they do have the rare African American professor, they can fail to see them as authorities in the classroom.

Cognizant of the limited literature on how White students perceive faculty of color, Parker and Neville (2019) conducted a study on three broader areas of inquiry that involved interviewing 22 students on accessibility cues from professors and how those cues influenced feelings of safety in the learning environment. First, they studied the benefits of diverse interactions. Second, they explored the unique contribution that faculty of color, particularly African Americans, make on college campuses by implementing an inclusive curriculum and coursework that promotes diversity. These practices provide students with an opportunity to interact with diverse groups, including peers and the faculty. Lastly, they explored the challenges that members of minority groups face in the classroom. For example, White students sometimes question the authority of non-white professors (Jones, 2001). This shows an inherent complexity in the interactions between the White students and the faculty of color. Parker and Neville (2019) showed that White students had a positive experience with African American professionals teaching their classes, as a warm an open environment was created, which is in direct opposition to what previous experiences of White students. It is apparent that racial identity contributes to the students' perceptions of administrators of color, including Black professors (Parker & Neville, 2019).

Marginalization

According to Edwards et al. (2019), African American administrators experience various challenges associated with personal or professional interactions within the work environment. For example, they are often excluded from funded projects. Sometimes they have limited access to resources, especially those in predominantly White institutions. They have concerns about their place within the institutions, experience cultural affronts and marginalization, as well as feel the continued pressure to prove that they merit their positions (Jones, 2001). African

American women are often confronted with the intersectional challenges of sexism and racism. Other obstacles that hinder female faculty of color from achieving academic excellence include professional isolation, little recognition, exclusion from collaborative research, and a lack of sufficient resources.

Wolfe and Freeman (2013) note that one of the most ethical dilemmas facing higher learning institutions today is the under-representation and marginalization of administrators from minority groups. This under-representation is especially prevalent in predominantly White institutions. Before the Civil Rights Movement, having White administrators at PWIs was the norm due to ongoing racism and segregation. Over time, and with the expansion of higher learning facilities, the civil rights mandates challenged institutions to adopt affirmative action policies that would promote access to job opportunities, promotions, and career development for administrators of color. However, Wolfe and Freeman (2013) observe that leaders of most PWIs did not welcome these policies, which were meant to promote a culturally diverse leadership in colleges and universities. The use of affirmative action to increase the representation of administrators of color at PWIs is not sufficient to ensure representation and inclusion; more is needed to address "the socially entrenched and complex power negotiations of institutional racism, institutional culture, and socialization" (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013, p. 3).

Having a racially diverse workforce at PWIs can have numerous benefits, so strategies to retain them should be studied. Steele (2018) observes that student-faculty mentorship programs that are racially matched lead to increased enrollment, increased GPA, and higher rates of graduation. However, professionals of color, including faculty and staff working at PWIs, may encounter challenges such as barriers in getting tenure and promotions, racial bias, and feelings of isolation and otherness, which lead to a chilly working environment. Steele identifies four

barriers that professionals of color face in a campus community. They are disrespect, excessive workload, isolation, and lack of mentorship. Professionals of color are often viewed by White peers and students as employees hired based on affirmative action rather than on merit. Colleagues and students, therefore, sometimes see them as illegitimate employees. Occasionally White students undermine their authority and expertise in classrooms. Moreover, when White students encounter issues with administrators of color, they tend to report to the administration or to a White faculty member instead of addressing the administrators of color directly (Steele, 2018). This makes them feel unwelcome, unsupported, isolated, and not valued.

Upon completion of official assignments, administrators of color are often assigned (or take on) extra duties such as providing mentorship to students of color or taking on service and committee roles with the department. These extra duties are rarely recognized and do not typically count as much as research in tenure or promotion decisions. In a phenomenological qualitative research study about the experiences of higher education administrators of color, Steele (2018) found that female faculty and staff of color sometimes feel unsatisfied socially and emotionally drained due to the poor quality of supervision they receive. Different from White staff and faculty members who tend to have access to supervisors, administrators and faculty of color ranked the quality of supervision and relationship building very low because they felt their supervisors did not prioritize meetings and/or listen to their needs.

Campus Climate

African American administrators' perspectives can be changed about the type of campus that they are working on depending on the environment that they are in – if the campus climate is more warm and welcoming or less friendly, that can shape their overall experiences. Campus climate is an impalpable attribute that can be studied to assess perceptions of diversity (Hurtado,

Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Aguirre (2000) concluded in an empirical research study about the recruitment, retention, and promotion of higher education professionals that administrators, and particularly women, are confronted with icy working spaces that are not helpful when it comes down to fostering diversity among colleagues. African Americans in institutions of higher learning face discriminating campus climates and difficult working conditions. Aguirre (2000) determined that minorities in general are more likely to have trouble feeling included on a predominantly White campus due to a possible lack of familiar community. African American administrators also sometimes connect better with students of color in comparison to their white colleagues.

Regarding campus climate and workplace tolerance, one of the reasons that African American administrators have an issue in these areas is the actual hours worked. Often African American higher education administrators work far more than the traditional 40-hour work week, including weekends, and are not compensated for their extra labor, which is a direct contrast to their White counterparts according to a Georgetown University study led by Rosemary Kilkenny (2019). Jones (2001) also mentions that while many White administrators do not seek to leave an institution due to the long hours and little pay, African American administrators are often recruited somewhere that will compensate them a bit more fairly for their time.

Underrepresentation

In Fall 2016, the percentage of all full-time Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander faculty in degree-granting institutions of higher education was 24 percent compared to 76 percent who were White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, p. 2). Although the National Center for Education Statistics notes that the percentage of all full-time faculty members of color in colleges and universities has slightly increased over the past decade, the

percentage in highly ranked universities and colleges is significantly lower compared to the national average. This is particularly true for the Black professional at PWIs. The statistics are a concern and, therefore, necessitate research to establish the experiences of the minority group professionals in PWIs and the reasons leading to underrepresentation.

The underrepresentation of both faculty and administrators of color in PWIs can be caused due to fewer individuals holding doctoral degrees compared to White faculty members (Fries-Britt et al., 2011). Krupnick (2016, para. 9) observes that in 2014, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) hired 539 instructional staff, which was more than any other university in the US. Of those, only 1.3 were African Americans, while 2.9 percent were Hispanics. However, Fries-Britt et al. postulate that doctoral degree qualifications are not the only factor that impedes the representation of racially minority faculty in higher learning institutions. The researchers recommend the need to explore the role of systemic policies and practices, including discrimination during recruitment, hiring, and promotion of the staff and administrators of color on campuses.

Another reason that there is a lack of minority professionals situated at PWIs is that they are not being hired at as high a rate as their White counterparts. According to Williams (2015), "While widening participation interventions have focused on student recruitment and bettering representation, inequalities continue to persist for academic ethnic minority staff, especially at leadership levels" (p. 12). While affirmative action exists for both students and faculty/staff so that colleges/universities must proactively recruit for more ethnic diversity, minority higher education professionals are still largely underrepresented at predominately White Institutions.

When African American higher education professionals are hired by a predominately White institution, advancement into leadership roles is not always easy, nor is it likely. Marable

(2003) noted that what we know for certain is that it has been a trend for institutions of higher learning to, "undermine access and opportunity for many African Americans in higher education, which is evident in the continued low overall percentage of African Americans employed in managerial and administrative positions" (p. 41). In 1965, Caplow and McGee made a statement regarding minority higher education professionals – specifically African Americans – that unfortunatly often still rings true. They stated,

> Discrimination on the basis of race appears to be nearly absolute [in the academe]. No major university in the United States has more than a token representation of Negroes on its faculty, and these tend to be rather special persons who are filled in one way or another for such a role. (p. 194)

Frazier (2011) notes that it is common for African American higher education professionals to become overwhelmed in relation to caring for the student body and feeling as though they are just a token member of administration, as opposed to working the job they were actually hired for, thus allowing them to build their career.

There is also the need to shift focus from numerical representation in the workforce, which aims at promoting a diversity discourse, and to paying attention to the actual climate for professionals of color at PWIs, which is often poor. An institutions' obsession with diversity as a concept remains hollow without real inclusivity and social justice. According to Fries-Britt et al. (2011), "…diversity discourse is just rhetoric unless it is put into action" (p. 3). Moving from discourse to action regarding minority higher education employees would require not just using diversity as part of the mission statement and in presentations, but also creating opportunities for growth such as mentor programs, trainings on microaggressions, and ways to find value in what minority administrators suggest.

Challenges faced by African American administrators within the realm of higher education can make adjusting to an environment and building capital difficult. Underrepresentation, racism, and marginalization are some of the obstacles faced by this population. In the next section, I will cover coping strategies that African American administrators have used for navigating PWIs.

<div align="center">

Coping Strategies for African American Administrators

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Members of minority gruops – and women – have long stuggled to receive support in the workplace (Tessen, White, & Webb, 2011). As efforts to recruit African American students, faculty members, and administrators intensify, institutions are making an effort to also retain these individuals (Gardner, Barrett, & Pearson, 2014). In a qualitative research study by Gardner, Barrett, and Pearson (2014) on the enablers and barriers to career success of African American administrators at PWIs, the researchers list mentoring as the main coping strategy that would also serve as an enabler for success. In another qualitative study on toxic work environments, Steele (2018) lists mentoring, supervisory, and institutional support as one major theme and navigating the institution as the second major theme relating to coping strategies for African American administrators. Navigating the institution serves as a coping strategy in terms of professional networking and counterspaces which are ways in which minority professionals can feel more at home in an environment that can sometime be unwelcoming. In the subsections that follow, I cover additional coping strategies of the African American administrator in predominantly White institutions.

Authenticity

Authenticity entails "the act of being true to one's personality, spirit or character" (Dunn, 2019, p. 32). Being authentic in a work environment does not necessarily mean exposing every

thought and emotion. It requires one to portray a personality that is outwardly reflective of their self-identity and, at the same time, to meet the evolving needs of institutions. For faculty and staff of color to progress at PWIs, they need to practice authenticity. Practicing authenticity means showing up as one's genuine self. For people of color, that could mean allowing their ethnic backgrounds to shine, and striving not to completely assimilate to White culture regarding hair, experience, answers to questions, etc. While there is always some form of codeswitching that may take place, showing one's authentic self from the beginning matters because when an individual is accepted and hired for who they are, affirmation of self can have a powerful impact on the work environment and experience. When professionals of color do not practice authenticity during the selection and recruitment process, they expose an institution to the risk of not identifying and dealing with challenges they may experience during their tenure. Administrators of color holding key positions of leadership should exemplify authenticity and demonstrate that success and authenticity do not have to be mutually exclusive to be successful in a PWI.

In qualitative interview-based study of how 22 Latinx students at a public California university assessed the influence of their faculty members authentic performance of racial identity, Cota (2019) reveals that the faculty of color's authenticity stimulated the student's authenticity, creating a favorable environment that fosters interaction and sharing of ideas. Moreover, by being mentored by a faculty or staff member of color who they felt reflected authenticity, students felt some comfort at their school, found it easier to navigate through campus, and developed a positive attitude toward their education. When faculty members are authentic, students may also benefit from innovative pedagogical skills and a feeling of home in a racially and culturally diverse campus climate.

Mentorship

  Few programs provide formal training of what is expected of African American administrators once they are hired by a university or college. Newly recruited professionals of color usually have limited experience in institutional politics and how to deal with students when they are the administrator in charge. This is where a good mentor comes in to assist, provide direction, and offer support. Jones (2001) argues that it is vital for new administrators to orienting themselves with an already successful African American administrator in order to flourish at a predominantly White institution. Mentoring, which entails cultivating developmental relationships, is defined as a bond between two individuals, in which the focal point of the bond lies with discussion and advisement of the mentee surrounding personal, professional, financial, social, emotional, and even spiritual growth (Griffin, 2012). Mentoring bonds between a mentor and mentee can either be formal and structured or informal and nonstructured (Forret, Turban, & Dougherty, 1996). A staff member who has been around for a while can offer advice and knowledge, which would be useful in overcoming institutional barriers in a campus environment. It is hard to find a better mentor than one who has already been through and experienced some of the same things earlier on in life (Taylor, 2019). PWIs are making concerted efforts to hire staff, faculty, and administrators of color to build a robust and diverse workforce. After hiring, mentorship programs are needed to promote the personal development of staff and faculty of color, helping them to create a sense of identity within the institutional culture. Outside of personal benefits and development, mentoring is a vital piece in higher education because it creates space for institutional goals to be met, organizational maturation, and succession planning (Jernigan, Dudley, & Hatch, 2020).

While mentoring could be a great benefit to new leaders of color, it is also challenging to ensure all new administrators have access to culturally knowledgeable and supportive mentors. Due to the typically small number of African Americans employed at any given PWI, there are not always enough African American executive administrators to mentor new staff. While cross-cultural mentoring is not necessarily an issue in theory, in practice it can be when the mentor and mentee do not share experiences or cultural interests (Tillman, 2001). Tillman (2001) conducted a qualitative study across two predominantly White institutions to explore the role of mentoring in the professional growth and development of minority professionals. Although this study focused on African American faculty, the study referenced higher education in general as well and the importance of mentoring. Tillman found that it was particularly important for African Americans employed at PWIs to have mentors in order to grow professionally and to allow space for social-emotional release and discussion in environments where African American staff and faculty members are sometimes ostracized. Tillman suggested that mentoring initiatives be mandated at predominantly White institutions.

Steele (2018) conducted a study which she inquired about the experiences of African-American faculty and staff members. One way that her African American administrator participants coped was to join an "affinity group." These groups serve as a form of support for minority employees and allow the members to encourage and lean on each other on both great and challenging days. Participants described the group as "fostering a sense of community" (Steele, 2018, p. 116).

Hatch (2018) conducted a phenomenological study involving semi-structured interviews with six African American men who held positions as deans. The majority of participants mentioned that mentoring – whether formal or informal – along with a strong support system

played a crucial role on their path to the deanship. Additionally, in another study, researchers found that serving as a mentor and having been a mentee helped participants to form a vested interest in both position and institution (Jernigan, Dudley, & Hatch, 2020). In this study, African American administrators described how their mentors helped them cope as vested interest coupled with personal relationships produced a counter-culture once individual experiences were shared (Jernigan, Dudley, & Hatch, 2020). For the 6 deans in their study, the strength of the counterculture based on mentorship was so authentic and worthwhile that it outweighed many negative experiences.

Professional Networking and Outreach

Although the benefits of networking may be invisible to those embedded in those networks, research shows that professional networks contribute immensely to career growth (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2014). For African American administrators at PWIs, professional networks can act as levers for career advancement by helping participants to build social interactions and grow social capital. Knowing and aligning oneself with individuals inside and outside of the campus environment promotes intellectual and social growth that positively impacts career development. Informal networking with peers and staff from other departments, such as clerks and support staff, can be instrumental in helping new employees to understand informal practices within the campus. Bringing together research on survival strategies for African American faculty, Taylor (2019) argues, "Good relationships with clerical staff can help new faculty wade through administrative and bureaucratic procedures with relative ease as opposed to trying to do it all by themselves" (p. 4).

In a quantitative interpretive multi-case study of 28 Black higher education professors on experiences of racism at institutions of higher learning concerning employees, Griffin, et al.

(2011) state that, apart from institutional departure, faculty of color respond to institutional barriers such as racism by networking externally and participating in service activities. Focusing on external networks is a form of psychological departure. When the campus environment becomes challenging, faculty and staff of color may seek ways to define their identity outside or within the campus by networking to overcome preconceived perceptions concerning their scholarship capabilities or racism.

Counterspaces for African American Administrators

Researchers have shown that African Americans working in institutions of higher learning often grapple with severe alienation and oppression, both of which undercut their individual wellness and threaten professional achievement (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015). To contend with these difficulties, scholars suggest one way that African Americans employed at PWIs can cope is through creating professional counterspaces (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; West, 2017). West (2019) defines professional counterspaces as "a professional development opportunity intentionally designed by and for similarly situated, underrepresented individuals to convene with one another in a culturally affirming environment, where the reality of their experiences are held central" (p. 1). West assessed the value of professional counterspaces by conducting a qualitative study focusing on African American women higher education administrators. She conducted semi-structured interviews with seven African American women who are employed at predominantly White institutions. Each of the individuals interviewed were regularly in attendance at the African American Women's Summit (AAWS) between the years of 2006 and 2011. The study explored how professional counterspaces such as the AAWS for women of color add to individual health and professional success. The six themes that emerged from the summit according to West are vital indicators of what African American

women need to thrive in environments where they are the minority. The themes are: 1. emphasizing the importance of physical health (exercise, a balanced diet, and eating well), 2. validating the role of spirituality (rooting oneself in a faith practice such as attending Church and having relationship with a higher Deity), 3. acknowledging the realities and importance of interpersonal relationships among African American women, 4. designing a process for mentoring relationships, 5. enlarging professional networks (connecting through conferences and social media platforms), and 6. offering professional development undergirding and increasing the findings of prior research studies and much more clearly articulating the necessity and influence of professional counterspaces among African Americans in higher education (West, 2017).

Case and Hunter (2012) take the definition of counterspaces a step further, and break it out of the shell of having to occur within the bounds of a professional development opportunity by defining the term as

> …settings, which promote positive self-concepts among marginalized individuals (e.g., racial and sexual minority individuals, persons with disabilities, etc.) through the challenging of deficit-oriented dominant cultural narratives and representations concerning these individuals. Further, in challenging deficit narratives concerning marginalized individuals, these settings represent ''sites of radical possibility'' (Hooks 1990, p. 149) in which proactive attempts are made to ensure that patterns of oppression in the larger societal context are not reproduced within the setting. (p. 261)

They make the point that the particular location of the counterspace or the exact category that it falls into (conference, seminar, fire-side chat) does not matter so much as the ability and need for marginalized individuals to hold space with one another, while interrupting these individuals'

inclination to abandon cultural norms, "in order to conform to dominant societal norms" (Case & Hunter, 2012, p. 261). Counterspaces can exist at a variety of levels. Settings or counterspaces can even be informal places such as sororities or fraternities or even a home due to the cultural history involving African Americans and homes as places of personhood as opposed to servanthood (Case & Hunter, 2012). Most counterspaces carry with them at least three challenging processes: narrative identity work, acts of resistance, and direct relational transactions (Case & Hunter, 2012).

Counterspaces for African American higher education administrators at a PWI could exist in a variety of places: fraternities and sororities (life-long service commitments), advising historically black student groups, office lunches or meetings with other marginalized staff, therapy, weekend brunch, conferences, etc. African American students enrolled at predominantly White institutions also create counterspaces as a reaction to a harsh racial climate (Soloranzo, 2000). These counterspaces help to counterbalance encounters of social rejection, whether sought out intentionally or unintentionally (Harper & Schneider, 2003). It becomes more challenging to create counterspaces the higher one ascends in the administrative ladder.

African American Administrators – the Presidency

At the center of higher education within the United States of America and a dream for many administrators, though sought after by few, is the highest-ranking position of President. Responsible for serving as the head of the institution and leading every faculty, staff member, and student, the President guides decision-making processes, sets in motion the strategic plan for his/her institution, and connects those on campus with community partners (Gagliaradi et al., 2017). Additionally, the President plays a vital role in ensuring the success of their respective institution (American College President Study, 2017).

Although diversity in higher education institutions has grown since the hiring of African Americans began, there is currently a large disparity in who holds the seat of President. Since its establishment in 1988, the American College President Study – conducted and released every five years – is the primary source for demographical data of those who hold the Presidency. It not only outlines current demographical trends, but also serves as a predictor of future parity among race and gender in relation to the Presidency (American College President Study, 2017). As of the last study in 2017, the Survey details still present gaps in diversity due to 83% of college Presidents being White with the majority of that number being men (American College President Study, 2017). Of the over 1500 Presidents who completed the most recent survey, only a total of 8% were African American (Gagliaradi, et al., 2017). It is projected that an increase of 1.5% will occur each year pertaining to African American college Presidents, but that rise will not happen until the year 2050 (Gagliaradi, et al., 2017).

Not only is racial parity a struggle to achieve in the Presidency, but so is gender. Education earned by the presidential seat holder is not a deciding factor as 86% of female presidents are in possession of at least one earned terminal degree, measured against 77% of men (Gagliaradi, et al., 2017). African American female Presidents are on average the youngest appointed to the Presidency (average age of 59 years old, whereas men are on average 62 years of age) and they are more likely to be without a spouse (only 68% are married compared to approximately 90% of White males) (Gagliaradi, et al., 2017).

The rise to the Presidency for the African American administrator is often an ascent that that takes much effort. Once there, African American Presidents must contend with the disparity in the field and how they can best maneuver the space that they are in. They face challenges similar to other African American leaders in professional fields.

Chapter Summary

While higher education institutions address ongoing concerns with growing the institution, improving performance, and increasing productivity, they also struggle to create a diverse workforce through effective hiring and retention strategies. To fit in a racially and culturally diverse campus, African American administrators battle daily to overcome barriers that threaten their job security and opportunities for professional growth. Recruiting and hiring staff, faculty, or administrators of color is one thing while maintaining and advancing them is another. Social capital attained through networks, mentoring, sponsorship, counterspaces for African American administrators, and interpersonal relationships all influence how people from minority groups are able to function in predominantly White institutions. The literature also covers several coping strategies to help African-American administrators deal with or overcome the challenges that they face each day as the member of a minority group within a PWI.

While we know about some of the main issues affecting African American higher education professionals, a lot is still unknown about their perceptions of self-value and institutional importance, daily struggles, and how obstacles imposed via a possible lack of equitable institutional practices influence their ability to serve all students well, but most especially, students of color. I designed this study to answer these questions.

In chapter 3, I explain the methodology I used to conduct this basic qualitative study. I interviewed 10 African American administrators from eight different predominantly White institutions of higher learning, situated on the east coast of the United States. I describe how I selected and recruited my participants, the interview procedures I used, and how I analyzed the data. I also discuss issues related to ethics and trustworthiness.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Much of the existing literature on race in higher education is about how race affects the lived experiences, sense of belonging, perception of value, values, and productivity of African-American students and faculty at predominately White institutions of higher learning. There has been comparatively little inquiry related to the experiences of African American higher education administrative professionals at PWIs (Steele, 2018). Among African American higher education administrators at PWIs, researchers have uncovered that perceptions of being undervalued, discrimination, lack of mentorship, institutional bias, and marginalization all influence their work experiences, which in turn, impacts the overall effectiveness of staff, especially in relation to serving minority students. For African American leaders in higher education, research regarding their relationship to career advancement and the influence among minority students reveals that engagement by minority campus leaders improved the overall experience of students. Studying the lived experiences of African American administrators serving in predominately White institutions of higher learning can provide insight needed to foster an equitable and culturally responsive environment for African American administrators, which could in turn improve campus engagement with students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of African American administrators at predominately White institutions of higher learning, particularly related to perceptions of value and job advancement. Additionally, I sought to understand from the perspective of African American administrators, how the lack of representation at higher levels

affects their ability to aid underserved students. I also explored the intersectionality of race and perceived value.

I interviewed African American administrators in predominantly White institutions in order to understand their experiences and hear their counternarratives. I initially anticipated that these stories would provide a critique of the culture of PWIs and insight to minority administrator engagement with students. I was curious if the individual experiences of African Americans serving in leadership roles at PWIs were shared, whether they would allow me to identify common hindrances towards upward career mobility and senior level leadership positions. I was interested in how the encounters and perceptions of value of African American administrators influenced their work with minority students at PWIs. As I was interested in understanding the experiences of African American administrators on a deep and personal level, I designed a qualitative study to conduct my research.

In describing qualitative research, Yin (2016, p. 9) writes that there are five components:

1. Studying the meaning of people's lives in their real-world roles,

2. Representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study,

3. Explicitly attending to and accounting for real-world contextual conditions,

4. Contributing insights from existing or new concepts that may help to explain social behaviors and thinking, and,

5. Acknowledging the potential relevance of multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

I honored the five components as I investigated the experiences of African American higher education administrators at PWIs. Before beginning the study, I conduced a pilot study to explore the feasibility of my proposed methods and research protocol.

Pilot Study

I set the foundation for this research by conducting a qualitative pilot study involving interviews with executive administrators employed at PWIs. These higher education professionals were each situated within colleges/universities within the state of North Carolina. Additionally, they each were in positions of influence in their respective institutions, as either mid or upper-tier level staff. They held the positions equivalent to, or above, the level of Director.

The purpose of the pilot study was to examine the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of administrative professionals at PWIs. I conducted face-to-face interviews with three higher education professionals who met the previous criteria. Specifically, they served in the following roles: Title IX Director/Associate Director of Psychology, Dean of Student Affairs, and Vice President of Enrollment. For the interviews, I used qualitative techniques to gather the experiences and perspectives of individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the interview, I developed a list of ten open-ended interview questions that enabled the higher education professionals to share their experiences and insights. Each question was designed to explore the experiences and counter narratives of administrators in PWIs. I used a semi-structured format to allow for respondents to define and elaborate upon their experiences within their respective PWIs, according to their reality.

To recruit subjects for the pilot study, I compiled a list of five higher education professionals from North Carolina. I knew each of these participants through my past experiences working with them at their institutions. Three participants gave consent for an interview, and I interviewed each in their office or an environment of their choosing. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes and I audio recorded for the purposes of

accuracy and transcription. During each interview, I took notes on particular comments and topics expressed by the participant and documented the time for reference prior to transcription. I requested basic demographic data including age, years of experience, number of years in their current role, official title, and race. After each interview, I reviewed the audio and assessed participant responses, while making note of any particularly interesting or unique experiences or responses. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and then I coded, collapsed codes into categories, and developed themes from the codes.

My objective for the pilot study was to practice conducting semi-structured interviews and to gain perspectives regarding the experiences of higher education professionals employed at PWIs. The pilot study aided me in learning about the perspectives of higher education leaders at PWIs. I was also able to practice coding and analyzing data for reoccurring themes. As a result of transcribing the interviews and interpreting the data for collective trends, I was prepared for further study and research related to my dissertation. I also used this experience to determine topics and questions for future interviews related to my research. Based on the pilot study, I knew that I wanted to add in questions that dealt with personal experiences of African American administrators based on career mobility, how those administrators perceived their value based on treatment by the institution and colleagues, how any challenges faced might affect their ability to serve students, and also the coping mechanisms used, if needed.

By interviewing individuals from various backgrounds, I gained knowledge of a range of experiences of those in PWIs. In my search for administrators who could be interviewed from PWIs, there was a gap in minority representation. There were few minority representatives who were employed in administrative leadership roles who had influence related to policy making decisions in comparison to their White counterparts, especially at the private institutions.

Minority higher education professionals were employed in entry level and low-tiered positions of management. Based on the knowledge gleaned about the gap in minority representation, I narrowed my future research to focus on the experience of African American administrators employed at PWIs.

Information Learned from the Pilot Study

The years of experience of the three higher education professionals who I interviewed for my pilot varied from three years to over ten years in their current position. Geographically, all participants worked in North Carolina. Two of the participants worked at a private college while the other participant worked at a four-year state college. Before I narrowed to wanting to focus on African American administrators, I was more interested in how administrators in general worked with and supported diverse students. Thus, I interviewed two white females and one African American male. Even given the different settings, length of tenure, and racial status their responses were similar. Three thematic challenges associated with PWIs emerged: 1) inequitable practices and policies, 2) lack of diversity and inclusion among faculty and staff, and 3) no sense of belonging or investment. All participants expressed concern regarding retaliation from employers for sharing their experiences. When I asked all three participants about their experiences with diversity and inclusion, each responded with challenges either experienced personally, or that they witnessed happening to a minority student or colleague.

I asked each participant to describe the culture of their institution as it related to policies and practices. Participants identified current institutional policies and challenged the culture within their institution as outdated and biased. The policies of PWIs were said to be beneficial to White colleagues and less beneficial to African American employees. Two participants noted that practices related to hiring and employment review tended to favor non-minority applicants

despite their lack of related experience in some cases. When asked to discuss further, the White participants noted that typically they do not receive as many applications from people from minority groups. One participant believed the lack of employment applications from minority group members to be related to the perceptions of PWIs. In discussion with the African American participant, he shared that the culture of his institution demeaned the voices of Black colleagues as less experienced despite tenure and education. He shared that in spaces of decision making and policy, he would often be overlooked and not consulted regarding potential changes. In discussion with the two other female participants, they shared similar experiences of being overlooked. The female participants, however, noted that they did feel valued and were often consulted when policies were being developed. One participant noted that their PWI's policies supported non-minority students while acting as a barrier for minority students. Practices related to institutional aid were said to be rewarded by merit rather than need which correlated to non-minority students' having a more difficult time receiving funding because they may not have come from a high school or background where they were able to acquire grades that were as high or have access to strong resources. While their grades may have been enough to admit them, they were often shown to not quite meet the mark in the scholarship category. These practices were considered outdated and not in alignment with the participants views on diversity and inclusion. All participants shared a cost of standing up for equitable practices among minorities, however, the cost is relational to the perceived social status of each participant within PWIs.

Finally, I inquired about each participant's sense of belonging and perception of value within their institution. Both White females expressed a sense of value from the institution and felt like they belonged. One noted that her institution had made several investments in her career through personal development and conferences. In contrast, the African American male shared

that he also had been the recipient of personal and career development opportunities but did not feel valued by his institution. Each participant mentioned that their value centered around a narrative of personhood and their overall perceived worth.

Each individual that I interviewed for the pilot study noted that their institution was not perfect and that while they held views that supported minority group inclusion on paper, this was not as true in practice. Even still, each interviewee felt a deep commitment to the process to help their institution evolve. Each expressed positive views of the future for their college/university and felt that in their current role, they could help to further the mission of inclusivity. Based on these three interviews, I gained insight as to the experience of higher education professionals employed in leadership roles within PWIs.

Modifications to Study Design Based on the Pilot Study

After conducting the pilot study, I realized I was most interested in the experiences of African American administrators, specifically, those serving at predominantly White institutions. There is a gap in both representation and literature related to the experience of members of minority groups in administrative positions at PWIs. The insight gained from all three interviews allowed me to notice trends regarding inclusion and the role of race in higher education. As a result of the pilot study, I revised my research questions to more narrowly focus on my updated dissertation topic related to African American higher education leaders. Additionally, I decided to broaden the geographical locations from where I solicited participants from – the eastern side of the United States, instead of just North Carolina due in part to my desire to have a wider variety of institutions represented and in part to ensure that I had sufficient numbers of participants.

Research Questions

One overall research question guided this study: What are the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs? I also had three sub-questions:

- How do African American administrators perceive their role and value in predominantly White institutions?

- What are the experiences and perspectives of African American administrators about the opportunity for upward mobility in predominantly White institutions?

- What are the challenges faced by African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions and how do they affect their ability to support students?

Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative study using semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to answer my research questions. My initial pilot study was exploratory in nature as I sought information related to participant experiences. This study is similar to the pilot in that I aimed to understand the unique perceptions and experiences in detail of African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions. I chose interviews as the research method because, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mention, interviews are essential when we cannot discern demeanor, emotional state, or how humans perceive the society at large.

Using connections I have from my experiences in higher education and snowball sampling, I solicited participants from different PWIs on the east coast of the United States. I sought study participants who held a wide variety of administrative leadership positions within a different predominantly White institutions and ranged in gender, age, and duration of employment. Each participant has at least a Master's degree as one interest I was upfront about is the role that graduate level education plays in the experiences of African American

administrators. I was curious about the alignment between the degree that administrators hold and their position.

I determined participants through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is also known as chain or network sampling and is a common way to solicit participants in qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is an approach that requires finding a few initial participants who clearly match the criteria set in order to be part of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While interviewing each initial participant, the practice is to then ask them to suggest the names of other people who they know that would meet the criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After I identified potential participants, I emailed all requesting an interview to occur via Zoom or Google Meet due to the current pandemic. Before any participant agreed to participate, I provided them the full details and the overall goals for the study. I then sent them the documentation and approval for the dissertation research given by the University of North Carolina Greensboro's Institutional Review Board. Since the study had a limited risk associated with it, I was advised by IRB that participants were not required to sign and date paperwork indicating their consent. They simply had to receive a copy of the most up-to-date version and provide their verbal consent during the interview. The emailed consent form was sent to each participant and included details such as the reason that the study was being conducted, ability of the participant to withdraw from the study at any point in time, a reminder of voluntary participation with no compensation being involved, and no coercion, and their right to request a copy of my findings if they so desire (Creswell, 2003). I then interviewed each participant virtually after setting up a time and date that was convenient to the interviewee. I audio recorded the conversation, had the interviews transcribed, and coded each transcript to review for topics and themes.

This research was exploratory in nature as I sought to learn about the experiences of African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions. As it is a qualitative study, I did not make generalizations or assumptions about participants. This study was designed to provide a sample of experiences from African American administrators employed at PWIs. I provided participants with a platform to share experiences that express their perspectives and sense of value within their various institutions.

Sample Population

In this study, persons who participated consisted of African American mid-level administrators or higher, holding one of the following titles: Assistant Director, Associate Director, Director, Assistant Dean, Dean, Provost, Vice President, President, Chancellor or above. Each participant was employed by a Bachelor's degree granting program at a public or private university on the east coast of the United States. An advanced degree (master's or doctorate) was a condition for participation. Due to a limited population and an initially different research focus, I did not seek only African American participants for my pilot study. However, for this study, the criterion of African American participants was the main factor. I also considered gender of each candidate with the original hope that I could obtain equal gender representation of African American participants who identified as higher education administrators. This was important because it was my desire to have men and women equally represented so that I would be able to make some preliminary assessments about the role gender might play in their experiences. Several studies focus on female administrators but leave out men. There are some that focus solely on the male administrator experience. I believe that both male and female perspectives are equally important, and desired for that to be reflected in my research. Though I aimed to have an equal number of both male and female participants, men

largely outweighed the women regarding who was available and willing to participate in my research study. In addition to snowball sampling, I sent invitations to participate via social media groups that I am part of.

Data Collection Methods

I interviewed ten administrators from both public and private predominantly White institutions. As mentioned, the interviews involved open-ended questions (see Appendix A). I developed my interview protocol based upon findings from my pilot study and review of the literature.

I contacted each participant by email to schedule the interview and conducted all interviews electronically via video due to the current health pandemic. The video format allowed me to gain some of the benefits of face-to-face individual interviews in that I could see facial expressions and some of the feelings, behaviors, and perspectives of each participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Each interview lasted around an hour on average. Prior to the interview beginning, participants reviewed the consent form and I highlighted the details for them, and affirmed their participation in the study. Also prior to the interview, I analyzed the administrator's institution website for their mission statement to gain a better understanding of their context. I asked each interviewee to share their demographic information, which acted as a secondary method to confirm that they met the requirements of the study. I asked participants to disclose their department, years of experience in their current role, and current position and title.

Once consent was provided and all questions were answered, I began the individual interview by asking each participant to tell me about themselves. As the interview continued, I invited each participant to think about their experience as an administrator in higher education as I wanted to gain answers to understand the experiences of African American administrators at

PWIs. As needed, I followed each question from my interview guide with discussion and additional questions in order to clarify the experience and asked a range of follow-up questions based upon their response. I chose a semi-structured interview protocol which allowed for conversation with participants that were guided yet exploratory. The questions enabled me to solicit various experiences and perspectives from the participants. I made a very conscious effort not to interject too often, nor to guide the conversation in narrow directions, in order to ensure that participants were free to share their experiences authentically. After each interview, I sent the recording off in order to have it transcribed. I reviewed and edited each transcription while listening to the recording in order to ensure accuracy, updating when appropriate, and then coded the data to look for recurring themes and expressions offered by the administrators.

Data Analysis Strategies

I analyzed the interview data using standard qualitative procedures for research. This included coding of transcripts, clustering the codes into similar patterns, and identifying themes based on the patterns in the data. I reviewed the data in the light of the trends I found in the literature review related to upward mobility, perceptions of value, sense of belonging, role of race, and mentorship as well as other topics that surfaced solely during the interview time. I read through the transcripts multiple times, coding for key ideas, experiences, values, emotions, and topics of interest. While doing so, I began to identify some preliminary themes and subthemes.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, I used member checks and peer review. First, I utilized member checks in order to verify the accuracy of interview transcripts and my initial analysis of the data. Each participant had the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview and make edits, if necessary, or elaborate on any points that they made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Participants had a three-day window to review the transcript and offer any remarks so that I could make changes or edits if necessary.

In addition to review of the transcripts, I also emailed participants a summary of my initial findings and/or themes so that they could provide any feedback that they saw fit. No one had any changes to either the transcripts or the findings. Of those who responded to the email, they mentioned that what they had received seemed accurate.

I also used peer review as a strategy to get feedback on my research protocol and initial findings. I asked two peers – one who is also in a doctoral program at another institution and one who has already graduated with a PhD and was familiar with the topic to review my transcripts, coding schemes, and data to share with me if they had any suggestions as far as emerging themes or believed that the findings are reasonable. The peer reviewer who had already graduated with a doctorate was instrumental in guiding me through the coding process and demonstrating how to best arrange and classify my information into codes and themes. While reviewing my themes, the second peer reviewer struck up an interesting conversation about next steps regarding future research based on the information gathered for the present study. The individuals chosen were a great fit for my study due to familiarity with the topic, understanding of qualitative research, and being completely unaffiliated with my study, thus being able to offer unbiased perspectives.

Limitations and De(limitations)

In relation to limitations, due to the small sample size, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to all African American administrators within the US. This is typical for a qualitative study as the goal is to gain deep insight about the experiences of small number of participants, not to generalize.

As it pertains to the delimitations of this study, I studied the perspectives of African-American administrators. The perspectives of African American faculty were not considered in this study. Similarly, I concentrated only on the experiences of African Americans, not members of other minority groups.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the methods that I used in order to conduct my qualitative research study, as well as, to ensure trustworthiness of the data that was collected and interpreted. In the fourth chapter, I describe the findings related to the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs, and whether their experiences are directly related to upward mobility value, and ability to support students.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences and perceptions, especially in relation to upward professional mobility, of African American administrators who serve at predominately White institutions of higher learning. Additionally, I hoped to understand from the perspective of African American administrators, how a lack of representation at higher levels affects their ability to aid underserved students. As mentioned earlier, African American administrators can struggle to excel professionally at PWIs due to marginalization. In my experience and research, African American administrators are often overlooked, overworked, and underpaid in comparison to their White counterparts. Also, the viewpoint of the administrators is sought after via research much less often than those of African American faculty and African American students.

Although each administrator comes from a different background, there were both similarities, as well as significant differences in their perspectives and experiences. Even with administrators who serve the same institution, some of their answers were unexpectedly different. I begin this chapter by introducing the participants. I offer a general overview of each participant in which I describe their position, offer a brief snapshot of their career, and explain what led them to working in their current institution. Following participant profiles, I share four overarching themes that I identified throughout my research interviews and coding of data.

Participant Profiles

The ten participants that I interviewed for this study are currently employed as administrators in predominantly White institutions. Additionally, they each hold a minimum of a Masters' degree, with some holding a doctoral degree, while others are actively pursuing the doctorate. Seven of the ten administrators were men, and three were women. Each one of them

self identifies as African American. Participant years of experience ranged from a low of four years to a high of thirty-five years of experience in the realm of higher education. Each of the participants have held multiple positions and most have worked at more than one institution. The majority of their overall work experiences have taken place in predominantly White institutions, although two participants noted having served at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) at some point in their career.

In order to guarantee confidentiality and encourage frank answers to my questions, I assigned each participant a pseudonym and I also used a pseudonym for the university at which they currently work.

Administrator Location, Experience, and Demographic

Administrator	Location	Sex	Number of Years Employed in Higher Education
Stedman	The King's University	M	12
Stokely	The Queen's School	F	5
Claire	Preparatory University	F	5
Parker	College of My Heart	M	4
Rosemary	The Queen's School	F	35
Maximus	College of the Just	M	11
Prince	Arts University	M	7
Theo	The Queen's School	M	5
Alexander	Contemporary University	M	11
Blaze	Knight's Palace Uni	M	6

Stedman

Stedman is currently the Assistant Director for Residence Life at a large public university in the urban south with a student population of more than 35,000. He holds a Master's degree in Higher Education and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in the area of Educational Leadership. In his previous role, he served as an Area Coordinator for Housing. Stedman has worked as an educator for twelve years, with six of those years spent in his current position. For all twelve years, Stedman has been employed at PWIs, although he has worked in different states. He is married with children. At the time of hire at his current institution, Stedman had been actively searching for a new position in the hopes that he could find one that fit his ideal criteria: more autonomy than his previous position, close to an airport and family, and student-facing but not an entry-level position. Stedman mentions that he had an overall positive hiring experience and that the colleagues he met during the interview phase were friendly. Due to the role and institution location meeting each of his ideal criteria, regarding whether he believes he made the right decision in accepting the offer, he notes, "I would agree I think, at the time. Yes, I did make the right decision." Simultaneously, Stedman believes that he has learned all he can in his current role. He mentions that he is currently staying where he is based on convenience. Stedman hopes to change roles and possibly institutions once he graduates with his doctorate.

Stokely

Stokely currently serves within a medium sized, prestigious private institution in the suburban South in the School of Medicine. The student population is roughly 16,500. She is the Director of a bridge program that serves both graduate and undergraduate students. She earned a PhD in Molecular Cell Biology. In her previous role, Stokely worked in the research realm

dealing with mentoring. She has served in higher education for five years, with that past three and a half of those years taking place at her current institution. All five of those years have been spent at PWIs. Stokely is single with no children. While she was searching for a new position, Stokely prioritized her next position having a strong mentoring role, being able to work closely with students, and finding something that would fall in line with her academic credentials, having already completed a postdoctorate. She noted having a positive hiring experience for her current job due to the people that she met, as well as the university's willingness to fly her out during the hiring process. Her only concern was that the interview turnaround time was rushed. Stokely believes that she made the right decision accepting the offer to her current institution, though she believes she has reached a ceiling in her current role because she has to step outside of her position in order to find ways to grow. She is looking to ultimately find a role that will help her develop professionally in what she feels is an authentic way. Until that time, she will continue to add things to her role to expand it further and create new opportunities.

Claire

Claire is the Assistant Director for Fraternity and Sorority Life at her institution of higher learning. The university is large, public, and based in the rural deep South. It boasts a student population of more than 35,000 students. She has a Master of Education and recently relocated from a smaller institution to the large university setting. Claire has worked in higher education for a total of five years, with two of those months being at her current institution. She has only worked at PWIs and she is not married, nor does she have children. Claire says that she chose her current institution first from a list of schools that fell within a recognized organization pertaining to Greek life, and second, based on the following criteria: the school's ability to help her grow as a professional through more direct access to students than her previous position, a title change, a

pay increase, the opportunity to pursue a doctorate, the ease of social life, and her own overall investment in her personal life. She was appreciative of the opportunity to fly down to visit the school and people during her interview process and to have already had a close relationship with her current boss prior to hire. Claire believes that she made the right decision in accepting the offer to come to her current institution. She states, "And I feel like I am growing here…" Claire is satisfied in her role and is planning to stay at her university for the next three to five years.

Parker

Parker is currently the Senior Assistant Director of Admissions at a large sized public university situated in the rural South with a student population of approximately 20,000. In his most recent previous role, he served as the Assistant Director of Admissions for International Student Recruitment. He has worked in higher education for a total of four years, with one year taking place within his current institution. Parker is married with no children. He came to be hired to work in his current school by venting to an Associate Vice Chancellor (who he knew previously) about how dissatisfied he was – for a variety of reasons – with what is now his former employer. She encouraged him to apply for an opening at her institution, and he followed through. Parker reached out and spoke to African American individuals who either worked at, previously worked for, or knew about his current institution in order to take a temperature check on whether the environment was conducive to the support of minority individuals. He was pleased with what he found, saying, "consistently, I saw across the board that all African Americans were more fulfilled in their [current] roles than they were at previous institutions." Parker hopes to eventually serve as a Director of Admissions in the Enrollment Management arena.

Rosemary

Rosemary is the Director for the Multicultural Affairs Center within a medium sized, prestigious private institution in the suburban South. The student population is roughly 16,500. She has been in higher education for a total of 35 years, with all of that time having transpired at her current institution, although she has switched roles throughout her career. Prior to joining higher education, Rosemary first taught English and Reading in a middle school and then worked as a secretary in both an elementary school and an orthopedic clinic. Upon her arrival to her current institution, she was employed as a secretary/staff assistant for multicultural student affairs. Rosemary was not actively searching for a new position immediately before she secured her current role, but she mentions that a friend of hers who was completing his PhD at the institution at the time suggested she apply for the opening. She notes that the people she has been surrounded by were essential to both her hiring experience and her time employed. Rosemary also mentions that when she was hired, she didn't really have a concept of higher education. She says,

> I didn't think of myself as going into higher education….I didn't even have that concept. I was primarily thinking, oh, here's a job I'll be here for maybe, I don't know, maybe three or four years. And, you know, and then I would move on. And so, yeah, I never thought about it as that just wasn't my familiarity, you know.

Rosemary is planning to stay in her current position until retirement.

Maximus

Maximus serves as the Assistant Dean within the Office of University Collaborations at his current institution. It is a mid-sized prestigious private suburban school with a student population of around 8,500. He is also a lecturer in the Education Department as well. He is

married with one child. Maximus has been an educator for a total of eleven years, with that time

spent at four different PWIs. He has a Master of Education degree and a PhD in Educational

Leadership. His immediate past position was in Student Support Services with a TRIO Program.

Prior to that, Maximus was serving in his current institution as a summer camp counselor to a

pre-college program. He was offered his current position due to the work he'd done in his

previous role at the institution, as well as the institution's knowledge of some notoriety he'd

gained after attending and graduating from a prestigious university. Maximus notes that in part, it

was a matter of convenience to accept the position at his current place of work as he was in

graduate school out of state when he completed his Masters' degree, and he desired to be in

closer proximity to his wife. He mentions that he is not tied to his current institution, and

although he is happy with where his is, he does not necessarily believe that he will be there for

the long haul. This is in part due to the fact that his family may need to relocate because of his

wife's career.

Prince

Prince is currently the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within his institution's

medical school. The university is situated within the urban North and is a large public institution

with a total of over 50,000 students enrolled. Prior to his current role, Prince worked in a student

affairs position dealing with diversity. He is single with no children. Prince has been an educator

for a total of seven years, with three of those years taking place at his current institution. He has

worked in a PWI for all seven years. When searching for a new position, Prince knew that he

wanted to work in a DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) space and he knew that he wanted to

live in the northeastern area of the United States. Prince notes that although the hiring process for

his current job was unorganized, he nonetheless felt a genuine connection with his would-be supervisor which sealed the deal in him accepting the offer for his current position. He says,

> She really was a believer in the power of, of DEI and higher ed and its ability to both
> serve our student populations, but also to serve the communities around us and the
> broader, higher education community as a country. And, so, the more that I listened to
> her, and the more that I just had her full support, or whatever it is I had, the more I felt
> like I made the right decision.

Prince also mentions that he is very happy in his current role, but also that he is actively looking for other positions as well. He says, "I've always heard that the best time to apply for a job is when you're happy at your current job." Prince also notes that he is considering corporate America as a viable option, should he ever leave higher education, due to higher pay.

Theo

Theo is a Learner Consultant and Student Engagement Coordinator within a medium sized, prestigious private institution in the suburban South. The student population is roughly 16,500. His most recent position prior to this was as a staff member in the office of Multicultural Student Affairs. Theo has served on the higher education level for a total of five years, with two of those years taking place at his current institution. He is single with no children. Theo was drawn to his current university primarily due to the opportunity to pursue a second Masters' degree. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Educational Leadership. While there for school, he was contacted by the university as they were aware of his previous work for another institution. Theo believes that he made the right choice to attend and be employed by his current institution. He mentions that he feels like he is working in fulfilling his purpose and that everything aligned

for him to go to school and work at the same time. He says, "I feel called to the work, I have a great team that I work with, particularly, you know, my boss, who's a Black woman and who supports my developmental growth." Theo mentions that he sees himself at his current institution for another seven-to-ten years, due to a variety of reasons: flexibility, the people that he works with, the type of work that he does, and because of the opportunities for growth.

Alexander

Alexander is the Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at his institution of higher learning. The school is a large, public research institution seated just above the Mason-Dixon line with a student population of over 20,000. His immediate previous position was in the President's Office at a community college. He has served in the field of education for fourteen years total, with eleven of those years being in higher education. For the other three years, Alexander served as a K-12 teacher. He has worked at six different institutions; three HBCUs and three PWIs. He is single with no children and earned a PhD in Leadership Studies. Alexander was drawn to his current position and institution due to the ability to be dwelling in student matters while also sitting at the table with fellow chief diversity officers. Additionally, through the interview process he became aware that the institution had a void that could be filled with his expertise, which is "diversity, equity, and inclusion…creating safe, affirming, and brave spaces for diverse students." Ultimately, Alexander hopes to become a Vice President of Student Affairs and noted that he does not believe in staying in a role in higher education for any longer than a three-to-five year window.

Blaze

Blaze is the Assistant Director for Student Conduct at his university. The institution is a mid-sized private school with approximately 7,000 students. It is situated with the suburban South. He has worked in the world of higher education for six years, with some of that time having been spent at an HBCU, though most of it has been at a predominantly White institution. Blaze is married with no children and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership. He did not have the best experience at his previous institution and actively sought out new employment. While at his previous institution, Blaze gave a presentation at a conference at his current university and discovered during the conference that he wanted to work there. He made a connection with an employee at the conference, and after applying once and not getting hired, his named was raised the second time he applied due to his previous networking, and Blaze was offered the job. He mentions that during his interview, he loved how each of the interviewers talked about, and made space for, inclusion of equity. Of his current institution, Blaze says, "I enjoy the work. And also, I think that I am probably underpaid and overtaxed." Blaze's ideal job is to become a Dean of Students or a Vice President of Student Affairs.

Each participant brought their own set of experiences and reasons for wanting to work at their current institution, whether they feel valued, whether they see upward mobility as an option, and what equitable practices look like for African American administrators. They shared a range of thoughts and experiences with me during each interview. Each administrator has a different background and family life dynamic, as evident in their brief profiles, which provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of African American administrators at predominantly White institutions.

Themes

Although the research participants have a wide range of backgrounds and experiences surrounding their time spent working in PWIs, there were several shared themes that identified in their interviews. I arranged the data collected into four themes: Mentorship Matters, The Necessity of Authenticity, The Reality of Upward Mobility, and Value Me. African American administrators are drawn to institutions where they connect with interviewers, appreciate building and sharing new relationships once hired, and believe that mentoring is essential to success. In terms of upward mobility, participants believe that it is possible to progress, but often find themselves hitting a proverbial ceiling within 3-4 years in their current roles. As it relates to the theme of value, African American administrators discuss how they perceive their worth and the institutionally external and internal ways in which they do, or do not, feel respected by and within their places of employment. Finally, the theme of authenticity pertains to the administrators regularly striving to be themselves without feeling the need to codeswitch to a large degree

Mentorship Matters

I asked administrators questions about their experiences in their current and previous places of employment in order to determine their values and goals, and how well they align with those of the institutions where they have worked. Participants showed through interview responses that one of the things that they value most and believe makes a difference in the experiences of African American administrators is mentorship.

As I noted in my literature review, community can play a vital role in the success or failure of minority individuals in higher education. A welcoming and supportive community is also an important part of the decision to join, stay at, or exit an institution. I asked administrators

questions about their initial interview process, the role that mentorship plays in their experiences as African American administrators at PWIs, and to describe their counterspaces and coping mechanisms. Counterspaces in particular are places in which minority individuals are able to be in community with one another and affirm each other culturally in the midst of a place where culture may be limited. They can be officially put together as a group or a conference, or counterspaces can simply be discussion within an office or a local coffee shop. I hoped to determine what role relationships played in the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs. These questions yielded responses about the importance of both professional and personal relationships for participants.

Mentorship Not Offered Upon Hire

During the interview, I asked participants whether or not they received a mentor upon hire. In addition to discovering the role that relationships held in the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs, I also wanted to find out whether or not PWIs were intentionally providing those administrators with tools to help them thrive upon arrival. Based on the literature, offering mentorship is one tool that could make a major difference in the success of this population. Largely, interview participants were not offered mentoring when they were hired.

Stedman, Claire, Blaze, Parker, Prince, Alexander, and Rosemary all noted that they were not offered any type of mentoring for their positions when they were hired at their current institutions. Stedman shares that this was true for all of the PWIs where he has personally been employed. He does recall receiving business cards from other higher education professionals during conferences, with comments to connect with them if he needed any advice or support. He says that he has reached out to those individuals when he has needed something; however, he

does not see these connections as a mentor/mentee type of relationship, but rather one where he can occasionally depend on folks to provide him with feedback. Similar to Stedman, Blaze reaches out to people as he sees a need. On not being offered a mentor upon employment, Blaze says, "To give it context though, I'm not as big of a fan on paired mentorships." Stedman mentioned that because there are still not high numbers of African American administrators at PWIs that he doesn't even believe it is on the mind of those in power to offer mentoring to people of color within the higher education setting.

Rosemary does not recall having been offered a mentor in her 35 years of employment at her current university. She mentions that for the most part, people would informally ask her occasionally what her future plans were for moving up from her then current role.

Although Claire has a strong mentor within higher education, she mentions that she has not heard or seen much talk of mentorship at her institution. Describing why mentorship is important, Claire says,

> …yeah, it is vitally important in every aspect, because if you're just flying through blind, you don't know what you don't know, and sometimes a mistake that 15 other people have made, if they had told you, you may not have made that same mistake. So yeah, it's been very helpful in helping me figure out if I want to continue to do this work.

Having the guidance and foresight from experienced individuals is especially critical to the sustainment of African American administrators who are striving to go above and beyond in a PWI where the environment is not always a level playing field.

Parker and Maximus offered opposite opinions on the significance or insignificance of race pertaining to mentorship for African American administrators at PWIs. Parker was not offered any systemic or official mentoring upon hire at his present institution. Instead, he let his

Director know right from the beginning that he desired to be mentored by an African American individual. Having already been mentored by a White administrator, Parker wanted to experience being supported by someone who looked like him and was in a position that he wanted to one day hold. Maximus mentions that when he first arrived at his university, "well-intentioned White folks" essentially introduced him quite often to the other one or two Black men on campus as a means for possible mentorship. Maximus notes that while he has sought mentorship from the people suggested to him, he also makes a point to seek out individuals – regardless of race - who view the institution through, "a critical lens."

Alexander expressed that he does not have any mentors at his current place of employment and was not offered one, though he has found mentors in higher education within the broader student affairs field. He believes this to be a positive, because he can vent to these people however he needs to without fear of retaliation or his concerns being leaked to the greater campus community. Alexander also notes that because of the level of his position as an Associate Vice President, that the higher up the ladder one climbs, the harder it is for them to confide in anyone outside of those at the same level.

The Qualities of a Strong Mentor

While talking with participants, I asked them to describe their experiences with mentorship. These experiences could have taken place at their current institutions, former places of employment, or just life in general. Overall, administrators warmly shared the things that they thought made their experiences with those that they've grown fond of as mentors, exceptional.

Blaze told me that each mentor serves a different purpose for him. He shared that throughout his life and career, he has always chosen mentors based on people that he likes, respects, and trusts with his most vulnerable moments and deepest secrets. Blaze values mentors

who have taken the time to personally invest in him and who are honest with him. Along the same lines, Stokely speaks about personally having different mentors for various reasons and seasons. She values honesty, openness, and in some way, shape, or form the motivation for the mentee.

Both Theo and Parker mentioned the qualities that most drew them to their respective mentors. Of Theo's direct supervisor, who is one of his mentors, he appreciates the quality of her leadership in higher education, her love for people, the way that she treats others fairly, and time that she sets aside to nurture those who report to her. Theo says that leadership and mentorship like that, "…is hard to find. Especially at a University like The Queen's School." Theo credits where he is today professionally (both in ministry and higher education) to the mentors that he started with back home in the town in upstate NY where he was raised, his mentors in the Church, as well as those who mentor him currently both professionally and personally. Of his current mentor Parker says, "She has really helped me to understand how this world works and how a person that looks like me, in this field can find fulfillment and feel that they have the tools to be successful on this side. She's really great." Parker also notes that he values the goals that his mentor helps him to set, and the intentional time that she carves out every two weeks to meet with him. One of Parker's goals that he set with his mentor is to become the Chair of a particular organization in higher education. He is currently the co-chair and believes that his in on track to reach his target, due at least in part to the support of his mentor.

Claire and Rosemary share the importance of mentors who challenge their mentees to be better. On this topic, Rosemary states,

> …she always pushed me. Always. You know, she had a very broad view and she has
> done that with every person she has ever worked with. She made sure that if they did not

have a Masters, they got their Masters. She pushed them. So of all the mentors, she is the

one that [I] will have to just give…ultimate, the ultimate kudos to. I owe her a great deal,

and I've told her that I will be forever grateful.

Claire states, "…mentoring to me has been vitally important. If I hadn't stumbled upon the

mentor that I currently have. I wouldn't still be in the field." She mentions that one of her

mentors is important to her because she communicates to Claire any potential drawbacks that she

sees in decisions that Claire may be getting ready to make, as well as lessons that she has learned

throughout her career, and advises Claire regarding how she can become a better professional.

Prince did not discuss mentors at his current institution. He does mention that he is

appreciative of a mentor at his former place of employment who would take him for lunch once a

week and help him to process the benefits and drawbacks of staying or leaving higher education.

Prince states, "…it was definitely the conversations with my mentors, both in this example of

black men helping other black men…who helped me to understand and think about and talk

through these things." Blaze also attributes his decision to stay in higher education and to leave

residential life for student conduct in part to his mentors advising him on what might be best for

his personal and professional career. He states, "Mentorship is extremely important for me."

Alexander's biggest draw to his mentors – one of whom serves as a Provost, and one of

which serves as a Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs – is that their conversations are honest, and

that he can run scenarios by them that he may be having a hard time navigating, and his mentors

are typically able to give him sound and solid advice on how to proceed with the matter.

Maximus describes his mentorship experience as being one in which he has had people

who look like him and those who don't. He says,

I feel as though I've gotten phenomenal mentorship from these, these folks that people have either put me onto or I've met in passing on my own. I've been mentored by folks who don't look like me and don't come from my background. It's just, I think I had to expand my expectations of mentorship.

My Community

At their current institutions both, Blaze and Theo consider their direct supervisor to be mentors. Blaze notes that although she is White woman, his direct supervisor has been a safe space for him both in his role and as an African American male on a predominantly White campus. Outside of that, he names three Black women who are significant in some way, shape, or form to be those who mentor him. Blaze additionally identifies an important counterspace for him as the Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity Education at his campus. He mentions that his husband works in that office and sometimes they both talk with colleagues of color when they need to process or hold space with individuals who share the same or similar experiences. Similar to Blaze, Theo shares that his number one mentor at work is his boss. Theo also lists the new Dean of Students as someone who he sees as mentor due to them having lunch often and the Dean helping Theo to get into position for what he wants to do next.

Rosemary says that there is one person that stands out to her. The person who she would credit as having "mentored me most effectively," is her one of her closest friends, who at the time served as an Interim Director when Rosemary was an Administrative Assistant. Their mentoring relationship started when Rosemary's mentor could not attend a meeting due to a schedule conflict. The mentor asked Rosemary to attend the meeting in her place, take notes, and report back. This experience opened up the opportunity for Rosemary to be present in a space and among people that she'd never been exposed to before.

Claire and Stedman both discussed groups and or individuals within their respective work communities that provide counterspaces. Claire mentioned a minority group for women of color within her field where she has been able to connect with other Black professionals, including the Director. Outside of mentors, Claire shares that there is one other African American woman in her department and a Latinx male across the hall who she sees as part of her community. She notes that even though she herself is not always the most social, when she needs a space to unwind and share her frustrations, the two aforementioned colleagues have helped her to feel as though she can do that in a way that no one else has within her university setting. Claire also notes being part of a GroupMe for Black faculty and staff members at her current institution. Since mentoring is scarce for Stedman, he indicated that he has core group of individuals who he informally spends time with. He states,

> We're just Black brothers…we've sent jobs each other's way, have reviewed resumes and cover letters and have other times [had]…very intentional professional development conversations with everybody…but we find ourselves like every day going up for lunch or we have our own group chat and so on. First, we would try to put something in there real quick. Sometimes we're able to respond, sometimes we're not. But knowing that we're all in this together and still trying to help each other out any way that we can.

As it relates to other relationships that help administrators to maintain their current roles, Theo also notes that he often grabs drinks at a local bar with colleagues or "people who look like me." In most cases, the participants that I interviewed – whether inside or outside of their current institution of employment – believed the mentorship of African American administrators to be essential to their success. Most of the participants noted, however, that mentorship was not offered to them upon arrival at the institution. For some, this was a positive thing due to their

ability and preference to keep work frustrations from being aired in the workplace. For others, they noted that it was or would be nice to have a mentor within their employment setting.

The Reality of Upward Mobility

In general, most people tend to value the ability and opportunity to be upwardly mobile within the workplace. I questioned African American administrators regarding their experiences with upward mobility in predominantly White Institutions, and their beliefs about possibilities for African American administrators to advance professionally in higher education and what it takes to advance in their careers. Administrators shared through their interview responses that they believed it possible to advance and that they have seen or experienced advancement, but that sometimes African American administrators are held more closely than their White counterparts to a certain set of expectations, education, and credentialing in order to move forward.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Regarding perspectives and experiences pertaining to the opportunity for upward mobility in PWIs, some of the African American administrators interviewed shared their thoughts on whether or not it matters to stay at the same institution for a longer period of time in hopes of a promotion, or whether it makes more sense to move up the ranks by switching institutions. Additionally, administrators shared information about how being targeted to be fired influenced their decisions to stay at or leave their current institutions.

Stedman remarks that he believes it is more difficult to achieve upward mobility for African American administrators as compared to White administrators, in part because of administrators themselves and in part because of an institutional agenda. On the side of African American administrators, Stedman insists that they often hop around from school to school in

order to move up the ladder. This may make things more difficult due to not having a long track record at any one particular institution. It also can complicate matters because African American administrators have not been in positions long enough to make a significant change before they move on to another school, thus crippling their effectiveness.

In contrast to Stedman, Stokely, Alexander, and Claire believe that in order for African American administrators to move up the institutional hierarchy, they must switch schools. Stokely says, "And I think it also means moving institutions regularly…you have to move out to move up." Stokely believes that it is possible for African American administrators to advance into more prominent roles, but that it is primarily up to the individual desiring to do so. She says that because it is incredibly rare for people to just take you by the hand and lead you to where you want to go, the intentionality falls on the one who wants to make the switch to align themselves with any resources or individuals needed and to actively seek out the position desired. Similar to Stokely, Alexander notes the importance of moving institutions. Although he acknowledges that there was a generation who could stay employed at the same place for decades, he asserts that there is, "always an opportunity somewhere else." He passionately says that he has absolutely no problem packing up his whole house and moving, and additionally that he doesn't believe in staying employed at any one place for longer than a three-to-five-year window. Alexander believes that "keeping things moving" in terms of switching positions and institutions is what has allowed his career to continually progress upward. He also shares that when people stay in the same position for fifteen to twenty years at a time, there is nowhere for young, African American professionals to move regarding upward mobility, because the seats are already occupied. Claire also reflected on the idea that sometimes you have to move out in order to move up. Pertaining to the experiences of African American administrators and their

experiences of upward mobility, Claire mentions that she believes those administrators are often hindered due to not being truly valued for what they bring to the table. This causes them to seek employment in other places.

Regarding the experiences and perspectives of Black administrators in higher education, Parker and Theo both noted that each institution is different. Theo and Parker share experiences of times when they became aware of their previous institutions firing African American administrators with no true reason. This fueled both of their desires to move out from their old positions of employment. Parker expresses the hurt and the anger that he felt upon finding out the way that his colleagues were being treated, and that additionally, he was on the list to be fired at his former institution. He says,

> I think every institution is different. You know, every institution says, oh, we're equal opportunity employers or whatever that means. I mean, every school is different. At my previous institution, there was not the opportunity for advancement of people of color. In fact, every time that someone got promoted to a leadership position, they were fired or something happened where they could not be successful and they had to leave… And so we were all on the list to be fired [due to my old institution being in debt]. So unfortunately, two of my colleagues in my department were fired. And the only reason why me and my other colleague were safe was because the supervisor advocated for us and told them that they had no grounds of firing us and that he was only firing us because we were Black. And so that that hurt to learn that. And that was when the reality set for me. That dang…dang. This is how these White people feel about me. And that was a rude awakening for me. So, it's definitely…it's not easy for African-Americans…for us to advance ourselves.

African American administrators often have to decide whether it is best for them to stay at an institution to get more years in one place and hopefully a leg up, or whether it is better to take their chances and move from place to place in order to rise professionally. Additionally, staying or leaving a particular institution also means contending with co-workers, supervisors, or institutional dynamics that are set to get rid of African American administrators at the first sign of trouble, whether it be due to the administrators doing or not.

Education Gives Rise to Elevation

When I conducted interviews, I did not ask participants whether or not they believed education to be important to their roles. I did initially ask each interviewee what their level of education was. Each shared that they had a Master's degree at minimum, with the rest either in pursuit of a doctorate or having already earned one. The majority of these degrees are in some form of educational leadership or higher education administration. This information helped me to understand that African American administrators value advanced degrees and most likely see them as necessary to upward mobility within the world of higher education. As the administrators discussed what it takes to be upwardly mobile during the interviews, education presented itself as a sub-theme.

Both Rosemary and Alexander believe that level of education is a deciding factor regarding the advancement of African American administrators. She states, "I think in many instances, unless you have a Master's and above, it's hard to move through. It really is." Though her comment is not directly tied to being able to advance, Rosemary notes that outside of official education, it has been vital for her to understand the importance of long-term salary earnings. She posits that awareness of how to achieve incremental salary increases makes a difference in earning power, capacity, and opportunities that she's had throughout her career. Alexander

believes in the importance of being credentialed. He says that he knows without a doubt that he would not be in his current position if it were not for his earned PhD. He talks about the "sad reality" of African American administrators having to go above and beyond the minimum requirements in order to receive any job or decent salary, although their White counterparts seemingly often do not. Although Alexander states the "sad reality," simultaneously he says that going above and beyond is necessary in order for Black administrators to succeed. He believes in going the extra mile and doing what may be uncomfortable now in order to be victorious in the long game.

Claire also mentions the importance of having credentials behind one's name in order to move up the higher education ladder. She says that she considers a Master's degree to be the baseline for most jobs within higher education, although generally, people can advance without it. She says, "You can get in if you don't have one [Master's], if you came in on the ground floor - like a different level - but usually, you already have it." Claire's perspective on needing a Master's or Doctorate differs from other participants because she shares that although it is required and she believes that it will theoretically help you, in actuality a degree is no replacement for experience. She states,

> [In school], we learned a lot of things like theories, and we wrote a lot of papers and did a lot of case studies. But my first day on the job, none of that helped me like it was just like, okay, here, do this. And so yes, I have this degree. Yes, I think that it's great. And I think that it helps you think critically and helps you to know what research to do. And if you do want to get your terminal degree, you can do that. But I really feel like depending on the program, unless you do a graduate assistantship - which I did not - that puts you in that space to do the work that you want to do long term, you are wholly unprepared for

the next step. I worked full time as an admissions counselor. So, I could go straight from

grad school and use those theories in like the real-world applications that I was doing

enrollment management, but walking into Fraternity and Sorority Life, my last semester

of graduate school when I wasn't even finished, I had no idea what I was doing. So, I just

did it the best way I knew how…I kind of figured it out, kind of bluffed it out and kept

moving.

African American administrators believe that attaining more education – whether

admitted implicitly or explicitly – helps them when it comes to being hired for better jobs or

being promoted in the world of higher education generally, though especially in predominantly

White institutions. For Black administrators, additional education is a matter of proving

themselves to those they want to work for. Though it is most certainly a "sad reality," as

Alexander states, it is definitely an actuality the African American administrators must dwell in,

in order to professionally climb the ranks.

Your Gifting and Relationships Will Make Room

When describing their perspectives on upward mobility for African American

administrators situated at PWIs, Theo, Rosemary, and Blaze describe their belief that it depends

on the institution of employment. Theo mentions that at his former institution, he was able to

move up because he built close relationships that yielded opportunity for him to grow upward. At

his current institution, he was able to get in the door because an interviewer remembered him

from the last time he'd applied. Theo states, "…higher ed[ucation] is not necessarily what you

know, it's who you know." He mentions that relationships are not simply one-sided with him

being the beneficiary of promotions. He discusses how in each role, he strives to "create space to

bring others along with me…" He shares, "So if I have access to…I'm on the committee, I'm looking out for our brothers and sisters to get them up."

 Similar to Theo's perspective on the opportunity for upward mobility, Rosemary believes that it largely comes down to a combination of "divine intervention" and relationships. She attributes much of her current success to her first boss, who is now more of a friend, who saw what she was capable of, believed in Rosemary's ability to succeed, and offered Rosemary her first role and salary advancement. Blaze shares his story of having met the person who brought him into his current institution at a housing conference while he was working for another institution. Previously, he applied for a job at the university he works at now but was not hired. After meeting someone from the school and taking time to sit down and talk with her about himself and what he was looking to do in the long-term, when the time came for him to apply, he was able to reach out to her and she remembered who he was and believed Blaze to be a great fit for his current institution.

Along with building and maintaining close relationships, Theo also notes that the opportunity for upward mobility is made easier when you show the school that you are a higher education professional who simply cares about the wellbeing of the students, and your gifts and talents are able to benefit the student body. Theo observes that this is when the school will create or find space for one to contribute in ways that capitalize on one's gifts and talents. He has especially seen this happen at his current institution. He says,

> But most importantly, you know, your gift…your gift makes room for you. And that
>
> allowed me to move through without having to take anybody else down…move up, in
>
> that space… I believe if that's what God wants me to do, if that's what I'm called to do,
>
> there will be room.

Theo is bi-vocational. In addition to his work as a higher education professional, he is also a pastor within his church. I believe that this plays a role in the strong thread of faith he has that God can and will work out his advancement without him having to pull the rug out from underneath others to succeed.

Maximus shares his thoughts on upward mobility for African American administrators from a less broad standpoint than the other participants. He acknowledges that since each of his positions at his current institution were created specifically for him, that he is biased due to his experience, and realizes that his experience is a unique one. Similar to Theo, he talks about how his outside gifts of hip hop, poetry, and spoken word have helped to make room for him to advance professionally at his current institution. He believes that leveraging his talent gives him a special edge both with students and administration.

It is no secret that familiarity and connection are much more likely to yield desired results than going into any situation blind. Not only are relationships important, but sharing one's true gifts and talents as an African American administrator can make them that more tempting to hire and be promoted within predominantly White institutions.

A Matter of Promotion

Something that African American administrators struggle with is being fairly promoted within predominantly White institutions. While some of the administrators I interviewed believed that their path to promotion was more challenging than their White counterparts, others believed that times had recently changed, and that more African American administrators were being promoted due to social justice matters coming to the forefront, especially in 2020.

Both Blaze and Stedman discuss African American administrators being routinely passed over for promotions given to their White counterparts, even though Black administrators are

often more qualified. Blaze mentions that institutions talk as though they center diversity, equity, and inclusion, but in actuality, PWIs often promote White individuals over African American administrators. He notes that time and time again, he has seen job positions rewritten and made available to his White counterparts, when at the same time, Black administrators are overlooked. Stedman also says that African Americans are often overlooked for promotions even though they often have more experience and education than their White counterparts who are most often offered the promotion. He questions, "So if I was here longer and I have more experience and more post master's degrees, then why was I not really considered for this [position]?" Stedman asserts that this type of lack of consideration is what causes African American administrators to begin "hopping" from one school to the next, which in the long run is detrimental for institutions. He mentions that a possible way to aid in the advancement of African American administrators at PWIs would be to launch internal searches to fill seats within the university first, before opening jobs to the greater community. This would regularly promote already hired employees, in addition to strengthening each department as the skills that an employee learns or gains in one role are often transferable to another role.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Alexander mentions that since the death of George Floyd and other Black men at the hands of police, he has personally seen more African American administrators being hired and promoted. He believes that those deaths sparked a "sense of urgency" and "call to action" that pulled PWIs out of their places of complacency and into spaces of equity and access. He acknowledges that it has not always been the case that Black administrators have been promoted because upward mobility has not always existed for this group. However, those who have moved up have learned how to navigate the environment through when and when not to speak, who to talk to, and what issues to bring to the table.

Alexander mentions that in order to advance professionally, sometimes it means being the only person representing your race at a higher level, which can take an emotional toll.

Prince mentions that in order for African American administrators to advance in at PWIs, it is important for them to be unafraid of institutional politics. He maintains they must have, "the ability to self-police, and to, to know how to explode internally without exploding externally," have a community both inside and outside of the institution, and they need, "White allies who are willing to leverage the power that comes with their whiteness to advance roles. It takes having some cheerleaders who are loud." Prince fully describes the need for African American administrators at PWIs to have healthy mix of both positive, internally driven qualities and traits paired with an external support from community and White colleagues at their institution of employment.

Similar to Rosemary, Parker describes the importance of wage earnings. He also mentions the disparity in pay among African American administrators at HBCUs and those at PWIs, with PWI employees making more money, though they are not any more qualified. Parker shares that in order for Black administrators to advance professionally, they must challenge the status quo in a way that pulls the goggles off of others but does not cause them to compromise their position.

There are several factors that influence why or why not African American administrators are promoted within predominantly White institutions. Although it may be true that more African Americans are beginning to promoted to higher positions within PWIs, most are still seen as a second choice to their White counterparts.

Intentional Access

Blaze is passionate about accessibility of upward mobility for African American administrators. He mentioned that a two-hundred-year long history, which includes the upholding of White supremacy and dominance, complicates upward mobility for African American administrators. He states, "…when I think about higher ed and how it is situated in this culture – it is trying to include people in a system that quite literally was not built for them. Higher ed was not built for non-White people." Blaze suggests that for things to change in the future, White allies would have to decide that they choose to support African American administrators by showing up in the spaces where it counts the most, with action and words.

In relation to upward mobility for African American administrators, Prince mentions that access is something that makes a difference. He notes that reporting directly to "the big boss" and having a role that is trending right now (e.g., involving diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives) gives him more space and opportunity to design his career trajectory into what he wants it to be. He states, "My reality is that I fully expect to be able to progress in this role, at this institution, but I realize I am an outlier – not the norm."

Overall, participants were able to express their perspectives and experiences regarding upward mobility for African American administrators in a way that shed light on extrinsic and intrinsic factors of higher education advancement. Advancement does not all come down to institutional issues being fixed, nor is it all centered on experiences and degrees that the individual has acquired. One thing that does make a major difference is personal motivation and drive. This is important no matter who you are, where you work, or what it is that you do. Rosemary suggests that personal determination to take on something new and unknown adds to the overall ability for African American administrators to succeed. She recalls that many of the

people – specifically women - who were her direct counterparts in other offices decided that they did not want any extra work or responsibilities, and so they simply did not advance. In this section, I discussed the overall theme of the reality of upward mobility for African American administrators at PWIs, and the subthemes of decision to leave, advanced degrees, relationships, talent, access, and promotion. In the next section, I discuss the perception of value as it relates to African American administrators.

Value Me

As one might deduce, feeling valued in one's place of employment is a significant factor that contributes to job satisfaction, retention, and the ability to function effectively in one's assigned role. In the interviews I conducted, I learned that this was absolutely the case for all of the African American administrators. Whether it was being valued due to their role in the institution at large, valued primarily by the others in their office, or being valued by students, administrators acknowledged the importance of worth within their respective roles. Within the group of administrators that I interviewed, participants demonstrated through their explanations ways that they are valued, and/or what it would take for them to be fully valued in an ideal situation.

Partially Valued

Being valued no matter what setting one is in makes a difference in the experience. Some of the participants interviewed mentioned that they were valued in part – by their respective department, for example, but not by the institution as a whole. Parker, Alexander, Claire, Stokely, and Blaze mention that in some way, shape, or form, they are only partially valued within their current institutions. Parker feels valued and supported within his office at his current place of employment. He believes based on conversation, that other African American

colleagues also feel affirmed within their division. Although Parker personally feels valued in his role, he notes that the institution itself has quite a way to go in order for African American administrators to be valued overall. Alexander also says that he feels as though he is valued by his supervisor and within his division, specifically. He notes that due to the newness of his position, he does not feel institutionally valued as of yet. This is largely because his colleagues are not quite sure of what to make of why he has been hired and how that could positively or negatively affect them. He also shares that people are not always sure about who he is personally. Although he does not feel valued institution-wide, due to his position, Alexander does believe that people respect his authority. He believes that his opinion, background, and credentials are respected overall, albeit less than his White counterparts. When the Vice President is out, there are times when the leadership mantle falls directly to Alexander, and he is in charge. People respect his authority to make decisions and get the job done.

Similar to Alexander, Claire is new in her role and to her institution. She contends that it is difficult to know whether or not one is valued in a particular position or place until they leave that role and are able to compare it to something else or look back on it. Reflecting on her last position and institution, she believes that she was valued. Due to it being a small institution, she could directly see the affect that she had on students and staff members, and she had more time to deal with problems that arose in a personable way. Claire admits that she is still trying to figure out whether she is valued or not in her current institution. Since she works in one of the largest institutions with one of the largest Greek systems in the country, she feels more like a "cog in the machine" as opposed to an essential, hardworking member of her institution. Stokely gives a brief response about feeling valued. She mentions that if there is a crisis and she puts out the fire by deescalating the situation, then people definitely see the value of her presence.

Outside of crisis situations however, Stokely thinks that her colleagues and institution struggle to see on a daily basis exactly what is there is to value about her. She states, "I think they just don't know I'm needed until there is a problem." Stokely believes that people respect her authority in terms of how she deals with and helps her students to succeed. Outside of that, Stokely suggests that the window is narrow for respect.

Blaze is a bit of an outlier as he feels valued and respected by the institution on a surface level, but he says he is not valued on the deeper level that he desires and needs in order to feel 100% seen and cared for. Blaze seems confident in the thought that his thoughts and his feelings are truly respected. He believes that people know that when they ask him a question about anything, they can trust that he will give them and honest, clear, and transparent response. Though Blaze believes that the campus community overall values his perspectives, he notes that he is not always valued in the ways that he personally needs. For example, he mentions that compensation is an indicator of value in an institution. As stated earlier on, Blaze believes that he is overworked and underpaid. He also mentions that the university does not consider what it is like for him as a Black man to go to work in his county every day while actively seeing confederate flags and Trump signs hanging down from bridges. He relates this to "lack of his intellectual property and opinions," but holistically they do not show that they value him as a person.

Although being valued within one's department is great, not being valued by the overall institution can make it difficult for administrators to connect to others and be taken seriously once they leave the comforts of their department. It is important for Black administrators to be valued not just by one portion of the school, but by every individual, group, and department that they come into contact with.

Overall Value

While some of the earlier mentioned interview participants felt as though they were only valued in some ways but not others, there were some who did feel as though they were valued overall within their institutions and departments. For the most part, these individuals felt as though in their current situations, they'd received most of what they needed in order to prosper where they are.

Maximus and Theo both share that they feel really valued at their institutions, partly because their universities are relational places. Maximus also feels valued because his institution created positions for him and they celebrate and leverage his notoriety and gifts as an artist. Maximus notes that he believes he is respected. Due to being someone who will speak up for others and ask questions when he or others need clarity, Maximus is seen as a team player. Although he is in a position of power, he is not a micromanager nor does he feel that he is overwhelming as a boss in a negative way. Instead, he uses his authority to empower students and employees by coming alongside them and helping to make the University a better place for all on its grounds. Maximus does acknowledge that while he feels both respected and valued, he is fully aware that others on campus may not have had the same experience as him. Theo shares that for the first time in his career, he feels valued at his current institution. He shares that if he ever does not feel valued and appreciated in a place or role, without question, he will leave the job because there is always another opportunity where his colleagues will appreciate the gifts and talents that he has to offer. Theo mentions that although he does not work to be noticed, he does appreciate being valued both by students and the institution and that people notice the effort that he is putting forth to ensure quality and positive outcome for the university, staff, faculty, and

above all, the students. Theo is confident that he is valued but shares that he struggles with people respecting his authority due to not being in an executive level position, and because he doesn't have a doctoral degree, which he sees tends to command respect. He notes that his school is heavy on titles. He struggles with his position sounding like an entry level position, even though it encompasses much more than that. He concludes his discussion of this topic by saying that he believes that students and some of his colleagues respect his authority, but it just depends on whose path he crosses as to what extent.

Like many of the others, Prince feels valued within his university. Due to his role in the fields of diversity, equity, and inclusion, people see the need for his presence within his department and the greater campus community. Additionally, Prince serves on the Senior Leadership Team for Scientific Research, which is a respected position overall. Although Prince feels like there are some individuals who do not know how to interact with him in general, perhaps because they fear being told that they are doing something wrong policy-wise, he believes that by and large, "there is a general kind of buy-in to the work I am doing." Prince does pause to question whether he is completely valued based on his level of access to his supervisor. He has observed that other employees meet with her on a more consistent basis, whereas he only sits down with her every once in a while, and questions whether that is telling of more than his outward and surface level value. Prince does believe that his authority is respected, simply because he reports to "the big boss." He also notes that because his institution is geographically located in the northeastern part of the United States, he thinks he does not have to deal with as much racism or refusal to obey his requests and orders from colleagues who quite possibly would not support a man of color serving in a leadership role over them. Similar to Stokely's experience that I described in the prior section, Stedman speaks briefly on his perception of how

he is valued within his place of work. He believes that he is valued at his place of employment and that his personal goals align with those of the institution. He does not speak at length on his perspective regarding whether he personally feels valued or not, however he does note that institutions overlooking African American administrators for people of other races even though they may be less qualified, is telling as it relates to how Black administrators are valued overall.

Rosemary notes that she feels valued within her office environment, and more specifically, "…by the people that I need to feel valued by." She shares that even though she believes that others perceive her differently than she perceives herself, she still feels appreciated and valued. A portion of Rosemary's value doesn't come from being affirmed extrinsically. Intrinsically, Rosemary believes that she is an individual and unique, which means that nobody can be who she is or offer what she has to offer better than she can. She is confident in what she brings to the table and those who appreciate who she is.

How We Feel Valued

Several of the African American administrators interviewed discuss what it would take for them to feel completely valued. They list in detail the things that it would take to round a corner for both themselves as individuals and African American administrators overall to feel fully valued working in predominantly White institutions.

Parker lists competitive salary and benefits such as tuition remission for graduate degrees as two of the things that would show Black employees that they matter to the institution outside of filling a space and doing work. Claire also mentions that being compensated well financially is a vital way for employers to show that they value the contributions and experience of their employees. Blaze shares this sentiment as well.

Parker and Alexander find inclusion, equity, and access for African American administrators to be vital pieces to institutions showing that they value their minority employees. Parker shares that minority representation in the highest levels of the university setting would be a true indicator that African American perspectives, lives, and needs are valued. He says that he feels respected in his current institution and that he believes that the initiatives that they are working on are headed in a great direction. In order to address the value issue, Alexander believes that it would take the institution acting on diversity and inclusion and not just talking about these issues.

Even though Claire didn't speak too much about being valued currently, she says that having the autonomy to do what she was hired to do would be a step in the right direction. She appears to be at odds with decisions being made about her role that differ from what she was told during the interview process. The final thing that Claire believes would show value for African American administrators is similar to Parker's suggestion – representation, specifically having a seat at the metaphoric table of power. Claire feels that even when African American administrators actually have a seat at the table, they often do not truly have a voice in what is going on, rather they are present for show, which speaks to the tokenization of Black administrators that sometimes occurs within PWIs. It is not just that administrators feel that way – it is a reality. If institutions could turn their focus to actually desiring to hear and implement what African American administrators have to say, this would cause them to feel more valued. Claire believes that her authority was respected in her former institution. Pertaining to where she is currently, she is trying to earn the respect of her students and colleagues.

The administrators who I interviewed felt varying degrees of value within their current places of employment. It was clear that several of them felt valued in one arena while

simultaneously acknowledging how their respective institutions could make improvements in another arena. Suggested improvements ranged from showing intentional action to support and affirm African American administrators and the roles that they play to the desire to retain those individuals to work at predominantly White institutions. Until institutions become serious about showing minority employees through actions and not just words that they are valued – such as equalizing the pay and hiring more African Americans in spaces that they can most make a difference – PWIs will always struggle with minority individuals not just feeling valued, but being valued.

The Necessity of Authenticity

Authenticity to oneself versus feeling the need to codeswitch in order to fit in with the dominant race has long been both a point of contention and a matter of survival for African Americans in general, though especially in predominantly White settings such as higher education. In the interviews I conducted, participants discuss their preference to either be completely authentic to self – refusing to codeswitch – to do their best to blend in, or to use a mix of both paths in order to make it.

Authenticity to Self: Refusing to Codewsitch

In the very beginning of our dialogue, Stedman mentions that he values advocating and "pushing back against a system" that sometimes does not think about the big picture for to people of color. He shares that sometimes his pushing back and advocating looks nice, calm, and respectable. At other times, he mentions that his push for equity comes across as much more raw and direct. He says, "Don't feel threatened or anything else." Stedman notes that he is not going to codeswitch just because it makes others feel uncomfortable – when you see him, you get what you get. He believes that authenticity to self and being "real" is one of the most important traits

that an African American administrator can have, especially as they are progressing throughout their career. Stedman voices that along with building relationships, staying real and true to who you are as an African American administrator is something that works in your favor more than hinders it. He states, "…be authentic. Be you. You shouldn't have to change to fit somebody else's viewpoint of what you should be." Stedman notes that once more African American administrators can truly embrace the idea of showing and expressing their authentic selves, they will better be able to fight well for what is right.

Theo mentions that he rarely codeswitches. One of the things that he prides himself in is staying true to who he really is. This looks like using the language that is authentic to him (which sometimes includes profanity, although he does strive to use it less in the work environment), embracing his culture by lifting up the experiences, people, artists, and things that have made him who he is, whether not others agree with this. Theo was raised in a city in upstate New York and has no qualms about letting people know who he is and where he is from. He is a proud Black man. He shares that wherever he is or whoever he is with, he is extremely likely to be himself. Theo admitted to sometimes having to use a filter so as to keep his profanity under control, but noted that overall, "it is what it is." Theo believes that people respect those who are able to be honest, open, and authentic. He says, "I've always been beyond codeswitching. I've always been a really black and white person, there's really no gray area with me." This means that Theo does not try to change his vernacular, slang terms, or the essence of who he is in order to suit White individuals. Theo advises higher education minority professionals to stay true to themselves because PWIs have a way of trying to make administrators who they want them to be instead of who they really are. He says, "Be who you are."

Parker also believes in the importance of authenticity for the African American administrator. He mentions the importance of institutions creating space for Black people to be unapologetically who they are. Parker is passionate about authentic showing of self. He states, "No one should have to feel like we have to downplay ourselves or our education in order to make other employees feel big." Parker shares that he strives to be his authentic self as much as possible and has grown in this desire to achieve this since his first two post-college positions. Parker insists that authenticity to who you truly are helps to change the status quo for the better.

Blaze firmly believes in remaining true to self. He mentions that one of his strengths is authenticity and transparency. He is quick to admit that he does not police his language often, and that he honestly will operate in whatever he has to give for that day. Blaze notes that he does know how to be political, but by and large he brings his authentic self to the table on a regular basis. He believes that authenticity as an African American administrator is particularly worthwhile as a role model for students. He shares that he can best advise students and gain their trust as a school official when he is upfront about who he truly is.

Alexander places a high importance on being authentic to self. He notes that he has witnessed other Black administrators attempt to codeswitch, but that they often have a hard time keeping up with it because the effort is too much to be someone else. Alexander notes that he is always his authentic self. He admits that when he first got started in education that he used to try to codeswitch. He shares that at this point in life, interviewers know what and who they are getting the moment they meet him because he is upfront and direct about exactly who he is. Alexander says,

> I think that you've got to be transparent, which is sometimes difficult, especially in White
> spaces. But I think being authentically me has been the key to my success. I have never

tried to cover up any of my identities in the workforce in this space. And I think people

are genuinely gravitating to me, because I show me all the time and you always get what

you get with me. There is no fluff here.

Maximus also believes that it is essential to be authentic as an African American

administrator and faculty member on campus. He recounts the story of decorating his cubicle

with his favorite hip hop albums on the wall so as to communicate no matter whether he was in

or out of the office, that a Black person works there. Maximus is passionate about authentically

showing up to work as who he is so that his students can see that it is okay to be unapologetically

themselves, no matter what the popular culture on campus suggests.

The majority of African American administrators interviewed take very seriously their

need to be freely themselves without having to hide that because of the environment that they are

in. Outside of vernacular, upbringing, formative thoughts and experiences, they also include hair

and sense of style in this category.

A Mixed Bag

Prince and Claire both believe that knowing how and when to codeswitch is essential to

the prospect of being able to advance professionally and survive as an African American

administrator at a PWI. Claire terms codeswitching as, "being palatable." She shares that many

schools in the South have certain sets of rules and guidelines that they follow in order to keep

things in order. Claire admits that she has a hard time knowing how to best balance authenticity

to self and palatability to the institution. She does not see doing so as a situation of an "either

or," but rather a "both and" with the priority leaning toward palatability. Regarding her issue

with authenticity in the workplace, Claire says, "I don't believe anyone brings their authentic self

to work." She goes on to describe how her authentic self and her work self are in direct

opposition to one another, and if she were to display her authentic self in the workplace, she would most likely be passed over for positions or never have even been hired in the workplace. Prince mentions the importance in playing the game if one wants to win. He says, "This is politics. And you got to have a stomach for politics. And if you don't, it is nearly impossible to survive, or it's impossible to grow."

Chapter Summary

The administrators who I interviewed desired to have space and ability to purse upward mobility, wanted to be valued, believed in the power of mentorship, and overall believed in the importance of authenticity in the workplace. In this chapter, I shared participant profiles and described the themes that arose from the findings related to the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs. In the fifth and final chapter, I will provide an analysis of my key findings through answering my research questions. Additionally, I will discuss implications, limitations, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, and my final thoughts.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher education is a peculiar yet transformative world, which has the ability to grow all who enter its doors in a way that can make a difference in both personal and professional livelihood. The potential to build social capital, network with career professionals, build critical thinking skills through debate and challenges to norms of thinking, and immersion into a space where there are individuals from different religious faiths, gender identities, socioeconomic statuses, and racial backgrounds is an opportunity that not all are afforded, though it is an opportunity that can make a tremendous difference in the trajectory of one's worldview. Higher education provides those who cross its' threshold the agency to see life, people, and relationships in a unique manner and from a personal standpoint, ideally the ability to be the change that one seeks in the world.

Supporting African American administrators who work at PWIs is an important step to unlocking old ways of being and doing that no longer serve this present age. It also has the potential to have an iterative effect on minority students as they are more supported when there are administrators who share their race and cultural ways of being. Though this unique potential is present and ready to be accessed, it does not come freely, simply as a byproduct of attending or working within an institution. The experiences of African American administrators at PWIs suggest that universities are changing and paying more sustained attention to issues of equity in their school mottos, values, and creation of positions and departments in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. They also mention diversity in admissions presentations, and through email and mail blasts sent out by the publications department. Intrinsically, however, and from the perspective of Black administrators, matters involving equity and value must be fought for, bargained for

through logic, and repeatedly addressed. Saying that an institution values diversity is not the same as living out that commitment in practice. Working to make progress and change within a structure that historically was designed to uphold Whiteness, is – for the African American administrator – often tiring and full of highs and lows The experiences of higher education professionals of color in predominantly White institutions must continually be assessed if we are to, "decolonize the bureaucratic structure that higher education is beholden to," as stated by one of my interview participants.

African American administrators are a vital part of all institutions where they serve. They often play the most important roles in places and spaces where they have to fight to create and sustain a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Though their presence is important, African American administrators should be able to exist within the space of predominantly White institutions without having to bear the burden of dealing with systems that they did not create. They should be able to walk into work with one concern – how do I best serve my students? They should be able to serve on committees pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion when that is clearly their passion and person, not because they are expected to fix a broken system or because they are seen as a token Black person on campus. African American administrators should be able to express to their employers – because their employers care to ask – about the things that matter to them most and that are either adding to or detracting from their ability to serve the institution that they are part of. This means they should be able to talk about race dynamics safely and without fear of repercussions.

In this study, I explored the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs. There, were many overlaps among participant experiences. There were differences as well, sometimes connected to institution, geographical location, size and culture of school, and

personality of the administrator. Understanding the experiences of this group of administrators is crucial because how African American employees are seen and treated can affect how and to what lengths they are able to operate, which can affect how and to what degree students receive a holistic learning experience that shows them what equitable practices look like, which can affect what both students and staff members contribute back to society as a whole.

Summary of Key Findings

The results from this research study contribute to knowledge about the experiences of African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions of higher learning with particular regard to opportunity for upward mobility, perception of role and value, and challenges faced in their respective roles. The daily encounters experienced in a predominantly White institution as a person of color influence one's thought process regarding available opportunities, feelings of worth, and one's sense value to an institution, even when African American administrators haven't spent much time thinking carefully about these experiences. These experiences can be supportive and enriching and at the same time, they can generate conflicted feelings regarding who one genuinely is as a minority on a predominantly White campus, who one is treated as, and how one responds to that treatment.

In this study I investigated African American administrator experiences at PWIs. The majority of administrators I interviewed had experience at more than one PWI, with the exception of one individual who had been situated at her current institution for the totality of her career. Inquiring about the length of employment in the field of education/higher education, how many other institutions administrators worked at, and the type of institution (whether a PWI or HBCU) was an important part of the study design because I desired to determine if there were patterns among why African American administrators were choosing to seek and stay at

predominantly White institutions in spite of any challenges that they may have faced in their daily work. Additionally, it was vital that each administrator I interviewed hold at minimum a Master's Degree, in part because I was interested in the relationship among education, experience, and credentials.

When I began this research study, my aim was to give a voice to African American administrators regarding their daily experiences dealing with perceptions of their worth, potential for upward mobility, and challenges they faced. I hoped to collect rich descriptions and unique experiences that could be used to add to the body of existing literature. I also hope this research might be useful fo decision-makers and policy holders at predominantly White institutions of higher learning in determining how to best support African American staff.

Research Questions Answered

My study was designed to answer one overarching research question, with three sub-questions included. I begin with the all-encompassing research question that guided this study.

What are the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs?

Through interviewing African American administrators positioned at predominantly White institutions, I learned about how their experiences, though similar in some ways, varied based on a range of elements such as geographical location of the institution, beliefs and leadership strategies of direct supervisor, personal beliefs and rearing, personality, gender, and relationships both within and outside of the institution. Subsequent to coding the interview transcripts in order to analyze the data from the ten interviews conducted, I identified four major themes. While race role did not turn out to be a major theme due to participants not experiencing a significant amount of or for the most part any racism, I thought it important to discuss the role

that tokenism plays. I shared that information in this chapter. I discussed these themes in relation to five topics:

1. Mentorship Matters

2. Value Me

3. The Reality of Upward Mobility

4. The Necessity of Authenticity, and

5. Race Role

The topics of value and upward mobility (numbers two and three) correspond directly to the sub research questions, and so I share information regarding the each one under their respective question. It is important to note that although these themes undergird the overall research question regarding the general experiences of African American administrators, they also help to respond to some of my sub questions as well.

Mentorship Matters

Each African American administrator who I interviewed shared in some way or another the importance of mentors in their lives and how those relationships that were initially built or carved out and sustained in the long-term helped them to know through example, conversation, and advisement how to be their best selves. While we were talking, I could sense through body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice the genuine warmth and positivity associated with thinking about and discussing the people who had been instrumental in helping the interview participants to become who they are today. They all had their individual reasons as to why mentorship was important. Many administrators spoke about not just the past, but how mentors were currently shaping their lives and experiences through providing space and opportunity to express anything and everything that might be happening in their worlds, whether it be at work

or at home. Additionally, some administrators did not leave the topic of mentoring to discussing only that they received the benefit themselves, but stretched the topic into how they also see the importance of mentoring other individuals as well, especially minority students.

With regard to African American administrators having mentors in the workplace, few had been intentionally and officially offered mentors upon hire, though they may have found an unofficial person to whom they confide in. Largely, though most participants considered their mentors to be people outside of their current institution, several named a person on campus in whom they confided and sought out for advice. As I listened to participant responses, I wondered whether or not lack of official mentorship was the cause for some African American administrators feeling stuck or as though there was no upward mobility within their current institutions. Jernigan, Dudley, and Hatch (2020) note in their analysis that from the perspective of both having served as a mentor and having been a mentee, African Americans are more likely to form a vested interest in both their current position and the institution as a whole when they are systematically supported. If African Americans administrators are without mentorship in the workplace – a major tie that would bind them – it would seem that right from the beginning, they are have less vested interest than their more supported peers, which could much more quickly lessen their desire to stay in one place for a longer amount of time as relationships helps to build and maintain love for institution and job. Gardner, Barrett, and Pearson (2014) support this logic in their research, mentioning that both African American administrators and faculty are likely to resign from their positions before they are promoted or receive tenure. Additionally, of the administrators I interviewed, those who felt connected to other individuals on campus were more likely to see future potential and time in their institution of employment.

The Necessity of Authenticity

The need for authenticity was vital for African American administrators in my study. Several mentioned how important it was to be themselves totally from the beginning of the interview process throughout hire in order to avoid any confusion or feeling like they were a totally different person at work than at home. African American administrators believe in the importance of showing up authentically in the space that they are to serve and giving all of themselves to their students, colleagues, parents, and community partners. Most importantly, African American administrators find it important to give more of their culturally authentic selves (hairstyles, customs, beliefs, etc.) in order to stay true to self. This seems to be consistent with the notion that authenticity is not necessarily saying or doing everything that one thinks, rather the notion that an individual's inward self is reflected outwardly (Dunn, 2019).

Outside of the importance of showing up authentically for oneself, I agree that authenticity shown by African American administrators and staff paves the way and gives permission for minority students to show up authentically as well (Cota, 2019). Even at college age, students are very impressionable. It is important to remember that African American administrators and faculty are not just teaching students subject matter, how to interact socially, or school policy, but they are also teaching students how to be themselves. The more one shows up as who they truly are, the more that they are able to empower others to do the same.

Race Role

During my interviews, I asked each administrator about their experiences with racism, tokenism, exclusion, and microaggressions. Most participants noted that within their time working in institutions of higher learning that they personally had not experienced much outright racism, though they each knew colleagues who could tell another story. I was somewhat

surprised that their own personal experiences were rather positive when it came to experiencing racism. However, while overt racism was not a common experience at the respective institutions of participants, experiencing tokenism was common. Steele (2018) argued that tokenism plays a major role in the experiences of African American administrators at predominantly White institutions. She notes the university expectation for Black administrators to speak for every member of their race when in situations pertaining to people of color, especially African Americans. My participants openly spoke about tokenism, at either their current or previous institution. Maxwell comments were illustrative:

> I feel tokenized sometimes when I'm called to do certain things. I think it's really when people are struggling to think about how the university is diverse, or is accepting or cutting edge or innovative. And then they throw my name in without really knowing specifically what it is I do, or specifically what I teach, or specifically, you know, the sort of specifically how I go about doing what I do. That's when I feel tokenized is when I'm, like, offered up as an example.

Prince's comments were similar. He says,

> I mean, I have…it's much more like implicit bias. And just kind of the comments that are said, about, "Oh, this is Prince's area," or "Oh, well, you have a felt stake in this" or, "Oh, we have Prince here, so it's diverse, right?" So I've never really experienced explicit racism to my face, but there is the tokenism that I just mentioned.

For African American administrators, tokenism seems to be a fairly regular part of their experience. Some participants mention that while they do not believe it is done intentionally most of the time, it is still a common experience and micro aggression.

Administrators noted the reasons that they either felt seen or undervalued as a person of color in a PWI. These reasons were largely answered through my three sub research questions. Some of this information overlaps with the information I shared in answering my overall research question. I now turn to the first sub question.

How do African American administrators perceive their role and value in predominantly White institutions?

African American administrators appear to be in a unique place within the higher education setting, as they sometimes have to teach their employers, students, and colleagues on campus how to best value them. Throughout the process of collecting data, I began to wonder whether Black administrators were valued as their complete and total selves or valued primarily for how well they could complete the job that they were hired to do. In short, many see a dichotomy between 1. institutional value and departmental value and 2. value of intellect and work which benefit the university and personal values and internal experiences which are important to the individual administrator. Administrators provided answers to questions about the extent to which they feel valued and why, as well as what it would take ideally for them to be 100% valued within their institutions.

Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson (2019) provide evidence which suggests that lack of complete value of African American administrators – particularly forms of (in)visibility – is a stressor that affects the day-to-day wellbeing and duties of these individuals. Reflecting back on my interviews, I wonder if the administrators I spoke to felt comfortable enough to discuss the places and spaces where they felt less valued. Based on the interviews, the administrators that I spoke with most often did not raise some of their deeper concerns and were accepting of the idea that although they may not feel completely valued within their institution, those within their

departments or the people that they needed to value them were the ones that valued them. I often

think back on the comment of one administrator as he spoke on value from his perception,

> I feel valued in certain spaces. I feel valued by my supervisor, I feel valued in our
>
> division. I feel valued in certain academic spaces at the university. I would not say [that]
>
> institutionally, I feel valued.

From his perspective, it was not enough to be valued by one group or department of people;

rather African American administrators at PWIs desired to be completely valued as people by the

institution in a genuine way that helps them to know that they are seen. This means valuing them

enough to acknowledge hardships for people of color and doing something about it. For example,

Blaze says,

> One of the reasons why I think that I don't feel valued is the lack of the lack of attempts
>
> to better my experience. Even things like being resistant to promotions, like, really? And
>
> truly, is that appropriate, based on the things that I do? It is saying, "We don't support
>
> you as an institution."

The need to be holistically valued as an African American employed within a PWI was a

consistent desire of the participants in my study. Interview participants noted that they didn't feel

consistently welcomed and valued on their campuses. For example, though administrators may

feel valued as a member of their department and by the co-workers and students associated with

that particular Division, oftentimes this merit does not extend university-wide. Additionally,

although administrators believe that the university overall appreciates what they bring to the

table in terms of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and output of work (which is

sometimes acknowledge as of higher quality because these individuals go above and beyond

expectations), several participants did not feel as though the institution cared about them, beyond

getting what they needed to survive. Some of the factors that would move African American administrators from surviving to thriving include higher pay, an opportunity for advancement at the same rate as White counterparts without having to go above and beyond (working longer hours and pursuing additional education), and in some cases, more access to key university stakeholders.

What are the experiences and perspectives of African American administrators about the opportunity for upward mobility in predominantly White institutions?

All of my participants believed that the opportunity to advance in a PWI exists. Participants differed on the best path to follow in order to achieve that advancement. Six of the study participants believe it vital to not stay in any one institution longer than three to five years (even if they have stayed at an institution longer than that); rather, they find it necessary to seek advancement in new places so as not to ever become static or comfortable. It was mentioned by some in this group that it only takes two to three years to learn most of what you could learn at a particular institution and that unless a new position is created for you, being upwardly mobile in one's particular area of concentration within higher education would require waiting for their boss to retire or moving to another institution. Retirement or leaving a job at the top is rare, as in most cases, individuals who are seated in high level positions are there for years – sometimes decades – on end. Among the four participants who either already have or see themselves committing to one particular university for longer periods of time, the majority have experienced or seen positions created to keep employees happy, at the same institution, and on an upward moving track.

What are the challenges faced by African American administrators employed at predominantly White institutions and how do they affect their ability to support students?

To sum it up, there are many challenges, and about half of the African American administrators interviewed feel as though the challenges faced impact how they serve or heavily support students attending the institution where they work, while the other fifty percent do not see the challenges as something that significantly impact their ability to do their job well, though they can make the pathway to getting their jobs done less clear. Participants shared responses regarding the challenges they have experienced or have seen other people experience, how they best navigate those difficulties, and why or why not any struggles keep them from serving their students well.

Diversification of staff, how response and/or attitude of African American administrators is received by White bosses, being circumvented in the chain of command either altogether or when students/parents do not like the initial answer given, gender and sexual orientation, and centuries of racial inequity having been woven into the institutional framework are some of the common responses pertaining to challenges faced by African American administrators at predominantly White institutions. Three participants noted that while these challenges do not keep them from doing their jobs to the best of their ability by serving students and the institution, the challenges experienced do affect their mental and sometimes physical health which can sometimes keep them from being fully present in whatever space they are in.

Implications

People will do what they believe is best for them as a means to achieve their goals. By this, I mean that when making any decision, if one feels like the good outweighs the bad or if it fits with the big picture, individuals are likely to make some less than ideal choices without

overly considering the ripple effects that can occur. I designed this basic qualitative study in order to uncover some of the current day-to-day experiences of African American administrators employed within predominantly White institutions. Many institutions do not realize or take control of the way that their decisions affect employees, students, the campus community, and society overall. Although each administrator consciously and intentionally chose to work in their current institution, it seems that most did not think too deeply before our interviews about the experiences and the impact those experiences on their health and wellbeing. In this section, I discuss implications tied to this overall study of the experiences of African American administrators at PWIs.

Impact of Administrators' Experiences Personally

In this study I explore the very real and personal experiences of African American administrators. Each administrator initially makes the choice to work in a PWI due to their needs, where they are headed, and perhaps because of former experiences. One thing that has personally impacted administrators is loneliness. Since they are already in the minority at their institution, and there are typically few other Black administrators in their direct department, they can experience loneliness. Being in the minority, which is exacerbated for those who frequently move jobs in order to advance their career, means that they are almost never getting settled in any one place before thinking about the next steps in order to get to whatever is next. It also means that it can be much more difficult to stay present and become fully invested in a role knowing that that they are always looking for a better job to come along and applying regularly. Building some kind of professional community is vital for African American administrators as relationships promote success and retention at higher rates.

In addition to loneliness, Black administrators also struggle with family life. Out of 10 participants, six identified themselves as having either a spouse and/or a child. Each person with others relying on them recounted times when they were single and could move freely about with only concern for self. Now that they have settled down, participants shared hesitations about moving into another positions – even if that was best for their career – because of the job their significant other had or the school that their child was enrolled in. Those are some of the things that keep them tied to a position and institution longer than they would sometimes like to be.

Impact of Administrators' Experiences Institutionally

Institutionally, African American administrators are desired and hired for a variety of reasons. Overall, and based on the experiences of the 10 participants in my study, they are seemingly accepted, welcomed, and their presence makes a difference within the campus community, though they still face disparities in areas such as pay and promotion. When it comes to the way that African American administrators impact the institutions that they work for, one concern is that they sometimes only spend a short amount of time at an institution due to constantly being on the lookout for a position that will strengthen their resume and pay them what they feel that they are worth. This can cause a quicker turnover and need to hire new individuals more often, which is something that can affect the stability and effectiveness of an institution. Though an employee can begin a change, it can be difficult to track long-term growth when employees are in their position for only a short amount of time.

Institutionally, students are also affected if due to an inequitable culture, African American administrators have to struggle for any part of what should be a baseline for humanity and a contributing member of any institution. Overall, however, my participants recounted mostly positive experiences, and none discussed any egregious acts of racism or even significant

or consistent disregard. In some ways, this was a surprising finding since in my own experience, mid-level African American administrators often struggle to feel valued and integral to their universities' mission and vision, especially beyond their work on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

<center>**Limitations**</center>

Due to being able to locate fewer recent studies on African American administrators in comparison to those done on African American faculty and African American students, I constructed this research study with an exploratory goal in mind. As I have mentioned earlier, I worked with just ten administrators. Although my decision to have a small amount of interview participants is consistent with the expectations of my department, it is nonetheless a limitation in terms of the generalizability of my findings. One cannot typify the experiences of all African American administrators based on a selection of only ten participants. Another limitation of my study was that although I initially hoped for an equal amount of male and female participants, the individuals who showed interest in interviewing were primarily male, and I end up with a total of three females and seven males while conducting research. Although I did not notice any significant differences based upon gender, the research results are slanted much more toward the male perspective. It would have been nice to see more African American women represented and their voices heard.

<center>**Recommendations for Practice**</center>

Building upon the research executed for this study, I offer several recommendations for practice for leaders at predominantly White institutions. Recommendations are the first step to making change; however, only when institutions follow through on recommendations can real change occur. The African American administrators that I interviewed mentioned that they each

appreciate being valued, not just by their respective departments or for their intelligence and work ethic, but in a more holistic manner that considers their Blackness as valuable. In order to achieve this end, I would suggest institutions creating a council for minority employees in order for them to express needs, values, and recommendations as to how those can be achieved.

For the Board of Trustees and Budget Committee, I would first suggest raising the salary for African Americans at their respective institution(s) to ensure that these individuals are being paid what they are worth based on experience, education, and responsibilities of the position that they were hired to work. It is important that they receive salaries that are commensurate with their similarly positioned White colleagues at the very least. In addition to equitable salaries right from the beginning, I would also suggest step increases for performance on a yearly basis. This would take care of the pay disparity that has so long plagued African Americans in general, though specifically relating to institutions of higher learning.

Regarding Human Resources and the Chancellor or President of the institution, it is important to hire and appoint African American employees in order to diversify the institution and to abandon the practice of not choosing African American employees because they look, sound, or seem different than their White counterparts. This would hopefully help those hired to feel less alone due to being one of the only individuals that made it through the hiring process. This suggestion is also for Department Heads.

Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion could consider, in conjunction with Board of Trustees, Chancellor/President, and Chief Financial Officer, tying merit pay to DEI requirements being met. Those requirements might look like a certain number of workshops being offered and attended in each department, DEI initiatives being created and met, or increasing diversity programming and awareness for current students, and marketing for prospective students. One of

my interview participants mentioned this as something that his school took part in, and I thought it both unique and valuable. Leveraging an additional bonus checks in conjunction with matters of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion reminds all employees that DEI is not a one person or one department's job, but rather it should constantly be on the minds of every individual employed at the institution. Within this bracket, I would also suggest training all supervisors on campus regarding how to approach, advise, and talk to employees of color in a way that would show African American administrators that there is concern for their general wellbeing, and not just getting the work of the institution done. Feeling cared for on a deeper level regarding issues of race would not only build the bond between supervisor and supervisee, but also employee and love of university.

Another initiative that I would suggest for Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion would be to start either a mentorship program or a formal counterspace for minority employees. If this were to be the case, whether African American administrators decided that it was needed in the long term or not, they would have the opportunity to be in fellowship and community with individuals who are facing some of the same struggles. This would open doors for conversation and connection, especially in the beginning when employees are new and do not know who is who on campus.

For the Chancellor/President of the institution, I would suggest creating intentional space to hear the concerns of African American administrators. This may look like a small group setting, town hall, or individual meetings with minority employees on campus on a regular basis in order to hear their concerns. The Chancellor would then need to make a feasible plan to work on improving one or two of the issues at least every few months. After some time of doing this, I have no doubt that institutions would begin to see growth in areas of diversity, equity, and

inclusion, as leadership starts from the top. The suggestions given and improvements made would need to be officially charted and tracked. The head of an institution personally taking matters into his or her own hands would send a huge message of importance to students, board members, faculty, staff, and community partners. This is one of the most important steps in order to get the momentum rolling in terms of building inclusive campus climates.

Recommendations for Future Research

As mentioned in the limitations section, I only interviewed ten administrators. Given the time and opportunity, I would appreciate seeing a larger scale study done that involved closed and open ended surveys. It is my hope that this would be an effective way to collect additional information from a larger and wider spread grouping of individuals. I envision this survey crossing the span of the entire United States and dealing with hundreds of people. I am aware that many campuses conduct climate surveys for their own staff; broadening these to include many different institutions could help assess the extent to which African American administrators feel welcomed and valued in higher education more broadly.

Another recommendation for future research would be to concentrate a qualitative study on junior colleges or community colleges, especially since the challenges at this level are likely to be different, and many African American administrators are located at this level. This could include determining the correlation between experiences of African American administrators at traditional four-year institutions and those employed within two-year colleges. Are their experiences similar or different? Though the community college system is also a level of higher learning, it would be interesting to see if it feels similar to traditional institutions for those who have worked in one setting and then transitioned to another.

Additionally, I would be interested to see a study focused on African American administrators from the perspective of students – both minority and White. It would be a helpful piece of information to determine what the students think things look like right now versus what they should be in order to provide themselves with the best education and minority educators with the best experience at an institution. From my perspective, learning from students is important to figuring out how we can all come together as one to best make a positive change.

Another research recommendation is for a case study to be conducted on a larger or endowed institution that mentions diversity or equity in their mission statement or values. One goal would be to assess what the school says they believe and work to do in their writings and brochures versus what is actually woven into the every day reality of the institution. If the spoken about and actual realities surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion did not align, hopefully this study would help the heads of the institution to better meet their expressed goals.

Due to the fact that several participants referred to their faith during the interviews, I would be interested in a study of how or if one's faith background plays a role in their experiences as an African American administrator. The majority of my participants attributed some portion of their livelihood – whether it be professional or personal – and success in making it up the proverbial workforce ladder of higher education to God. Participants also mentioned, in a nutshell, waiting on what God has for them next in the terms of moving on to a new position or tackling a new challenge within the arena of higher education. A clear thread of faith that ran through the majority of interviews suggests that this is a component that can be and should be studied and researched moving forward.

My final recommendation for future research would be for a study to be conducted on the differences between pay and funding between African American administrators and their White

counterparts. In order to right a disparity, we must first place it in the light. It is important for African American administrators to receive equitable pay, and only by systematically studying this issue can we determine if they are.

Final Thoughts

African Americans who work at predominantly White institutions matter. They matter not because they are token members of staff to be called out and held in the center light when it is convenient. They matter not because their direct supervisors know that they can hire them and sometimes pay them less, but get more work out of them than their White counterparts. They matter not because they will speak and say the hard things while everyone else remains silent. African American administrators matter because they simply are important role models for students and to the thriving of institutions. They are people above all else and at the core of humanity, that means something. To add to that, African American administrators are qualified both educationally and via experience. They are passionate about fulfilling roles that often come with a long list of responsibilities and very little acknowledgement. It is high time that the offerings and priorities placed within institutions of higher learning match the whole of who African American administrators are and the passion, effort, and dedication that they bring to the field.

Investigating the experiences of African American administrators at predominantly White institutions has solidified and perhaps even grown my perspective in the need for this population to be represented in larger numbers, particularly on the staff side. While the numbers have increased from what they were fifty years ago and institutions of higher learning in today's society have offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done. Of the eight institutions that my participants were employed at, only one of

them had some kind of process for African American administrators that connected them to resources when hired. It is important that institutions not place diversity, equity, and inclusion in their mission statements and core values but fail to enact it in a way that makes a difference for all who are housed underneath their roof.

I must note that I initially entered this study thinking that the people interviewed - no matter who they were or where they worked at, would have instances of racism at PWIs to share. That was largely not the case. Tokenism was discussed heavily, but overt racism was not experienced by and large. I would be interested to know moving forward if this is solely due to a shift in the time and culture, or whether due to being in higher positions, employees are less likely to experience racism.

My hope is that this study and additional studies similar to it will aid in the employment increase of African American administrators within PWIs, while also providing needed opportunities such as mentorship, intentional counterspaces, and increased opportunities for upward mobility. It is my desire for institutions to also explore the ways in which they show that they value African American employees in a way that suits those employees internally (feelings, campus experiences, and needs met in order to function at maximum capacity as a minority member of the institution) as well as externally (social capital, increased DEI programming across all departments, and pathways for promotion). It would be advantageous to society overall if in each professional arena – with higher education leading the way – we made regular, conscious decisions to even out the playing field for minority members. We must acknowledge that while things are better than they once were for African Americans working in the field of education, tokenism, exclusion via lack of equitable practices adopted in our institutions, racism, and double standards still exist. It is our role as humans, and moreover educators to recognize

and correct inequitable customs and practices both within ourselves and within the current culture. We must take it a step further and give rise to the future – a generation who makes conscious decisions regarding the practices that benefit every part that makes up the whole. Continuing to turn the ship in this direction will move society, the realm of education, predominantly White institutions and the trajectory of African American administrators forward.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Introduction, provide a small overview of the research study and its purposes:

• Timeline for the interview: approximately 1 hour
• Explain the consent form and voluntary nature of the study; review IRB form
• Recording the interview; double-check the recording (volume) before you start

Part One: Choosing a School to work in
• Background of interviewee: name, current position, past position, years in PWI, Education.
 • I wanted to find out a little more about what led you to choose (Insert School Name) to work in? What led you to (Insert School Name)?
o How did you find out about (Insert School Name)?
o Is this the only PWI that you have worked in?
o How long have you been in a PWI? Have you ever worked for a HBCU?
o If so, what led you to seek out a different school?
o What position were you in prior to this position?
• Can you think back to a moment when you first came to realize that this school was the right choice for your employment? What happened? How did you know you made the right choice? Are your plans to continue in this position for the foreseeable future? Until retirement? Are there any factors that could influence this decision positively or negatively?

Part Two: School Experiences
1. How do you perceive your value in this institution? What talents, strengths, gifts do you

    bring to the institution?

2. Discuss your hiring experience and your experiences when you first took the job. What

    stands out to you? Were you provided with mentoring (and if so, describe that

    experience)?

3. What are your perspectives and experiences pertaining to the opportunity for upward

    mobility in PWIs? What possibilities do you see personally for job advancement at this

    institution?

4. What challenges do you face as an African American leader at a PWI? In what ways do

    these challenges impact your ability to do your job?

5. How do the hindrances faced by African American administrators employed at PWIs affect their ability to assist minority students?

6. Reflect on when race is most salient to you in your current position. What experiences have you had with (discrimination, marginalization, tokenism, exclusion) racism?

7. Has the culture of the institution changed since you've been here, especially in relation to issues of diversity and equity? If so, how?

8. What do you think it takes for African-American administrators to advance to larger roles? To what extent do you believe that people respect your authority?

9. Are there other issues you would like to share about your experiences as an African American administrator at a PWI? What advice would you give to other African Americans who aspire to leadership roles and who are navigating PWIs?