

EXPERIENCING RACE IN THE WORKPLACE: UNDERSTANDING HOW AFRICAN  
AMERICAN MALE LEADERS MAKE SENSE OF THEIR RACE AT WORK

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Graduate School of Leadership & Change  
Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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June 2021

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EXPERIENCING RACE IN THE WORKPLACE: UNDERSTANDING HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE LEADERS MAKE SENSE OF THEIR RACE AT WORK**

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Weber (2001) defines race as “the grouping of people with certain ancestry and biological traits into categories for differential treatment” (p. 74). Yet, according to the American Anthropological Association (1998) and countless doctors, scientists, geneticists, and scholars, in theory, the term “race” does not scientifically correspond to biological and physiological distinctions and has no empirical basis. Despite the lack of biological basis, racial categories are powerful frameworks for defining self-concepts and structuring opportunities within American society. Within the framework of a racially stratified, White dominated society, individuals who self-identify as White (or are perceived by Whites to be White) receive privileges that are not equally attainable for non-Whites. Even in the 21st century, as in prior centuries, race continues to be used as one of the most instrumental signifiers of differences between people within the United States. Racial categorization has undergirded hierarchical structures powerful enough to determine a group’s access to fundamental human necessities (clean water, food, and safe living conditions), intellectual and economic resources, infrastructures, agricultural and commodity trade markets, and financial systems. Socially and politically, race continues to be an important variable in how individuals are categorized and treated in the United States. The proposed research aims to understand how African American male leaders experience and make sense of their race in the workplace. The knowledge and skills acquired from being an African American

male leader in the United States includes navigating a multifaceted intersection of domains such as racial identity, masculinity, and leader development, which encompasses personal and professional lives. This research asserts that African American males' understanding of race affects their professional relationships and leadership experience in the workplace. This study will explore how African American males' perceptions of race influence their interactions and leader development at work, including barriers and bridges to communication, stereotype threat, and perceived prejudice and discrimination. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA, <http://aura.antioch.edu/> and OhioLINK ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>

*Keywords:* Black leaders, Black masculinity, authentic leaders, narrative inquiry

## **Acknowledgements**

This work would not have been possible without the support and guidance of many individuals along the way. I am deeply grateful to my Dissertation Chair, Laura Morgan Roberts, PhD. Thank you for believing in me. Without your leadership, encouragement, and wisdom, I could not have survived this strenuous academic journey.

I also would like to acknowledge the support of my committee members, Elizabeth Holloway, PhD, and Oscar Holmes IV, PhD. Elizabeth, thank you for your expertise and feedback to help me develop a methodological system that amplified the voices of my participants. Oscar, thank you for your questions and feedback, you helped me to gain a greater depth perception about Black masculinity.

I also would like to thank Professor Philomena Essed, PhD who graciously shared her time and wisdom in the beginning of my research journey.

I am grateful for the participants in this research study. Your courage and dedication to living leadership inspired me to keep moving forward. You are what made this study authentic and valuable. Thank you for graciously volunteering to share your time and experiences with me. I am humbled by your generosity. You have been heard, and you are valued.

I would like to thank my wonderful family. Their love and support gives me strength everyday: Glory (my heart), thank you for always making me smile. Mark J., thank you for making me laugh. Thank you mama (Alice Watson), for your steadfast kindness, love, support, and encouragement. Thank you Pops (Mark Watson), for teaching me to stay strong. To my beautiful sisters (Shayla, Shannon, Sherrell), you always know how to lift my spirits. I love you all.

Additionally, I would like to thank my “big brothers,” (Kevin Cooke and Cuttie Bacon, IV). Thank you for your guidance and support. You have helped me on my leadership journey more than you know.

I also would like to acknowledge anyone who may be trying to move forward in their personal journey. Whatever you are dealing with, you can make it. I believe in you. Stay strong, take care; and, if you need help, say so. One of my favorite quotes that helped strengthen me during difficult times is from the Greek poet Dinos, “They tried to bury me but they didn’t realize I was a seed.”

I would like to praise and thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has granted me countless blessings, so that I have finally been able to accomplish this dissertation. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

## **Dedication**

In loving memory of my Grandparents (Mary K. Daniels, Earl and Martha Watson), Uncles, and countless mentors and friends who were always supportive and encouraging.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Dedication .....	viii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, AND JUSTIFICATION .....	1
Significance of Problem in the United States .....	4
Stereotype Threat and Metastereotyping .....	8
Purpose of the Research .....	9
Research Rationale .....	10
Position of Researcher .....	12
Organization of the Dissertation .....	13
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
Racial Categorization .....	14
Identity and Race .....	16
Internalized Racial Oppression .....	17
Black Masculinity and Oppression .....	24
White Hegemony and Patriarchal Domination .....	30
Performing Black Masculinity .....	31
Racial Stereotypes and Potential Barriers for African American Male Leaders at Work .....	39
African American Masculinity and Racism in the Workplace .....	41
Intercultural Communication at Work .....	47
Inclusion at Work .....	50
Leader Development .....	55
Authentic Leaders .....	56
Reflected Best Self .....	57
Gaps in Research .....	59
Research Questions Themes: Individual, Psychological Foci .....	61
Research Questions Themes: Organizational Foci .....	62
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH .....	64
Pilot Research Project: Understanding the Racial Experiences of Mid-level to Senior Executive Level African American Males at Work .....	64

Pilot Study Results, Conclusions, and Implications .....	65
Education .....	65
Maintaining a Standard of Excellence Beyond What Others Expected (and External Obstacles).....	66
The Influence of Positive Male Figures.....	67
The Positive Impact of Negative Experiences .....	67
Narrative Thematic Analysis .....	68
Criteria for Participant Selection .....	70
Interview Questions .....	71
Data Collection and Analysis.....	72
Interviews.....	72
Thematic Coding.....	73
<b>CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS &amp; ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>75</b>
Leader Vignettes .....	76
Eric .....	76
Jason.....	76
Joe .....	77
Michael .....	77
Nick.....	78
Robert.....	78
Scott .....	79
Thomas.....	79
Xavier.....	80
Dimensions of Identity.....	81
Interactions with People from Other Races .....	83
Relationships Outside of Work with People from Other Races .....	84
Developing Relationships with Other People of Color.....	86
Summary: Dimensions of Identity .....	86
Racism.....	87
Historical Perspectives about Racism.....	95
Subtle and Impactful Racism of Liberals and Progressive Thinkers .....	95

Summary: Racism .....	97
Positive Influences .....	98
Summary: Positive Influences .....	99
Work-life balance.....	100
Summary: Work-life balance .....	101
Confidence (or Lack Thereof) .....	101
Summary: Confidence (or Lack Thereof).....	103
Leader Strategies.....	103
Empowering Others to Lead .....	105
Inclusive Communication–Make Staff Feel Valued.....	105
Summary: Leader Strategies .....	106
Motivation and Resilience .....	106
Summary: Motivation and Resilience.....	107
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	108
Key Findings: Living Leadership .....	109
Do Black Males Believe That They Have to be Mindful of Their Race at Work?.....	112
How do African American Male Leaders Make Sense of Their Race?.....	114
Do the Ways African American Male Leaders Think About Race at Work Impact Their Interpersonal Interactions?.....	115
What Were Some Common Examples of Perceived Stereotype Threat and Metastereotyping in the Workplace? .....	116
What Specific Skills and Strategies do African American Male Leaders Utilize at Work, When Faced With Perceived Situational Stereotype Threats? .....	119
What Positive External or Internal Influences (if any) do African American Males use to Counter Perceived Stereotype Threat?.....	120
Resilience Birthed From the Struggle of Being a Black Male.....	121
Black Masculinity .....	123
The Connection Between Black Masculinity and Community.....	125
The Authenticity of the Individual Leaders .....	126
Limitations and Scope of the Study .....	128
Implications for Leadership and Change in Practice .....	129

Recommendations for Future Research .....	131
Positionality .....	1313
Closing .....	134
References .....	136
Appendix A: Permission to use Table 2.2 Inclusion Framework .....	159

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Stereotype and Metastereotype Research and Potential Leader-Related Issues.....	23
Table 2.2 Inclusion Framework .....	54
Table 3.1 Primary Descriptors .....	74
Table 4.1 Narratives of Racism .....	88
Table 4.2 Narratives of Positive Influence .....	98
Table 4.3 Narrative of Work-life Balance .....	100
Table 4.4 Narratives of Confidence (or Lack Thereof) .....	102
Table 4.5 Narratives of Leader Strategies.....	104
Table 4.6 Narratives of Motivation and Resilience .....	107

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Venn Diagram—Visual Representation of Research Foci ..... 61

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, AND JUSTIFICATION

Race and racism are contested themes in current discourse, given that they operate as power relations where varying interests are at stake. In the age of President Obama, the first Black American President of the United States of America, the phrases “post racism” and “color blind” were heard quite frequently in describing a new age in American culture (Barkan, 1992; Goldberg, 2002; Hall, 2002; Martin, 2011). However, statistics have shown that having a Black president did not increase post-racist attitudes, as was previously believed by some in our country (Bacon, 2015; Enck-Wanzer, 2011; Teasley & Ikard, 2010). In fact, some believe we are now witnessing the rebirth of White American nationalist extremism in the United States (Swain, 2002). An increase in divisive discourse, exclusion of diversity in executive cabinet selections, and polarizing conversations about race and immigration fueled a subset of the White American society and their backlash, determined to “Make America Great Again.” In a matter of months, U.S. legislation, executive orders, and court rulings threatened to infringe upon the rights and freedoms of people of color, non-Christians, women’s rights, voting rights, LGBTQ+ rights and freedom of speech. These actions are aligned with the claims of Neville et al. (2005) that the existence of racism:

assists in the multiplication of racism’s hegemonic economic and social control, cultural beliefs, and ideology to the point that Americans are affected, with its debilitating effects being more detrimental to those located at the very bottom of the stratified racial hierarchy. (p. 29)

Sociological research on race has consistently restated that overt racism has declined in relation to an increase in “subtle prejudice” (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997), “color-blind racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2002), or “laissez faire racism” (Bobo et al., 1997). By contrast, the rise of social

media and the internet's ability to live stream videos has increased the visibility of racism in the lives of African Americans. Within seconds, an individual's day-to-day life (racial) experiences (subtle and explicit) are made public for many in the world to see. Political protests, riots, and irrational, violent, deadly law enforcement encounters with innocent and/or unarmed African American citizens are now a regular part of mainstream social media. Thus, racism remains a salient and charged issue in public discourse. Given the prominence of race and consequences of racism, this dissertation seeks to understand how Black male leaders make sense of their racial experiences in the workplace. I will also examine the question of how Black male leaders maintain and garner their authentic selves at work within the socio-historical context of racial oppression.

Actions perceived as racist need not be deliberate in order to cause impact on an individual. Instead, regardless of intentionality, racism is destructive and is naturally intertwined with other forms of oppression and social injustice. The duration and depth of racial trauma has the potential to pervasively effect every waking moment of an oppressed individual's psyche (Essed, 1990, 1991). In response to racial trauma, "tendencies therefore would be to settle for what is safe and comfortable—a state of dependence and waiting to be given an opportunity—while feeling dissatisfied, frustrated and even enraged with one's situation" (Alleyne, 2005, p. 296). Racial stratification of our society, in which Black<sup>1</sup> and other racial minorities are systematically discriminated against, makes it challenging for many individuals in these categories to move beyond the societal limitations associated with their race. Such limitations include equitable access to clean water, employment, the rent or purchase of a home, loans and mortgages, adequate schools, educational resources and qualified teachers, quality medical care,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms African American and Black have been used interchangeably and refer to Black American citizens of the United States of America.

and voting rights. In these ways, the dominant society works as mechanism against Black males' advancement and vitality (Alexander, 2004; Bonilla, 2003; Clarke, 2008; Connor, 2005; Crosby, 2002; Harper, 1996; hooks, 2004; Jackson & Dangerfield, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Levant & Kopecky, 1995; Madhubuti, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992; Pierre et al., 2001; Wallace, 2002; Weber, 2001; West, 1993).

Racism as a form of oppression is described as a system of supremacy and privilege based on racial group designations (Essed, 1991; Harrell, 2000). According to Foucault (2003), the making of a single race into a superrace creates a polarity that supports state racism. State racism is used to create fragmentations, subscribe negative labels and stereotypes, and create a social hierarchy that normalizes the superrace while identifying deviance in the subraces. According to Hughey (2012), "Whiteness is construed as the dominant superrace, while subordinate and subrace categories pertain to all others. Black males generally hold the lowest subrace category (Bell, Marquardt & Berry, 2014)." (p. 95) Having conversations on race in a stratified society serves as a method for "fragmenting human populations into 'naturally' dominant and subordinate 'superrace' and 'subrace' categories" (Hughey, 2012, p. 95). Thus, conversing about race without allowing equal space for the perceived subrace groups to be equally heard does not simply describe race, it creates it. Specifically, the discursive tool of blackness, particularly black masculinity, has "long functioned as a key metaphor and fundamental referent for white Americans in public discourse" (Feagin, 2010, p. 101). The impact and importance of race and the interpretation of racial experiences within a leadership context are not independent factors for African American males. Instead, race gains meaning in relation to masculinity and other forms of oppression.

The concept of internalized oppression grew out of the scholarly work on double consciousness, which was coined in 1903 by African American scholar, activist, and author W.E.B. Du Bois. Double consciousness was described by Du Bois as an awakening of one's oppressed state, in which an individual becomes aware of the tinted lens by which society views and judges them (Du Bois, 1903). Addressing his experiences as a man of color living in America, Du Bois' focus and passion for demystifying this double consciousness specifically addressed the socio-political and psychological impacts of racism on African Americans. Although it has been 118 years since Du Bois wrote his famed work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, the concept remains relevant yet elusive in the 21st century. According to Du Bois, double consciousness occurs as a result of societal racial oppression and marginalization. Victims of racialized oppression are said to internalize external racial stereotypes and develop an awareness of a regulated societal hierarchy, which is justified by socially labeled inferior and superior social groups.

### **Significance of Problem in the United States**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), 12.6% of the U.S. population are Black, and 48% of the Black population are Black males. As of June 2021, only three (.6%) CEOs in the Fortune 500 were Black males (Wahra, 2021). "In the history of the Fortune 500 list, first published in 1955, there have been only 19 Black CEOs out of 1,800 chiefs" (Wahra, 2021). Additionally, in 2018, the Alliance for Board Diversity and Deloitte identified that 83% (4853 board seats) of the 500 largest publicly traded companies were held by White chiefs, White males, 62% (3627 seats), White females held 21% (1226 seats). Black chiefs held 9% (510 board seats), Black males held 6% (327 seats), Black females held 3% (183 seats). According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, as of March 2021, Black Americans held 10% (984 seats)

of federal senior executive positions. In contrast, White Americans held 77% (7239 seats). The most recent data reports and tools do not specifically identify what percent of federal senior executives are male or female.

Blacks who hold comparable management positions as Whites consistently report feeling less accepted by their organizations, perceive themselves as having less discretion in their jobs, and express less career satisfaction (Browne, 1999; Feagin & McKinney, 2005; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Greenhaus et al., 1990). In addition, significant racial gaps in an individuals' psychological experiences at work continue to be present, even when variances in education and income are controlled (Deitch et al., 2003; Franks et al., 2006; Williams & Mohammad, 2009). More than education and income, race affects psychological experiences. While hundreds of studies have looked at situational cues that cause identity threat in academic settings, researchers have acknowledged that little work has linked these precipitating cues to the American workplace (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Holmes et al., 2016; Kray & Shirako, 2012; Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Organizations that lack representation of racially and ethnically, historically underrepresented, employees are said to lack "critical mass," containing few individuals from their group (Cohen & Swim, 1995; Duguid, 2011; Ely, 1995; Inzlicht & BenZeev, 2000, 2003; Kanter, 1977; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Roberson et al., 2003; Sekaquaptewa & Thomson, 2002, 2003; Stoker et al., 2012). As in other aspects of life, psychological experiences also take place at work.

Racial minorities are still less visible in top leadership positions than would be expected on the basis of population base rates (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2005; Corporate Board Initiative, 2006; Fortune, 2006; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). One key determinant as to whether employees advance is how their leadership skills and task competencies are perceived and

evaluated (Connelly et al., 2000; DeVries, 2000). Leadership categorization theory posits that over time individuals develop a set of beliefs about the behaviors and characteristics of leaders. These beliefs are developed into leadership categories. According to the leadership categorization theory, leaders will be evaluated as most effective when they are perceived to possess prototypical characteristics (Lord & Maher, 1991). Studies have shown that leadership prototypes affect leadership perceptions, including how individuals are perceived based on their sex, race, etc. (Brenner et al., 1989; Eagly & Krau, 2002; Ensari & Murphy, 2003; Heilman et al., 1989; Nye & Forsyth, 1991). “Leaders that possess characteristics that are consistent with the evaluators’ leader prototype are appraised most favorably” (Phillips, 2008, p. 759). According to Phillips (2008), being White is a prototypical attribute of leadership; the average leader is a White male and the exemplars of leaders are likely to be White males. Most Americans believe that they practice principles of meritocracy (Rosette & Thompson, 2005), and race is not important, nor does it affect their workplace evaluations of others (Reitman, 2006; Wildman, 1996). Yet, racial differences in leader prototype perception may provide insight into why minority leaders receive poorer performance-related evaluations than their White counterparts (Cox & Nkomo, 1986; Ford et al., 1986; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Jones, 1986; Powell & Butterfield, 1997; Waldman & Avolio, 1991). “Regardless of racial group, evaluators will be likely to perceive White leaders more favorably than non-White leaders” (Phillips, 2008, p. 760).

Yet current research is limited in an organizational setting regarding the impact of racism (overt and subtle) on stigmatized groups at work. Also, research is limited as to how a Black male leader experiences (seeing, feeling, living) race in a work environment. Within an organizational system, a leader’s individual experiences can influence the workplace and team

environment. As a result, an organization's performance and productivity may be linked to the leaders' performance and productivity. In situations where leaders experience racism or other culturally exclusionary experiences, they can face physiological challenges. Impacts of racism include stress and diminished communicative and cognitive abilities (hooks, 1994; Rich, 1994; Seligman, 1975).

To better understand this phenomenon, this research examines the defining relationships between Black males, their environment, and their subjective position in contemporary workplace culture. Speight (2007) asserted that a dominant group's stereotypical images of a numerically marginalized group become internalized by marginalized group members as they search for an identity. By contrast, Nussbaum and Steele (2007) demonstrated that when individuals briefly disengage their sense of self from evaluation, they can facilitate persistence and motivation toward the completion of classroom-based exams. In other words, if an individual is able to temporarily refrain from considering how their racial identity may influence their actions, performance, and circumstances, they can then focus on communication. This pattern emerges in the workplace, in which "situational disengagement allows individuals to persist despite the identity" (Block et al., 2011, p. 580).

Stereotype threat research offers an explanation of the cause and performance impact of such internalization. Although stereotype threat research typically occurs within an educational laboratory context, focusing on cognitive, performance-based outcomes, this study will draw upon stereotype threat research to add to the understanding of the experiences of Black male leaders; and, how stereotypes shows up in their workplaces, and impact their interpersonal relationships. The following section briefly reviews stereotype threat research, and its implications for the current study.

## **Stereotype Threat**

Stereotype threat is the concern that others are evaluating you through the lens of negative group-based stereotypes (Steele, 1997). Importantly, an individual does not have to actually be stereotyped by others to experience stereotype threat, nor must they believe the stereotype about their group(s) or themselves is true. Further, the accuracy of the stereotype is unrelated to whether individuals experience stereotype threat (Kalokerinow et al., 2014). Instead, individuals only need to be concerned that they may be stereotyped for stereotype threat effects to emerge. An increased focus on dealing with stereotypical situations or scenarios at work could negatively influence an employee's level of psychological safety. Psychologically safe (Edmondson, 1999) workplaces are environments where employees feel they can safely and confidently express themselves and their ideas without negative consequences, both in terms of how they are perceived and their career progressions (Singh et al., 2013). When employees can safely express themselves, they are not constrained by prolonged stressors.

A related phenomenon that may be relevant for understanding African American male leaders is that of metastereotyping. Metastereotyping refers to in-group members' perceptions regarding the stereotypes that out-group members hold of the in-group (Vorauer et al., 1998). Metastereotyping answers the question: What do I think that they think about me based upon my social identity group? While stereotyping is a practice of describing the generalization of negative or positive beliefs, and directing those generalizations towards other groups, metastereotyping shifts the focus to introspective thoughts of what we think others think of us (Voyles et al., 2014). This research study will allow for the exploration of how, in a work context, unwarranted, unsubstantiated claims or racially coded actions against a Black male (who believes, for example, that he is already perceived as a dangerous criminal) might affect that

individual's relationship with their leadership, peers, team, and future opportunities within the organization.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to examine how African American male leaders experience their race at work. Being a minority in a measured context such as the workplace is sufficient to spark stereotype threat (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Murphy et al., 2007). Victims of racialized oppression may internalize racial stereotypes and develop an awareness of a regulated societal hierarchy, which is justified by labeling inferior and superior social groups. Like all forms of internalized domination, internalized racism is not the result of cultural or biological characteristics, nor is it the consequence of any weakness, ignorance, inferiority, psychological defect, naiveté, or shortcomings of an oppressed individual. In effect, the internalization of oppression is a multidimensional occurrence that simulates many forms across situational contexts, including the intersections of multiple systems of domination (Padilla 2001; Pyke 2010). Internalized racism is powerful because it silently alienates and devalues individuals, and is often normalized as more of an individual's personal struggle instead of a societal issue in everyday society. According to Speight (2007), an actual racist encounter need not occur because awareness and internalization of society's stereotypes is enough to produce a psychologically threatening situation. These perceived ways of knowing "circulate throughout society where they influence social norms, organizational practices, bureaucratic procedures, and commonsense knowledge" (Pyke, 2010, p. 556). The most significant injury caused by internalized racism is shame (Watts-Jones, 2002). Watts-Jones (2002) described this as shame associated with ones' "African-ness" as a result of posttraumatic slavery syndrome, the physiological and psychological toll of slavery and racism, and the very shame of being shamed. In this sense,

shaming is used as tool for dehumanizing and continuing the marginalization of individuals from oppressed groups. Based on the theories of Butler et al. (2002) and Taylor and Gundy (1996), this study explored the relationship between perceived racism and internalized racism. Further, I explored the process of obtaining mental liberation from internalized oppression, which Moore (2005) argued would be “the goal of a single-minded conscious individual” (p. 753).

As previously mentioned, the bulk of research concerning stereotype threat focuses on laboratory-based cognitive performance outcomes, primarily in university settings, like standardized tests. Less focus has been placed on stereotype threat research in non-laboratory, non-university settings, like in the workplace. Yet, recent research suggests that the impacts of stereotypes have been largely ignored in the organizational stereotype threat literature (Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014). As such, more academic research and discourse are needed on the experiences surrounding African American male leader development and stereotype threat.

### **Research Rationale**

Approximately 2.7 million Black Americans are at risk for destructive outcomes related to racism-related stressors (APA, 2016). However, Banks and Stephens (2018) maintain that this figure underestimates the risk, because most studies fail to measure racism-related stress due to what has been historically called internalized racial oppression. According to Banks and Stephens (2018), “a literature review of articles that measure the effects of discrimination over the past 10 years located 243 peer-reviewed articles, of which only six studies explicitly measured internalized racial oppression” (p. 92). As such, it is vital that stereotype threat research extends into organizational settings, as existing data suggest that stereotype threat is an emerging concern for organizations who desire to retain their talent and help them reach their fullest potential. Talented employees who believe that they are a valuable contributing member

to the mission of the organization are more engaged and dedicated to supporting the success of the organization. Additionally, there is a visible lack of critical inquiry in the literature on the impact of stereotype threat within organizational settings as it pertains to race-based stereotype threats, such as African American males (Block et al., 2011; Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014; Gomez, 2002; Pronin et al., 2004; Singh et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele et al., 2002; Thames et al., 2013; Vorauer et al., 1998; Voyles et al., 2014). Although it is commonplace for individuals to experience evaluation apprehension when being judged by others, stereotype threat goes beyond the typical experience of evaluation apprehension and can result in additional issues for marginalized individuals in organizations.

This dissertation contributes to the continued research in the area of African American male leader development and growth and will add to the scholarly understanding of how leaders experience race at work. Additionally, this research has the potential to drive dialogue within organizational research by identifying potential ways that organizations impact Black males' racialized experiences, employee engagement, and ultimately the productivity and growth of both the employee and the organization. Further research may assist in the development of strategic approaches to empower Black males (and possible Black females, and other non-white males) to overcome potential obstacles they face regarding experiencing their race at work and may support workplace initiatives that assist with improving employee satisfaction, morale, and motivation of Black males. In addition, in an effort to give voice to those typically marginalized and excluded from mainstream research, this dissertation uses narrative inquiry to focus on the narratives and lived experiences of the participants. Narrative inquiry is a subtype of qualitative inquiry (Chase, 2005). Narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of the human experience. The act of creating narrative is a significant way in which human beings make sense

of their experiences, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning. As such, using a narrative inquiry approach to this research may contribute to amplifying and interpreting those once silenced voices so that they may “aid in identifying meaning and constructing new theoretical views” (Lyons, 2007, p. 17). The following six research questions will be explored during this dissertation: Do Black males believe that they have to be mindful of their race at work? How do African American male leaders make sense of their race? Do the ways African American male leaders think about race at work impact their interpersonal interactions? What were some common examples of perceived stereotype threat and metastereotyping in the workplace? What specific skills and strategies do African American male leaders utilize at work, when faced with perceived situational stereotype threats? What positive external or internal influences (if any) do African American males use to counter perceived stereotype threat?

### **Position of Researcher**

I am an African American, female, GenXer who was raised in a suburban American, white-collar household. I have always lived in communities and interacted with people who came from diverse backgrounds and races. Throughout my entire life, my exposure to different cultures both in the United States and abroad, and their ways of knowing, fostered an interest in people, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, I have been a civil rights, diversity, and inclusion practitioner in the federal government since 2008. As a result of my personal and professional experiences and networks, I have had numerous conversations over the years regarding oppression, metastereotyping, and stereotype threat. I have also personally observed and assisted individuals, including Black males, faced with complex workplace challenges as a result of what they believed to be racial stereotyping and discrimination, as well as assisted White (and other groups of) supervisors and managers who face challenges in communicating

with Black (and other groups of) employees. I also attempted to bridge the gap between employees (regardless of race) and their leadership. For the majority of my work experience, I have witnessed hundreds of incidents that have made me innately aware of the existence of and impact of oppression, stereotype threat, disparate treatment, and systemic barriers in the workplace. This dissertation has grown out of a personal desire to understand how Black males manage stereotype threats and perceived racism at work in order to develop into successful leaders. These professional and personal characteristics inform my interest and understanding of this research.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter I positions myself as the researcher and establishes the importance and purpose of the study and the questions it sought to answer. I also highlight the theoretical frameworks that will serve as a lens for studying how Black males experience race at work. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter II provides a framework of identity, racial oppression, Black masculinity, and the relevance and dynamics of race in the workplace. It follows with an in-depth examination of the literature that addresses the concepts of internalized oppression, stereotype threat, and the impact on leader development and expressions of key leader abilities, such as communicative exchanges.

Chapter III identifies the methodology used in the dissertation, and the guiding research questions and research procedures.

Chapter IV identifies the qualitative research findings.

Chapter V provides an interpretation and discussion of the research findings.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides an analysis of scholarly theories and perspectives, presenting foundational information about theories that are critical to understanding how Black male leaders experience race at work. There is no individual theory or body of literature addressing these experiences. As such, I have conducted an analysis of related scholarly theories that are central to the research. The literature on racial identity and internalized racial oppression (through the lens of Black masculinity) establishes intersections between prototypical attributes of leaders and the impact of stereotype threat. The literature review conducted for this research illustrates barriers and challenges that exist for Black masculinity in the workplace.

### **Racial Categorization**

The fundamental basis on which the principles of racial categories were formed was established during imperialism (Alleyne, 2005; Du Bois 1903; Foucault, 1977; Gramsci, 1971; Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Moore, 2005; Neville et al., 2005; Pyke, 2010; Speight, 2007; Williams & Templeton, 2003). According to the American Anthropological Association (1998) and countless doctors, scientists, geneticists, and scholars, in theory, the term “race” does not scientifically correspond to biological and physiological distinctions and has no empirical basis. Although first used in the 16th century to identify speakers of a common linguistic heritage and national affiliation, in the 17th century race was used to define perceived genetic differentiations amongst humans (American Anthropological Association, 1998). Since that time, the term has been used to categorize humans by physical, cultural, ethnic, genetic, geographical, religious, and social affiliations (Andrade & Morin, 1996; Angier, 2000; Cann et al., 1987; Hammer, 1995; Jin et al., 1999; Jorde et al., 1997; Kaessmann et al., 1999; Keita & Kittles, 1997; Krings et al., 1997; Lewontin, 1972, 1974; Nei & Roychoudhury, 1974; Pritchard et al., 1999; Thomson et al.,

2000; Tishkoff et al., 1996; Underhill et al., 2000; Vigilant et al., 1991). Weber (2001) defined race as “the grouping of people with certain ancestry and biological traits into categories for differential treatment” (p. 74). Scientific evidence corroborates that physical features used in American society to define race, such as skin complexion, hair texture, and facial features, do not correlate with innate characteristics such as intelligence or one’s ability to learn, develop, grow, and contribute to society. However, despite their lack of biological basis, racial categories are powerful frameworks for defining self-concepts and structuring opportunities within American society. For example, racial ideology focuses on the individual-society dialectic in shaping one’s racial outlook and reflects the method with which individuals encode and interpret racial information (Neville et al., 2005). It connects individual beliefs and dominant societal racial beliefs. Racial identity specifically centers on the development of a personal racial self-concept or personal social identity and sense of self-based upon one’s racial categorization (Neville et al., 2005). One aspect of African American racial identity is collectivism, which is defined as an individual’s concern with the advancement of the group to which they belong (Akbar, 1991; Allen & Bagozzi 2001; Nobles, 1991). Collectivism is characterized as an individuals’ sense of connection to and responsibility for members of their group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994; Triandis et al., 1988).

Race continues to be used as one of the most instrumental signifiers of difference within society and has been used for centuries to create social and institutionalized hierarchies that determine a group’s access to intellectual and economic resources, infrastructures, agricultural and commodity trade markets, and financial systems. The very essence of our democracy was built on the existence of racism. Within the framework of a racially stratified, White dominated society, individuals who self-identify as White (or are perceived by Whites to be White) receive

privileges that are not equally attainable for non-Whites. The literature demonstrates how the dominant society works as mechanism against Black males (Alexander, 2004; Bonilla, 2003; Clarke, 2008; Connor, 2005; Crosby, 2002; Harper, 1996; hooks, 2004; Jackson & Dangerfield, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Levant & Kopecky, 1995; Madhubuti, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992; Pierre et al., 2001; Wallace, 2002; Weber, 2001; West, 1993). Weber (2011) suggested that the very act of using race in order to sort humans holds inherent value judgments. What is clear from these definitions is that race is a socio-political construct that is powerfully influential in how individuals are perceived and how individuals (belonging to racially stratified groups) perceive themselves.

### **Identity and Race**

The socio-political construction of race influences how individuals perceive others and themselves. I believe that the intersection of identity and race cannot be understated given the significance of the hierarchical and racialized society in which we reside. Our current society both informally and formally supports racial categorization, and the unequal resource distribution amongst varying race identities. Identity is composed of varying qualitative meanings and experiences that result from the interactions of multiple social group memberships and cannot be explained by examining each identity single-handedly (Warner, 2008). Although we tend to believe that our individualistic nature drives our talents, motivations, and preferences, we are greatly impacted by social identities. By imposing on certain conditions of life, social identities can have a crucial influence on:

Performances in the classroom, standardized tests, memory capacity, athletic performance, the pressure we feel to prove ourselves, even the comfort level we have with people of different groups, all things we typically think of as being determined by

individual talents, motivations, and preferences. (Steele, 2011, p. 4)

Social identities exist within a specific place at specific times. Although they are often subtle enough to exist underneath our awareness, nonetheless their existence can significantly affect things as critical as our intellectual functioning (Steele, 2011).

### **Internalized Racial Oppression**

Racism “cumulatively, spans generations, individuals, time, and place; encompassing much more than discrete acts” (Speight, 2007, p. 126). Consequently, psychological injury due to racism is not limited to that caused directly by one perpetrator, at one time, in one place (Speight, 2007). It is important to note, regardless of time and place, that being genetically associated with Black Americans (or being perceived to be Black) is a commonality that is shared intergenerationally. In the United States there is a phrase rarely spoken but is deeply connected with chattel slavery that still remains socially potent called the “one drop rule.” This is the idea that if a person has one drop of African American blood (Murray, 1997; Sweet, 2005), even if the individual does not exhibit any of the perceived physical traits, they are associated with being Black. For White racists, this equates to impurity. Often the first interaction of individuals in the United States is to place people in racial categories (Sweet, 2005). If an individual’s race cannot be determined by visual observation, many people are emboldened to inquire of an individual as to what race they belong.

Oppression can be defined as the systematic mistreatment of a group (or groups) of people by another group or by society as a whole. Mistreatments can take the form of covert or overt beliefs or acts of prejudice and discrimination (Gainor, 1992). “Internalized oppression is the incorporation and acceptance of the prejudices against them within the dominant society by individuals within an oppressed group” (Pheterson, 1986, p. 148). Oppression itself is

reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions and operates through the normal processes of daily life. Racism is not always blatantly pervasive in nature; it has become part of our daily social reality and can be difficult to discern. The act of internalizing oppression then becomes a social psychological process that affects marginalized groups, such as African Americans.

Prejudice, intergenerational wounds, and the vicissitudes from our historical past are all aspects of this inner tyrant, the internal oppressor. They are kept alive through the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Alongside these aspects of the internal oppressor are other factors such as our narcissistic injuries, our personal unresolved difficulties where power and domination feature as themes, and those difficult and painful experiences unresolved within our family dynamics. The nature of the internal oppressor appears to be the sum total of these characteristics, which rest in the shadow of the self. (Alleyne, 2005, p. 295)

Woodson (1933) postulated that if an individual were made to feel inferior, they would accept an inferior status and take on the role of an outcast. Consequently, in order to maintain a system of racial oppression, there is a psychological component that is self-perpetuating; thus, the quandary of internalized oppression. Within a system maintained by internalized oppression, the oppressed become foot soldiers, subconsciously upholding the power of the dominant society. As a result of the power of internalized oppression, there is no longer a need to overtly, publicly enforce, or impose the disempowerment or oppression of the oppressed group because the oppressed group will enforce it upon themselves (Bailey et al., 2011; Poupart, 2003). The act of internalizing oppression is powerful because it silently alienates and devalues groups and individuals on a very personal level. Its injustices exist within the normalcy of the way things are

in everyday society (Essed, 1991). According to Speight (2007), an actual racist encounter need not occur because awareness and the internalization of society's stereotypes is enough to produce a psychologically threatening situation. These perceived ways of knowing "circulate throughout society where they influence social norms, organizational practices, bureaucratic procedures, and commonsense knowledge" (Pyke, 2010, p. 556). Taylor and Gundy (1996) theorized that a direct relationship exists between perceived racism and internalized racism. Thus, "the goal of a single-minded conscious individual who is dealing with internalized oppression would be to obtain mental liberation" (Moore, 2005, p. 753).

The foundation of theories of internalized oppression lies in W.E.B. Du Bois' 1903 theory of "double consciousness." Du Bois (1934) referred to double consciousness as the tension between pride and shame in self and the group. Du Bois (1903) explained this phenomenon as the sense of viewing the self through the eyes of hostile elements. "The consequence is such that the person struggles to maintain a positive sense of self despite powerful forces pushing in the opposite direction" (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001, p. 372). Du Bois contended that there is not a major distinction between the African American self and the collective people, that one's self-identity as an African American and the identity of one's people are not merely interdependent or interrelated but identical. Although this worldview exists, it is considered to be beyond the conscious level of many African Americans (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001).

Du Bois' (1903) theory of double consciousness through the metaphor of "the veil" was used by Du Bois as an image for an obstruction to self-awareness, a kind of realization and reminder of one's differences brought about through the actions of external sources. Du Bois described the veil as always being present. Self-consciousness, for Du Bois, required an outside

influence. Postcolonial scholar Frantz Fanon (1967) echoed this sentiment: “The Negro is unaware of the veil so long as his existence is limited to his own environment; but the first encounter with a white man oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness” (p. 150). The later the discovery of the veil, the more violent the shock of that realization (Ciccariello-Maher, 2009). In the end, Du Bois (1903) believed double-consciousness to be a condition to which educated souls are susceptible. Due to the sheer impossibility of African American individuals dismantling the oppressive system directly, Du Bois suggested the route to liberation was rising above the veil. Du Bois (1903) saw the veil as something that could be evaded and transcended through higher education.

Both one’s direct lived experiences with racial marginalization and the experiences of others lay the foundation for the historical scope of racism. Ultimately, both add to the pervasiveness of internalized oppression. This historical range operates simultaneously on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and even virtual levels. Repeatedly when telling their life stories, Black males described being punished in schools for daring to think and question (Masters, 1997). According to Masters (1997), the curiosity that may be deemed a sign of genius in a White male child is contrarily viewed as trouble making when expressed by Black boys. No one actually told men “you should hate yourself.” However, the images, symbols, products, creations, promotions, and authorities of White America very subtly and often quite openly teach White supremacy. Masters (1997) recalls in his autobiography, *Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row*, “looking I realize it wasn’t rage that motivated me, though I hid behind anger to avoid certain truths about my life; there was no room for wonder in my life” (Chapter II, para. 3). According to hooks (2004), when a Black boy was given permission to be in the gifted classes, it was only after he had proven himself to be subordinate. Although reading and writing are basic

skills needed if one is to work and be a fully productive citizen, these skills are not equally taught to most Black males. Due to their previous negative experiences, an element of what appears like post-traumatic stress exists for many African American males.

They also say that reading feels stressful, especially if it makes them think about subjects that generate more feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness. This pressure is part of the psychology racial arsenal, and constantly reminds educated Black people, especially Black males, that no amount of education will allow them to escape the imposition of racist stereotypes. They want to appear harmless, not a threat, and to do so they have to entertain unenlightened folks by letting them know “I don’t think I’m equal to you.” (hooks, 2004, p. 39)

Beyond these psychological consequences, stereotype threat and internalized racism<sup>2</sup> have significant practical consequences as well, especially within the context of the workplace. Kopano (2011) asserted the unfounded and marginalizing position that Black males were unable to provide for themselves, and engage in behavior that lands them in prison, where the institution then “takes care of them” (p. 215). Often in predominantly White educational settings, Black males try to maintain a resemblance of control and protecting themselves from white racialized rage. According to Essed (1991), various intergenerational aspects of racial oppression affect and support the search of inference and comparison. This makes it more likely for structures of rational interpretation to be created by individuals existing within the racialized system (Essed, 1991). Rational interpretations influence dominant cultural narratives, or are stories

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of “internalized racism” refers specifically to White dominance that is internalized by the non-White group or individual and is directed inward toward the self or the group. The terms internalized racism, colonial mentality, psychological slavery and internalized White racism are used interchangeably (Pyke, 2010).

communicated to individuals through socialization channels, such as schools, interpersonal encounters, and mass media. These narratives often convey derogatory stereotypes about sociopolitical minority groups (Rappaport, 2000). I postulate that White supremacy may be so dominant that it overrides the positive (or even neutral) cultural narratives. In essence, White supremacy may be a barrier to the perception and potential development of interpersonal and intergenerational narratives, and inhibit one's personal interactions and leadership growth and development.

Another potential reaction to fears of White racial oppression can be distancing oneself from perceived negative racial stereotypes (stigmatized in-group members' shared beliefs about how others in the out-groups evaluate them); this is known as metastereotyping. According to Gomez (2002), consequences of metastereotyping may include "anything from that perception, and emotional reaction (such as, anxiety, stress and threat), or a behavior such as, lower task performance, avoidance of interactions with group members, or withdrawal" (p. 258). In an attempt to escape negative stereotypes from out-group members, in-group members may psychologically distance themselves from these negative stereotypes. This distancing is known as identity bifurcation and involves the rejection of aspects of one's identity that are seen as unacceptable in a given domain while remaining identified with other aspects that are unproblematic (Block et al., 2011; Pronin et al., 2004; Steele et al., 2002). The potential impact of both stereotyping and metastereotyping is a constant wondering and worrying with regards to how they and their actions are perceived. Individuals who self-identify with negatively stereotyped groups have the added apprehension of being judged on the basis of their group membership (Roberson & Kulik, 2007) and thus employ identity buffering strategies to enhance their sense of self.

**Table 2.1***Stereotype and Metastereotype Research and Potential Leader-Related Issues*

Symptoms of Threat Response	Potential Leader-related Issues	Supporting Research
Heightened anxiety, worry, fear, feeling overwhelmed	Negative physiological responses, decreased effectiveness in communication; increased errors	Blascovich et al., 2001; Blascovich et al., 2004; Bosson et al., 2004; Chen & Matthews, 2003; Osborne, 2006, 2007.
Reduced skill development	Increased learning curve, decreased selection for complex work assignments	Taylor & Walton, 2011.
Executive resource depletion; reduced working memory capacity; mind-wandering	Increased frustration; potential depression; decreased productivity	Croizet et al., 2004; Johns et al., 2008; Mrazek et al., 2011; Schmader & Johns, 2003.
Lower self-confidence	Lower morale; potential depression; increased communicative issues; decreased motivation	Spencer & Castano, 2007.
Impaired self-regulation, lack of impulse control (overeating, risky choices, financial decisions)	Increased stressors based on negative outcomes of impaired self-regulation (weight gain, potential family or financial problems); potential decrease in integrity; decreased work-life satisfaction,	Block et al., 2007; Cadinu et al., 2005; Carr & Steele, 2010; Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Inzlicht et al., 2006.
Inflexibility while using previously successful problem - solving techniques, no longer effective, and lowered performance expectation	Decreased self-confidence; decline in merit-based performance, awards and recognition; decreased motivation; decline in appearance as a team player	Cadinu et al., 2003; Stangor et al., 1988.
Disengagement and disidentification	Distances self from marginalized group; decreased motivation	Pronin et al., 2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone et al., 1999; von Hippel et al., 2005.
Persistence and overcompensation	Increased frustration; burnout	Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Kray et al., 2004; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997.

## **Black Masculinity and Oppression**

The potential impact of race and identity stereotyping is further complicated by the concept of masculinity. Masculinity is a term typically used to describe the socio-cultural construction and expectation of males within society (Hecht et al., 1993). As defined by Oxford Dictionary (2014), masculinity is a set of qualities, characteristics or roles generally considered typical of, or appropriate to, a man. Masculinity has historically been synonymous with virility. Similar to the definition of manhood, within our culture a male described as masculine is perceived and expected to be courageous, strong, and sexually potent. Although theoretical constructs of masculinity vary across historical and cultural contexts, masculine norms are in essence an avoidance of femininity, restriction of emotions (with the exception of anger), sex disconnected from intimacy, the pursuit of achievement and status, independence, aggression, and homophobia (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). Masculinities primarily reflect the ethos of gender, race, and class politics (Crosby, 2002).

Philosopher bell hooks argues that, “although society depicts Black masculinities as dominant, fantastical and narrow, in essence they mirror the very descriptions of White masculinity” (hooks, 1992, p. 89). Masculinities are not to be understood as a singular or unitary reality, but as multiple masculinities pluralized to accent an anti-essentialist perspective, which accounts for variations resulting from culture, class, sexual orientation, religion, and other differences. For both Black and White males in the United States, masculine identities are generally defined by common denominators, like the ability to provide for one’s family, protect their loved ones, heterosexual orientation, ability to educate and rear their children, domination over women, and material possessions. Masculinities are not stable, predictable forces; they are as adaptable as one’s perceptions (Jackson & Dangerfield, 2002).

Review of the literature also identified four common themes specific to Black masculinity: the struggle of existing as a Black male in a racialized, White dominant society; the perseverance established from the struggle of being Black; the connection between Black masculinity and community; and, the importance of spirituality and religion within the Black community. Likewise, although some African American men may acknowledge an ancestral lineage back to Africa, there was less recognition of a Black males' individuality. Black male collectivism is regularly recognized over individuality within our society. Regardless of one's upbringing, familial environment, socio-economic status, education, region, age, career, and sexual orientation, a number of texts mentioned societal oppression as endured by Black males, for example, bigotry, racial assaults, and microaggressions (Alleyne, 2005). Jackson and Dangerfield (2002) described Black manhood as a behavioral category influx, developing with age, experience, stability, cultural consciousness, self-comfort, and spiritual awareness, and affirmed by the community (family, local, global, etc.). Universal criteria do not exist for Black manhood because communities change and are often diverse. Over time, individuals develop resilience birthed from the struggle of being a Black male both within and outside of the Black community. Jackson and Dangerfield (2002) identified five factors that they believe affect Black masculine positionality: struggle, community, achievement, independence, and recognition.

The literature review also identified *The Negro Family* (Moynihan, 1965), what is seen as a highly problematic and unfounded document that continues to remain in circulation present day, and is regarded as one of the most important works of the postwar period in the United States (Amazon, 2021). In 1965, Daniel P. Moynihan published the work entitled *The Negro Family*, which posited the notion that Black women had emasculated Black males by being matriarchs. Moynihan claimed that participating in the armed forces was one way for Black men

to reclaim their patriarchal status. This was seen as a significant shift in accountability for Black male oppression from White supremacy to the matriarchy of Black women. Black female success began to be perceived as separate and in competition with the success of Black males. This theory posited that the more Black females advanced, the more Black males were oppressed (Moynihan, 1965). Beginning with Moynihan (1965), Black females began to be seen as outsiders and non-members of the Black male community. Along with this positioning, Black female oppression was dismissed as not being real and unrelated to the oppression Black men experienced. Some Black males came to believe that Black females were never as oppressed as Black males and began to see themselves as victims disconnected from the experiences of Black females (hooks, 2004).

The perception of Black males seeing themselves as victims and in the shadows of Black female advancement produces performances of masculinities that engage what is referred to as the Cycle of Victimhood: the socialization process that produces performances of Black masculinities characterized by a victim mentality. However, even though Black men may identify with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity for them to be recognized by the White male community, they must be partially detached as well as attached to the mainstream culture. Hegemonic masculinity is a term coined by sociologist R. W. Connell (2005) and identifies practices that are believed to guarantee the dominant social position of men, and the subordinate social position of women. Hegemonic masculinity suggests how and why men focus on maintaining dominant social roles over women, and other gender identities which are perceived as “feminine” in society.

“Code switching,” or the negotiation of cultural identity, is a minority group phenomenon and not considered necessary behavior for White Americans (Thibodaux, 1994). Jackson and

Dangerfield (2002) described code switching for men as an “attempt to coordinate his actions with others, as well as [an awareness of] the possibility that his masculine identity may become anonymous, silenced, suppressed, and accessorized” (p. 7). He must always be cognizant of the effects of identity negotiation. This is accomplished by policing and maintaining surveillance over his identity. Code switching strategies are attempts for Black males to make their presence and views less threatening for the majority White population. This can be seen in their tone of voice, word usage, a decrease in eye contact, an overall decrease in communication, or avoidance. The quote below demonstrates the contrast and struggle perceived by a particular interview participant (Johnson, 2003). The challenge of altering one’s individual performance (how one interacts with others, etc.) in order to appear less threatening and possess an identity one may be expected to embody within an intercultural context is a common theme in performing Black masculinities.

You have to be able to be gray (a lighter shade of Black). If you can’t be gray you will never make it in a white man’s world. You can’t be white, you can’t be Black, you have to be gray. (Anonymous, Johnson, 2003)

According to Jackson (1997), White American men have not experienced estrangement from and fragmentation of an integral cultural self. Their humanity has not been questioned and their freedoms remain intact, producing different experiences in how they perceive and are received by world. The Black masculine person is perpetually concerned about validation but without a means to obtain it. This quest for validation and acceptance as a human being is one of the saddest, silent struggles of an oppressed person. African Americans are then left with the inability to “represent themselves to others as complex human beings, and thereby consent in some regards to the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White

supremacy ideologies” (Bell-Jordan, 2011, p. 31). Supremacy ideologies can be internalized by stigmatized individuals through a phenomenon known as stereotype threat.

Stereotype threat, as detailed in Chapter I, has been identified as a cause for psychological stress (Blascovich et al., 2001); heightened anxiety, worry, and fear (Blascovich et al., 2004; Bosson et al., 2004; Chen & Matthews, 2003); heightened physiological arousal, such as feeling overwhelmed (Blascovich et al., 2001; Osborne, 2006, 2007); reduced learning and skill development (Taylor & Walton, 2011); reduced working memory capacity (Croizet et al., 2004; Schmader & Johns, 2003); lower self-confidence (Spencer & Castano, 2007); impaired self-regulation (Cadinu et al., 2005; Inzlicht et al., 2006); executive resource depletion (Johns et al., 2008); mind-wandering (Mrazek et al., 2011); inflexibility while using previously successful problem solving techniques, and lowered performance expectations (Cadinu et al., 2003; Stangor et al., 1988); overeating, aggression, persistence, risky choices, financial decisions, and verbal ability (Block et al., 2007; Carr & Steele, 2010; Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Inzlicht et al., 2006).

Cognitive stereotypes provoke distress for individuals during performance episodes, such as academic tests. Thus, an immediate effect of cognitive stereotype threat is a decline in performance (Block et al., 2011). This is manifested by disengagement and disidentification from the devalued group being stereotyped (Pronin et al., 2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone et al., 1999; von Hippel et al., 2005); self-handicapping strategies that impact performance (Keller, 2002; Stone, 2002); and, overcompensation and working harder in response to stereotype threat (Kray et al., 2004). Although working harder can lead to high levels of performance, in a work setting people are often faced with falling short of their goals. “When the task is difficult and complex, more effort does not always translate into better performance” (Block et al., 2011, p. 578). Researchers found that members of stigmatized groups, including

women and ethnic minorities, prefer to attribute negative outcomes to their own personal inadequacies rather than discrimination (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). It may be easier to blame oneself and retain an appearance of control over performance than acknowledge the existence of racism (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). It is possible that this response also stems from the belief that a “negative stereotype is untrue for all members of one social identity group” (Block et al., 2011, p. 576).

Stereotypes effect a wide range of outcomes and may influence interpersonal situations and have the potential to occur more frequently given that interactions repetitively take place in workplaces. Non-cognitive stereotype threat is described as non-performance based and may make an individual feel as though they are unable to freely express themselves as they generally would outside of the workplace. For example, African Americans are stereotyped as being more aggressive or combative than their Caucasian counterparts. This stereotype could lead to African-American employees being hesitant or fearful of the act of expressing themselves in the workplace. This may be out of concern that displaying a different opinion, disagreeing with a colleague, or expressing concerns pertaining to a particular issue may be seen as confirming this stereotype. This fear may be magnified by the fact that the same action may be appraised as more aggressive when taken by an African American in comparison to a White employee (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). Despite the potential impact on employees and organizations, less research has been conducted on the impact of stereotype threat issues in the workplace. According to Dhanani and Wolcott (2014), it may be more strongly associated with job and health-related outcomes. Focusing on cognitive stereotypes to the elimination of other stereotypes limits our understanding of employee experiences. The nature and range of consequences associated with

stereotype threat may help us to understand how African American male leaders make sense of race and its intersections, particularly with regards to masculinity at work.

### **White Hegemony and Patriarchal Domination**

The present-day practice of hegemonic masculinity in the U.S. spans racial, ethnic, and class barriers and allows for men to enact gender-based privilege over women. “Without the proper tools to analyze and self-define what it means to be a Black male, many Black men have defined their lives as Black duplicates of the White male ethos” (Madhubuti, 1990, p. 60). However, even when Black men internalize and accept the standards of White masculinity, inequalities in earning potential, employment, educational constraints, human rights, civil liberties, and financial stability inhibit their ability to assert their masculinity in the dominant culture. One described difference between White and Black American males’ identity include the White American’s emphasis on competitiveness, individualism, encouraging a present and future time orientation rather than a past historical orientation, lack of respect for elders, and alienation from nature which is congruent with a Eurocentric worldview (Pierre et al., 2001). “Within this Eurocentric type of system the confinement, the loss of autonomy, and forced adherence to rigid institutional rules contradict normative notions of masculinity and manhood” (Jackson & Dangerfield, 2002, p. 94). In contrast, an Afrocentric worldview emphasizes holistic and communal harmony, exhibiting collective responsibility, synchronization with nature, interdependence, and a deep appreciation for elders in the community (Kambon, 1996; White & Parham, 1990). Anger is sometimes the only emotion recognized and rewarded in the Eurocentric system. Similarly, Kaufman (2001) described masculinities as tenuous and fragile philosophies that exist mainly as displays of violence, conquest of human needs and expressions, and common delusions that sex and gender are the same. The hegemonic portrayal of Black

males as violent, angry, aggressive, threatening, oversexed, criminal, and focused on materialism is the most prominent representation of Black males (Kaufman, 2001).

### **Performing Black Masculinity**

There is a notable absence of research focusing on varying performances of Black masculinities. The performance of Black masculinity, where African Americans are viewed as an underrepresented race, could be considered a restrictive and complex algorithm for surviving within a racialized societal structure. An individual's freedom of self-expression is critical to the concept of performance. According to Pelias (1999), performances are essentially communicative in nature. "All human communication is an act of performance. In its most general sense, performances are the executing of an action" (Pelias, 1999, p. 3). They are not singular demonstrations of self, but they are symbolic of one's social context or societal norms. As a result, the extremely narrow framework for understanding how Black males negotiate performances of gender has limited society's view and weakened our ability to understand the inferences. This has further solidified the perception that Black males are the opposite of White males. In a society in which White masculinity is deemed heteronormative, Black males continue to be seen as abnormal and defective.

Performances are spoken and embodied through the behavior of the actor. Thus, performance functions to produce something for the purpose of audience interpretation (Pelias, 1999). Masculine performance is often motivated by males' fear of what others will think of them. Much of the profiling, posturing, and violence witnessed in prison environments reflect feelings of fear, insecurity, and anxiety (Crosby, 2002). "The great secret of American manhood is that we are afraid of other men" (Kimmel, 1994, p. 133). Masculine performance is explained by males' fear that other males will expose them as not being real men. Black males may be both

victims and coerced participants in creating conflicts that contribute to their psychological distress (Pierre et al., 2001). The larger societal dynamic for African American males is an expectation to function within a culture that silences, abuses, and devalues their existence. These stand as painful reminders to Black men that they are expendable and powerless within American culture.

Schechner (2002) suggested that there are two elements to the concept of performativity. First, performativity is a method of constructing reality. Secondly, performativity characterizes the practice of salvaging behaviors for the purpose of personifying particular performances in everyday life. Schechner (2002) also suggests that there is a direct relationship between the production of certain performances and the social realities created. Hamera's (2006) definition goes on to add, "performativity is a specific means of material and symbolic social production that centers on the repetition and apparent stability of a particular kind of embodied utterance" (Hamera, 2006, as cited in Schechner, 2002, p. 6). Performances are influenced by social location, societal norms, socialization, and culture. Jackson and Dangerfield (2002) regard these situational manifestations as "social positionings." Social positionings are said to "facilitate how masculinity is understood and enacted at any given moment" (Jackson & Dangerfield, 2002, p. 204). They are repetitive in nature and oftentimes reflect the continuing qualities of masculine gender behaviors, which serve the purpose of producing certain kinds of social realities for their actors. According to Schechner (2002), these behaviors find their impetus in socialization, traditions, and rituals. Schechner further suggests that what race means to the broader society is not necessarily defined in the same way it would be within the confines of a particular cultural group. The negotiation of race differs within and outside of one's cultural identity. It is this varied dimension of ethnic performance that influences how one performs gender (Schechner,

2002). Individuals engaged in ethnic performances exist in duality. They live between the tensions of the identity created by White dominant society and the identity they are expected to embody within an intercultural context.

To live with the threat of racism means planning, almost everyday of one's life, how to avoid or defend oneself against discrimination (Essed, 1990, p. 260).

It then becomes not one's race but one's proficiency in demonstrating ethnic performance that is the determining factor concerning the authenticity from one's cultural community. "Performative identities are not false; they are not the function of the kind of artifice or masking that implies a hidden 'real' self; rather they challenge the coherence of that presumed real self" (Blocker, 1999, p. 25). Cultural membership is maintained primarily through recognizable performative practices. Membership is also contingent on the validation of these cultural performances.

As an example, there is a type of performance known as "passing." Passing is a product (an assessed state), a process (an active engagement), performative (ritualized repetition of communicative acts), and a reflection of one's positionality (political location; Blocker, 1999). It is a performance of suppression and denial which has the potential of helping an individual to avoid the stigma and social and cultural structures that are associated with the unwanted interpretation of oneself. It is not the state of becoming but rather the state of being between two performance communities: the point of origin and the place of desire. The idea of passing in American culture often refers to the concept of passing oneself off as a White American. If an individual with Black American heritage possesses physical characteristics more often identified with being White, they may "pass" or self-identify as White to garner the privileges that come from being White in a racialized society. Additionally, the performative act of passing is negotiated between the one passing and those who would accept or deny the passage.

Singer (1992) asserted that cultural performances are “framed events.” They are also important productions that enable participants to understand, criticize, and even change the worlds in which they live. In addition, Turner (1988) argues that “cultural performances are active agencies of social changes, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more effective or ethical ‘designs for living’” (p. 24). Cultural performances are a process of delineation using performative practices to mark membership and association (Clarke, 2008). Much of the delineation also depends on the privileging of one’s social markers, such as gender, at the cost of another marker, such as race. These categories are always social constructions, their persuasiveness derives from their seeming factuality and from the deep investments individuals and communities have in setting themselves off from the “Other,” who they must, then simultaneously and imaginatively construct (Britzman et al., 1993).

Scholarship suggests that ascriptions of authentic Black masculinity are inextricably tied to the performance of being Black (Johnson, 2003). Yet still, the conceptualization of Blackness is directly related to ideals of hegemonic masculinity, in which a dominant-subordinate polarity exists in order to attribute power to the group of White males. Performing Black masculinity in this context means that Black males must be responsible for their own survival because others cannot be trusted and that support and opportunities in life cannot be expected. The inability to trust is conveyed to everyone, resulting in living one’s life in a constant defensive posture. The philosophy concerning the relational existence between Black males and White males suggests that some Black males may consider Black females as much, or even more of a threat to Black male achievement than White males. Likewise, there is a clear implication that Black women should not achieve success beyond Black males’ achievements.

Black males benefit from having the privilege of remaining oblivious to the sexism impacting Black females (hooks, 2004). All the while, they are willing contributors to it because of the ultimate benefit to their perceived dominance. In many respects, the authenticity of Black men is determined by their perceived hypermasculinity (Johnson, 2003). Hypermasculinity is a psychological term for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression, and sexuality (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). It also entails behaviors and the devaluing of anything conceptualized as feminine and/or homosexual in nature (Young, 2007). The portrayal of African American men as hypermasculine is a predominant characterization of Black men in American society. In other words, hypermasculinity can consist of callous sexual attitudes toward women, the belief that violence is manly, and the experience of danger as exciting. “Masculinity is defined as ‘controlling others, climbing hierarchies, obtaining possessions (using coercion, force, and in many cases even violence to achieve such control and power’ (Denborough, 1996, p. 74).

Although the concept of domination and violence relate to the overall masculine culture, Black men are often labeled as more threatening and violent than their White male counterparts regardless of scientific and statistical findings. According to the U.S. Department of Justice’s 2018 Bureau of Justice Statistics briefing report, White individuals committed 62.7% (a total of 738,371) of all violent offenses, Black individuals committed 33.6% (a total of 396,316) of all violent offenses, American Indian/Alaskan Natives committed 2% (a total of 23,390), and Asians committed 1.4% (a total of 16,356; Beck, 2021, p.10). The total number of committed violent offenses for Hispanics totaled 206,976, this figure was reported separately from the above mentioned racial categories (Beck, 2021, p.10). Patterson (1998) emphasized that long before any young male acts violently, he is born into a culture that condones violence as a means of

social control. Patriarchal masculinity is identified by the will to do violence. Showing aggression is the simplest way to assert patriarchal manhood; men of all classes are aware of this ideology. Patterson (1998) makes the important point that most Black males are not criminals. Although society typecasts them as being criminals, the reality is that the typical criminal is White American. White American males commit a disproportionate number of crimes within the United States (Patterson, 1998). Additionally, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (2016), White males account for 69% of total arrests in the United States, in comparison with Black males who account for 26% of total arrests. Given the current socio-political racialized structure of our society, it is believed that the oppressive dominance will never truly confirm Black male dominance.

Within the societal structure, a Black male's attainment of full masculinity is defined by his ability to acquire money. With the focus on money and not the realization or concern for work ethic based on integrity and ethical values, more Black men had the opportunity to enter and advance in life. However, as long as the focus was on the attainment of respectable jobs and work that would lead into the mainstream, Black men struggled profusely and had few options of beating the odds of existing in a racially stratified society. In other words, while it may have been impossible for an individual to enter into change, or maneuver through a racialized employment system due to exclusive company practices (access to information, hiring, training, mentorship and promotions), regardless of the means, Black males had a greater likelihood of still earning money. In connection with earning money, according to Wilson (2011), economic class continues to be more important than race in determining life outcomes for Blacks. In addition, the socialization aspect of being seen as a respected and contributing member of society can be impossible to penetrate as an outsider (Young, 2004). The result is a very narrow

conception of masculinity that guarantees some men a place in a vicious generational cycle of oppression. As stated by Billson and Majors (1992), to be considered a Black male means that one cannot experience the full range of humanity for fear of being deemed inauthentic within the Black cultural community and rebellious within the dominant society. A Black man blocks out all emotions that interfere with this “cool pose” (Billson & Majors, 1992). Cool Pose is a coping strategy that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: social competence, pride, strength, protection, and control (Harris, 1992; Major, 1989; Major & Billson, 1992; Oliver, 1989; Staples, 1982; Wilson, 1991). Such coping behavior takes on a life of its own and sustains dangerous and self-destructive patterns. However, the behaviors associated with cool pose are believed to impede men’s attempts to develop open, expressive, emotional relationships with both men and women. Many Black men have learned to live up to a harsher standard: real men are not involved with anyone or anything that is not cool. Adhering to this standard means that Black men have a hard time being authentic even with each other. “Their behavior must follow as unyielding code of coolness in order to gain and maintain acceptance” (Billson & Majors, 1992, p. 45). A Black man that does not act in this manner is ostracized within the Black community. Hooks (1995) postulates that resistance to rethinking masculinity is embedded within the psyche and lived experiences of men as well as women.

Masculinity, as a performance, is set to a musical score, a dirge orchestrated by culture and social design (Alexander, 2006, p. 76).

Wallace (2002) noted that his research identified three ways in which Black males perform their masculinities. The first way is a result of the dominant society’s expectations of Black male pathology, which focuses on the historical criminalization of Black males. Secondly,

Black males are required to negotiate between the dominant society's characterization of normalcy and what Wallace (2002) terms the "Organic Self." Thirdly, he refers to "me against the world" tension. Based on his research, Wallace (2002) postulated that his participants felt they lived defensively and in survival mode. The performance of Black masculinity perpetuates the expectations of Black males to embody more accepted, non-Black, non-threatening identities within an intercultural context, and can be entrapment for many Black men. "Therein lies the sad compromise—playing into the spectral and the spectacular in racist representation of Black men" (Wallace, 2002, p. 30). According to Wallace (2002), the performance is "less cannibal" and more crafted, canned, and contrived. It is a convincing performance of control and survival. Ironically, the performance of "good man" is read as bad Black man (Alexander, 2006).

So I wear my mean Black man face, from time to time, as a defense mechanism— as a performance, and even as a stratagem to get or cross over. I wear the expected mean Black man face like a sign of membership or a signifier of identification to those who buy into that socially constructed performative expectation. I wear the expected mean Black man face like I would carry a fake passport, a documentation of citizenship in some (not so) imagined world in which my identity is dictated by others. I wear it knowing of course, that my body is always and already marked and that sometimes, it is not only what I look like, but also how I act. (Alexander, 2006, p. 12)

As described by Alexander (2006), performing the hegemonic Black masculine identity can be a complex process. Green (1996) notes that the parameters of identity are not constrained by a single static border; instead, identity is fluid and flexible. In fact, "sometimes the very essentializing and reductive nationalistic ideas that are supposed to unite us and make us identifiable to ourselves and others often render us silent about significant realities about

ourselves and our individual desires” (Green, 1996, p. 253). It is a magnified performance for display and acts to promote a particular social positioning. Black masculinity is indistinguishably tied to the social and sexual control they supposedly have over women (Wallace, 2002). Central to the imagined images of Black men as inherently dangerous is an emphasis on physical prowess, limited mental capacity, and emotional aggression. However, positive recognitions of performance are typically missing from the conversation. Black men have always maintained a strong work ethic as part of their psychological repertoire. African American men and women worked for 300 years without pay in this country, and through their labor, almost single-handedly supported the U.S. economy (Marable, 1983). The problem is not the unwillingness or disinterest of Black men to work. Instead, it has been the shortage of employment and the lack of equality and inclusion in hiring practices. Young Black men applying for entry-level jobs were rejected three times more than their White counterparts (Coontz, 1992). Black men, as a result of their inability to locate employment, are often left vulnerable to multiple stressors that afflict individuals in the low socio-economic status brackets.

### **Racial Stereotypes and Potential Barriers for African American Male Leaders at Work**

Societal, race-based stereotypes of Black males being dangerous miscreants, possessing limited mental capacity, and predisposed to emotional aggression support potential barriers in the workplace. As such, the workplace could represent a microcosm of larger societal barriers. A huge number of research participants and scholars described how the dominant society has worked as mechanism against Black males (Alexander, 2004; Bonilla, 2003; Clarke, 2008; Connor, 2005; Crosby, 2002; Harper, 1996; hooks, 2004; Jackson & Dangerfield, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Levant & Kopecky, 1995; Madhubuti, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992; Pierre et al., 2001; Wallace, 2002; Weber, 2001; West, 1993; Wingfield, 2012). Some White individuals have

internalized a more socially diplomatic custom of not behaving in a prejudiced manner publicly and demonstrate an aversion for those who publicly behave prejudicially. As a result, individuals concerned about portraying a non-prejudiced image may carefully monitor and control their thoughts and behavior in order to combat the expression of stereotypes and negative attitudes that are often activated automatically and intentionally (Divine, 1989; Monteith, 1993; Shelton et al., 2005; von Hippel et al., 2000). The external pressure not to appear biased during interracial interactions is quite high in American society. For Whites with relatively high levels of racial bias, this pressure can be challenging because it is in direct conflict with their propensity to activate stereotypical thoughts (Shelton et al., 2005; Whittenbrick et al., 1997). In contrast, Whites with lower levels of automatic racial bias can be less concerned with expressing prejudices. “They may be more relaxed during the interracial interactions and, as a consequence, perceived as relatively less involved” (Shelton et al., 2005, p. 401). The disturbing implication is that detecting individuals who are prejudiced within social interactions can be quite difficult for some Blacks (Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001; Vorauer & Turpie, 2004). Failing to identify prejudiced actions and responses of others within various social contexts can create anxiety.

They hate him before they even know him (Anonymous participant, Crosby, 2002, p. 68).

A key determinant of anxiety among Blacks and Whites relates to the spatial proximity of Blacks to Blacks and Whites to Blacks. Whites remain anxious about whether individuals of African descent are seen together in groups voluntarily or involuntarily (Watts-Jones, 2002). If Whites initiate the formation of Black exclusive groups, such as any form of segregation (education, financial, real estate, incarceration), racial profiling, or the corporate glass cliff, there is far less anxiety. If a grouping among Blacks results from their own self-determination (Watts-Jones, 2002), anxiety is more common. According to Watts-Jones (2002), the perception

among Whites is that African Americans are “plotting” against them or planning to do something negative. Due to the historical fear of plotting, Whites made conscious efforts to separate the ancestors of Black Americans, spatially, ethnically, and culturally (including linguistically). This was done to “prevent individuals from communicating with each other and from plotting resistance” (Watts-Jones, 2002, p. 597). The theoretical model of racism, which was made available during slavery, “was crystallized in the period following Reconstruction and is still influential today, in which White men’s control of Black men is mediated by the always-about-to-be violated bodies of White women” (Fraiman, 1994, p. 71). The tradition of fear among slave masters that determined the grouping of Black people (without Whites to monitor their activities) signaled endangerment to their system of oppression (Watts-Jones, 2002).

For the Black “other” who has been kept in the child position, being separate and autonomous might be underpinned by catastrophic fantasies of the consequences of emerging and being oneself. Tendencies therefore would be to settle for what is safe and comfortable—a state of dependence and waiting to be given an opportunity—while feeling dissatisfied, frustrated and even enraged with one’s situation. (Alleyne, 2005, p. 296)

A system supported and maintained with the existence of oppression relies heavily on the oppressed. The privilege and entitlement of Whiteness does not exist without the undercurrent of Blackness (Watts-Jones, 2002). As a result, such a racialized system places Blackness in an inferior position in comparison to Whiteness.

### **African American Masculinity and Racism in the Workplace**

The U.S. work environment is an atmosphere where race continues to be a cornerstone of internal organizational processes and procedures that support leader development and growth; as

well as a space where misplaced hegemonic dominance is performed on a daily basis. When White male leaders perform successfully, perceptions of their leadership capabilities are often confirmed and reinforced throughout the organization. In contrast, Black leaders are consistently evaluated negatively, regardless of their performance (Carton & Rosette, 2011; Powell & Butterfield, 2002). Even when White leaders perform unsuccessfully, perceptions of their leadership capabilities remain unchallenged, and, they are assumed to have compensatory qualities that offset their lack of leadership abilities (Carlton & Rosette, 2011).

One challenge facing Black male leaders is that occupational minorities tend to suffer token status, which is being labeled as one who did not excel as a result of professional competence but instead due to their minority racial status. Due to the small number of Black leaders, they often experience the symptoms of tokenism: higher visibility, performance pressures, isolation, intense scrutiny, and negative performance evaluations (Kanter, 1977; Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002). They also experience hostility, resistance, and challenges to their authority by insiders within the organization, which may consist of direct reports, peers, and senior leaders (Heilman et al., 1995; Kanter, 1977). Tokens and solos are also less likely to benefit from social and professional networks and to receive organizational support, information, and assistance from peers and subordinates (Taylor, 2010). As a result, they tend to be more cautious and frugal with organizational resources (Gutek & Cohen, 1987). These pressures and resource deficiencies in turn impact performance and job satisfaction (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2003; Spencer et al., 1999; Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002).

Minorities may accept perilous leadership positions out of fear that they will lack better opportunities in the future (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). Still others felt “pressured to accept risky appointments when benefactors or mentors framed these promotions as pivotal opportunities for

career advancement” (Collins, 1997, p. 59). Glass cliff theory presumes that occupational minorities are more likely to be promoted to leadership positions in organizations that are struggling in crisis, or at risk to fail (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Organizational decision makers have a tendency to perceive women and minorities as less competent and capable of leading organizations compared to White men (Carlton & Rosette, 2011; Rosette et al., 2008). If occupational minority leaders fail to produce positive results, decision makers will search for traditional corporate saviors to restore organizational viability (Khurana, 2004). Even short-term performance declines increase the odds of replacement by corporate saviors (Cook & Glass, 2013). Minorities who attain top leadership positions have survived successive levels of discrimination and are likely to be exceptional (Ferree & Purkayastha, 2000). Yet even these exceptional individuals are subject to the enduring trauma of social and institutional racism, especially as it is internalized through stereotype threat.

As discussed earlier, stereotype threat is the expectation that one will be judged on the basis of social identity and group membership rather than actual performance and potential (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Stereotype threat has been found to occur when the following conditions are met:

(a) The task an individual is performing is relevant to the stereotype about an individual’s group, (b) the task is challenging, (c) the individual is performing in a domain with which he or she identifies, and (d) the context in which the test is being performed is likely to reinforce the stereotype. (Block et al., 2011, p. 572)

Stereotype threat was originally defined as the risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, minority group members are also exposed to negative stereotypes about their group that are irrelevant to their

ability to perform tasks (Dhanani & Wolcott, p. 423). For example, Black Americans are stereotyped as being more aggressive than their Caucasian counterparts. This may lead to Black employees being “fearful of expressing themselves in the workplace out of concern that the behavior will be seen as confirming the stereotype” (Dhanani & Wolcott, p. 423). This fear may be compounded by the fact that the same action is believed to create more aggression when perpetrated by an African-American, in comparison to the same action being perpetrated by a Caucasian (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). However, although other threats may exist there remains a tendency to focus on cognitive-based stereotypes. As an example, women reminded of the stereotype that women are horrible at math and then asked to perform mathematical equations (at a level that they would effectively perform without the presence of threat) perform more poorly than women who are not reminded of the stereotype.

The research on cognitive-based stereotypes is primarily based in educational settings (Steele, 2011). According to Schmaeder and Johns (2003), the most prominent theory about why this occurs claims that negative thoughts, worry, suppression, hyper-vigilance, and other related mechanisms impact performance. As an example, “women under threat have reduced executive functioning, or general-purpose control mechanisms that modulate the operation of various cognitive sub processes and thereby regulate the dynamics of human cognition” (Miyake et al., 2000, p. 50).

Unfortunately, the focus on cognitive ability-related stereotypes leaves us less acquainted with the wide-range of additional stereotypes that have the ability to impact workers (Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014). In fact, Dhanani and Wolcott (2014) propose that non-cognitive stereotype threat have consequences for emotional labor. When an employee faces non-cognitive stereotypes at work, they may feel as though they are unable to freely express themselves (Dhanani & Wolcott,

2014). “Stereotype threats that cause stress during performance are activated in interpersonal situations and can potentially occur more frequently given that interactions constantly take place in most workplaces” (Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014, p. 423). This stress may be demonstrated in both informal and formal communicative work interactions for de-valued, underrepresented group members. For example, a Black employee may be fearful of being assertive with a rude, disruptive customer because of the threat of corroborating the stereotype that Black males are aggressive. In situations such as this, an employee may engage in emotional dissonance by closely managing their communication and emotions (Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014). Members of racial minority groups and other negatively stereotyped groups report greater instances of adverse social evaluation than majority group members (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). This greater perceived discrimination may be more directly linked to social identities that describe us in the present, than those that described us in the past (Steele & Aronson, 1995). According to Steele (2011), an individual’s academic strengths and confidence rather than academic deficiencies may make them more susceptible to stigma pressure. So, while anyone may be impacted, it is not the least educated who are psychologically impacted the most, instead it is those who are highly educated.

Although individuals may physically, mentally, and emotionally do their very best to prevent themselves from being associated with stereotypes, they still encounter situations where their lives are evaluated based on the stereotype (Block et al., 2011). Psychological identity threats do not have to be experienced directly to impact an individual, and the individual experiencing the threat does not have to be certain that a threat has occurred. The possibility of the threat occurring is enough to stimulate rumination. “It's the possibility that requires vigilance and that makes the identity preoccupied” (Steele, 2011, p. 75). According to Steele (2011), even

the most minimal identity threats are enough to make an individual think and behave like a group member. For example, research demonstrated that women, African-Americans, and Hispanics are seen as deficient in attributes critical to leadership skills when compared with men and Whites (Block et al., 2011; Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Heilman et al., 1989; Tomkiewicz et al., 1998). “Individuals who respond to stereotype threat with discouragement realize that no matter how productive they are and how much they achieve, they will still be perceived in light of the students—not in every situation, but unpredictably” (Block et al., 2011, p. 579).

An avenue for future research would be to take a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the range of stereotypes that pose a potential threat to employees. Focusing on cognitive stereotype threat at the exclusion of non-cognitive stereotype threat limits our understanding of true, real-world experiences of employees (Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014). Likewise, it limits our understanding of the various negative consequences that could be associated with stereotype threat (Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014). Additionally, the vast majority of empirical studies testing stereotype threat have taken a quantitative approach, in which various aptitude and arithmetic tests have been given to a wide range of college students at large universities. While diversity was accounted for in the demographic make-up of the participants, studies were still administered in laboratory settings. In fact, the greatest common limitation to the research was the use of college students as participants. While such findings may be beneficial within an academic setting, within a professional work environment, research findings continue to be devoid of the voices and experiences of African American male professionals. “Numerous laboratory studies have documented the negative impact stereotype threat on short-term test performances, yet its effects in applied contexts, such as work settings, continue to remain unexplored” (Block et al., 2011, p. 570). The impact of stereotype threat extends

beyond laboratory settings and into the workplace. As previously mentioned, the stress of racism may be demonstrated in communicative work interactions for underrepresented group members. As such, challenges faced by the negative effects of the perceived threat have the potential to also negatively influence interpersonal relationships and one's ability to communicate effectively.

### **Intercultural Communication at Work**

The inability to communicate effectively at work due to racism or perceived racism has the potential to negatively impact leader development and growth. As with all interactions, communicative exchanges (verbal and nonverbal) are paramount. According to Spitzberg (2000), there are three levels of analysis required when discussing intercultural communication: individual, episodic, and relational analysis. An individual level of analysis examines the personal attributes and skills inherent in the individual; skills required for competent interactions. The episodic level of analysis assesses appropriate and efficient interactions within a particular situation. Lastly, the relational level of analysis maintains interactions throughout a relationship. Increased communicative knowledge leads to improved competence (Spitzberg, 2000). "Shared culture influences an individual's reasons for communicating effectively, and what they deem to be norms and behaviors, leading to competence" (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 86). It is culture that comprises an integral part of the environment. It is also through cultural standards that group norms are set. Cultures are established in codes, communication, and communities (Hecht et al., 2003). Effective communication within a cultural community requires that interactants have the requisite communication skills, be motivated, to communicate and have knowledge of self, other, situation, and topic (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984). The ability to adjust and accommodate communicatively becomes more salient within intercultural contexts.

Intercultural contexts continue to expand given the increase in racioethnic diversity in the United States. “As a natural consequence of this increasing diversity, the proportion of workplace interactions spanning racioethnic lines will rise” (Avery et al., 2009). People experience increasing challenges due to lack of exposure, awareness, and comfort when engaging within intercultural contexts. This can be especially true for White Americans who have minimal intercultural interactions outside of the workplace. Social psychological researchers have found that White Americans often feel anxious and self-conscious prior to and during interracial interactions with Black Americans (Blascovich et al., 2000; Crocker et al., 1998; Devine & Vasquez, 1998; Dixon, 2006; Dovidio et al., 2002; Hyers & Swim, 1998; Norton et al., 2006; Plant & Devine, 2003; Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; Shelton, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). This is partially due to the contested Black–White relations in the United States (Bacharach et al., 2005). Anxiety results partially from the uncertainty of what may result from these interactions (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). White employees are generally less likely than non-White coworkers to have significant, prior experience engaging in interracial interactions outside of the workplace (Avery et al., 2009; Ibarra, 1993; Smith, 2002).

Likewise, despite their efforts to conceal the discomfort, the most intense feelings that White people experience about interracial interactions entail contact with Black individuals. Often these Black colleagues recognize the discomfort of their White colleagues. Anxiety pertaining to these interactions causes avoidance of minorities (Dixon, 2006; Dovidio et al., 2002; Pant & Devine, 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; Shelton, 2003). Additionally, many White employees manage their behaviors in the workplace because they are concerned with avoiding the appearance of being racist (Blank & Slipp, 1994; Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Due to

the unique history of African Americans in the United States, in comparison to other non-White groups, White Americans' interactions with Black individuals often differ from their relations with other racioethnic groups (Dixon, 2006). Black–White interactions invoke a state of physiological threat in some individuals (Blascovich et al., 2000; Blascovich et al., 2001). The anxiety is believed to stem in part from the uncertainty of the situation (Avery et al., 2009). Individuals are most unaware of their feelings and behaviors during interracial interactions; and, when they are aware, they often misrepresent negative experiences and feelings (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Plant & Devine, 1998; Word et al., 1974). Nevertheless, even in brief interactions, contact may temporarily deplete the executive attentional resources of White individuals (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005). Individuals may be unaware of their behaviors and feelings during interracial interactions. However, when they are aware they may be inclined to misrepresent any negative feelings and experiences (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Plant & Devine, 1998). Nonverbal communication reveals attitudes individuals do not report on self-reporting instruments and verbal communications.

In addition, the anxiety experienced as a result of inter-racial communications can create communication burnout. Burnout is a multidimensional construct representing a “wearing out” from the stress of work (Golembiewski et al., 1986; Maslach, 1982; Pines et al., 1981; Welch et al., 1982). It is described as a chronic condition in which individuals experience three dimensions that impact their psychological well-being: emotional exhaustion; depersonalization, which is seen as a negative shift in responses to others; and the diminished sense of personal accomplishments, due to work pressures (Maslach, 1982).

“Although personality does play some part in the burnout, the bulk evidence . . . is consistent with the view that burnout is best understood (and modified) in terms of situational

sources of job-related, interpersonal stress” (Maslach, 1982, p. 9). Burnout can negatively influence an employee’s work satisfaction, dedication and loyalty to the mission and objectives of their organization, occupational and professional commitment, and communication burnout. The types of communication considered effective in dealing with burnout are social support (House, 1981; Ray, 1987) and participation in decision-making (Golembiewski et al., 1986; House & Cottingham, 1986). “Perceptions of the workplace and job attitudes are a function of the communication environment . . . burnout is then a job attitude that could be influenced by the communication of salient others, particularly supervisors and coworkers” (Brown & Roloff, 2015, p. 304). Identifying stressors resulting from interracial interactions and increasing positive outcomes may help alleviate situational anxiety. In order to decrease the experience of employee burnout, and increase the experience of inclusion and positive outcomes, Brown and Roloff (2015) ascertain that influence in decisions, support from supervisor, and support from coworkers can reduce the perception of stressors in the work environment.

### **Inclusion at Work**

Dealing effectively with other employees is paramount for a leaders’ success in the workplace. Employee inclusion and a leader’s ability to work with and influence a diverse group of people is a critical skill. Inclusion has been defined as “the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system” (Pelled et al., 1999, p. 1014). Roberson (2006) defined inclusion as “the removal of obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees in organizations” (p. 217). The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2018) describes inclusion as “the achievement of a work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization's success.” Additionally, Avery et al.

(2008) defined inclusion as “the extent to which employees believe their organizations engage in efforts to involve all employees in the mission and operation of the organization with respect to their individual talents” (p. 6). Holvino et al. (2004) stated that an inclusive organization is “one in which the diversity of knowledge and perspectives that members of different groups bring to the organization has shaped its strategy, its work, its management and operating systems, and its core values and norms for success” (p. 249). Similarly, Wasserman et al. (2008) defined an inclusive culture as one that exists when “people of all social identity groups have the opportunity to be present, to have their voices heard and appreciated, and to engage in core activities on behalf of the collective” (p. 176).

Based on these definitions of inclusion, contrarily a description of exclusion is not allowing valuing the unique differences of individuals, not treating individuals fairly or respectfully, and not providing equal access for individuals to meaningfully contribute to the mission of the organization. Diversity is described as “pervasive and part of an overall perspective and strategy that is inclusive of all employee differences, and these differences themselves are considered opportunities for both individual and organizational learning” (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas, 2002, p. 324). An essential theme in inclusion and diversity literature is the tension between what Shore et al. (2011) referred to as belongingness and uniqueness, which is focused on the individual within the group. The varying levels of belongingness and uniqueness determine an individuals’ perception of inclusion verses exclusion.

Shore et al. (2011) identified four categories: (a) low-belongingness and low-uniqueness, (b) high-belongingness and low-uniqueness, (c) low-belongingness and high-uniqueness, and (d) high-belongingness and high-uniqueness. A low-belongingness and low-uniqueness combination

is identified as exclusion. In this scenario, an individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique contributions. However, there are other employees or groups who are acknowledged as group insiders. In situations where belongingness is ignored, harmful cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes can exist and workplace rejection by ones' supervisor and coworkers is detrimental to the work attitudes and psychological health of men as compared with women (Baumeister et al., 2005; Blackhart et al., 2009; DeWall et al., 2009; Hitlan et al., 2006). In the second category, high belongingness and low value in uniqueness describes scenarios where an individual who is unique is treated as a group insider when they conform or assimilate to the dominant norms of the work culture. In the third category, low on belongingness and highly uniqueness is referred to as differentiation; the individual is not treated as an organizational insider, yet their talents and contributions are still considered valuable for the organization's success. Within professional settings, individuals whose groups are stigmatized or stereotyped are inclined to be unsure of the quality of their social bonds; for this reason, they are particularly sensitive to signs that they do not belong (Spencer et al., 2015). As a researcher, I believe that a leader's social exclusion within an organization and their ability to possibly form and discern supportive work relationship bonds with others may be a vital point to consider when researching African American male leaders. Mor Barak (2000) noted:

Employee perception of inclusion-exclusion is conceptualized as a continuum of the degree to which individuals feel a part of critical organizational processes. These processes include access to information and resources, connectedness to supervisor and co-workers, and ability to participate in and influence the decision making process. (p.

52)

Mor Barak developed a theoretical model of inclusion in which she posed that diversity and organizational culture would contribute to perceptions of inclusion–exclusion, which would then lead to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, individual well-being, and task effectiveness. For instance, theoretical perspectives most commonly relied upon in the diversity literature (relational demography, social identity theory, and the similarity–attraction paradigm) argue that people seek to belong to groups and tend to treat people in their in-groups more favorably than those in out-groups (Byrne, 1971; Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Riordan & Weatherly, 1999).

Racial similarities amongst individuals has been associated with a greater comfort and liking, higher interview ratings, healthier communication behavior, reduced relationship conflict, a decreased intention to leave the organization, and lower turnover (Buckley et al., 2007; Chatman et al., 1998; Chattopadhyay, 1999; Godthelp & Glunk, 2003; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Tsui et al., 1992; Wiersema & Bird, 1993). Furthermore, researchers have found that gender similarity is positively related to trust, group cohesion, feelings of competence, psychological attachment, and decreased turnover (Mellor, 1995; Pelled & Xin, 2000; Shapcott et al., 2006; Tsui et al., 1992).

Conversely, research findings resulting from the focus on belongingness have been mixed (Mannix & Neale, 2005; Riordan, 2000), which suggests that demographic similarity may not always promote a sense of belongingness on its own and also that it may not be sufficient to ensure positive outcomes (Riordan & Wayne, 2008). Belonging to an underrepresented group and being different from others can activate feelings of stereotypes and exclusion, or the fear of being treated on the basis of negative stereotypes (Pelled et al., 1999; Steele et al., 2002). Transformational leadership, which creates belongingness among direct reports by unifying them

around objectives and values, moderated the affiliation between demographic differences and team performance (Kearney & Gebert, 2009). Team participation and team member orientation can be indicators of belonging and predict performance (Mohammed & Angell, 2004). The inclusion framework proposes that within organizations team members want to feel valued for their unique attributes and are interested in belonging to the group. Individuals assign positive characteristics to members in their in-groups, and also display in-group favoritism (Turner, 1975). The loyalty, cooperation, and trustworthiness among team members function to enhance the confidence and safety of individual members (Brewer, 2007).

**Table 2.2**

*Inclusion Framework*

	Low Belongingness	High Belongingness
Low Value in Uniqueness	Exclusion: Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the work group but there are other employees or groups who are insiders.	Assimilation: Individual is treated as an insider in the work group when they conform to the organizational, dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness.
High Value in Uniqueness	Differentiation: Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the work group but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/organization success.	Inclusion: Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group.

*Note:* Adapted from “Inclusion and Diversity in Work Groups: A Review and Model for Future Research”, L. Shore, A., Randel, B. Chung, M. Dean, K. Ehrhart, G. Singh, 2011, 37, No.4, July 2011, 1262-1289. Used by permission.

According to Pickett et al. (2002), individuals choose to identify socially with a particular group when it supports both belongingness and uniqueness. Although both belongingness and uniqueness are crucial, circumstances happen in which one or the other becomes more prominent

(Correll & Park, 2005; Pickett & Brewer, 2001). Social identity complexity highlights how people subjectively combine multiple social identities, reconciling how individuals may be out-group members on the basis of social identities and characteristic, such as race (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Social identity is positively related to tolerance toward out-group members (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) and positive attitudes toward racial out-groups (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Miller et al., 2009). Another level of research focuses on multiple social identities and intersectionality, which refers to the way in which various aspects of identity may combine in different ways to construct social reality (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The majority of diversity research has focused on single categories of diversity, such as race and sex, but research on intersectionality has begun the process of researching how multiple categories simultaneously influence the experiences of individuals. Developing the ability to pull from multiple identity categories could positively influence the impact of negative stereotype threat. Further, such research could provide valuable insight on the development and nurturance of leaders that both furthers organizational diversity goals as well as creating a more welcoming and productive atmosphere for employees.

### **Leader Development**

An organization's ability and willingness to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for leaders may influence a leader's interactions, and impact their potential for development. Karp and Helgo (2008) postulate that leadership is an action, facilitated by leaders' identity construction. Their idea is supported by Day and Harrison (2007) who argued that identity promotes leadership and leaders develop in the interaction between people within the acts of recognizing and being recognized; gaining the necessary trust, credibility, and respect to perform as a leader. The perceptions and acceptance of others also influence the leaders'

interactions with others. Leadership is a developing phenomenon of people in interaction, a self-motivated, socially enabled and constrained purpose (Klein, 2004). A leader is personified in an individual person, and more importantly, leadership is a social happening that emerges only in interaction. Leadership has no value without interaction.

Researchers have begun to establish the importance of management philosophy and values affecting diversity and inclusion (Avery et al., 2007; Gelfand et al., 2005; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Scheid, 2005; Wasserman et al., 2008). Inclusion is associated with improved job performance and higher levels of organizational citizenship behavior (Wayne et al., 1997). Trust is also an important essential mechanism of social exchange (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Shore et al., 2006). In light of the various challenges faced by an individual resulting from stereotype threat, the self-empowerment of African American male leaders to develop self-empowerment and self-supporting strategies is crucial. Several such self-empowerment approaches are authentic leader development and reflected best self (RBS).

### **Authentic Leaders**

The idea of authenticity is rooted in Greek philosophy, to thy own self be true (Gardner et al., 2005). The development of fully functioning or self-actualized persons, i.e., individuals who are in tune with their basic nature and clearly see themselves and their lives (Maslow, 1968, 1971; Rogers, 1959, 1963). According to Gardner et al. (2005), authentic leaders experience heightened levels of self-awareness. The awareness factor of authenticity involves having awareness of, and possessing trust in, one's motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions (Kernis, 2003). It also incorporates awareness of both one's strengths and weaknesses. Among the numerous definitions offered for values, I believe a more relevant one was offered by Schwartz (1999), who defines values as conceptions of the desirable that

guide the way social actors, such as organizational leaders, policy-makers, individual persons, select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations. Values serve as trans-situational and normative standards for behavior and evaluation (Schwartz, 1992). According to Shamir and Eilam (2005), a leader's life story provide understanding into the meanings they ascribe to life events to guide direct reports; and, likewise to develop themselves over time through reflection. A leader's life story "reflects the degree of self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, and person-role merger he or she experiences, and provides followers with cues for assessing leader authenticity" (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 318). Although women and other groups who may be considered outsiders, who have not customarily had access to leadership roles, may find it challenging to achieve interpersonal authenticity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This is due to individuals who are not seen as a prototypical leader not being granted the same level of legitimacy as leaders who belong to the majority group (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Shamir and Eilam (2005) suggest the following four characteristics of authentic leaders: (a) authentic leaders are true to themselves, instead of assimilating or conforming to the expectations of others; (b) authentic leaders are motivated by personal convictions, instead of organizational status, recognition, or personal benefits; (c) authentic leaders lead from their own personal point of view; and (d) personal values and convictions lead the actions of authentic leaders. A positive moral perspective is also believed to encompass authentic leaders (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; May et al., 2003).

### **Reflected Best Self**

The themes of authenticity, leader development, and being true to oneself are also notable in a strength-based theory known as reflected best-self (Roberts et al., 2005). Reflected best-self unveils crucial means by which individuals compose their reflected best-self through

interpersonal experiences. Roberts et al. (2005) define *reflected* as “perceptions of how others view us,” and *best* as the “strengths, contributions, and enduring talents that each person brings to a situation” (p. 712). According to Roberts et al. (2005), we compose a self-portrait from our personal experiences. The formation of our self-portrait can be sub-conscious and take place over time, and the organizations in which we work can also play a participating role in supporting our work relationships, giving feedback, and contributing to our goals (Roberts et al., 2005). Being at one’s best is described as being authentic (Erickson, 1995; Harter, 2002); true to oneself (Hoyle et al., 1999; Leary & Tangney, 2003; Palmer, 2000; Quinn & Quinn, 2002); and high-performing (Spreitzer et al., 1995). Erickson (1995) stated that authenticity is not an either/or condition, individuals are neither totally authentic nor inauthentic; however, that can be described as bordering on authentic or inauthentic. As such, from a leader development perspective leaders experience growth through self-reflection and by becoming more authentic. From a reflected best-self vantage point through a process of self-reflection, an individual has the potential to enter their state of best-self by constructing identities that are positive. Positive identities can positively impact an employees’ ability to address stress and hardship (Caza & Bagozzi, 2009; Hobfoll, 1989). Through positive interpersonal relationships; an individual’s perception of empowerment and confidence in their ability to make personal choices, individual employees may be empowered to create and revise their positive identities through reflected best-self. Individuals who previously struggled to overcome stereotype threat could create value and meaning in their lives by focusing on positive areas of self-strength and competence, (Roberts et al., 2005). Positive interpersonal relations may be an important factor into the future growth and development of individuals:

The support that men receive in their relationships may help them to make meaning of the discriminatory events that they encounter; and, may provide a context for reinforcing views of themselves as valuable individuals who are worthy of love and respect. (Powell et al., 2006, p. 688)

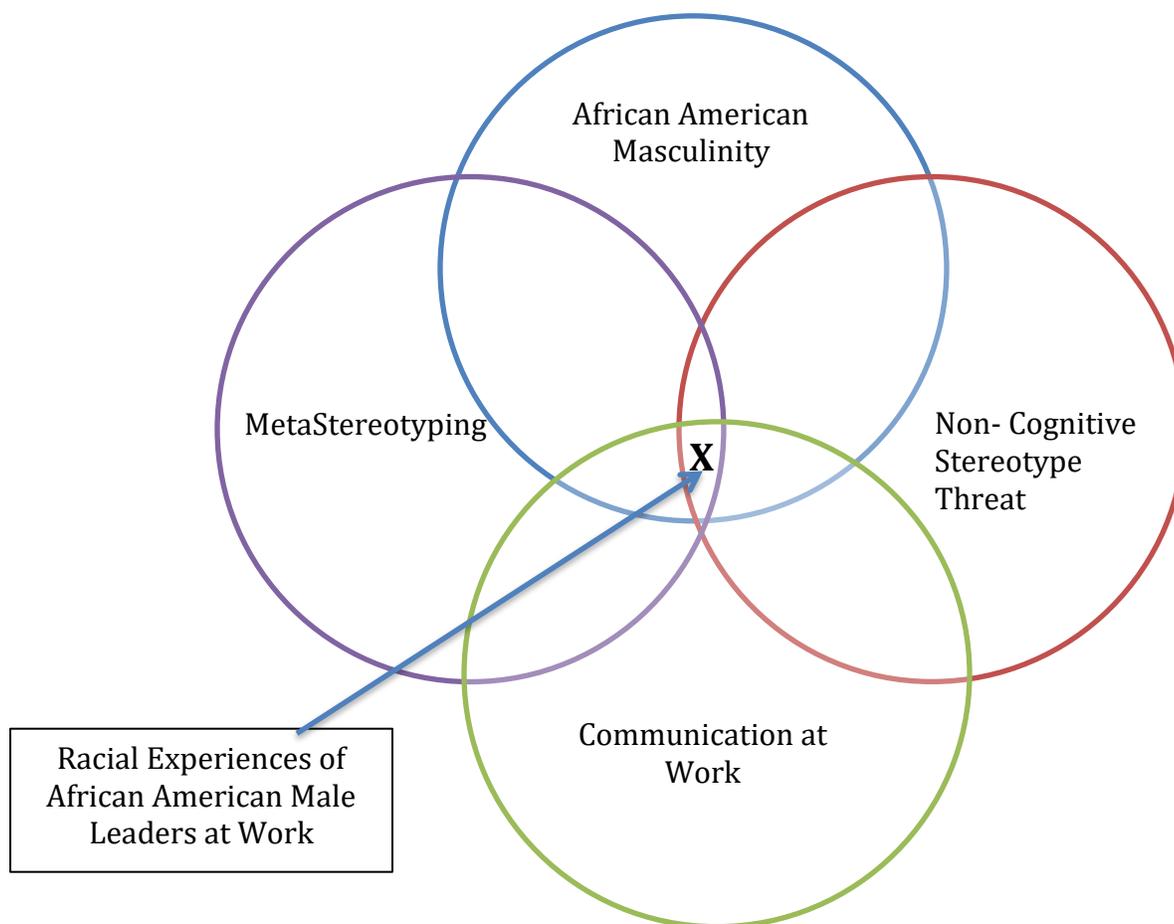
More specifically, this suggests that African American males who experience greater levels of both emotional and social support may be better capable of facing the harsh realities of discriminatory encounters without losing their positive outlook. I believe that this may demonstrate the significance of positive social support, and the role that social support plays in countering discrimination. In fact, increasing and strengthening ones' social networks could further support an individuals' perception of their best-self.

### **Gaps in Research**

The influences of stereotype threat outcomes and African American masculinity constructions upon African American male leaders' experiences at work has not been examined as thoroughly in leadership or African American studies. While stereotype threat has received research attention (Pyke, 2010; Schwalbe et al., 2000; Watts-Jones, 2002), work in the area of stereotype threat has usually focused on academic performance (Chasteen et al., 2005; Crocker et al., 1998); as well as physiological well-being (Blascovich et al., 2001) of members of stigmatized groups. However, limited research exists with regards to negative stereotype outcomes on work-related communication of stigmatized groups. The few studies in the area have often examined the impact of in-group stereotypes within organizations and how stimulating these mindsets can have negative implications for leadership aspirations (Davies et al., 2005), and feedback seeking behaviors of disadvantaged individuals (Roberson et al., 2003). Still others have examined the effect of this mindset on test performance during an interview,

when stigmatized individuals are nearer to the workplace, and have demonstrated that stereotype threat undermines performance at interview (Klein et al., 2007). Likewise, researchers have examined African American male employment and mobility (Collins, 1989, 1993, 1997; Dau-Schmidt & Sherman, 2013; Massey, 2008; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999); as well as gender and race-based experiences in predominantly female and male-based career fields (Wingfield, 2012). However, little research has been published on the African American male leaders' perceptions of their race at work that a dearth of empirical work is needed regarding African American male leaders' interactions at work. Namely, we do not have much research on how African American males perceive their race at work, nor do we know whether race is manifested as a salient lens through which they perceive their abilities to connect, network, and communicate with others in the workplace.

Given that the prototypical leader stereotype is unconsciously acknowledged and respected by many subordinates and senior leaders in organizations (regardless of the race of the subordinate employee), how then does this perception impact the experiences of African American males? We have not thoroughly researched how African American males respond to the reactions and encounters regarding their race. Limited research has explored how non-cognitive, race-based stereotype threats and metastereotyping are manifested in the workplace (Block et al., 2011; Gomez, 2002; Pronin et al., 2004; Steele et al., 2002; Singh et al., 2013; Vorauer et al., 1998; Voyles et al., 2014).

**Figure 2.1***Venn Diagram—Visual Representation of Research Foci*

Note: This figure is a visual representation of what I believed to be a gap in the research on non-cognitive stereotype threat, and negative metastereotyping on interpersonal relationships and work-related communication of stigmatized groups. The effects of stereotypes may impact a wide range of outcomes. This is where I focused my research on African American males' perceptions of their race at work.

### **Research Questions Themes: Individual, Psychological Foci**

How might these threats be translated into understanding from an African American male's perspective? Additionally, given the psychological and physiological components of experiencing race, it can be argued that experiencing race can be more than an isolated, situational experience. As such, non-work situations (directly and indirectly faced) may impact

African American males' perceptions of race at work. It is also worth exploring whether the perceptions of the individual's racial experiences influence their experiences at work; or the perceptions and actions of others are greater influences on African American males? What may be an African American male's perceived reaction of others if and when his race becomes a topic of discussion?

### **Research Questions Themes: Organizational Foci**

Within the context of African American male leader development, several themes have emerged thus far, from the internal struggles of being a Black male in a racialized, social system; the perception and performance of Blackness and masculinity within varying social contexts; an individual's ability to overcome the challenges of successfully existing and excelling professionally in an organization where stereotype threats may exist. In support of these themes, the following questions have been identified to initiate the dialogue: Do others mention race more frequently than African American males themselves, in essence reminding them of their race? If so, how often do others remind them of their racial status, and in what ways? What skills and tools do African American male leaders use to achieve success in the workplace? What are some of the racially centered, situational cues that African American males have learned to identify as biased and oppressive actions in the workplace? How do they successfully leverage relationships at work, in spite of potentially negative race-based perceptions? How do they leverage relationships and develop trust with direct reports, peers and senior leaders, given the prototypical leader concept? Do they see these relationships as being authentic, or are they simply a necessity to lead in an organization? How big a part do they believe race plays in their overall success?

Oppression is systematically replicated in major cultural, economic, and political institutions and operates through ordinary processes of everyday life (Essed, 1990; Young, 1990). Particularly because oppression is part of our daily social reality, it can be difficult to distinguish. These research questions and topics are important to better understand African American male leader experiences and engagement. Gaining a deeper understanding of the non-cognitive stereotypes that may pose a threat to African American males within an organization would allow us to gain insight as to what threats are experienced by members of stigmatized groups. In addition, non-cognitive stereotype threat may be more strongly associated with job- and health-related outcomes. Leader engagement has been shown to support the communicative exchanges and climate in their team and division (Dirks & Ferrin 2002).

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This dissertation investigated the themes of internalized oppression and race-based stereotype threat in the workplace, through the lens of an African American male leader. It also seeks to offer insights that can contribute to a scholarly understanding of the experiences of Black males in the workplace. In this dissertation, I used a qualitative research approach known as narrative inquiry to examine the gaps in research to (a) address the critical lack of inquiry in the literature on the impact of African American masculinity on the individual leadership development and growth of African American men, and (b) examine leader development in the context of internalized oppression and stereotype threat. This narrative inquiry took the form of participant interviews to give voice to the overlooked workforce population of African American male leaders. In this chapter, I briefly describe my preliminary research with this population, which served as my pilot study. Following this discussion, I have provided a description of the methods applied in this research. Due to the visible lack of research attention to Black males outside of the educational arena, I chose to focus on the lived experiences of African American male leaders in non-educational workplaces, such as the federal government and for-profit organization, etc.

#### **Pilot Research Project: Understanding the Racial Experiences of Mid-level to Senior Executive Level African American Males at Work**

With the guidance and support of my professors, I completed Antioch University's Individual Learning Achievement (ILA), "Understanding the Racial Experiences of Mid-level to Senior Executive Level African American Males at Work." This pilot study was developed on the foundation of earlier research on the "Exploration of African American Masculinity Narratives." I began my focus with attention to masculinity because it is central to understanding

the environmental, psychological, and sociological variables that are critical to the masculine identity and their perception of the world, and workplace. I conducted four in-depth interviews. This preliminary research study began the development of my dissertation focus. Additionally, they provided an avenue to hear the experiences of participants from an often-overlooked population of leaders; identified that a dearth of research is needed in the areas of African American male leaders; pinpointed gaps in the scholarly inquiry on African American male leaders at work; provided insights into the existence and impact of stereotype threat; and helped me to identify and frame the problem as well as develop the theory. In this chapter, I am not including a comprehensive illustration of my entire research process and outcomes. However, I identified five major themes that are critical to the methodological design of this research.

### **Pilot Study Results, Conclusions, and Implications**

Five themes emerged from the interviews: (a) education, (b) maintaining a standard of excellence beyond what others expected (and external obstacles), (c) viewing oneself as an equal to all people, (d) the influence of positive male figures, and (e) the positive impact of negative experiences.

#### ***Education***

Education (both academic, seminars taken for professional development, and situational/cultural awareness) was mentioned by all participants as a means to advancement. However, no one directly mentioned education as a means to financial advancement. Although financial growth could commensurate with one's level of educational attainment, it appeared that the focus was more on overall intellectual growth and career advancement. In three interviews the participants specifically mentioned the negative, racially motivated influence that White, adversarial, adults had on their education. However, they did not mention being treated

negatively by their White peers as children; nor did they mention having a diverse group of friends as children. Additionally, while intellectual and physical barriers were constructed and maintained to prevent their academic growth and development, the most pervasive barrier was the challenge faced with gaining access to information.

***Maintaining a Standard of Excellence Beyond What Others Expected (and External Obstacles)***

The term excellence is used here to define the participant's level of quality towards academic performance, or professional distinction that was mentioned during the interviews. Three participants mentioned how adversaries attempted to prevent them from having access to academic information, opportunities, and from advancing intellectually within an academic setting. Three participants discussed the support and expectations set for them by their parents. For example, Richard's parents were not college educated; his mother retired from the federal government after 39 years of service, and his father owned a television technician store. Both his parents were described as providing him with the best education possible. Richard and William also talked about how their communities looked after him. Richard was the only participant that did not discuss being subjected to adversity as a child and adult. I believe that he was extremely cautious, diplomatic, and hesitant to provide information about his personal inter-racial experiences. Richard was also the only participant that mentioned that he "tried to learn that much more, to not give someone a reason or excuse [to treat him differently]." Similar to Richard, William was raised in a supportive household with both parents. His parents both had two master's degrees each and expected him to attend college. William described his childhood as "extraordinary," and mentioned how he was taught to do his best. He also described how he

was not spoiled and was required to maintain consistently high attainments, like with his grades and his personal image.

### ***The Influence of Positive Male Figures***

All four participants mentioned the importance of positive, male figures in their lives. They also discussed the motivation they experienced by having non-familial, male figures active in their lives throughout their childhood to present day. Coaches, supervisors, mentors, and fraternities were described as effective support systems outside of family.

### ***The Positive Impact of Negative Experiences***

Unlike what I had initially expected, none of the participants attributed intergenerational trauma narratives to their experiences as African American men. I had anticipated more stories regarding race trauma narratives passed down from their older male relatives, friends, and colleagues. Without leading, I attempted to create an avenue that would facilitate the delivery of this information with the following questions: Who influenced you growing up? How would you describe your experiences growing up as a Black male? How often do you think about race in the workplace? If so, in what context? All four participants acknowledged the existence of racism and disparate treatment that they personally experienced, or others close to them had experienced. However, in their recollection of their experiences as African American male leaders, they did not talk about intergenerational trauma as if it was recognized as an independent variable. They did not describe their negative experiences in the context of racism hindering their individual development (as men and leaders), nor did they mention that racism impacted their abilities to communicate with and interact with people in a diverse workplace. I purposefully did not mention Richard in this comparison. I believe that some of the information shared by Richard was contradictory. For example, his response to “How often do you think about race at work?”

was, “I don’t think about it, I just try to be the best person I can.” Yet, when asked about whether he believed any aspect of his experience as an African American male impacted his development as a leader, he replied, “Yes, I try to learn that much more. Try not to give someone a reason or excuse.” The way that I translate this phrase is that he is consciously aware that he may be viewed unfavorably because of his race. However, in spite of the negative stereotypical biases that may exist in his work environment he works harder.

### **Narrative Thematic Analysis**

This dissertation is a qualitative narrative inquiry study. Narrative inquiry was first introduced by Connelly and Clandinin (2000) as a methodology to describe the personal stories of teachers. The approach supports a valuable description of individual experiences and an examination of the significance that individuals derive from their experiences. Narrative researchers search for ways to understand and present real-life experiences through the stories of their research participants. Intensifying voices that may have otherwise remained silent, the approach utilizes storytelling as a way of communicating the participants' realities to a larger audience. Research emphasizing narrative inquiry may include interviews, or life stories to assemble a person’s or a group’s authentic basic truths (McAdams, 2005). Narrative inquiry focuses on stories and/or the storied nature of discourse by analyzing themes, structures, or interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Riessman, 2007). “A good narrative analysis prompts the researcher to look beyond the surface of the text” (Riessman, 2007, p. 13). A thematic analysis was utilized for this dissertation. “Themes are abstract constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects . . . as the conceptual linking of expressions” (Daiute 2014, p. 11). “Themes are described as coming from the data and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Ryan &

Bernard, 2003, p. 87). By utilizing the narrative format to present findings, researchers can retrieve an abundance of information that provides a more in-depth explanation of the participants' points of view. As a result, the knowledge gained can offer the reader a greater understanding of the subject material and additional insights to apply the stories to their own lived context (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Rather than searching for the facts or truth, researchers look for the meaning represented in the narratives.

In the narrative inquiry process, the researcher asks questions that will assist them in interpreting and experiencing the world of the participants. Within this context, the participants are seen as powerful contributors with the potential to offer new perspectives as to how life experiences uphold and impact social interactions and dynamics. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), people interpret their past and shape their daily lives in terms of their stories. “To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Thinking narratively about the phenomenon is necessary throughout the inquiry from varying perspectives, such as framing the research question, to facilitating the interviews, to composing the transcriptions and research. In addition, thinking narratively about a phenomenon challenges the dominant story of a phenomenon as fixed and unchanging throughout an inquiry. It also influences the living of a narrative inquiry, as narrative inquirers may draw upon ideas such as self-reflection, relational knowing, world-travelling to describe their own and their participants’ living throughout an inquiry. Narrative inquiry creates space for participants to share their stories either in one-on-one situations, or in groups. In personal interviews, participants are asked to tell their stories by responding to interview questions that may be structured; by engaging in conversation; or, by

telling stories prompted by personal artifacts such as photographs. The following six research questions were developed based on gaps that I believe exist within current scholarly research:

Question 1: Do Black males believe that they have to be mindful of their race at work?

Question 2: How do African American male leaders make sense of their race?

Question 3: Do the ways African American male leaders think about race at work impact their interpersonal interactions?

Question 4: What were some common examples of perceived stereotype threat and metastereotyping in the workplace?

Question 5: What specific skills and strategies do African American male leaders utilize at work, when faced with perceived situational stereotype threats?

Question 6: What positive external or internal influences (if any) do African American males use to counter perceived stereotype threat?

### **Criteria for Participant Selection**

The following criteria was used to select the nine participants: African American male leaders between the ages of 21–65 years, who held mid-level to senior executive level, white collar positions. Based on my review of literature over the past three years, research centering on African American males tends to focus primarily on college students. However, the work experiences and daily interactions of 18–22-year-olds is not the same as a professional mid- to senior executive level employee. I became very interested in researching the racial experiences and leader growth and development of African American males that interacted with historically underrepresented people in a career setting. It was my goal to interview participants from the primary three generational cultures typically present in most work environments (Millennials, Generation Xers, and Baby Boomers). Participants were recruited by word of mouth and through

professional associations, and or via various social media sites, like Instagram and LinkedIn. The following 15 structured questions were prepared for the interviews; however, I did not want to limit the participants' conversation flow.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Who influenced you growing up?
3. How would you describe your experiences growing up as an African American/Black male?
4. What's it like for you being an African American male in the U.S.?
5. Present day, what is it like being an African American male at work?
6. What stereotypes about Black males influence African American males at work?
7. Do you believe these stereotypes influence you at work?
8. Do you ever feel like being an African American man in the U.S. impacts you at work?  
If so, how are you impacted? And, what's impacted?
9. Describe your professional network and support system at work?
10. How does your work contribute to the mission of your organization?
11. How would people closest to you at work describe you?
12. On a scale of 1 to 5 (one being least comfortable, and five being extremely comfortable), what's your level of comfort interacting with others at work?
13. Do you believe any aspect of your experiences as an African American male has negatively impacted your development as a leader?
14. What happens more at work, you thinking about your race; or, others causing you to think about your race?

15. If you were the head of your organization, what changes would you make to improve the work experiences of African American males?

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), the analytic process demands a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life. “Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 154). Narrative inquiry-based interviews are central to this dissertation. It is through the interview process that the collection of the participants’ stories and the characterizing of the phenomena of their human experience, that I hoped to document the participants’ meaning(s) of self, and effectively communicate those meanings and views. An inductive approach was used to code the research data. As such, a rigorous and systematic reading of the transcripts was conducted.

Segments of interview text were coded enabling an analysis of interview segments on a particular theme, the documentation of relationships between themes and the identification of themes important to participants. Similarities and differences across sub-groups will also be explored (Elliott & Gillie, 1998, p. 331).

### **Interviews**

Nine semi-structured interviews were scheduled for 90 minutes. To aid in the collection of data the audio of the interviews were recorded and transcribed via a recommended transcription service. I took notes to aid in organizing my thoughts during the sessions. The interview notes were stored in a protected file electronically during the data analysis; all responses have been kept confidential, and my notes will be destroyed after the completion of the

dissertation. In all written materials and presentations, pseudonyms have been substituted for all names. Every effort was made to protect the anonymity of participants during the interviews. If at any time participants wished to stop the interview and did not wish to continue, the interview was stopped. After the completion of the interviews, common themes were identified.

### **Thematic Coding**

The coding structure used shows the details of primary codes described through the sub-categories. A total of 81 codes emerged in the initial coding of the interviews. These initial codes were then grouped together based on narratives documented from the participants. As an example, if a participant mentioned anything related to bias due to age, being a male, sexual orientation, and so forth the word “bias” became the primary code. In this manner, a total of eight primary themes were identified. Throughout the research process, there was a natural transition from the initial code descriptors that I identified as part of my coding to the sub-categories that began to surface during the interview process. For each interview transcript, I noted every time a participant mentioned experiences relating to primary code descriptors. For example, if a participant mentioned that they loved their family, work, exercised, enjoyed helping others, peers, religion, or that they were respected in community, I placed the narrative under the category of “positive influences.” I continued this process and compiled a final list of themes that emerged. Two new themes emerged from this process (frustrations and work-life balance). The table below is a compiled list of the primary descriptors, comments and themes that emerged from the analysis of the narratives.

**Table 3.1***Primary Descriptors*

Comments That Emerged During Interview Coding	Themes that Emerged in Analysis
Age, being a male, sexual orientation, hierarchy in organization, physical attributes, respected by others	<i>bias</i> (age, being a male, sexual orientation);
Negative comments about abilities, positive comments about abilities	<i>confidence</i> (positive comments about abilities)
Leadership during pandemic	This did not emerge as a theme.
Supportive Relationships: Has support, lacks support	Relationship with leader
Empowering others to lead, inclusive communication, make staff feel valued	<i>leader strategies</i> (empowering others to lead, inclusive communication, make staff feel valued).
Love their work, exercise – health, family, enjoy helping others, peers, religion, respected in community. Lack of positive influences	<i>positive influences</i> (enjoy helping others);
How participants relate to other racial identities, at work, how others perceive their blackness, how others refer to participant’s blackness in relation to whiteness, at home, how they perceive self, how white co-workers relate, in their community	<i>race</i> (how participants relate to other racial identities, at work, how others perceive their blackness, how others refer to participant’s blackness in relation to whiteness)
Potential for job growth, imposter syndrome, feel unheard, unequal access to opportunities. Hesitant to use the ‘r’ word, family – historical stories about racism, has experienced and try to improve work environment, hasn’t experiences at work, family – currently discusses with their children, observes others dealing with racism, observes white privilege, openly uses ‘r’ word, regularly experiences	<i>racism</i> (historical stories about racism, has experienced and try to improve work environment); <i>bias</i> (age, being a male, sexual orientation)
	<i>New theme - frustrations</i> (Potential for job growth, imposter syndrome, feel unheard, unequal access to opportunities)
	<i>New theme - work-life balance</i>

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

This chapter is an examination of the lived narratives of African American male leaders, and how they experience race at work. At the very core of my interviewing approach was the importance of respecting the lived experiences of the participants and correctly sharing the lived insight and understanding of my participants throughout the interview process. I was conscientious about my role as a researcher, as researchers are often in positions to listen intently and with an open mind in order to document the lives, observations, thoughts, and feelings narrated by participants. As such, I focused on holding a safe and free-flowing space for participants to share as much or as little as they chose. Although we conversed throughout the entire interview, I did not force responses or answers from any participants. I wanted everyone to feel heard, and to know that I was listening. In accordance with the narrative inquiry methodology, I focused on the stories told as well as the emotions, the silence, the sighs of tiredness and sadness, the frustration, and for some participants, flickers of anger. The emotions were raw, spontaneous, real, and impactful.

As described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), I also found that:

Merely listening, recording, and fostering participant story telling was both impossible (we are, all of us, continually telling stories of our experience, whether or not we speak and write them) and unsatisfying. We learned that we, too, needed to tell our stories.

Scribes we were not; storytellers and story lovers we were. (p. 12)

Being mindful of my own story as I journeyed through this process was freeing and powerful. I allowed myself space to learn through the lived experiences that I had the privilege of hearing, and for my own personal reflections I also documented the moments that were most impactful for me as a student of life, and a leader. Portions of these are documented in the

Chapter V discussion.

During the interpretive phase, I developed codes and brainstormed themes. In the final phase I reviewed the emergent themes, the overarching themes and the narratives that surfaced as the most central to the experiences of the participants. The following vignettes are an introduction to participants. I have used pseudonyms and general descriptions of their position titles, organizations, and regional locations in order to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

### **Leader Vignettes**

#### ***Eric***

Associate Dean at a university in the western U.S., 66 years, single, sexual orientation not mentioned, doctorate degree.

Eric described himself as an anti-professor because he came to higher education much later in life. He mentioned that he is a professional actor, and has worked in New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Minneapolis for many years before he returned to graduate school. Eric considered himself to be a working artist, activist, and director doing a lot of community-based work. He explained how coming to the other side of academia was a new and very interesting space to be with people who are your “colleagues,” and who have different experience, especially given his position of being a Black male in the arts.

#### ***Jason***

CEO of an organization in the southern U.S., 35 years, single, gay, master’s degree.

Jason indicated that he usually describes himself as a Black, gay or “same-gender loving.” He also mentioned that he is a Southern male, introverted and geeky (“a very nerdy, geeky type” guy). Jason also explained how he is very social justice oriented. He usually chooses

jobs and career paths that are connected to his passion and interest in changing the world in any small way. Jason said that he loves to give back and buy his space [actively contributing] within the village.

***Joe***

Financial industry, midwestern U.S., 31 years, single with children, heterosexual, high school degree.

Joe described how he used to be a drug dealer and overcame personal challenges to become a businessman. He stated that he used to be a “dope dealer,” and now he considers himself a “hope dealer.” He explained that although he did not have academic training, he had a “minor in jail, a bachelor's in struggle, a master's in faith and a PhD in perseverance.” He also mentioned that he believes that he graduated from the “streets university,” the same streets that he used to sell drugs. Joe explained that he is self-educated and studied finance and business through resources at his local library. He described that he “deals hope” through economic empowerment through financial services. He provides services to everyone but is especially interested in helping Black and Brown communities advance their economic empowerment.

***Michael***

Director of a Student Affairs Unit in a southern university, 31 years, single, heterosexual, doctorate degree.

Michael described himself as a strategic person. He mentioned that he is probably his own biggest critic. He described how he personally deals with impostor syndrome a lot, and his way of dealing with it is to be over-prepared, probably more than necessary. Michael explained how the positive part [is that his over-prepared approach] has led to more professional opportunities that come his way. The negative part [of his approach] is that, as those

opportunities come, the cycle starts over, because the realization sets in that he is actually in the new position. Michael described how his perception is that if he does not do well then people will ultimately find out that he did not deserve his previous positions. He also explained that if he were in a job interview, he would describe himself as someone who is careful in his planning. He likes to get consensus from a lot of different people. If he were on a panel talking about family and relationships, he said that he would probably say that he is a bit distracted by his work. His work is really important to him; and his family is extremely important to him as well, though sometimes his family relationships suffer for him to support work.

***Nick***

Principal of an elementary school on the U.S. east coast, 53 years, single, sexual orientation not mentioned, doctorate degree.

Nick described himself as a social activist, committed to eradicating seen and unseen inequalities that derive from class, race and gender, among other things. He also mentioned how he has grown as a leader and initially was focused primarily on the work products. Nick explained how he learned to value his team on a personal level and understands the importance of valuing the whole person.

***Robert***

Logistics Branch Chief, military—civilian stationed in the southern U.S., 41 years, married, heterosexual, bachelor's degree.

Robert described himself as a husband and a father. He considers himself to be a leader of both his family, and at work through his position and professional and personal experience. Robert also mentioned that he is driven to engage with a lot of people. He explained how he is a visionary and guides [individuals], when appropriate, toward common goals. Robert mentioned

that his description of himself is more about who he is as a person, rather than what he does in any position at work. He explained that what he does as a person is how he “rolls [demonstrates his commitment] from organization to organization, whether it's at work, at community service, or at church.” Robert described how he focuses more on doing good work than on his needs, and how it is to his detriment more than others. He described how focusing on the needs of others may be a driver for him. He also mentioned how he generally just tries to do a good job and be a part of making this world as best a place as he can.

### ***Scott***

National Manager, federal government, U.S. east coast, 39 years, married with children, heterosexual, bachelor's degree.

Scott described himself as a hard worker, self-motivated, husband and a father. He mentioned how he has spent most of his career in the federal government and is one of a few black males in leadership positions with his federal agency. He explained that doing good work and helping people is important to him. Scott also works very closely with individuals (predominately White males) who live in rural parts of the U.S. He described how learning is important to him. Scott is seen as an expert in his field. Although he deals with older White clients who often do not see him as being proficient in his career and often question his capabilities because he is one of a few Black male leaders. He described how they eventually listen to him after he proves himself.

### ***Thomas***

Assistant Director, non-profit organization in the midwestern U.S., 39 years, single, gay man - “not overly open with it,” master's degree.

Thomas described himself as someone who talks with everybody. He mentioned that he

was a first-generation college student. He also explained how his background has all of the “bells and whistles that comes with the stereotypes of the African American male.” Thomas explained how he was raised in a single-parent home; his father is incarcerated for murder. He also described himself as being a professional, a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He said that he loves his field but he is also burnt out and doesn’t want to continue within his field any longer. Thomas explained how he has learned to “grind and bury” the challenges that he has faced, and just uses his “grip to push forward.” He said that he recognizes that he has a whole lot more to offer, but that he does not think that he is being worked to his fullest potential in his current position. Thomas said that he sees himself as a student and practitioner, and that he is definitely seeking out another avenue to get himself out of his current work environment. He also explained how he works through micro aggression after micro aggression, and how it is sometimes blatant. Thomas mentioned being overlooked for positions, and that he has decided to continue to show joy and do his job to the best of his ability. He described that he believes that is time to start looking out for himself and doing something good for himself.

### *Xavier*

Senior executive in the federal government, U.S. east coast, 50 years, married with children, heterosexual, bachelor’s degree.

Xavier described himself as a Black man from [the Midwest], husband and father. He mentioned that he has a wife and a daughter, and that he has been working for the federal government basically his whole career. He also mentioned that his upbringing in the Midwest prepared him to communicate with everyone that he encounters on the job. Xavier described how African Americans represent a relatively small population in his home state, and his entire life from a very early age he communicated, worked, played and collaborated with White peers. He

also mentioned how his mother prepared him mentally as an African American male, and motivated him to move past negative racial experiences, so as not to tarnish his view of the world.

The African American male leaders above were born and raised in the U.S. Their expertise ranged from K-12 education, private sector, non-profit, academia, and the federal government. The leaders described race as one layer within a multi-layered dimension of their identity based on their professional, gender, generational; and, social identities as fathers, husbands, sons, student, and activists. Their narratives of how they describe themselves are insights into the dimensional complexities of how they described themselves as unique individuals and leaders. In the next section, I will present the themes with illuminating quotes. The first most prominent theme was racial identity.

### **Dimensions of Identity**

As demonstrated in the vignettes, the narratives of these leaders described race as one of many dimensions of how they saw themselves. In our discussions about their workplace, race was not identified by the participants as the primary or most prominent descriptor of themselves. Five of the participants (Eric, Joe, Michael, Nick, Robert) did not mention race when asked to describe themselves in the beginning on their interviews. Instead, the participants commonly selected intersectional descriptions of themselves, which included their professional identity, and multiple categories of identities simultaneously. The section below discusses the language used by the participants to describe their dimensions of identity and their experiences interacting with people from other races in the workplace, developing relationships with other people of color at work, and their relationships outside of work with people from other races.

**Table 4.1***Dimensions of Identity*

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Thomas	I am a gay man, but I'm not overly open with it. That's something I keep private to myself. But it is one of my identities as well.	Being gay is one of his identities but he is unable to be his whole self at work.
Robert	There's still a good old boy type of feel. If there's an opportunity and if someone else's fishing buddy is going up for a job; regardless of how qualified, regardless of your reputation, it's oh yeah, my fishing buddy, or my buddy that I served with, is going to get picked up. Because they meet the minimum criteria to legally be selected and I associate more. The hiring official or the leader of that division is more familiar with them. So, I'm cognizant of performance, we're still not in a meritocracy. (Robert)	<p>He is highly qualified professional with a solid reputation.</p> <p>One's acceptance as a good old boy, or White male takes precedence over one's expertise or reputation.</p> <p>White males recruit and promote employees who are members of their informal social groups.</p> <p>Leaders promote less experience White males because they are members of their informal social groups.</p>

As described by Thomas in the table above, in his organization, he keeps his sexual orientation hidden. Another participant, Jason, also identified as “same gender loving.” Jason described his sexual orientation as being important to his identity both within the workplace and in his personal life.

As a gay person, I'll be in spaces where typically people know but don't know because I present as heterosexual. (Jason)

Both Thomas and Jason described how they feel the need to keep their sexual orientation hidden from their colleagues. As described by Robert in the table above and in his narrative below, in his workplace his professional identity as a leader was most important to him. In the table above he described how one's professional expertise and reputation are not enough to

obtain promotions within his workplace. In addition, Robert described in the narrative below how he wanted to be seen as authentic.

For me, it's talking to people. It's before anything, getting to know people. Giving them an opportunity to get to know me. Just being what I think is being authentic, in that who I am is who I am. I guess it's for some people through politicking, but it's not just that I'm trying to make good with you because I need you or to manipulate you. I recognize that there's value in getting to know other and helping others feel valued as well. I do my best to respect who people are as a person. (Robert)

Race influenced how these leaders perceived others and themselves because they were reminded of the racial stereotypes pertaining to African Americans. The narratives below describe the three themes arose in the topic of dimensions of identity with others races and genders (interactions with people from other races, relationships outside of work with people from other races, and developing relationships with other people of color at work).

### ***Interactions with People from Other Races***

Robert, Scott, and Eric indicated an awareness of their race and masculinity when conversing with women. As an example, Eric described his experience interacting with individuals from different races and genders.

If I'm talking to a Black male as opposed to a White female, and if I'm even talking to a White male versus a woman of color. I'm a relational person so I tend to be pretty social. So, I have different levels of social intimacy with people that I've established relationships with over the years. There are certain people I can both joke with or I can hit certain topics with, and certain people I have to be very mindful, specific, and very somber. My word that I've been using in the past years is earnest. Everyone is so earnest because you want to be very careful and correct about everything you say and everything you do at all times. I'm in a position where I've been, as I call it, obnoxiously lovable because that's sort of my safety. (Eric)

As in Eric's narrative, he described how he remains mindful of the race of his audience during social interactions. He also mentioned how he carefully modifies the manner in which he interacts with individuals. He revealed how he has different levels of social interactions with

people, which ranged from being more cautious and somber to jovial and more communicative regarding certain topics.

Additionally, although participants expressed a genuine interest in supporting their staff, students, and customers, regardless of their race or background. They described being able to relate to and empathize with those who were mistreated because of their race, gender, or sexual orientation. Although participants never directly said that they empathized with their employees of color, participants did report that employees (and junior staff from other areas) often spoke with them about their personal concerns and struggles. It was narrated as though the employees perceived the participants as leaders who understood and empathized with their pain. Jason indicated that even in instances where he was unable to do anything about employee's situations, he was still seen by others as someone who would listen and sit with the employees.

I don't know what to do after I've had these conversations. What I do is I will try to go be there with them [staff members of color], have conversations with her [the White, female CEO of company]. I wouldn't say that she won't have conversations at all. It's more like she finds various methods to tiptoe around race, where I'm kind of like okay. My struggle has been that because she sees herself as a social justice advocate, it's difficult to point out to her how sometimes her ignoring or not addressing race - based issues often times puts her in a space where she's perpetuating those issues because she's still not going to address them. (Jason)

### ***Relationships Outside of Work with People from Other Races***

The majority of participants described living and working in diverse communities. They also have friends from different backgrounds. However, no one described having outside of work relationships with people that they worked with on the job. In fact, in the description of their working relationships the participants described how they made attempts to get to know their White peers but that their White peers expressed little interest in getting to know the participants as individuals, at work or outside of work. In contrast, Robert described occasions where his White peers spent time with one another during work and outside of work.

There's still a good old boy type of feel. If there's an opportunity and if someone else's fishing buddy is going up for a job; regardless of how qualified, regardless of your reputation, it's oh yeah, my fishing buddy, or my buddy that I served with, is going to get picked up. Because they meet the minimum criteria to legally be selected and I associate more. The hiring official or the leader of that division is more familiar with them. So I'm cognizant of performance, we're still not in a meritocracy. (Robert)

Although none of the participants described having close relationships with their White peers, Thomas, Eric, Robert and Michael mentioned the diversity of friends in their personal lives and their ability to be open and honest with friends who looked and thought differently than themselves.

In contrast to Robert, Scott and Eric's carefully choreographed workplace interactions, and the stress that they felt from those encounters, Xavier described his experience with interactions outside of work.

Out of all the people I knew in high school, two of the guys I still talk to are White guys. We have conversations about everything, from race to politics. One of them is a staunch Democrat, probably more Democrat than me or you, or anybody I know. Then the other guy is a moderate Republican. But we're both able to have those conversations. I've been out of high school 32 years and we've maintained our friendship over that time and respect in terms of where we can talk about stuff like race, and have real conversations about it. As long as people can talk about them, it's okay to have these differences or bias. I don't think it's that big a deal. Race does not prevent him from having close personal relationships with White male friends outside of work. (Xavier)

In Xavier's narrative, he described feeling free to be himself outside of work with his White male friends who he has known for more than 32 years. He also explained how they have differing ideologies regarding their political beliefs, and that they have respectful conversations about everything.

### ***Developing Relationships with Other People of Color at Work***

In the absence of what was described as a lack of developed relations with their White leaders and peers, Michael and Eric described informal meet ups where they connected with other Black leaders/peers and leaders/peers of color across their organizations.

There have been a couple of opportunities now we have on the faculty and staff of color. We meet for a happy hour, not a real happy hour but it's a time for us to get together and meet. It was very interesting seeing us across the disciplines and the roles that we play in the college, from staff all the way up to senior faculty and administrators. There's an experience that you have when you get in the room with each other you go like, "Oh, I can exhale." In a different kind of way, I mean, we're very dedicated because it's our jobs. (Eric)

Informal and occasional meet ups with other peers of color, external peers, and mentors, were described as positive and welcomed exchanges. Notably, none of the participants mentioned instances where their leadership helped to bridge what they perceived as relational gaps between themselves and their White peers. There was also no mention of their leader's attempts to bring employees within the organization together in general. Participants took it upon themselves to reach out to others who they also perceived to be marginalized for connections, and their attempts to communicate and develop relationships were reciprocated.

### ***Summary: Dimensions of Identity***

Although the participants above described the dimensions of their identities as varied and complex, they were marginalized and excluded by their White peers and White leaders. They were seen as and treated as outsiders. They were also unable to gain access to (or be included) in White male, informal social groups in their workplaces. The external pressure of having to competing against the negative and inaccurate stereotypes was described as being stressful and took time and strategic maneuvering to deal with. Several participants who identified as gay described how they were careful to not disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace. The

workplace experiences of the participants were complicated by the negative stereotypes about race that participants believe are still prevalent in the U.S. Participants described encounters dealing with race when interacting with differing races, in their interactions with Black peers and other people of color, and in their interactions outside of work with Black and White friends. They described their perceptions of how the negative social stereotypes White males held about Black males added to the complexities of forging interpersonal relationships with White peers and leaders at work. Yet, as it was described, the informal social relationships with White male leaders was where employees received the most support. There were opportunities to communicate with and get to know Black peers and peers of color, yet these individuals were not in positions of power. However, these relationships did provide a level of professional support. Participants felt limited in how they could interact with White peers and employees, so to prevent themselves from being seen in a negative light many leaders were cautious with what they said, how they said it, and with whom they communicated. The next theme will discuss racism and the language used by participants to describe their experiences with racism and marginalization.

### **Racism**

The theme of racism was one of the most narrated topics amongst the participants. They described their present-day experiences, what marginalization looked and sounded like, and the impact that they believed that racism has had and continues to have on their professional career.

**Table 4.1***Narratives of Racism*

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Xavier	I think that I've been able to just through time push my way past that. But I can say, when there's a new person, especially a person of color, they've got to prove themselves before they're just automatically accepted. Whereas, the assumption when you come to the table White, is that you know what you're doing. That you are deserving of your spot.	Being Black means that you have to prove yourself to your White peers and leaders.  White peers do not have to prove themselves to others who are White.  White peers are automatically accepted and acknowledged as experts in their field.
Jason	Being a Black male, there's always a sense that when aggression appears, that I'm able to resolve it.	Black males are perceived as being more familiar with aggression.  Black males are naturally more equipped to resolve hostile issues that come up at work.
Nick	I believe that it's definitely racism. It's impossible to have a teaching staff of 500 teachers in a district of 5,000 kids and only have eight or nine or ten Black teachers.	Black teachers are not hired due to their race.
Scott	When I work with the farm industry there are [majority] older white males. If they're having a conversation with a Black male manager [someone who's in a position to educate or share information] about a need. As a Black male, they have to gain an additional level of trust. The White males ask a lot of questions to try to make sure that the Black male knows the simple answers [they don't do this to White male managers]. This happens a lot with Black males.	White male managers don't have to prove themselves to White customers, like Black male managers.
Eric	It's racism in the form of the 21st century. It is not racism like we had in 1950's. There's a different way that we're also experiencing it. The idea that you aren't allowed to acknowledge that that's what you're feeling, or that's what you're going through, it's painful. We're all hurt because we can't say that it's actually racism. But, you want to go, well yes, it is [racism]; there's still this wondering about you being special because you got through. So there must be something different about you because you speak so well, and, you're well published, so that means you are obviously not just Black. You're like, "Yeah, but I am [Black]. But now you're saying that I'm not.	Black males are not allowed to acknowledge racism at work.  Black males are viewed through a very narrow lens. Educated Black males are not accepted by White peers as being both educated and Black.  White peers are unable to accept the positive attribute of being educated and their blackness

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Robert	I'm hyper aware of it [race] when I'm talking to my direct reports because I have the potential to come across as either an angry Black man or to come across as intimidating. I hold back a lot. I filter a great deal, and it's additional burden, it's additional stress. And people know it, because I show it on my face and when I'm saying something to the community.	<p>simultaneously. Being a Black male is seen as negative.</p> <p>He has to be cautious about how he communicates with his staff because of his race.</p> <p>If he does not select his words carefully and manage his actions he will be seen as angry, as a result of Black male stereotypes.</p> <p>It is stressful.</p>

Racial stereotypes as obstacles. Race was also seen as a challenge due to U.S. stereotypes about Black males that they believed existed within the context of their work environments. As a result of the knowledge and understanding of these stereotypes, participants described the impact of their blackness on their relationships and abilities to communicate with White peers and staff.

**Language Used to Describe Marginalization.** In the workspace, marginalization was described by all participants in the context of being dismissed or ignored by peers and leadership. They also mentioned the general disinterest of White peers and leaders in getting to know them as people; the lack of access to information and resources; the lack of professional opportunities, or being held back from participating in various opportunities without reason.

From the participant perspective of their self-contributions, race was something that they recognized as an aspect of diversity. Participants viewed their racial identities and racial diversity as assets that facilitated interactions with peers, staff, students and customers. Their personal views of and understanding of race was not described as something that prevented the participants from attempting to fully contributing to their individual team members, or in some instances their students. Every leader described the existence of diverse staff on their teams.

Rather than focusing on the racial differences between themselves and their staff they chose to focus primarily on the character of their individual staff members. As described by Xavier, bias is expected and can be overcome. Xavier also mentioned other biases present in his workplace that are demonstrated by his White male peers.

But I think there's always going to be some kind of bias in my opinion. The reason I say that is, the bias doesn't have to be race. It could be, we got men who don't like women. Not because they're gay, but because they're chauvinists. They don't want to work with women because they don't think that women are as good, whatever. That kind of stuff. So those kinds of things. Or it could, I don't like people from the South, because I'm from the East Coast and I think people from the South are country, or they're not as smart. So I think that some kind of bias will happen.

As described by Xavier, bias is expected and okay as long as you can work past it to do your job and support your organization. Similar to Xavier's narrative, Scott explained his perspective on navigating topics of race.

You know you've got a job to do, [so] across the board you're fair and equitable - you're just there to provide support. (Scott)

Scott's focus at work is not on race but on doing performing his duties. He did however mention that race does come up in conversations occasionally when his peers describe problems or issues. Navigating the topic of race was identified as a key factor in the participant's leadership experience. It was described as being stressful. It was carefully considered and narrated as though a misstep could be harmful to one's career and professional image in the workplace. Participants described the feeling of being held back from expressing themselves and because of stereotypes and how others perceived their blackness based on those stereotypes.

**Barriers to Self-expression.** Marginalization based on race was a key factor in barriers to self-expression. Thomas described the need to compartmentalize his thoughts and limit sharing his emotional reactions, like frustration and anger. He believed that his White peers attempted to assign a negative meaning to his display of emotions due to racial and gender

stigma involving blackness and masculinity. He described instances where others tried to assign a negative emotional label, such as anger or frustration, to their expressions. Thomas shared the following example of interactions with his White peers.

You have those people who always want to assign an emotion, and I let them know, don't say that I'm angry, don't say that I'm upset because that in and of itself is a microaggression. You don't get that right to do that. And I don't ever want to give them the opportunity to try to assign an emotion. (Thomas)

Regardless of his level within the organization, assigning an emotional label was significant in that Thomas described his inability to experience and show emotions (like anger, annoyance, frustration) as a human right. Thomas compared his experiences to that of his White peers, and suggested that they did not have to deal with the same constraints on emotional expression in the workplace.

There isn't a space that I go into [at work] where I don't think about the words that come out of my mouth, the clothes that are on my body, the way that I'm carrying myself, my choice to advance a concern or not advance a concern, measuring what capital I have, how often I've used it, when was the last time that I reached out to this person, to that person. There's nothing that I do as a leader of my office where I don't think about the fact that those things. Those actions, the way that I show up, will always be in a Black male package. It's that double consciousness...I'm thinking, can I afford to just leave it at the same level as a White man can? I don't feel like I can. I feel like I have to be an exception all the time. I have no way of knowing how much that's external and internal. I just know it's real to me. (Michael)

**Unequal Access and Accountability.** Marginalization also played a role in unequal access and accountability. Thomas, Nick and Eric shared experiences of unequal access and accountability in their workplaces, which were described in the terms of access to social circles in the workplace, career advancement opportunities; as well as, access to the unwritten social practices and scheduling flexibilities permissible within their workplace (for example, being able to take off work early without using leave, and without being criticized by peers or leaders). They mentioned the ongoing challenges with not being able to access the benefits of these close

knit social networks (which were described as White social networks) in the workplace. The leaders within their organizations were described as predominately White males. The benefit of these networks granted employees the support of leaders, and the ability to circumvent the traditional workplace policies governing things like work time. As described by Nick, having access to scheduling flexibilities is one of the benefits of White social networks in his organization.

You see it all the time on the job, how White counterparts can leave [work] at 3:00, 3:30, and go golf. I can't do that. Or take half a day, go golfing. I've never done that, never been able to do it. I don't believe I have the ability to do that. So that creates another set of stressing for my family, who doesn't understand what African American male leaders go through so they don't understand why you have to do so much more. They don't understand why you have to always be more. You don't get days for off [work]. So it creates a level of stress that quite frankly is sometimes unbearable. (Nick)

Nick explained how his inability to have flexibility within his work schedule (for example, having the ability to leave work early or take leave), like his White peers, was having an negative impact on his work-life balance and family relationships. Due to White peers and their direct reports' perceptions as to who was allowed to leave work early (which was solely their White peers), participants described the burden of having to work long hours and sacrifice time with their families. Nick's narrative described the added burden of him having to do more as an African American male leader.

Thomas described a situation in which his leader overlooked the enforcement of written policies and organizational procedures regarding the requirement for all employees to have a job description. He mentioned how objective organizational processes are in place to ensure equality, fairness, and efficiency, but leaders often chose subjective decision - making. However, according to Thomas, the lack of accountability was having a negative impact on him. He described his experience being the only leader in his organization without a job description.

I'm the only assistant director in the department that does not have an actual job description. (Thomas)

Although Thomas stated that he spoke with his leaders several times about his job description, but that no actions had been taken to remedy the issue. In professional settings an employee's job description is a mandatory requirement to create objective performance standards for the position, which directly impacts an employee's growth, salary, bonuses, and future career opportunities. In the situation where the leadership of an organization refuses to develop a job description for their only Black male leader but does so for his White peers, merit-based growth and advancement is nearly impossible.

**Unacknowledged Presence.** One of the most prevalent examples of marginalization described by the participants was their unacknowledged presence by their White peers and leaders. They recalled walking into meeting settings where their presence went unacknowledged (as the only Black male leader) or ignored, but their White male peers were greeted and recognized. In these instances, the participants described the behaviors of their White peers as dismissive. According to one participant, the lack of demographic representation within predominately White work environments and meeting settings made the dismissive behavior more apparent.

It looks like, in terms of when you walk in a room and its senior leadership, it's basically almost all White males. Even for the females, there's not very many. That's probably something that you notice, that you see. There's no way not to turn that [lack of visible diversity] into any kind of physical thing like color, that kind of thing. It's super obvious. So that's definitely something. I think, I don't know, sometimes they can feel dismissive. (Xavier)

Another important topic mentioned by Xavier was the lack of visible representation of other Black leaders, leaders of color, and in some settings female leaders increased their awareness of the White male environment.

Right now, in our agency, there's only one other Black male. There are no Black females. There is one Hispanic male. And, that's it for minorities. (Xavier)

According to Thomas, being physically present in a professional environment, even as a numerical minority creates potential opportunities.

Representation matters. And if at any time you have an opportunity to change the narrative for yourself and for other people of color, you ought to do it. (Thomas)

**Acceptable Behaviors.** The demonstrated performance of marginalization and the enactment of stereotypes defines what was described as acceptable behavior. The theme of acceptable behaviors was described by Jason in the context of White peers making fun of Black staff, and what he described as “policing” Black staff and clients. In this context Jason described how unacceptable workplace behaviors by his White peers were not corrected and were permitted by the White leader.

There was definitely a culture of making fun of language, like this is not the proper way to say this. I told her at one time, I was like, “No offense to you or anything, but they have a lot of other life issues that we're concerned about. You're managing and policing their use of proper noun or their subject verb agreement.” I didn't think it was appropriate. But I felt like that's policing the language to make them feel better, to make her feel more comfortable, her and other folks who were there.... Appropriate was always, for me, laced with some type of classist, racist type, or even when it comes to education. There's always some type of thing there that kind of I cringe a little when I would hear it. (Jason)

Jason's narrative below describes what his White peers and White staff viewed as acceptable with regards to the physique of a Black female staff member. In this example, the idea of what was acceptable was determined by what his White peers and White staff member's comfort level with seeing the actual body shape Black female staff member. Jason's White peers and staff relied on their personal opinions, perceptions, and their personal biases regarding the Black staff's attire.

There was a staff person there, for instance, whose body is -- she's very voluptuous, like very voluptuous in the front area and the behind area. And there were moments when the

staff had a conversation about whether or not her clothes were appropriate. And as a person who grew up with big women in my family, and also just understanding the concept of what is considered professional, I'm kind of like, her clothes stretch across her body. She's not wearing something like she's going out to the club. It's very appropriate, but they weren't used to her type of body, and so for me, had this hint of like being race based or racist was really about this black woman's body, which they weren't comfortable with. (Jason)

Even in instances where the inclusion of a Black employee's perspective or experience might enrich the workplace and add value to the work of the organization and the Black and brown communities that were served, participants reported that White leaders did not openly invite staff to contribute to the conversations and consider the perspectives shared, nor were they willing to support the participants' recommendations for changes to organizational processes.

### ***Historical Perspectives about Racism***

The historical experiences and narratives of relatives, and older mentors may be impactful and influence the perspectives of leaders. Michael commented on racism and the experiences of his relatives, friends, and peers. He also described their historical perspectives about racism with the strength of survivors by acknowledging the pain and stress. However, the pain from their experiences became a source of self - motivation and did not make them feel defeated. Michael described his grandfather's experience with energy with the expression of his grandfather turning a seemingly negative situation around by not giving up on his dream and taking advantage of all resources available to pursue his academic degree.

My grandfather finished up his bachelor's at a HBCU [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] in 1962. That was the same year that the University [down south] was integrated. But the state [down south] at the time was so committed to making sure that the school stayed segregated, that they would pay for someone to go and get a degree in another state. So, they paid for my grandfather to get his master's at the College. That's right. The state paid for him to go. If you were a Black citizen - pretty much almost all through the South - there were programs that would pay your full tuition, so that you would not try to go to a state school in that state. (Michael)

Only one other participant (Xavier) mentioned a historical perspective of racism, when he

described how his mother prepared him mentally to address and overcome racism. Xavier in turn is preparing his daughter in a similar manner.

***Subtle and Impactful Racism of Liberals and Progressive Thinkers***

It is important to note that the participants' narratives described White leaders and peers within their organizations who were highly educated, many of which possessed extensive experience in the workplace, and advanced education (e.g., master's degrees or doctorate degrees).

Believe it or not, it will shock you, but my director did a dissertation on race and ethnicity and the disparaging differences between the struggle that Black people deal with in the workplace. He's a White man...He get all of these accolades about being this socially conscious "woke" White man, yet he sits here with a known racist and watches microaggressions happen on a regular basis. I'm telling you that every single person of color in my department has come with a complaint and my director said "keep me out of it. I don't want to be involved." (Thomas)

In Thomas' narrative, he describes his experience working with a director who completed a dissertation that identified the struggles and different experiences of Black and White employees in the workplace. Thomas and mentioned how his director communicates with a White female leader that the people of color in his department believe to be racist but he is unwilling to listen to or assist the people of color who are having a difficult time working with the White female leader.

Additionally, when describing White colleagues, several times they also referred to themselves as being more liberal or progressive, which was described as individuals who were White, social justice advocates who were more accepting of diversity. Only on one occasion was a White colleague described as being "a racist." The distinction between the description of the White leaders and their demonstration of racism is important to the subtly of the display of racism. At no time did a participant ever describe being confronted by White peers in a hostile or potentially violent or aggressive manner. Instead, the behaviors were described as dismissive.

The founder of the organization that I work with is a White woman who started the organization to educate people on human rights issues. She's actually, admittedly, uncomfortable with race conversation, which is kind of strange considering she founded the agency. Sometimes it seems as though when it comes to race based conversation, that even liberal people are problematic at times. Especially in this instance, I've been working with them for the past four years. Everything single year, there are staff persons who have an issue with how she addresses issues around race. Either she minimizes the conversation or she re-directs the conversation and I've had to re-address it with them. (Jason)

In this situation, the participant found themselves in situations where they were required to act as an intermediary with staff members who were struggling with issues dealing with racism.

***Summary: Racism***

The theme of racism contained some of the most extensive narratives. Leaders dealt with a number of impactful situations where they felt dismissed and ignored; were not shown equitable support from peers or clients and commented that they had to prove themselves to be experts. Even on a fundamentally human level, they felt restricted from freely expressing themselves. The narratives of their experiences with racism were described as passive aggressive and less direct or confrontational. It was within the inequitable enforcement of workplace policies and their descriptions regarding the differences in holding White and Black employees equally accountable for adhering to the rules. The act of their White peers ignoring and dismissing them in professional settings was also mentioned. Although working hard to support their employees positively influenced the leaders, their efforts had a negative impact on their family relationships. The next theme will discuss positive influences, and narratives of where Black male leaders find support, drive and encouragement.

## Positive Influences

**Table 4.2**

*Narratives of Positive Influence*

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Nick	I actually have been out of work for about a month. I was diagnosed in November with prostate cancer. Almost all of the text messages that I got from staff members were not, “Hey, you did a great job in planning for your departure and putting pieces in place so we can steadily move forward.” “Hey, you did a really good job of putting the testing schedule together.” No, they were all, “Hey, I really miss you stopping into my room at lunch to ask about my children/spouse.” “Hey, the kids really miss you.” Every text and email I received talked about, hey, I miss the relationship with you, not so much the work.	Developing real connections with co-workers makes the job meaningful.  Valuing others and being equally valued matters.
Joe	We have around \$1.2 to \$1.7 trillion going through our hands every year. In the African American community, every six to seven minutes, the dollar is gone out of our community. So for us, it's about saving and investing more. And then we have too many people with no life insurance or who are under insured, so we need more life insurance. And we make less, but yet we spend more and we're not saving much. One out of every four Black and Hispanics lives in poverty.	Educating his community and future generations is important.
Eric	At one point in my career, I was worried there must be something I was doing wrong because I was not relating to people like I should be. We weren't going out for drinks and for dinner after we left campus. Then I realized, I really didn't want to. I had enough under staff that I created some other relationships that were more meaningful and supportive and affirming than the ones that I had on campus. You have to find those people who you trust.	Relationships with direct reports are meaningful and supportive.

In spite of the many daily challenges overcome by Black male leaders, Nick and Eric described how their team members served as a positive influence to their work experiences. They trusted their teams, and their teams trusted them as well. Oftentimes their team members checked on their well-being, treated them respectfully, valued them as people, and took the time to share personal stories about their families. They cared for their teams, and their teams cared for them

as well. Another source of positive influence was Joe's interest in contributing to the growth of African Americans and Hispanics in his community.

***Summary: Positive Influences***

The theme of positive influences was the one of the least narrated themes. In the descriptions provided by Nick and Eric, their personal relationships with their employees added value to their lives and the lives of their team members. In Joe's experience, working to educate the African American and Hispanic communities was a positive influence. No participants described having a close working relationship with their leaders that served as a source of positive influence, nor did they mention having regular interactions with their leaders beyond work – related conversations. Another common theme present in the narratives was the lack of friendships that the leaders were able to develop in their workplaces.

This is my philosophy. If you end up making friends with somebody, then that's just like a bonus, but that's not your expectation. (Xavier)

The leaders focused their narratives of positive influences on taking care of their teams, showing value and being valued by their teams, and supporting their communities. The next theme focuses on work-life balance.

## Work-life Balance

**Table 4.3**

*Narratives of work-life balance*

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Michael	I've gained a lot of perspective as a leader as like what's most important. To me, the ways that I've grown as a leader has been the ways that I've grown as a father and husband, and that I recognize what's most important.	He attributes his greatest areas of growth as a leader to being a father and a husband.
Joe	I do my best not to allow personal and business to mix... I learned years ago about meditation and mental health. That's been a major challenge in my life. Meditation helped with that, it helped with centering me. I learned about Buddhism and Daoism and your chi and you chakras. From time to time, I'll listen to soothing meditative music. I also recently just got this little comfortable pad that I can lay on. It's a little massaging pad that my children's mother got me for Christmas one year because she knew that would probably help me to relax.	Taking care of your mental and physical health are important to his work-life balance.

Work-life balance was another theme with fewer narratives. Michael and Joe were two leaders who described non work-related topics that support their work-life balance, like their families. Joe also described his health and wellness as being important to his work-life balance.

It's [work-life balance] something that I've been working on for a really long time. I'd say that the best work-life balance I've had has been during this virus. I have my kids home. I've gone for a walk with my daughter every day for the last four or five days. My little girl and I spending a lot of time with my family. (Joe)

In Joe's narrative, he described how he has had the opportunity to spend more time with his daughter as a result of COVID – 19.

I want to feel valued. If I decide that a place aligns with my values, I take on additional shifts or stay overnight and doing whatever else because I'm really connected to the mission of wanting to transform lives or support lives in their own transformation. I worked 90 hours a week at a location before. I've worked 60 hours and 70 hours a week on jobs that only paid me 40 hours a week. I found that often times, giving so much when you don't get any type of acknowledgement for what I've, has been problematic for me in the past. (Jason)

Jason described how he sacrificed his work-life balance in support of his organization. However, he felt as though his leadership tried to take advantage of his passion for the work and requested that he work additional shifts without compensation. Jason mentioned that his leader refused to fill the additional leadership position, and demonstrated a lack of concern for the mission of the staff. Jason described how a more senior position became available within the organization, and rather than hiring him for the role, he was passed over for a White male who not as knowledgeable and was external to the organization. Ultimately, Jason left his organization.

***Summary: Work-life balance***

Leaders did not mention their success in attaining work-life balance. Instead, the theme was described as something that they continue to work towards. Leaders worked toward achieving work-life balance by focusing on their families, children and spouses, and by attempting to align their values with the nature of the work performed.

**Confidence (or Lack Thereof)**

Confidence, or the positive view of one's abilities and skills, was a topic with limited narratives. I attempted to document the theme of confidence through the positive narratives made about the leader's own self-assessment. Leaders like Michael and Robert described their confidence in their abilities in relation to their success and the success of other Black peers. Below are several leader narratives that speak to the leaders' perception of confidence.

**Table 4.4***Narratives of Confidence (or Lack Thereof)*

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Robert	I haven't noticed as many impacts to my success because I'm an overachiever and performing at a very high level. And I hate the way that sounds, but it's objectively operating, at many times, many levels above my peers and to leadership in some cases. But I wonder, in reflection, if it's because of that level of extra effort that has allowed me to not notice as many impacts.	He is driven to over perform.  He doesn't want to appear as though he has a big ego.
Michael	If you don't get this right, people are going to find out that you didn't deserve the last one. I was on the phone with my friend who just had to take a lateral position at another institution because nothing was happening for her there. I'm the exception, but I don't always feel as such.	He has attained a high level of success but does not feel successful.  He struggles with imposter syndrome.

Robert and Michael described how they performed at a higher level than their peers, and have achieved a level of success beyond that of their peers. Robert identified his work ethic as the cause of his additional efforts. They described their performance and remained dedicated to their work. In addition, Michael also described confidence as it related to leaders having confidence in him, so as to invest in his personal growth, development and advancement.

Are they going to invest in me to be sure that I gain that experience? Do they have the confidence and opportunity to do that like they would for anyone else? Or will it be the thing that convinces them that changes their idea about what my level of aptitude could be? (Michael).

However, the theme of confidence for several leaders was viewed in the context of the leader lacking confidence in their organization's ability to rise to meet the needs of their mission. As in Jason's narrative below, he described how his leaders are unable to perform their duties to support their mission of his organization.

This is where it leads to burnout and frustration, especially lately, just dealing with several things which is why I'm here teleworking. So I don't do it for recognition or for advancement. Most of the things that I do it's because that's just how I'm wired. They don't even know what they're doing, now we have to do everything for them and it's a condescending attitude to support a country. Not just people, but the entire country that we're getting paid to support, the shareholder countries that we're supporting. So, while it may spoil my day, I get to know that there's a limit to how passionate I can be. (Jason)

Jason's described how he works hard to serve the country because of his values, without the necessary support from his leaders, and how he has become burnt out and frustrated. He also mentioned how his negative experiences are impacting his passion.

***Summary: Confidence (or Lack Thereof)***

The theme of confidence was once of the least narrated topics. Leaders described their confidence in their work abilities in comparison with their peers and leaders. They explained their level of confidence in completing their work and their drive to work hard and achieve success. They also described a lack of confidence in their organizations and peers to rise up to meet the needs of the organization, and the presence of other forms of bias in their workplace that potentially may impact the work and the employees.

**Leader Strategies**

Several themes emerged under leader strategies: empowering others to lead, inclusive communication, and making staff feel valued. The leaders' approaches involved developing skills to support the needs of their individual team members. Below are several leader narratives.

**Table 4.5***Narratives of Leader Strategies*

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Nick	So when you have people talk about school as they are and they say, hey we need a new curriculum, hey we need to have increase in technology, or hey we need to have smaller classes, or hey we need to deal with inclusion, we need to do more in inclusive practices and special education. Those are all technical things. And there have been no reductions in achievement gap in the last 75 years. Why is that? It's because we keep talking about it in the technical dimension. Unless you address people's beliefs and expectation, and unless you address the political aspect of it, you can't make any changes, which is why we haven't.	Leaders need to be skilled in developing inclusive practices around people's needs.  Leaders require more than technical skills.  Technical skills alone do not address the achievement gap issues that have existed for a three-quarters of a century.
Xavier	To me, part of that is, that if people care about you as a leader and they think that you care about them personally and professionally, they will do more for you than otherwise. I always say, I want the extras out of people. I want people doing stuff that I don't even know that they needed to do. I didn't even now this particular thing needed to happen. But I want people to do what they need to do, even if I don't know to ask.	Care for the whole person, personally and professionally.
Joe	I am effective in my communication. And I think people first. You got to communicate with people's heart. If you don't speak to people's hearts, then people won't follow you. People don't care about how much you know, they want to know how much you care. So you've got to speak to people's hearts and be an effective communicator first.	Showing people how much you care – putting people first is important as a leader.
Scott	My strategies are to stay patient, and constantly read and stay knowledgeable.	Be patient with others and maintain awareness and knowledge of new information in your field.

Nick, Xavier and Joe utilized two common strategies within their career: they put people first and they demonstrated effective communication. Scott described the importance of staying abreast of new information pertaining to his job.

### ***Empowering Others to Lead***

Empowering others was central to the stories shared about staff, and junior staff members who were not under their direct supervision. As in Nick's narrative below, a number of leaders interviewed thought that giving back in a meaningful way was a representation of themselves as leaders.

Being true to myself in my organization—means that in the face of adversity and in the face of the calls for the consistent normalcy of what is the status quo and homogenous and predominantly White organizations, which is to minimize those people who are probably not dominant groups, it means that you stand up at almost every occasion and say, “Hey, I want to introduce a different way of thinking.” And since I am the principal I can say, “I want to introduce a different way of doing. (Nick)

Also, as Michael mentions, having democratic processes in place to engage and incorporate the feedback and recommendations of the team is important to empowering others.

I don't like to be seen as—I understand that I'm the director, but I see everyone as capable. I see everyone as having tremendous value to our team. So I like to talk things through with my team. I don't like making an executive decision. I don't mind making a decision, but I really do like to hear from the staff what they think is reasonable, what they think is. (Michael)

Michael, Nick, Joe, and Xavier communicated with their teams. Putting people first was described as being a key approach to empowering their teams.

### ***Inclusive Communication—Make Staff Feel Valued***

All of the participants described their experiences leading diverse teams comprised of staff from different races, genders, national origins, etc. They described close relationships with their staff, and strong and inclusive communication. Jason discussed the cultural differences that he observed while developing communication with his team.

I used to be the executive director of a nonprofit. I was in the headquarters. I brought in the first woman of color. Headquarters staff were all White females. So, I brought this Black woman in and they struggled like hell with her. And the reality was, I knew her before, I was her boss before. She's an incredible worker. Never had any issues with her. In fact, people were trying to pull her away from me where we worked before. So they continually came to me, even to the point where they're like, "We will leave if we have to continue to work with her." They thought she was too loud; or, she didn't want to eat with them. They didn't realize her financial situation; she couldn't eat with them. She couldn't go out to eat more than two times a week, which is what they were doing. It became really problematic... they were consistently going around not speaking to her - she was in a leadership position too. At one point, someone actually went to a different supervisor for advice and to address an issue, and she brought them to my office. There was a clear sense of cultural differences.

Jason described how his all White female staff struggled with welcoming and accepting a new leader, who was the first woman of color in his organization. He also acknowledged the challenges that cultural differences and miscommunication presented.

### ***Summary: Leader Strategies***

Leaders described their approaches to empowering their teams, and also junior colleagues who were not in their direct chain of command. Effective communication, being mindful of cultural differences, and putting people first were important to their strategies.

### **Motivation and Resilience**

Leaders maintained motivation and resilience when faced with challenging and stressful workplace situations. All nine leaders identified and attributed intrinsic motivating factors to their success. Regardless of the level of support that they received by their peers and leaders, every leader described being driven to do the right thing, even if they never received recognition for their contributions.

**Table 4.6***Narratives of Motivation and Resilience*

Participant	When this occurred	Participant perceived this
Xavier	I think first, it's about passion and connectedness to a mission.	The mission aligns with his values and interests.
Nick	There's some level of me feeling like I want to feel like my work is valued, because I like working. I like being productive. I like feeling like I'm contributing to something.	He is contributing to something bigger than himself.  My contributions are important.
Jason	The other Black male in the staff in Colorado was a husband, and his wife had just left her job. So my ability to be able to speak out about some of those things were in part because I was a single dude who didn't have a lot of expenses. I didn't have someone else to support with my income. When we move, one of the things that's very clear is I'm going to have to start paying for in-home care for my mother. That means that I may have to be in positions where I find different ways to navigate race conversations. Whereas before I didn't have these issues and I could be more vocal.	Personal responsibilities can make it harder to people to speak out about problems at work.  He will need to be more mindful of his comments and how he navigates issues dealing with race, or he may have issues at work.
Eric	I have a great job. I get paid well. I have health insurance. Because I have tenure, I'm going to be able in this position for a while if I want. But because we're in a position of leadership we are viewed, and there's a droning [a hovering oversight] that's happening; we're very aware of how we are taking care of ourselves in these spaces. Sometimes that taking care will require us stepping away. I have a two-block rule. I'm not going to talk about anything too serious if I'm two blocks away because I'm going to be critiqued if I were on campus by anyone about that overheard the conversation.	He's in a great position.  He has to be very careful about what people hear him discussing.  He doesn't have serious conversation within two blocks from his job because he will be judged.

As Xavier and Nick mentioned their contributions are important, and that are motivated by giving back.

***Summary: Motivation and Resilience***

Motivation and resilience was driven by the participant's intrinsic values, what they describes as the need to help people and give back; and, their strategic management of serious and uncomfortable topics in the workplace.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and discuss key research findings. I will first briefly mention the purpose and methods used in this study. I will then discuss the key findings in Chapter IV, and then compare and contrast the findings with the literature. I will consider the limitations and scope of the study; as well, as the implications for leadership and change in practice. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of recommendations for future research, and what I have personally learned as a leader.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how African American male leaders experience their race at work. According to Inzlicht and Ben-Zeev (2000) and Murphy et al. (2007), being a minority in a measured context such as the workplace is sufficient to spark stereotype threat. Therefore, my goal was to explore the complexities and practices of how Black male leaders make sense of their race in the workplace. A specific focus of the study was to determine whether survivors of racialized oppression internalize racial stereotypes and develop an awareness of a regulated societal hierarchy, which is justified by labeling inferior and superior social groups. As noted by Padilla (2001) and Pyke (2010), the internalization of oppression is a multidimensional occurrence that simulates many forms across situational contexts, including the intersections of multiple systems of domination. Internalized racism is extremely powerful because it silently alienates and devalues individuals. It is often normalized as more of an individual's personal struggle instead of a societal issue in everyday society. Less focus has been placed on stereotype threat research in non-laboratory, non-university settings, such as the workplace. Likewise, research suggests that non-performance based stereotypes have been largely ignored in the organizational stereotype threat literature (Dhanani & Wolcott, 2014).

Narrative inquiry, a subtype of qualitative inquiry (Chase, 2005), was used to conduct nine in-depth interviews with African American male leaders in an effort to give voice to those typically marginalized and excluded from mainstream research. The act of creating narrative is a significant way in which human beings make sense of their experiences, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning. As such, I believed that using a narrative inquiry approach to this research would actively contribute to amplifying and interpreting those once silenced voices so that they may “aid in identifying meaning and constructing new theoretical views” (Lyons, 2007, p. 17). Whether or not we speak them or write them, we are all continually telling stories of our experiences. As a researcher, I have learned through this experience of recording the stories of my participants that as qualitative researchers, we need to also tell our stories. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), we are all storytellers and story lovers. As such, they determined that narrative researchers are obligated to move beyond the telling of the lived story to also tell the research story. This final research discussion is a mutually constructed, collaborative document, created out of the lives of both the participant and researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

### **Key Findings: Living Leadership**

Living leadership as a Black male in the U.S. is an arduous and character revealing process. It requires continuous mental agility, and physical and psychological stamina. It also requires a great degree of cultural, emotional, and situational intelligence. The challenges with being recognized as a leader and obtaining equitable access to resources is constant at times, and the experiences of Black male leaders at work are perceived as being in contrast to the experiences their White male peers. For the participants that I had the privilege of interviewing, living leadership was not seen as a separate experience from living as a Black man. As such,

regardless of their work sector, age, sexual orientation, education level, and regional location in the U.S., their lived experiences included being viewed, treated, and often marginalized as a Black male. Their abilities as a leader, leadership status, technical expertise, and unique cultural identities (like, age, sexual orientation, education level, etc.) were often viewed secondarily to their blackness. They described how they often walked the fine line of balancing their success in their career with being silently disenfranchised. They described being guarded at work, and very mindful of their words, the conversational topics that were discussed, and how much they contribute to conversations regarding serious topics.

Leaders provided examples of situations where White leaders, and White peers were not willing to get to know them as a person. Instead, they described how their relationships with their leaders and peers dealt primarily with doing their job. However, they mentioned that through the development of informal relationships, leaders in their organizations received executive sponsorship. Executive sponsorship was described as a high-level support from leaders. Executive sponsorship was described as a level of access that directly impacted one's ability for career advancement and access to resources. In spite of their daily struggles, for these Black males, living leadership was the embodiment of courage.

At the beginning of my research journey, I questioned whether intergenerational racial oppression and the wounds of racism influenced Black male leaders. The findings of this study suggest that the wounds of intergenerational racial oppression do influence Black male leaders, in ways that are somewhat unexpected. Our historical, familial experiences with racial oppression, and the stories that we often hear mold us and aid in the development of our situational awareness. The awareness itself is not based solely on a singular event but the accumulation of events, experiences, and stories. Although a few participants shared

intergenerational, familial experiences of racism, what was shared with them was often told lovingly by family members as warnings and reminders of how Black males are viewed in the U.S. Likewise, the few familial experiences of racism that were mentioned were about overcoming individual barriers and incidences of oppression, not giving up; and, making a better life for one's family in spite of the struggles. In that sense, narratives of struggle were also described as narratives of resilience. Contrary to what I had initially thought (after researching the topic of intergenerational oppression), the intergenerational, familiar experiences regarding racism shared by the participants were both uplifting and inspirational. No one described experiences of being unable to move beyond their experiences with racism or marginalization. However, one participant mentioned his young daughter and her innocence, specifically, the child did not understand why anyone would dislike or treat someone differently because of their skin color. The participant expressed concern and shared that he had conversations with his daughter and did not want her experiences with race to prevent her from moving forward. As his mother had done with him, he (Xavier) had conversations with his daughter to prepare for the harsh reality of racism. Instead of discovering intergenerational oppression and the open wounds of racism, I came to understand that participants may have been socially, emotionally, and lovingly conditioned by their families and even older mentors to foster a sense of intergenerational courage. They learned to live courageously and to continue moving forward.

Participants also possessed an internal awareness of how others perceived them based on their race and sex. As a result of racial stereotypes in the U.S., participants described the need to modify their behaviors and actions based on their audience, and expressed a warmth for their staff and stakeholders, and an interest in their growth and advancement on a fundamentally human level. In spite of their personal challenges with obtaining support and equality amongst

their own peers and leaders, it was the Black male leader's ironic acknowledgement and respect for their staff and direct reports, as people—first. They welcomed the diversity of background and often hired diverse teams. There also was an awareness of the limitations for how much they as leaders could give of themselves, to their organizations (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and still openly communicate about their personal experiences in their organizations without being criticized. In fact, some participants avoided sharing workplace concerns, complaints, and stress with their spouses and immediate family members (Harris, 1992; Major & Billson, 1992). Likewise, none of the leaders believed that they could freely share their concerns in the workplace with peers or leadership without being judged, criticized, and further marginalized.

### **Do Black Males Believe That They Have to be Mindful of Their Race at Work?**

The research has shown that Black males do believe that they have to be mindful of their race at work. This belief is influenced heavily by the actions and behaviors of their White supervisors and peers. Although most participants did not often deal with direct comments regarding their race, they often experienced behaviors that they perceived as marginalizing. In varying contexts depending upon their audience, they also were mindful and cautious with their word usage, tone of voice, attire, and expression of their emotions. Several participants mentioned that White peers had attempted to label them as angry, even though other White males were able to express themselves. In this respect, the participants were unable to express themselves, and one participant (Jason) described the expression of emotions as a fundamental human right. Participants described their work environments as tiring because they were constantly required to manage their presence. All participants worked in predominately White organizations. The lack of visible representation of other Black males (and diversity in general) in senior leadership positions reminded them of their blackness. They also experienced White

peers (who were not subject matter experts) who questioned and challenged them in meetings, and White male customers who required them to prove themselves (while their White male peers were presumed to be knowledgeable).

Regardless of their other identities, including age, position title, sexual orientation, and region in the United States where they worked, participants were cognizant about other's perceptions of their race. These perceptions influenced their interactions with their White direct reports and peers of other races. They worked hard to ensure that everyone on their staff knew that they were available to provide support. Although it was not mentioned significantly, several participants did specifically mention being mindful of their actions, especially around White women (this was described as though they needed to be cautious in order to protect themselves from being labeled in a negative way).

The ongoing policing and maintaining surveillance over the Black male leader's identity was an common theme. The experiences of eight of the nine participants directly aligned with the literature on "code switching," or the negotiation of cultural identity, which is a minority group phenomenon and not considered necessary behavior for White Americans (Thibodaux, 1994). Jackson and Dangerfield (2002) described code switching for men as an "attempt to coordinate his actions with others, as well as [an awareness of] the possibility that his masculine identity may become anonymous, silenced, suppressed, and accessorized" (p. 7). He must always be cognizant of the effects of identity negotiation. Code switching strategies are attempts for Black males to make their presence and views less threatening for the majority White population. The demonstration of code switching can be seen in their tone of voice, word usage, a decrease in eye contact, an overall decrease in communication, or avoidance. The challenge of altering one's individual performance (how one interacts with others, etc.) in order to appear less threatening

and possess an identity one may be expected to embody within an intercultural context is a common theme in performing Black masculinities.

### **How do African American Male Leaders Make Sense of Their Race?**

The manner in which African American males make sense of their race is grounded in the historical understanding of race that they learned through their personal experiences with being marginalized, and their observation of other Black men and women (and people of color) being marginalized by White leaders, peers and customers. Their personal experiences make up the greatest impact. Participants described the rigidity of White leaders and White peers that did not allow equitable treatment or fairness. For example, participants gave examples of internal organizational standards that were overlooked for their White peers to receive support, and resulted in promotions, interviews, the ability to have flexibility in their work schedules, and even the benefit to leave work early to spend time with family, or to golf. The leaders adhered to policies, procedures and practices that they believe hold them to a more rigid standards than their White peers. Their personal experiences with marginalization directly impacted their promotion opportunities, work–life balance, and relationships with their families (spouses and children).

Within the context of the literature, even after 118 years, W.E.B. Du Bois' 1903 theory of “double consciousness” remains relevant today. Du Bois (1934) referred to double consciousness as the tension between pride and shame in self and the group. Du Bois (1903) explained that the consequence is such that the person struggles to maintain a positive sense of self despite powerful forces pushing in the opposite direction. Du Bois' (1903) theory of double consciousness through his metaphor of “the veil” was used as an image for an obstruction to self-awareness, a kind of realization and reminder of one's differences brought about through the actions of external sources. Du Bois described the veil as always being present.

Self-consciousness, for Du Bois, required an outside influence. He suggested the route to liberation was rising above the veil through higher education. However, given that 90% of my participants have obtained degrees in higher education, I believe that the context of education does not fully address the issue liberation. Both one's direct lived experiences with racial marginalization and the experiences of others lay the foundation for the historical scope of racism and add to the pervasiveness of internalized oppression. Moore (2005) asserts that the "goal of an individual who is dealing with internalized oppression would be to obtain mental liberation" (p. 753). Based on the experiences of the participants, education alone may not force mental liberation.

### **Do the Ways African American Male Leaders Think About Race at Work Impact Their Interpersonal Interactions?**

The ways that African American males think about race does not impact these leaders by itself. Leaders did not describe ruminating about their race. Instead, the leader's interactions with White peers and leaders were most impactful. It was as a result of the negative experiences that leaders described where they often felt defined by their race and treated in accordance with that assigned definition by their White leaders and peers. However, the participants considered their race to be a constant variable; it was a part of who they were, but only one of their many identities. They acknowledged their wholeness as a human being (Eagly & Karau, 2002), even when others were unable to do so. Every participant described how they initially attempt to develop working relationships with peers and leaders regardless of race. At some point their efforts were often rejected and dismissed by their White peers. As a result, they moved forward and formed working relationships with those who they work closest with. Interestingly, no one described having close relationships with their predominately White male leaders. It is important

to note, however, that Black males have not fallen prey to their own negative thoughts. Meaning, that although the way that Black males think about race does have a negative impact on their interpersonal interactions, scholars continue to document the inequality that Black males face on a day-to-day basis in the workplace. Scholars have shown that subtle, daily patterns of experienced marginalization in workplace interactions continues to be a critical form of inequality in modern workplaces (Zanoni et al., 2010). Interactions that may seem ordinary and meaningless from an objective standpoint can still be subjectively experienced as meaningful threats in the work lives of those who are demographically different from the majority in their profession, like Black males (Clair et al., 2012). So, although their thoughts influence their interactions, the interactions of Black males are also impacted by various external influences working together to define their thoughts, perceptions and experiences.

### **What Were Some Common Examples of Perceived Stereotype Threat and Metastereotyping in the Workplace?**

Stereotype threat refers to the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about one's racial or cultural group. As a result of the threat, a disidentification occurs, which is considered to be a psychological survival strategy to protect one's self esteem. So, in the face of failure we unconsciously judge our performance against the general stereotypes associated with our cultural groups. As an example, women are often negatively stereotyped as not being as proficient in performing mathematical equations as men; White men are favorably stereotyped as being the prototypical leaders—while men from other cultural groups are not necessarily viewed as favorably, etc. Metastereotyping shifts the focus to introspective thoughts of what we think others think of us (Voyles et al., 2014). Metastereotyping refers to in-group members'

perceptions regarding the stereotypes that out-group members hold of the in-group (Vorauer et al., 1998).

Leaders shared several examples of stereotype threat, like the inability to show emotions without being negatively labeled, having to work hard to prove oneself, and the manifestation of stereotype threat in their personal lives outside of work. Black male leaders struggled with their ability to “represent themselves to others as complex human beings, and thereby consent in some regards to the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacy ideologies” (Bell-Jordan, 2011, p. 31). One common example of perceived stereotype threat was their inability (due to the social pressures of White peers and leaders) to demonstrate a full range of emotions, including anger and disappointment with situations in the workplace. Simply showing emotions like a reasonable (and whole human being was described as a challenge when interacting with their White peers and leaders. In fact, regardless of the demonstration of emotions, in some instances they still worked to avoid being labeled by peers.

In addition, several leaders mentioned their need to over perform their peers, though they did not correlate the external pressures of being marginalized in their workplaces to their extra performance efforts. However, one cannot forget that racism is a form of oppression and is a system of supremacy and privilege based on racial group designations (Essed, 1991; Harrell, 2000). According to Hughey (2012), Whiteness is construed as the dominant superrace, while subordinate and subrace categories pertain to all others, and Black males generally hold the lowest subrace category. The accuracy of the stereotype is unrelated to whether individuals experience stereotype threat (Kalokerinow et al., 2014). Individuals only need to be concerned that they may be stereotyped for stereotype threat effects to emerge. Without the existence of relevant data to support the claim, a Black male leader may be concerned about being negatively

labeled as incompetent, lacking expertise in their work, or potentially a “token” employee—who was hired for their diversity (Kanter, 1977; Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002).

The impact of race and the interpretation of racial experiences within a leadership context are not independent factors for African American males. Race gains added meaning in relation to masculinity and other forms of oppression, even outside of the work context. Leaders tried to present a strong image regarding their work life; however, all participants who had families, or identified as being married, or had children appeared to struggle with being able to share information about their work-life. No one described being able to discuss their workday with their spouses and children, tell their spouse and children that they had a bad day, or to openly share their thoughts and emotions concerning work. Several participants described instances where they were so stressed out from work that they argued with spouses and significant others, got upset with their children, or at times had a lower tolerance for their children’s behavior.

There were also several examples of negative internal outcomes, such as the stress and avoidance of interactions with individuals at work, withdrawal, and insomnia. Although workplace performance and mental agility were not described by all participants as problems, all participants attempted to compartmentalize their work experiences and keep their professional and personal lives separate. One of the largest issues appeared to be the ongoing psychological stress, which was manifested in the described tiredness and weariness. Several participants also mentioned being cautious when having conversations in the workplace with other black and brown colleagues regarding concerns and issues at work, so as not to be labeled as a complainer or a disgruntled employee by onlookers. In addition, although the word “morale” was not used by the participants, based on the narratives, there is evidence that participants may also be

struggling with decreased morale, which may be negatively impacting their ability to be creative, and their level of engagement in their organizations.

However, regardless of the race of their staff members or students, each participant expressed the hope and desire for their staff to be supported and developed into leaders (Pelled et al., 1999). In addition, they also described an awareness of how staff members, peers, or students, who identified as belonging to different races at times perceived them due to their blackness. As a result, several participants described how they worked harder to ensure that they were seen as supportive of individuals of other races.

### **What Specific Skills and Strategies do African American Male Leaders Utilize at Work, When Faced with Perceived Situational Stereotype Threats?**

Black male leaders work diligently to stay knowledgeable about their field and work products. Even when recognized as the expert by their leadership, they maintain their preparedness. In contrast, several participants described situations, where they believed White male peers had limited understanding of the concepts; however, in executive level meetings they were still given the leeway to offer their opinions, and at times even challenge the participants (Roberson & Kulik, 2007).

Likewise, within the context of workplace accountability, leaders described stories of White male leaders in the workplace who focused solely on mastering technical abilities. However, participants described technical abilities as foundational skills for all leaders. Beyond one's technical expertise, the Black male leaders believed that the true value of leadership was to nurture, challenge, and grow the vision of the organization and their employees. Participants described what they believed to be a lack of leadership focus of their White male peers. However, in spite of their performance and their team's performance, in several instances they

still did not receive recognition for their loyalty and concern for the organization. There was a consistency in the narratives relating to recognition, across the federal, private, and academic sectors. Consequently, the narratives revealed that one of the greatest challenges faced by the participants were a direct result of their leader's refusal to enforce the organizational policies equitably. While the act of overlooking the equitable enforcement of organizational rules may appear more subtle than overt racism, nonetheless the impact further marginalized the participants.

### **What Positive External or Internal Influences (if any) do African American Males use to Counter Perceived Stereotype Threat?**

Most participants described the significance of their personal relationships outside of work as a counter to perceived stereotype threat. These external relationships they surrounded themselves with like-minded, Black (male and female) leaders (and aspiring leaders) who understood the challenges that they faced as Black male leaders. Their peers and mentors served as an outlet to release their negative experiences and seek guidance and wisdom, and they helped the participants stay motivated. Several participants also described their experiences working from home during COVID-19, and being able to spend time with their children. Although one participant mentioned his religious faith as a positive influence and described how his faith in God helped to strengthen him and sustain him during difficult times in his life, no one else described religious or spiritual influences. For many black communities, the church is oftentimes seen as a foundational organization that connects, strengthens, and provides spiritual support to black men and families. I was expecting more participants to speak about their religious faith, and the success, strength and hope that they gained through their relationship with God, or their church family.

Additionally, only one participant described having a regular, positive outlet that might contribute to a better work-life balance, like a special hobby, exercise, mediation, or participating in counseling or talk therapy for work-related stress. There appeared to be a sense of loneliness in their leadership journeys. Loneliness from the standpoint that they may not have been able to share their whole selves with the people closest with them. This may be a point for further research, as it could be that their spouses also may be dealing with racism and stereotypes. I was left with the thought after speaking with every one of these gentlemen that I was not sure whether their loved ones had an opportunity to experience them as a vulnerable person, and not just because they had achieved financial success, or a position title but because they gave of themselves to make others better.

### **Resilience Birthed from the Struggle of Being a Black Male**

The struggle of being a Black male in the workplace is an experience that every participant shared. For every participant, there was saliency in being Black males, regardless of the state and city in which they lived, the sector in which they work, education level, sexual orientation, age, historical, and family experiences. Uniqueness existed in every narrative, every individual example shared, yet there was a loneliness and unmet longing to be their authentic selves (authentic Black males). Leaders faced the constant struggle to not allow the attitude, mistruths, and hostility of their peers to define the narrative that they created for themselves. Black male leaders are both vulnerable and resilient. In spite of the challenges that they faced, they are defined by their strength and perseverance.

In several narratives, participants described how their White male peers, female peers often relied on them to address and resolve conflict situations in the workplace; especially, situations that dealt with misunderstandings between employees of different racial groups, or

situations described as hostile. It was during these conflict situations that one participant was asked to lead but in everyday business operations he was often left out of the conversations, and not consulted prior to organizational changes taking place. In spite of the ongoing challenges, the leaders remained resilient and steadfast. They described their experiences as though their mistreatment was the expected (and tiring) norm based on the historical context of racism in the U.S. At times their resilience was described as a heaviness of spirit, a tiredness that stayed with them as they made it through one more day, recuperated, and returned to make it through another day. At other times, participants sounded energized and remained hopeful that their contributions would help their direct reports and customers. While none of the participants openly described themselves as strong, the strength that I witnessed through their personal narratives was apparent. Every leader with which I spoke possessed both mental and emotional dexterity and strength. Even in the most difficult situations they maintained their sense of focus and hope. Leaders described narratives where their leaders and organizations did not fully acknowledge their strength and value. Even still, the leaders were valued by their diverse teams, customers, and students. As one participant described it, he used to have a “binary vision, in terms of how he wanted all kinds of results, yet there was very little room for listening to perspectives and understanding their personal trials and tribulations.” Building a culture with their staff in support of the people and the mission of the organization suggested that the personal well-being of their staff is equally important to the mission. The resilience of these leaders created a workplace where their staff mostly enjoy being at work and increased the performance of their teams. Based on the narratives collected and analyzed, it was apparent that each participant possessed a sense of hope, personal conviction, and optimism (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). The common themes of hope, resilience, and perseverance were expressed in every interview. Additionally, each

participant described the driving force for maintaining their resilience, their personal conviction to their work (May et al., 2003), their self-described responsibility to lead and support their teams, or maintain or improve upon their financial stability for their families.

### **Black Masculinity**

Within the U.S. culture Black males hold the lowest subrace category (Hughey, 2012). While masculine norms are described as avoidance of femininity, restriction of most emotions (with the exception of anger), sex disconnected from intimacy, the pursuit of achievement and status, independence, aggression, and homophobia (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). Denborough (1996) defined masculinity as ‘controlling others, climbing hierarchies, obtaining possessions (using coercion, force, and in many cases even violence to achieve such control and power’ (p. 74). Black men are often labeled as more threatening and violent than their White male counterparts. Black men are also seen as hypermasculine, or having an exaggeration of the male stereotypical behaviors, with an emphasis on physical strength, aggression, and sexuality (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). Black males may be both victims and coerced participants in creating conflicts that contribute to their psychological distress (Pierre et al., 2001). It also involves behaviors and the devaluing of anything conceptualized as feminine and/or homosexual in nature (Young, 2007).

Contrary to U.S. masculine norms, an Afrocentric worldview emphasizes a holistic and communal harmony, collective responsibility, synchronization with nature, interdependence, and a deep appreciation for elders in the community (Kambon, 1996; White & Parham, 1990). Based on the narratives and the current terminology used to describe masculine norms, I believe that the leader’s demonstrated masculinity to be more closely aligned with Afrocentric worldview. The participants demonstrated a commitment to supporting and caring for their teams, even when

they lacked support themselves. While they were vocal about issues that they believed to be unfair, they were strategic and selective in their conversations and did not devalue others. In fact, in two instances participants identified themselves as homosexual. They also mentioned that they presented as heterosexual at work, and that most people with whom they worked did not know that they were gay. For these participants, regardless of their sexual orientation the participants stated that their blackness was always given precedence. The experiences of the Black, gay, male participants is consistent with what scholars have contended regarding the added stigmas associated with racial minorities. Sexual minorities who are also racial minorities are subjected to an additional level of prejudice. As a such, they are sometimes referred to as “double” minorities (Arlee et al., 2019). Double minorities are subjected to perceived and actual discrimination due to their sexual and racial status (Moradi et al., 2010). In addition, racial communities may associate homosexuality and bisexuality with the White American culture and an abandonment of their own racial community and culture (Panchankis & Goldfried, 2013). As a result, people who are double minorities are less likely to disclose and more likely to both prevent potential discrimination in their workplaces, and conceal their sexual minority status to reduce their exposure to oppression in their own racial minority community (Balsam et al., 2015; Moradi et al., 2010;).

The other layers of their identities, like their age and sexual orientation, were measured against their identity as Black males and the stigma that is associated with being a Black male. One participant shared how his sexual orientation was brought up in an inappropriate comment made by his White male peer, when he was told that he was different than the typical Black male. It was inferred as though the participant’s sexual orientation made the participant more approachable, or better. However, given the stigma associated with Black males, the participants

described situations where they dealt with unequitable treatment due to their race. As an example, Black male leaders described feeling the need to approach White female employees and peers more strategically, in one instance the leader used a intermediary—another peer leader to relay a sensitive message. Most of the participants did not describe having black or brown female peers at their same level, so I do not have any narrated examples of skills and strategies that they would use in instances with female leaders of color. Likewise, no leaders described situations where they engaged their leaders about their personal issues.

### **The Connection Between Black Masculinity and Community**

Black leaders shared a similar connection with the community that did not vary based on the sector in which the leader work, or the region in which they worked. From the west coast, Midwest, east coast, and south every leader described an additional responsibility to their social communities. They all expressed that representation, meaning the demographic representation of Black males in leadership positions within their organizations, was important. Most described how they mentored and coached junior staff members on their teams and across their organizations. Some described their relationships with staff as almost “fatherly.” Several participants also mentioned how individuals spoke to them because they were Black, and felt more comfortable having conversations regarding sensitive topics. When they were called on for assistance, especially when dealing with sensitive racial topics being fair and equitable appeared to be important to them.

Every participant made tremendous sacrifices to achieve professional success. They advance in their careers due to their knowledge, abilities, work ethic, and their teams are nurtured and strengthened because of their personal relationships. Yet, they lacked the relational

strength in their senior executive relationships to make the kind of transformational impact that they want to make.

### **The Authenticity of the Individual Leaders**

Authenticity is defined as the subjective experience of alignment between one's internal experiences and external expressions (Kahn, 1992; Roberts, 2007). Internal experiences are described as one's thoughts, feelings, behavioral preferences, and values; and external experiences are one's [outward] behavior, such as verbal communication, non-verbal gestures, and personal attire. The topic of authenticity was not directly mentioned as a primary theme during the interviews. However, authenticity was a theme that emerged in conjunction with all others. As an example, participants were not immobilized by the racism and marginalization that they experienced or the lack of unequal access. Instead, they had a clear understanding of whom most welcomed their authenticity, and when they could be their authentic selves at work. No participants described being fully accepted amongst their White peers and White leaders; and described situations where they were denied equitable relational benefits. Within the White peer and White leader dynamics, participants described being dismissed, disrespected, and treated inequitably. As a result, when dealing with their White peers and White leaders their behaviors aligned more with being cordial, performing the functions of their position, cautiously avoiding certain conversations at work when deemed unsafe and unproductive, and strategically avoiding being labeled angry—or anything other than what they attributed to themselves. In several instances, the participants described their awareness of an invisible line of acceptable behaviors that their White peers and leaders tolerated. For example, they believed that there was only so far that they were able to constructively question the protocols, procedures and practices of their White peers and White leaders. However, participants openly demonstrated their authenticity

with their teams and direct reports. It is within these team relationships that participants were nurtured and thrived. It is also within their team and direct report relationships that they leveraged their experiences of being a Black male and their leadership skills to create and sustain inclusive work environments.

According to Ferdman and Roberts (2014), “Inclusive practices create environments in which a broader range of people can feel safe, accepted, valued, and able to contribute their talents and perspectives for the benefit of the collective” (p. 95). Ferdman (2007) further describes the importance of one’s personal knowledge, acceptance, and expression of self when establishing the foundation of inclusive work environments.

To include others effectively and wholeheartedly, we first have to include ourselves; when we acknowledge the diversity of experiences, interests, and values that exist within ourselves, we are better equipped to notice and recognize the diversity around us in a more general manner. (Ferdman & Roberts, 2014, p. 95)

It is the diversity of experiences and self-awareness that contributes to the unique talents of the most skillful leaders. As described by Roberts and Dutton (2005), when we are at our best, we are able to actively tap into our values and strengths. They posit that the clarity of strength and purpose adds value to our lives and creates value within our social systems. The act of adding value to a social system will not change the multifaceted layers of marginalization within social systems, if the values and behaviors of those who are also in leadership positions do not reciprocate an equitable and inclusive workplace.

Only when we are able to access and appreciate our full selves can we wholly experience inclusion, which means feeling that we are “safe, trusted, accepted, respected, supported,

valued, fulfilled, engaged, and authentic in our working environment, both as individuals and as members of particular identity groups” (Ferdman et al., 2009, p. 6).

While Black male leaders can create a bubble-like environment where their direct teams feel safe, respected and engaged, in many respects the workplace in general is an imitation of authenticity. As such, the workplace is a direct product of the lack of safety, trust, acceptance, respect, support, fulfillment, engagement and authenticity of the organizational environment harbored by their White peers and White leaders. Black male leaders themselves are not able to establish a supportive climate for themselves and their teams without the necessary support. It is within a supportive climate that individuals “can freely disclose their various identities at work, including those that may be less visible and individuals are more likely to express their views on important organizational issues” (Bowen & Blackmon, p. 1408).

They described going through a transition where they learned the value of empowering their staff. They also described how they developed working relationships with their staff and got to know them as people. In developing closer relationships, they listened to their staff, were more open to the ideas shared. Several leaders described how junior staff from other parts of their organization came to them for mentorship and support. Black male leaders sidelined the binary mission-first, or people-first approach and instead redefined their success by creating and sustaining a more equitable mission and people-first approach.

### **Limitations and Scope of the Study**

All research has limitations, and this study is not an exception. This study was limited by the use of a sample of nine African American male leaders who live in the U.S. Three of the leaders had a doctorate, three had a master’s, three had a bachelor’s, and one had a high school degree. The leader’s educational experiences may have provided them with different

perspectives and skills that may not apply to the majority of other African American male leaders.

The investigator's role as a female interviewer presented another limitation. There may have been less disclosure if for any reason the participants thought that I was unable to relate to their experiences, or if for any reason they felt uncomfortable.

It would be appropriate to investigate a larger sampling of African American male leaders in the workplace to see if they share similar experiences. It would also be prudent to expand the study to include Black female leaders. As, I believe that Black female leaders may share in similar struggles and share parallel stories of resilience as their male counterparts.

### **Implications for Leadership and Change in Practice**

The intent of this work was to elevate the voices of African American male leaders, who are an underheard group of leaders, and to make sense of their lived experiences. From the findings, I concluded three things: that gendered racism impacts the interpersonal relations of African American male leaders in ways that do not impact White male leaders; African American male leaders learn to employ a range of leader strategies to negotiate the impacts of racism on their career (Goodly 2007); and, African American male leaders may not be aware of the extent of the impact of racial marginalization on themselves.

The study was an exploration of African American male leader's experiences with understanding race, overcoming racial stigma within the leader context, and the day-to-day impacts of racism and marginalization on their interactions, relationships, and leader strategies. From the narratives of the leaders who participated in this study, a picture emerged that is more than theoretical in nature. It provides insights and inspiration for other African American male

leaders, leaders of color, and anyone who may be interested in leading change to break through the barriers of racial stigmas in the workplace.

Based on the findings, organizational leadership must be mindful and address the organizational systems, and the individuals in who may be negatively impacting the organizational culture.

Identifying the root cause of the problem when we hear stories of racism and marginalization in the workplace, or identifying human resource data trends that reveal marginalization are crucial to understanding the issue and coming up with potential solutions. When an individual's behavior is identified as the root of the issue, once must address the problematic behavior and not directly assume that the system has failed (without further analysis), that policies and procedures are not in place or are not working to support the organization. Based on the narratives of the participants, there are direct examples of individual employees behaving inappropriately at work. I believe that the next time that we hear of marginalization in the workplace we should determine whether the policies in place are being enforced. Several examples have been provided in this research that demonstrate how leaders must be intentional in their efforts to engage their team, and hold their team members leaders accountable. Internal procedures are in place for a reason, in support of the organizational functions. As leaders, we must be willing hold ourselves responsible for following the procedures and policies, and we must hold employees responsible. The lack of responsible in the enforcement of polices is and will always be problematic if leaders are attempting to create and sustain equity and inclusion within their organizations. We must be careful with labeling issues dealing with individual employee inappropriateness as an "organizational cultural" issue. Such preemptive designations draw attention away from individual employee behaviors that should be addressed within the supervisory context. This is not to say that complex cultural issues do not exist within the

workplace; however, based on the findings there are several things that leaders can do in real-time to support the continued growth and development of African American male leaders.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The challenges of identifying present day approaches to addressing the deeply impactful experiences of racism and leader marginalization are complex. However, through the lens of this study, we may continue to build upon what the language of marginalization sounds like for African American male leaders, and continue to educate ourselves as to what the demonstration of racial bias looks like. The process of learning to value others through the life lessons of one of the most undervalued group of humans (Black males), could be an important step in the future of leader development. At this moment, our nation and our planet is experiencing a perfect storm of chaos, we are struggling to deal with COVID-19, racial violence, socio economic inequalities, growing political tensions, climate change and the destruction of nature, and large scale conflict. Leaders must be prepared to lead diverse, talented and high performing teams. As such, there is value in leaders learning from the lived experiences of Black male leaders to strengthen their resilience and fortitude. There is also value in organizational development, chief human resources, and equity and inclusion practitioners learning from the experiences of African American male leaders.

According to a report by Kirkland and Bohnet (2017), approximately \$8 billion is spent annually on diversity and inclusion training in the U.S. In addition, \$165 billion is spent on leader development programs in the U.S. (Training Industry, Inc., 2021), which includes dollars paid by corporations to educational institutions for corporate training initiatives. However, focus and efforts are not aligned to change systemic problems within the organization that break down and obstruct equitable and inclusive workplace relationships. As was described by each

participant, there are attitudinal-cultural barriers, and racist behaviors that exist within their workplace cultures that negatively impact the development of their relationships with their White leaders and White peers. In addition, participants described workplace cultures where not being equally accepted by their White leaders and White peers created a culture where they were made to feel as though they did not fully belong and were not equal to their White peers. Also, according to the participants, it was the employee's relationship with CEO's and senior leaders that determined the level of support received, and future career advancement opportunities. I postulate that a degree of intergroup and relational segregation may be occurring amongst White leaders and White peers that is negatively impacting the ability of African American male leaders to be accepted within the workplace; meaning, that although the participants all described attempts to develop workplace relationships with their White peers, their efforts were often rejected. The act of White leaders and White peers rejecting the development of relationships with African American male leaders, or not showing equal support of African American male leaders may be a form of relational segregation. Rather than focusing on whether relational segregation may be conscious or unconscious, I recommend further analysis into the impact of the relationship development of African American male leaders, their White leaders and their White peers; verses that of the White leaders to White peers. I would also ask the following questions: how are the acts of acceptance and belonging demonstrated amongst White leaders and White peers? Does one's race offer an added degree of informal relational advantage with White leaders? If so, what does that look like? How are other racial/gender/cultural groups impacted? I would also recommend looking into the development of a relational algorithm that intentionally pairs leaders within an organization based on the leaders' talents, skills, and organizational interests, so that organizations can benefit from diversity of culture, experiences

and knowledge of their employees. Racism remains a challenge in the workplace. Although corporations may support diversity, inclusion and leader development training programs, we must not ignore the importance of bridging the relationship and cultural gaps that still exist in workplace, the role of corporate leadership. While corporate educational and training initiatives may seek to address problematic behaviors by addressing the thoughts that influence behaviors, we must also remember that behaviors can also influence thoughts. Consequently, addressing the cultural and relational gaps by bridging and developing intergroup workplace relationships may positively impact the experiences of African American males (as well as other cultural groups), and the organizations where they work.

### **Positionality**

Although I discussed my positionality in Chapter I, I am addressing it once more in this section, as I believe, as Thomas Moore (2005) stated, “If there us hope, then it will begin with self-reflection.” During this research process, I have consistently and intentionally worked to remain aware of, and understand my own subjectivity. I was drawn to this research through conversations that I had with family, colleagues, and friends, regardless of upbringing, familial environment, socio-economic status, work sector, education, region, age, career field, and sexual orientation. From childhood on, Black males that I have had the pleasure of engaging believed that they endured societal attacks more so than their non-Black male peers, and believed that they were expected to demonstrate dysfunctional behavior. Some of these individuals remain voiceless and hopeless.

This research represents the voice of an often unheard group within our country, African American male leaders. In my role as the author of this dissertation and PhD candidate, I had assumed the responsibility of the researcher, interpreter, and messenger. I am innately aware of

the hierarchical power structure within our country, and as a result care very much about assuring that my roles and my voice did not overpower the less heard voice of my participants. I have also done my best to put my ego aside, in order to patiently listen and understand. I am also aware of the levels of privilege that I possess: college educated, woman, married to a loving supportive husband, socioeconomic status, professional access, raised in a middle-class household with both parents, and I have been privileged to travel internationally. As female I believe that it can be challenging to understand the world through the lens of a male. However, as an African American female researcher I believe that I am in a better position to sincerely navigate the topics of oppression and one's racial experience with empathy and respect. I, too, share a common racial identity with the research participants, and my experiences have been influenced by racial oppression. Various intergenerational dimensions of racial oppression collide and support the heuristics of inference and comparison (Essed, 1991). This makes it possible for structures of rational inferences to be formed by individuals existing within the racialized system (Essed, 1991). It is my hope that my own racial identity and experiences allowed me a vantage point to research the experiences of these participants.

### **Closing**

This research study has helped me professionally and personally in ways that I would never have imagined. This journey has introduced me to new equity and inclusion theories, which I have further researched and employed in my career. I also had the opportunity to meet some great people doing tremendous work around the globe. In addition, the process of amplifying the voices of my participants unexpectedly helped me reconnect with my own authenticity. I have been truly inspired by hearing each leader's personal journey, and the

courage that they demonstrate by living leadership. I am beyond grateful for their time, honesty, and wisdom. I leave this research study inspired and encouraged.

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**Appendix A**

**Permission to use Table 2.2 Inclusion Framework**

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