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WHERE AM I?: THE ABSENCE OF THE BLACK MALE FROM THE E-SUITE

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WHERE AM I?: THE ABSENCE OF THE BLACK MALE FROM THE E-SUITE

By

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WHERE AM I?: THE ABSENCE OF THE BLACK MALE FROM THE E-SUITE

By

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WHERE AM I?: THE ABSENCE OF THE BLACK MALE FROM THE E-SUITE

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Abstract

By Brian Bedford

University of the Pacific
2022

According to current U.S. labor statistics, Black male executives are underrepresented in every major industry in the United States. Common impediments preventing Black males from occupying executive positions include workplace white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development. Using critical race theory as a framework, this basic qualitative study investigated the experiences of eight male executives, five Black and three white, from various industries to understand their perceptions and perspectives on race and racism, and examined their workplace lived experiences to study why there are not more Black males in the e-suite. Moreover, strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions were explored.

The results of this study indicated white supremacy and norms are ubiquitous and dominant in the workplace. Consequently, this prevailing workplace ideology determines an organization's culture, policies and practices, and, altogether, trigger traumas for Black males. Black male participants associated many of their workplace experiences with traumas in the forms of white favoritism, marginalization, stereotyping, microinvalidation, and compulsive assimilation. As a coping mechanism, they found support and organizational belonging through social networking in peer relationships and affinity groups, but their white counterparts almost exclusively used networking for career advancement.

An emergent strategy from this study to increase Black male representation in the e-suite was the notion of a designed relationship model between aspiring Black male executives and equity-minded white male executives. However, because scholarship concerning career barriers impeding Black males from executive leadership positions is limited, future research is required to better understand the relationship between their workplace traumas and their underrepresentation.

Keywords: Black male, executive leadership, white supremacy, racism, biculturalism disparate career development, oppression, othering, microaggression, repressive structures.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Black male executives (BMEs) are underrepresented in essentially every major industry in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This chapter will present and examine, at a high level, four key factors that may operate to impede Black males from ascending to the e-suite; white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development. Additionally, it will introduce the four research questions that guided the study, the study's theoretical framework, and define key terms. For the purposes of this study, the e-suite refers to the executive suite or executive positions commonly occupied by top managers of an organization.

Regardless of the industry sector, the homogeneity of the executive leadership is ubiquitous and consistently white male. Major business, professional sports, and education provide examples of the white male's dominance in executive leadership positions. For example, the Fortune 500 is an annual list that ranks 500 of the largest publicly and privately held companies in the United States by total revenue and is a respected publication around the world. White males have traditionally held more than 90% of all Fortune 500 chief executive officer (CEO) positions, and more than 80% of all Fortune 100 board of director seats (Gelles, 2020; Hyter & Bohannon, 2020; Rosette et al., 2008). In its 65-year history, the Fortune 500 has had 19 Black CEOs out of 1,800 (Wahba, 2021). Today it has two Black male CEOs (Giacomazzo, 2021). Major league sports present an even more inequitable narrative.

Of the three major professional sports leagues in the United States, Black males remain absent from the executive leadership notwithstanding being overwhelmingly represented in the respective workforces. In the National Basketball Association, the National Football League,

and Major League Baseball, there are a total of 92 teams. Irrespective of the fact that nearly 75% of the National Basketball Association players and approximately 68% of the National Football League players are Black in addition to a sizable 43% of the players in Major League Baseball being of color, in aggregate, only 19% of all the head coaches are Black (Belson, 2019; Hill, 2020; Rosenberg, 2021; Townsend, 2019; Zillgitt, 2021).

Lastly, according to American Council on Education (2017), there were slightly more than 20 million students enrolled in Title IV public colleges and universities. Title IV institutions are those that accept federal student aid. Black students represented approximately 12.4% of enrollment in more than 6,600 postsecondary Title IV institutions. However, Black leaders held just over 8% of the presidencies at these same institutions (American Council on Education, 2017; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2018).

The Fortune 500, major professional sports, and higher education are three significant, distinct, industry sectors with diverse workforces, customers or fanatics, and students; yet white males disproportionately dominate the executive leadership positions in all of them. Achieving racial equity in executive leadership positions depends on many factors such as the organizations' location, the industry sector, and the racial diversity of the candidate pool (Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013; Smith, 2002). However, regardless of educational achievement or work experience, BMEs lag in representation in every significant industry sector. Statistically, the lack of BME leadership in major industry sectors seems to echo a similar and resounding message there may be sociopolitical determinants influencing their absence.

There are many academic presumptions that offer rational reasons why Black males are underrepresented in executive leadership, but the scholarship is sparse (Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Lowe, 2013; Ospina & Su, 2009). Varying hypotheses suggest white

supremacy, racism, systemic racial discrimination, bias, and intercultural differences as some of the reasons for the absence of Black males in these roles (Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Lowe, 2013; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Taylor, 1998). Some intellectuals argue whites in executive leadership positions practice racial homophily, a predisposition to better relate with others who look like them, to maintain the legacy of white male leadership to protect white power and privilege (Bottero, 2007; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Yuan & Gay, 2006). For the past decade, industry bellwethers in the technical sector, professional sports leagues, financial services, and manufacturing have made public declarations promising to intensify efforts and focus corporate objectives to increase diversity among executive leadership; however, representation has remained chronically static as evidenced by the numbers of Black executives.

By 2043, people of color are projected to be the racial majority in the United States, which may have implications on how businesses behave (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; Wilson 2016). This racial demographic inversion from majority white people to people of color portends a prospective shift in consumer product preference and demand driven by diverse consumer purchasing power. In 2019, white people represented approximately 76.2% of the U.S. population, and spent $13.2 trillion on consumer products (Catalyst, 2020). Although Black people made up only 13.4% of the U.S. population, they accounted for $1.4 trillion dollars in annual consumer spending, and Latinx at 18.6% of the population spent an additional $1.7 trillion annually (Catalyst, 2020). Demographic and economic data suggest diverse consumer spending is already impacting both product categories and entire industry sectors; thus, companies cannot ignore their consumer voice without potential negative impacts (Nielsen, 2018). If preferences shift, new product offerings must be introduced, or the redesigning of some existing offerings may be required to meet the prospective and differentiated demand. A

company's product offering is inextricably related to consumer demand, which is linked to

innovation and design. Innovation and design are commonly inspired by the leadership of the

organization and articulated in the strategic plan. Because of his lived experiences, a BME may

have a greater understanding of the prospective market majority, have a more significant cultural

connection to it, and be more attentive and readily responsive to its requirements. These

intangible facets of executive leadership coupled with the racial demographic inversion may

invariably translate into greater sales. An example of this phenomenon is the rise in popularity

of the Chrysler 300 vehicle in the early 2000s. Originally introduced by General Motors (GM)

in 1955, this family-style sedan went through several iterations while historically experiencing

modest sales (Demandt, 2020; Stern, 2020). After several consecutive years of being mired by

poor sales in the late 1990s, GM made a dramatic strategic decision about its leadership. In

2003, it hired Ed Wellum, a Black male, as its vice president of design (Witherspoon, 2010).

Two years later, he was named vice president of global design, responsible for all of GM's

design centers, and the first person to occupy such a role in GM history. Wellum subsequently

named Ralph Gilles, also a Black man, to lead the redesign of the Chrysler 300. An article

published in 2008 by Strategic Vision, an auto-industry focused research-based consulting firm,

included a quote from an automobile industry strategist that said, "Understanding the hearts and

minds of the ethnic buyer is relevant for the entire automotive industry as the likes and

preferences of African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos are more likely to shape

opinions in the US" (Auto Spies, 2008, para. 9). Gilles' redesign was done so with the Black

male as the target audience. In 2004, GM introduced Gilles' version of the Chrysler 300, and

sales increased nearly six-fold of what they were the previous year (Demandt, 2020). Besides

winning several personal awards for his design, Gilles' interpretation of the 300 won several

industry awards, including Motor Trend Car of the Year, Automobile Magazine Automobile of

the Year, Car and Driver 10 Best Cars, AutoWeek Reader's Choice Award, the Detroit Free

Press Car of the Year, and the Detroit News Car of the Year (New Car Test Drive, 2005). This

example is illustrative of the theory that a corporation's success may heavily depend upon its

ability to connect and communicate with its prospective new market when there is a shift in the

racial makeup of the majority of consumer (Jamison, 2017; Karim, 2003). Diverse corporate

executive leadership may be vital to both the consumer relationship and financial success of

corporations.

Notwithstanding the prospective demand for racial diversity in the e-suite, and despite the

demonstration of leadership prowess, the Black male's occupancy of the e-suite faces

tremendous challenges from both discriminatory corporate cultures and pervasive societal

racism. In 2020, 226 Black people were murdered at the hands of law enforcement (Statista

Research Department; 2021). This made up 22.5% of all killings by law enforcement for the

year; of these, a disproportionate number of the killers were white officers, and a

disproportionate number of the victims were Black men. The number of Black men murdered

was so incessant their homicides became the summer's top news stories nearly every night and

disquieted the country's apparent racial apathy. Several of the deaths were captured on camera.

The video footage, and subsequent narratives intimating white supremacy, appeared to motivate

some major corporations to remove and replace long-standing racist brand mascots to avoid

potential social, political, and financial repercussions (Mull, 2020; Taylor, 2020). The Quaker

Oat Company, Mars Incorporated, Pinnacle Foods, and B & G Food Holdings Corporation,

makers of Aunt Jemimah syrup, Uncle Ben's Rice, Mrs. Butterworth's syrup, and Cream of

Wheat rice, respectively, make up part of the list of industry icons that responded to racial

discord with mascot makeovers. Quaker Oats Company changed the name of its Aunt Jemimah syrup to Pearl Milling Company and removed the smiling 19th century "mammy" minstrel character logo it adopted 131 years ago (Vigdor, 2021). Similarly, Mars Incorporated, maker of Uncle Ben's Rice and Cream of Wheat, which both had images of an older Black man in a chef's hat smiling on the boxes, changed the name of its rice products to Ben's Original and removed the epitome of a Black slave chef from all products. Despite the changes, the timing of their reactions seemed suspicious. Such tectonic shifts in branding and marketing raised questions about the catalysts for doing something different. The Aunt Jemimah brand debuted in 1889, followed by Uncle Ben's Rice in 1893. These are both longstanding and widely recognized brands whose mascots' popularity were commensurate with their substantial market share. It is rare, and may be unprecedented, for century-old franchises to indiscriminately remake their legendary iconographies so suddenly and uniformly; yet they did. At first blush, it appeared to be furtive attempts to preemptively mollify prospective public wrath by changing slave-inspired and racially insensitive brand mascots to more contemporary representations. Nevertheless, massive mascot makeovers like these may represent dramatic and significant changes in corporate strategy concerning racial sensitivity, specifically toward Black people. Or maybe these vagaries will join the long list of actions that have helped coin the United States a "10-day nation" where issues of national interest stay relevant for 10 days before fading (Rice, 2020, para. 1). Whether these corporate changes represent more distracting barricades operating to protect the corpus of white supremacy, or whether they are sincere strategic pivots, white executives who once seemed to have no concerns with the slave-inspired branding made the changes while remaining in their leadership positions.

Change has radical implications. Meaningful change is rarely easy because it typically involves doing something dramatically different and the reallocation or reprioritization of resources, which can unduly advantage some, while disproportionately disadvantaging others. For some people, a change in corporate executive leadership, where Black males are more substantially represented, exemplifies radical change as it signals the displacement of white male executives. Given white men overwhelmingly represent corporate power and authority and occupy most corporate executive positions, for them, change of this sort may evoke feelings of dislocation, supplantation, or deficit (Gelles, 2020; Hyter & Bohannon, 2020; Rosette et al., 2008). Consequently, change that includes the reassignment of who sits in a finite number of executive seats may induce trepidation, avoidance, or denial for white males responsible to make such decisions. Therefore, to comprehensively understand how to effect change and increase Black male representation in the e-suite, it is necessary to include the white male executive's perspective and insights because their corporate positionality may be essential to transformative change. To not include or dismiss the white male executives' voice in this study may have created an intellectual void and be a massive oversight.

This study was guided by two fundamental questions:

- Why are there not more Black males in executive leadership positions?
- What can be done to improve Black male representation?

Although Black women face challenges equally as oppressive, destructive, and traumatizing as Black men, and in some instances maybe even more so, their experiences are distinct, and their narrative is unique in many ways. This work was narrowly focused on Black males and some of the key systemic and oppressive factors that may have frustrated their ascension into executive leadership positions because literature was sparse on this topic, and the topic was personal to me.

The key factors included white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development. Each of these sociocultural determinants will be briefly discussed to set the context for the purpose and significance of this study. Understanding the lived experiences of Black and white male executives, interpreting their perspectives, and articulating the innovative and prospective solutions that emerged that may advance Black male executive representation will also be important elements of discussion.

The lack of diversity in executive leadership has just recently become a more prominent topic of corporate discussion. However, due to sensitive contributing factors such as white supremacy and race that may encumber diversity advancement, the discussions are often more symbolic than substantive. Evidence of the reticence to genuinely and honestly explore this topic is an article published in Wall Street Journal, entitled "What's Keeping Black Workers from Moving Up the Corporate Ladder?" (Fuhrmans & Chen, 2021). This provocative title asks a relevant question that was representative of the times; however, the story significantly lacked substance because it failed to meaningfully address omnipresent influential factors in the workplace such as race, racism, and organizational repressive structures that may severely frustrate Black males' path to the e-suite. This study explored key factors, regardless of sensitivity and difficulty, in hopes of better understanding the phenomenon and developing solutions to increase Black male executive representation.

In this study, the word Black is capitalized in acknowledgement and regard for Black male marginalization not only in the workplace, but in society at large. Its capitalization is designed to highlight Black males and promote their presence, significance, and value. The phrase *white people* is used as a parlance, or general statement, to identify a common, yet nonspecific group, of white people. It is also used to attempt to frame or explain a larger more pervasive

perspective of some white people. White people is not used for the purposes of representing all white people, nor all of the possible beliefs, perspectives, or ideologies they may hold.

For this study, executive leadership positions are defined as those with titles such as president, vice president, or executive director, or those with work scopes and responsibilities commensurate with these titles. It was necessary to evaluate prospective participants' work scopes and responsibilities prior to their inclusion in the study because some organizations may use different titles for roles that have duties equivalent to common titles such as vice president. Additionally, the executive level roles must be directing or leading a group in an organizational work setting. A more comprehensive definition of executive leadership position is provided in the Study Participant section of Chapter 3.

Problem of Practice

Black males may be disproportionately underrepresented in corporate executive leadership positions in part due to four key factors: white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development (Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Lowe, 2013; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Taylor, 1998). Each of these factors is briefly discussed to set the context for the purpose and significance of this study. Although the dimensions of oppression are clandestine, complex, and multifaceted, the aforementioned aspects or key factors consistently reveal themselves in the literature as significant contributors to the onerous Black male experience and underrepresentation in the workplace (Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Lowe, 2013; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Taylor, 1998; Woodson, 2016).

White Supremacy

White supremacy was once readily, albeit fallaciously, identified by its members' emblematic white hoods and robes. Today, white supremacy seems to be an amorphously

stealthy, sanctimonious, and systemic cudgel used to maintain white power and privilege. It is

an ideology that proclaims white superiority over all other races and posits all major societal

powers including political, economic, and cultural should be controlled by white people (Bell,

1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Cornileus, 2010; Freire, 1972; Taylor, 1998; West et al., 1995).

White supremacy is undergirded by the social construction of race and fortified by racial

discrimination, stereotyping, implicit bias, and othering, the alienation of one group from another

to create advantages (Bell, 1992; Brons, 2015; Cornileus, 2010; Freire, 1972; West, 1996). In

her book *Caste*, Wilkerson (2020) discussed the evolution of the obscure U.S. caste system and

drew a parallel between race and caste by claiming both to be artificial constructions that attempt

to define human value by presuming one is superior and presuming others are inferior. For the

past 250 years, white supremacy has demonstrated its generational endurance and sociocultural

adaptability to perniciously dismantle the Black U.S. family, in particularly persecuting Black

males paternally, physically, and psychologically. From the antebellum period through today's

mass incarceration, Black males have disproportionately shouldered the ferocious animus and

catastrophic carnage that accompanies white supremacy (Bell, 1992; West et al., 1995).

Wilkerson (2020) claimed:

> Slavery was not merely an unfortunate thing that happened to black people. It was an
> American innovation, an American institution created by and for the benefit of the elites
> of the dominant caste and enforced by poorer members of the dominant caste who tied
> their lot to the caste system rather than to their consciences. (p. 44)

In the workplace, white supremacy seems to function as an integral facet of oppression

because it promotes an obscure foundational dogma that is catalytic to Black male oppression.

Consistent with the philosophy of white sovereignty, white is supreme and Black is to be

subjugated (Bell, 1992; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996). Accordingly, Black males are sometimes

cajoled into thinking they are inferior to their white counterparts by white corporate leadership,

and subjected to marginalization, microaggressions, and racial discrimination to support the notion (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Pitcan et al., 2018; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996). These transgressions, repeated multiple times daily, may be perpetrated by depreciatory or prejudicial words or actions concerning race or gender with the objective of conveying disrepute (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Karim, 2003; Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2009). Pitcan et al. (2018) examined the experiences of 12 corporate Black men and found—due to the regular undermining of their work product by white superiors and peers—they deduced a sense of implied or presumed inferiority. Being repetitively subjected to disparaging experiences can have a cumulative and insidious effect on the human psyche (Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Sue et al., 2009). Frequent managerial ostracization and discriminatory behaviors may begin to support unreliable self-imposed questions of value, contribution, and belonging in the workplace. Black males seem to become unsettled by this kind of psychological trauma, which can ultimately lead to self-doubt and immeasurably erode self-confidence in addition to promote health concerns (Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Bottero, 2007; Castilla, 2008). The lack of self-confidence resulting from an insufficient sense of belonging may eventually begin to negatively affect performance in the workplace. As a result of less-than-optimal performance, negative stereotypes may merge to shape a depreciative, yet specious, narrative about Black males, which seemingly then justifies their oppression and exclusion from executive leadership positions.

Biculturalism

Biculturalism represents another characteristic of oppression that impedes Black male progression in the corporate workplace. Du Bois (1989) coined the phrase double consciousness, or biculturalism, to mainly describe a Black person's attempt to assimilate and balance the norms and mores of two disparate cultures in two distinct environments; one culture predominately

Black outside of work and another predominately white while at work (Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Karim, 2003; Lowe, 2013; Ogbor, 2001). In many corporate environments, cultural conformity and relationships seem to be cryptically understood by the white people as the main ingredient for promotion, while others pursue advancement based upon an elusive meritocratic alchemy. Conformity is signified by adherence to the dominant white culture, including its values, attire, choice of words, social group affiliations, and other behaviors (Cornileus, 2013; Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013; Ogbor, 2001). Thus, if aspiring Black males desire corporate advancement, obedience to white norms and ideals, whether genuine or feigned, may be a prerequisite. Black males seem to be consistently faced with the difficult choice of attempting assimilation into the white work culture and accept the implicit abnegation or risk career suicide. The former implies compromising their personal values and consent with their own oppression, but the later may prevent career advancement and occupation of an executive seat (Bell, 1992; Friere, 1972; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Karim, 2003; West et al., 1995).

For Black males, attempting to straddle two divergent worlds creates confusion and makes having confidence in either world problematic (Bottero, 2007; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Du Bois, 1989; Rosette et al., 2008; West, 1996). An illustrative example of this is if a Black man in a meeting with white colleagues passionately waves his arms while settling a point of contention, he may be perceived as an angry Black man. An angry Black man in this context is characterized as unpredictable and may violently strike another for no apparent reason. Stereotypically acting a certain way is a sociological perception of a person's behavior most often associated with the negative characteristics or traits of a particular race or ethnicity (Devaraj et al., 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Guy, 2014; Rosette et al.,

2008). Cornileus (2013) contended "the stereotype of the angry Black man is common in corporate America and can spell career suicide for African American men" (p. 453).

Contrarily, if the same Black man goes home and practices the accepted norms and mores used to navigate the workplace, he risks being exiled. He may be maligned as stereotypically acting white, or being a sellout, or somehow less than Black. Ogbor (2001) stated, "Participation in a corporation in effect entails the replacement of one's identity with that of the organization's" (p. 597). Code switching, the art of repeatedly alternating between two or more cultures, can be both exhausting and perilous for Black males in the workplace (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Du Bois, 1989; Harris-Cornileus, 2010; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008). As a result, biculturalism may cause psychological trauma by creating difficulty reconciling one's individual and cultural identity with traits and tenets sanctioned by the organization.

Repressive Structures

Repressive structures are multidimensional and represent dynamic facets of oppression. These structures exemplify organizational norms and practices that deliberately work to maintain the status quo of privilege, position, and power (Freire, 1972; Guy, 2014; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jasmine, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008). For Black males in the workplace, successfully navigating the assembly of workplace despotism is tantamount to attempting to solve a riddle, wrapped in an enigma, cloaked in a smile. It may be at best difficult for Black males to discern why or how obstruction to executive positions is chronically experienced. Harris-Cornileus (2016) offered four significant repressive structures that impact Black males: (a) negative stereotypes, (b) lack of corporate appreciation for diversity, (c) differentiated acquisition of sociopolitical capital, (d) and subjective and disparate career development practices. All four of the structures are briefly explained to provide greater context.

Negative stereotypes attributed to Black males derived from mythical social narratives, malevolent untruths, or subjective isolated experiences can operate to help keep Black males out of executive leadership level positions (Cornileus, 2010; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008; Smith, 2002). Some undesirable workplace attributions, such as being unintelligent, lazy, or confrontational, may be precipitated by sociocultural typecasts constructed about Black males outside of the workplace. As a result, condemning characteristics about Black males can already be in the workplace before they arrive. These externally ascribed disparagements are then attributed to Black males in the workplace with the same venomous conviction to produce fallacious personas (Guy, 2014; Park-Yancy, 2006; Powell & Menendian, 2016; Rosette et al., 2008). A widely accepted corporate maxim is one's reputation precedes him. Said differently, a person's reputation arrives before he does. If true, pervasive negative stereotypes can be massively disruptive to a BME aspirant's career trajectory (Guy, 2014; Jamison, 2017; Karim, 2003; Rosette et al., 2008). Therefore, it may logically follow that widely held denigrations about Black males may be more than enough to discount or eliminate them from promotional consideration especially for executive positions.

When considered in the context of the United States' historic anathema for racial harmony, the lack of corporate appreciation for diversity may not shock the consciousness. The concept of human difference based on race is socially and systemically designed to ensure hierarchical distinction (Castilla, 2008; DiAngelo, 2018; Lowe, 2013; Phillips & Lowery, 2018; West, 1996). It may be an erroneous, yet inexorable, U.S. inculcation that white is supreme, and Black is to be subjugated. This is one of the tenets the United States was built upon. White supremacy is such a central component to this nation's rise, it is nearly impossible to disaggregate the two. Subsequently, because white people by and large hold most of the power

and positionality, a disproportionate share of the burden to effect change may rest with them. However, to date, there has been no development of a social design by white people to harmoniously acknowledge and appreciate racial difference as equal in this country or in the workplace which otherwise reinforces white supremacy (Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Rice, 2020; West, 1996).

Black males may also lack the requisite sociopolitical capital in the organization to ascend to executive leadership positions. Sociopolitical capital includes possessing critical information for decision making, having an influential network or relationships with people in positions of power, and access to key resources that can effect change (Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008). It operates as a form of workplace currency and may disadvantage Black males in the workplace because they often do not have access to the requisite information, positions of influence, or opportunities to build it (Castilla, 2011; Guy, 2014; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008; Woodson, 2016). White people may excessively acquire sociopolitical capital, when compared to other groups, because of their relational networks undergirded by white supremacy. Parks-Yancy (2006) claimed sociopolitical capital is acquired primarily through exchanges of resources among homogeneously white networks because marginalized groups lack access to the same resources. White people seem to be afforded access to information before other groups, are unduly in positions of power to influence circumstances more than other groups and can continuously manufacture opportunities for one another to maintain both positionality and homophily unlike other groups (Castilla, 2011; Park-Yancy, 2006; Rosette et al., 2008; Woodson, 2016). Black males do not have relationships with the white executives in this way; thus, the accumulation of sociopolitical capital seems to be extremely challenging (Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Woodson, 2016). A pathway to

gain sociopolitical capital may be for Black males to attempt to assimilate and subscribe to white norms and mores; however, this approach forces them back to negotiate the dichromatic detriments of biculturalism.

Disparate Career Development

Another component of oppression in the workplace is the unevenly applied corporate career development strategies that may disproportionately affect Black males' advancement due to covert, subjective, and discriminatory practices. When opportunities appear to be offered to employees based on race and Blacks are not included, career development can be weaponized as a form of a repressive structure (Castilla, 2011; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017). Employee developmental strategies commonly include opportunities for job enrichment, a documented criteria for assignment of key projects, promotional guidelines, performance management metrics, and mentorship (Cornileus, 2013; Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013). Obscurity of opportunities and information can make employee selection for development suspicious and promote the perception of favoritism, bias, or discrimination. When Black males seem to be chosen for opportunities at an inexplicably lower rate than their white counterparts, as evidenced by the data, race may be factored into the selection calculus. Cornileus (2013) discovered, from interviews of 14 Black men in mid-management or higher corporate positions, policies and practices concerning career development regularly lacked process, transparency, and accountability resulting in fewer people of color being selected for development opportunities. White executives in position of power seem to commonly look for acceptable corporate traits and individuals exemplifying those traits known as *golden children*. Golden children are typically characterized as white employees held in high regard by executive leadership and whose traits and behaviors represent a corporate archetype for success (Clark, 2018; Woodson, 2016).

Because corporate leadership is predominately white and often fraught with subjectivity, golden

children seem to be consistently chosen for career development. Incongruously, Clark (2018)

explained when Black employees exemplify golden child behaviors they are not recognized and

the behaviors may have the opposite effect by casting them as too aggressive, confrontational,

and arrogant. Subjective and capricious selection practices such as this may systematically arrest

the development of aspiring BMEs because they are not afforded development opportunities

evenly to their white colleagues (Guy, 2014; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008; Smith 2002).

Harris-Cornileus (2016) found white males were regularly and favorably selected for key

strategic assignments, promotions, and leadership opportunities to the detriment of other

employee groups.

Although academic literature exclusively focusing on Black males and their career

development experience is scant, the literature does suggest instances when career development

for white males and people of color is comparable. White employees and employees of color

sometimes experience equitable development opportunities and promote at the same or similar

rate at the lower levels of the organization chart (Cornileus, 2013; Karim, 2003; Lowe, 2013;

Ogbor, 2001). However, if and when the stakes are raised because the available position is

perceived as a leadership role or having significant influence, favoritism, bias, and

discrimination in the hiring process seems to reappear (Cornileus, 2010; Jamison, 2017; Ogbor,

2001). And, once again, Black male advancement is stunted.

Altogether, the edifice of oppression seems to create the experience of the proverbial

corporate *glass ceiling* for Black males. In the corporate workplace, the glass ceiling gives the

illusion executive leadership is equally attainable by all who are willing to work hard and earn it.

However, the established meritocratic system that undergirds advancement seems to be a

subjective one with standards of measure that are essentially designed to complement white values and attributes and devalue all others (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Castilla, 2011; Cornileus, 2010; Littler, 2013; Ogbor, 2001; Phillips & Lowery, 2018). Consequently, corporate advancement to the e-suite for Black males may be thwarted if—and when—their values and attributes do not comport with the accepted white standard of measure.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of Black and white executives in the workplace through the lens of racism and propose strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions. Better understanding this phenomenon may offer insights that lead to effective strategies to increase Black male representation in the e-suite.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research are:

1) In what ways do Black males experience racial oppression within the context of career advancement?

2) What impediments do white male executives perceive as hindering Black males' opportunity to lead organizations?

3) What existing strategies, approaches, or tactics are effective in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions?

4) What new and emerging strategies, approaches, or tactics would be more helpful in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions in the corporate workplace?

Significance

This research codified the study participants' workplace experiences related to race and provide insights to strategic practices that may operate to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions. This work added to existing literature by specifically examining

the Black and white males' workplace perceptions from a racial perspective. The principal focus was to understand how racism is perceived by both groups, and to specifically learn what impediments white executives recognize as obstructions to Black male ascension. Concurrently, this work identified existing strategies to improve Black male executive representation and suggested the development of additional strategies based on the learning.

Research focusing exclusively on impediments hindering Black male advancement in a corporate setting is sparse. The strategies developed from this research may offer guidance to aspiring BME leaders and white executives who desire to increase the racial diversity of those who occupy the executive seats in the organizations they lead. This research primarily focused on how white supremacy and racism, along with other key factors such as biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development practices, frustrate the advancement of Black males into executive leadership positions. Although the data collected was centrally focused on Black males, the general learning and practices developed may serve white executives and be universally applied to other populations of color in the workplace. The product of this study may effectively assist its users in increasing BME representation in corporations.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) functioned as the theoretical framework guiding this research. Its premise is predicated on the assumption white supremacy and racism are both well-steeped and rife in the cultural fabric of the United States. Furthermore, it posits the notion that white supremacy and racism operate to subjugate and marginalize people of color while protecting white privilege, power, and position (Bell, 1992; Freire, 1972; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996).

CRT is particularly applicable to this study as an analytical lens because, historically, Black males have been subjugated and subordinated in the workplace and research revealed racism as a key factor. It rejects the idea meritocracy, as espoused by the white majority in the workplace, is an objective standard of measure (Carter, 2015; Castilla, 2011; Cornileus, 2010; Littler, 2013; Ogbor, 2001; Phillips & Lowery, 2018). The framework insists, in meritocracy, white people have designed and institutionalized a systemic standard of measure that inherently devalues people of color such that equity and equality remain elusive. CRT provided a template for a reasoned examination of the Black male experience in the corporate workplace and afforded an academic lens to articulate the impact race and racism have on Black males' lack of representation at the executive levels.

Delimitations

This research took place from January 2021 to June 2021 in Sacramento, California. Study participants included five BME leaders and three white male executive leaders from various industries in northern California who led or recently led organizations of at least 500 employees and, as defined by the study, were considered to be at the executive leader level. The selected study participants' views represented a small sample of the many perspectives and sentiments that exist concerning the absence of the BME from the e-suite. Their experiences, perspectives, and depictions of events were not intended or designed to represent the entirety of deliberation on this topic, but merely offer some insight into the phenomenon of Black male oppression in the workplace. Specifically, the executive leader participant must have held the title of CEO, chancellor, executive director, senior vice president, vice president, deputy or associate vice chancellor, or the equivalent, or have held at least one of these positions in the past 3 years. He must also have had either ascended the ranks to his executive role in the same

company or have been in the same industry for at least 10 years before assuming his position. I fit the profile of the Black male study participant and will discuss my subjectivity and methods to safeguard accuracy and objectivity of this study in Chapter 3. The complete research design is also outlined in detail in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to ensure clarity in this study:

Executive leadership: Holding a position of chief executive officer, executive director, vice president or the equivalent in a workplace and have senior managerial responsibilities including primarily practicing organizational and people management (U.S. Legal, n.d.).

White supremacy: White supremacy is a belief white people are superior above all other races and proposes major societal powers including political, economic, and cultural are best controlled by white people (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Crenshaw, 2011; Freire, 1972; Nichols, 2019; Werner, 2018; West et al., 1995).

Biculturalism: Biculturalism refers to a person balancing living separate identities in two distinct cultures. It is putatively used to insinuate a Black person's double consciousness created by attempting to maintain his connection to Black culture and values while navigating integration into the divergent white culture (Bell, 1992; Du Bois, 1989; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Ogbor, 2001; West, 1996).

Repressive structures: Repressive structures are systemic and organizational impediments that work together to oppress and suppress people of color to maintain white people's control of position, power, and wealth (Freire, 1972; Guy, 2014; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008).

Chapter Summary

Black males may be inequitably represented in corporate executive leadership level positions in the United States in part due to key factors such as white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development opportunities. The disproportionate underrepresentation of BMEs exists in every major industry in the United States when compared to their white male counterparts (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2016). By 2043, racial demographics in the United States are anticipated to invert from predominantly white people to people of color making up most of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; Wilson, 2016). Moreover, the majority-minority racial demographic shift can ultimately affect the racial composition of the workforce and may substantially change organizational cultures, pivot market preferences, and call into question the ability of a white person to effectively lead predominantly diverse organizations. Despite the prospective demand for racially diverse executives in the corporate workplace, the oppressive systems upon which the United States were built seem to frustrate Black males' ascension to the e-suite. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of both Black and white executives in the workplace through the lens of racism and propose strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions.

This research added to existing literature by specifically examining the experiences of BMEs with insights from white male executives to understand the lack of BME representation in the corporate setting. The strategies learned from this research may offer guidance to Black males who desire to hold executive leadership positions, and to white males who are in corporate executive leaderships and wish to effect transformative change. CRT served as the theoretical foundation for this study and provided a lens to understand the experiences of the study

participants. Although scholarship exclusively focusing on Black males' experience in the

workplace was very limited, it suggested advancement to the executive levels is obstructed

partially due to factors noted at the beginning of this chapter summary.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of both Black and white executives in the workplace through the lens of racism and propose strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions. Through the lens of CRT, this literature review examines four key factors that may impede Black male ascension into executive leadership positions in the corporate workplace: (a) white supremacy, (b) biculturalism, (c) repressive structures, and (d) disparate career development. Four research questions guided this study:

1) In what ways do Black males experience racial oppression within the context of career advancement?

2) What impediments do white male executives perceive as hindering Black males' opportunity to lead organizations?

3) What existing strategies, approaches, or tactics are effective in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions?

4) What new and emerging strategies, approaches, or tactics would be more helpful in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions in the corporate workplace?

Essential to the premise of CRT is the notion race and racism are endemic in the United States and operate to sow white supremacy into the social order such that the subjugation of Blacks is a societal norm (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Cornileus, 2013). Although Black male oppression in corporate America is comprised of a composition of concentrated influencers, the four key factors highlighted are strongly and repeatedly represented in the scholarship as significant. Although each has its own defining characteristics, they are all woven together in a tapestry of oppression that is fabricated to facilitate the persecution of Black males in the scope of the workplace. Black males are disproportionately underrepresented in executive

leadership positions when compared to their white male counterparts (Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Lowe, 2013; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Taylor, 1998). By 2043, the majority population in the United States is anticipated to invert from being predominantly white to predominantly people of color (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; Wilson, 2016). As the nation's demographics change, the workforce demographics are shifting as well. Educational achievement is one of the fundamental tenets and essential pathways to gainful employment, advancement, and prosperity (Autor, 2014; Cheng & Peterson, 2018; Horowitz, 2018). As more people of color are educated, their prospective employment opportunities should become more abundant. Increased academic achievement by people of color and long-term labor force projections anticipate that people of color will make up most of the working class by 2032 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020; Wilson, 2016). This racial population and workforce transposition may not only have a dramatic impact on the sociocultural norms of the nation, and subsequently influence market trends and product offerings but may also influence the notion of what constitutes effective corporate leadership. In anticipation of the inversion of the racial makeup of the United States, research institutions have begun to examine different facets of its prospective effect. Coqual is a 16-year-old highly reputable international advisory group that produces research on matters of equity and workplace advancement for underrepresented populations (Coqual, 2019). It includes a very diverse and accomplished board of directors with comprehensive international industry business experience and a staff that is responsible for producing acclaimed reports on *Disabilities and Inclusion*, *Latinos at Work: Unleashing the Power of Culture*, and *Being Black in Corporate America.* Coqual's research has been integral to the articulation of workplace inequity and a valuable data resource used to promote the corporate advancement of underrepresented populations. In 2019, as part of its research for its *Being Black*

in Corporate America report, Coqual conducted a national survey online and over the phone of 3,736 respondents to better understand the Black professional experience in the workplace (Coqual, 2019). The respondents included 1,398 men, of whom 203 were Black and between the ages of 21 and 65 years, currently employed, and had achieved at least a baccalaureate degree. According to Coqual (2019), based upon national degree completion rates in comparison with their white counterparts, the Fortune 500 should have 29 Black CEOs instead of three. In this modern era of technology and consciousness, this new dominant and racially diverse consumer may recognize his access to and the power of information and demand more corporate transparency and responsibility. Furthermore, this new majority-minority consumer may increase his product awareness and have distinct product preferences with more purchasing power than ever before (Mull, 2020). This fresh consumer cognizance can be authoritatively demanding in the marketplace. Consequently, diversity in executive leadership positions may become more critical to remain competitive in the innovative and dynamic marketplace by creating cultural connections with the newfangled consumers and fostering greater brand loyalty (Jamison, 2017; Spriggs, 2020).

Chronic and pervasive racial disparity and underrepresentation of Black males at the corporate executive leadership levels could suggest a concentration of oppressive factors may be at play. This literature review examines four key factors that may be key contributors in explaining the Black males' oppression in the workplace and their absence from the e-suite; white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development. It is important to explore other factors, along with white supremacy, which may be at play because the phenomenon appears to be dynamic, complex, and nuanced. Moreover, this study uniquely chronicled the perspectives and lived experiences of both Black and white male executives in the

same study to juxtapose their insights in search of comprehensive solutions to increase Black

male executive (BME) representation and help to fill a research gap. CRT was used as a

conceptual framework or lens to observe the four key factors noted above that may operate to

obstruct aspiring Black males' from occupying to the e-suite (see Figure 1). Because literature

exclusively examining the impediments that primarily affect Black males' ascension into

corporate executive positions is limited, further research is required to better understand the

relationship between key obstructing factors and BME underrepresentation.
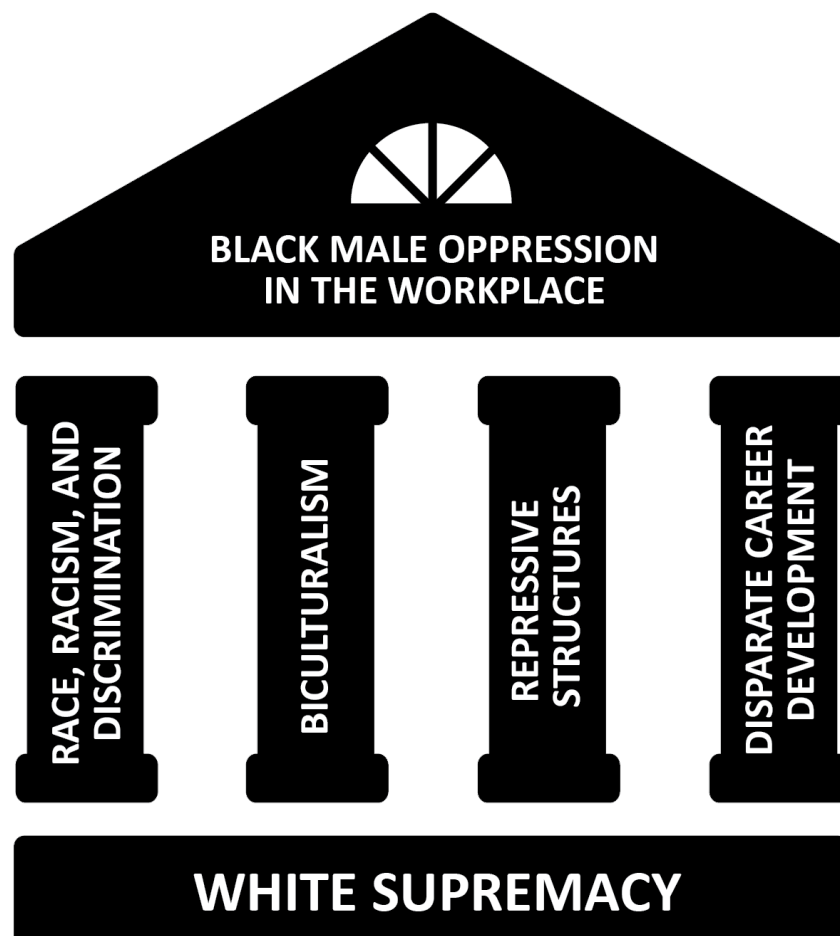
Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Edifice of oppression.

CRT

CRT was born of critical theory. Critical theory was originally conceived in Germany's Frankfurt school in the 1930s by theoreticians Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Max Horkheimer (Bronner, 2017). It posits societal structures, norms, and assumptions create more social problems than other individual influences (Bell, 1992; Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2017; Horkheimer, 1972; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Functionally, critical theory uses the inquiry method to expose authoritarianism and set forth notions of deconstruction of oppressive power (Bohman, 2019; Bronner, 2017; Horkheimer, 1972). Bohman (2019) confirmed "critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms" (p. 1). Early application of critical theory in education is attributed to Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher who coined the phrase critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire challenges the traditional hierarchical relationship between teacher and student and proposes they relate as co-creators of knowledge.

Developed in the 1970s, CRT asserts the social construct of race was conceived by white people to advance their social, political, and economic welfare to the detriment of people of color (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Du Bois, 1995; Friere, 1972; Nichols, 2019; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996). Cornileus (2013) emphasized, "The main emphasis of CRT is that race and racism are endemic to the U.S. social order such that they serve to normalize the racial power of whites in the United States while further subordinating Blacks" (p. 18). Pseudo-human distinctions, such as race, and the accompanying loathsome and false narratives were specifically manufactured to malign Black people and fortify the institutions of white supremacy, power, and privilege (Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Russell-Brown, 2008). Racism, the discriminatory and

controlling expression of the white supremacy ideology, is indispensable to CRT because it supports the fictitious conception of race and reinforces through oppressive words and actions racial hierarchical social order. Scholars of CRT argued for the past 250 years that white supremacy and its principles of white dominance, conquest, and tyranny are embedded in the U.S. law and may be responsible for the enslavement, murder, rape, familial fragmentation, disenfranchisement of wealth accumulation, and continued oppression of tens of thousands of Black people (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Du Bois, 1995; Nichols, 2019; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996). In particular, white supremacy promotes the notion western, white, heterosexual males are superior to all other people. West et al. (1995) maintain that whiteness is significant "but it is much more; it remains a concept based on relations of power, a social construct predicated on white dominance and Black subordination" (p. 287).

Critics of CRT counter CRT is not a theoretical framework but rather a conjectural rant to challenge racial oppression, lacks testable hypotheses, and is too reliant on qualitative narratives as data (Farber & Sherry, 1997; Kennedy, 1989). In critiquing CRT, Cabrera (2018) declared critical race theorists often refer to systemic racism and white supremacy as the cause of racial inequality but fail to define a mental model or framework of racism for examination. Nevertheless, advocates of CRT maintain the theory presupposes white supremacy and its values and virtues are sacrosanct, and all other perspectives are deviant and inferior (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996).

White Supremacy

White supremacy is an ideology that proclaims white superiority over all other races and posits all major societal powers, including political, economic, and cultural, should be controlled by white people (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Freire, 1972; Taylor, 1998; Werner, 2018;

West et al., 1995). It is the corpus and foundational dogma that advances notions of white dominance, white privilege, and the subjugation of all others, in particularly Black people. As a hierarchical system of discriminatory policies, practices, and patterns that privilege white people and disadvantage people of color, white supremacy is not new. A review of historical demarcations, such as the antebellum period, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and today's mass incarceration, highlight white supremacy's adaptability, pervasiveness, perseverance, and attempted destruction of Black people (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Du Bois, 1995; Smith, 2002; West, 1996). The tenets of white supremacy may be as central to the United States as the ideal of the "American dream"—the notion that anything is attainable via working hard (Frye, 2019). White supremacy seems to be most antipathetic toward Black people and predominately Black males largely because of the villainous narrative white people have created to perpetuate and justify oppression (Bell, 1972; Cornileus, 2010; Jamison, 2017; Russell-Brown, 2008; West et al., 1995). In the doctrine of white supremacy, Black males are denigrated as bestial savages who are lazy incompetent subhumans incapable of rational thought and conceived as inferior with a high proclivity to commit crime (Cornileus, 2013; Guy, 2014; Russell-Brown, 2008; Taylor, 1998). Boroditsky (2018) shared words shape perceptions and perceptions shape reality. Adhering to her logic, white supremacy's doctrine and tactics may facilitate Black males being more easily ostracized from the majority, besmirched, and then disparaged.

In the corporate workplace, white supremacy can furtively function both implicitly and explicitly inflicting insidious and ruinous destruction of Black males' career (Cornileus, 2010; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013). In practice, white supremacy is virtually inerrant and begets many sociocultural determinants such as race, racism, discrimination,

stereotypes, and othering, the alienation of one group from another to create advantages (Brons, 2015; Jamison, 2017; Powell & Menendian, 2016). They work in concert to reinforce the specious institution of whiteness, its ideologies and positionality as the natural foundational societal order. Simultaneously, it also precipitates many other facets of oppression such as biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development.

Race, Racism, and Discrimination

Race is a social construct created by white people that creates societal hierarchical structure among people with different phenotypes (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Crenshaw, 2011; Freire, 1972; Nichols, 2019; Werner, 2018; West et al., 1995). Black and white people are the most polarized races in the United States largely due to the ease in which either can be discerned (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Lowe, 2013; Smith, 2002; West et al., 1995). Some of the first visual identifiers of race, although many times inaccurate and misleading, are skin tone, facial features, and hair texture. The impacts of these deceptive identifiers are racism, racial stereotyping, implicit biases, and othering which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the United States, the racial hierarchical order presumably begins with white, whiteness, and white people at the top and this disposition exists in nearly every organized community. In his examination of race and epidemiology, the study and analysis of health and disease conditions among various populations of people, Jones (2001) concurred race is a social construct based on social phenotypical classifications but added "race also governs the distribution of risks and opportunities in a race-conscious society" (p. 300). Jones (2001) contended race originated as a means of societal classification and measures a blend of social class, culture, and genetic makeup as defined by the dominant race. Consequently, being Black in the United States implicitly and disproportionately associates one with poverty and ignorance,

although most poor people in the United States are white. In this context, race governing the distribution of risks and opportunities refers to the notion that perils and prospects in the human experience are significantly influenced by race. Despite the divisive societal impacts of the concept of race, humans are biological more similar than dissimilar. In their work on genome sequencing, Venter et al. (2015) discovered the process of determining an organism's complete set of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), although "Every human is unique, every human being shares about 99.9% of his or her DNA with every other human" (p. 1207). This research scientifically dispels the destructive biological dogma of white superiority and confirms the ideology that we are all one human race.

Racism is a complex and nuanced system of white power, subjugation, and discrimination based on race (Cornileus, 2013; DiAngelo, 2018; Lowe, 2013; Pager & Shepard, 2008; Phillips & Lowery, 2018; West et al., 1995). It is an amorphous and ubiquitous force that permeates every facet of U.S. society with a devastatingly impactful force including the corporate workplace. Racism in the United States is rarely, if ever, spoken of, but is commonly and surreptitiously practiced predominately by white people against Black people with the greatest ferocity (Taylor, 1998; West, 1996; Woodson, 2016). As a nuanced autocratic social order, racism promotes whiteness and white supremacy and the disparate treatment or racist acts against Black people and others of color who are ostensibly believed to be inferior (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Guy, 2014; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Lowe, 2013; Ogbor, 2001). Intentionality is not a prerequisite of a racist transgression. Jones (2001) described racism as an oppressive system of control undergirded by a racial construct that assigns titles and meanings to phenotypical traits, which ultimately unfairly advantage some while disproportionately disadvantaging others. White people have historically used terms such as nigger, coon, sambo,

negro, and colored in reference to Black people to signal condemnation, inferiority, and

subhumanness. By embedding these racist and pernicious terms into the U.S. lexicon in

association with Blacks, the terms operate to fundamentally disadvantage Blacks because they

indicate disparagement and disdain. Wilkerson (2020), which compares race and racism to

casteism, contended that caste or the artificial construction of human supremacy is:

> Insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things. (p. 70)

An oppressive system suggests racism is designed into the very structure of the American

experience including its culture, policies, and practices. This structural design minimizes the

role of the traditionally identifiable perpetrator but provides advantages to white people. For

example, in the 1970s, cosmetic companies such as Covergirl, Loreal, and Maybelline regularly

ran television commercials advertising their makeups, hair products, and beauty creams.

Virtually all the models depicted in the advertisements were skinny white women. The

metamessage was thin and white is beautiful. Tate and Fink (2019) underscored beauty as

defined in the United States, like race, is socially constructed by white supremacist.

Consequently, Black people are similarly denied the attributes of beauty merely because of their

skin color and other features such as hair texture, full lips, and wider noses. Although these

makeup companies were responsible for advertising their products in this fashion, they were not

held to account for their discriminatory messaging because it was largely understood and

culturally accepted skeletal white women were the epitome of beauty. This message was

omnipresent, overt, and sown into the notion of American with immunity. Thus, merely

communicating what was tacitly understood and believed by most U.S. citizens in television ads

left no discernable perpetrator but perpetuated fallacious racist communications just the same.

Institutionalized racism is the manifestation of white supremacy. Through policy, practice, and procedures it systemically controls culture, access to goods, services, and opportunities including employment (Bell, 1992; Jones, 2001; West, 1996). When racist ideals are manifested, organizational policies and practices are created and connected to models of racial superiority designed to advance one group while oppressing others. Institutional racism exists where the power and ability to enforce policy, practice, and procedures rest with a dominant person or group who also typically controls key resources. In the U.S. corporate workplace, white men are this dominant group. Although almost never a topic of discussion and mostly imperceptible to the naked eye, institutionalized racism is endemic in U.S. society and radically shapes the realities of those advantaged and oppressed by race (Bell, 1992, Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Du Bois,1989; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996; Woodson, 2016). An example of institutionalized racism is the use of Black hair or traditional Black hairstyles as a proxy for racism. When institutions ban by corporate policy or practice braids, cornrows, or dreadlocks, they are essentially discriminating against Black people. These hairstyles are associated with Black culture and are disproportionately worn by Black people. Consequently, to establish a prohibition of traditionally Black hairstyles from being worn in the workplace is discriminatory, and an expression of institutional racism designed to control the organizational culture and oppress Black people. In 2019, several states including Kentucky, New Jersey, Tennessee, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois all proposed legislation to explicitly ban race-based hair discrimination (McGregor, 2019). They follow California and New York, which had previously done so. Furthermore, civil rights groups are partnering with beauty brands such as Dove and others to end this type of discrimination.

In the corporate workplace, the commitment to racist practices seems to function as a tacit understanding among white leaders concealed in the organizational culture designed by them (Bottero, 2007; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013). Racism operates to limit many facets of employment, and has a particularly pernicious, pervasive, and profound effect on Black people. In some instances, its impact may compromise employment opportunities, career development, and selection for promotion. Coqual (2019), in their examination of the pervasiveness of racism in the workplace, found of 3,736 college-educated professionals, 58% of the Black males surveyed had experienced racism in the workplace as opposed to 17% of their white counterparts. CRT contends racist and oppressive tactics are practiced by white people as protective devices because white people are not willing to sacrifice position, power, or privilege, in the support of equality or equity (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Nichols, 2019; Ogbor, 2001; Taylor, 1998, West et at., 1995). The United States was colonized by white people, committed to white supremacy, and constructed via violence and oppression of others. For the notion of white supremacy to thrive, white people created the concept of race and its hierarchical structure to distinguish themselves from others. Race and caste are connected because race, as defined by white people, determines where one may land in a caste system.

Caste is the systematic and hierarchical division of people by heritage in a society that bestows some privilege or benefit on those deemed to be higher up in the caste system (Wilkerson, 2020). Wilkerson (2020) emphasized, "In the American caste system, the signal of rank is what we call race, the division of humans on the basis of their appearance" (p. 18). White is ranked highest, and Black is the lowest. Wilkerson (2020) also wrote, "If we have been trained to see humans in the language of race, then caste is the underlying grammar that we

encode as children, as when learning our mother tongue" (p. 18). Essentially, race, racism, and casteism are as fundamental to the United States and American as hotdogs and apple pie. In the workplace, white people seem to be willing to effect clandestine tactics of racial oppression and intolerance, whether explicitly or implicitly, to protect their interests and repress Black males from corporate ascension into executive leadership positions. Systemically, racism effectuates its objectives by various means including racial discrimination, stereotyping, implicit bias, microaggressions, othering (Bell, 1992; Freire, 1972; Ladson-Billings; 1995; Nichols, 2019; Werner, 2018; West et al., 1995; Woodson, 2016).

Racial discrimination operates to subjugate Black males in the workplace and keep them from executive positions. It is described as unwarranted animus and prejudicial treatment of a particular group of people based upon their race (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Freire, 1972; Lowe, 2013; Smith, 2002; West et al., 1995). Pager and Shepherd (2008) define prejudicial treatment in two primary categories: differential treatment and disparate impact. Differential treatment is the uneven treatment of a particular group or groups of people based on race, while disparate impact assumes equal treatment, but the impact of the treatment favors one racial group or groups over another (Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Lowe, 2013; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Smith, 2002). In the workplace, Black males may experience both. With respect to differential treatment, Coqual (2019) determined 59% of Black men felt they had to work harder to advance in the workplace, compared to 15% of the white male counterparts who felt the same. It is a common sentiment in the Black culture Black people must be twice as good to get the same as white people. Working twice as hard is tantamount to having more education, more experience, and simply performing twice as well because Black people are held to a higher standard of excellence. Although they are often well qualified for positions, it seems Black

males, at times, are not given the same opportunities for development or advancement as their white counterparts (Bell, 1992; Cornileus, 2013; Lowe, 2013, Nichols, 2019; Werner, 2018). When not selected for positions, Black males may be offered specious rationales by white executives to explain their decisions, such as not being a good fit or not having a large enough followership. Followership is a term used in the corporate environment to describe the number of people outside one's immediate organization that respect and admire the person's leadership. Another example of a hollow explanation offered to Black males when not selected for opportunities is they have not met every criterion noted in the job description. It is rare any candidate does, but when Black males do not it is somehow fatal to them in the hiring process. These and other kinds of excuses are sometimes given to cloak racially discriminatory decision making and avoid litigation (Cornileus, 2010; Lowe, 2013; Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Empirically, it seems the tension between increasing the number of Black males in executive leadership and maintaining corporate excellence is both palpable and a pain point (Rice, 2020).

Tantamount to racial discrimination, corporate policies and practices may also have a disparate impact on Black male employees. In U.S. law, disparate impact frames programs and policies that, although well-intentioned and seemingly innocuous, have an adverse effect on a legally protected population of people more than another (Bell, 1992; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Nichols, 2019; Werner, 2018). Although sanctioned corporate leadership training may appear prima facially to be benign, it may not be. Often, the authors of corporate training and development are white. Consequently, they develop curricula and learning outcomes as conceived through their subconsciously biased experiential and educational lenses, which may be different than the lenses of others. When the training curricula is countercultural to Black learning styles or behavioral norms, a Black male may struggle to grasp

the concepts being taught. Unfortunately, his learning challenges may be perceived as incompetence or rejection of the learning and thus detrimental to him successfully learning and advancing in the company (Cornileus, 2010; Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013; Smith, 2002; Werner, 2018). In either case, as a prospective executive in the organization, he is expected to practice the corporately sanctioned curricula, and he is marginalized and disfavored when he cannot. This scenario exemplifies disparate impact.

Conversely, because training curricula is most likely designed by white people from a white perspective, the Black male's white counterpart generally does not have a cultural disconnection with the training and excels. Du Bois (1995), attempted to explain these phenomena when he introduced the concept of the psychological wage of whiteness. Psychological wage of whiteness occurs when white people systemically advantage themselves and other white people in an organized and structured fashion by favor, entitlement, and ethnocentricity. This is a form of self-dealing or group dealing because position or status is used to serve self-interest or the interests of those belonging to the same group as the perpetrator. It is also synonymous with and indistinguishable from organizational sociopolitical capital, defined as one's proximity to key information, influential networks, and relationships with people in positions of power (Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008). Essentially, the oppressive system is both a byproduct of the original white supremacist structure, and perfectly redesigned via policies and practices to perpetually and amorphously support its creator and subjugate racial nonconformists. Given Black males by and large do not have sufficient sociopolitical capital to influence organizational policy and practice, they suffer the disparate impacts and abject inequities inherent to the psychological wage of whiteness. In these ways, white supremacy is not only assiduously designed into the fabric of the United States, but it is

also undergirded by inequitable and operational practices. Castilla (2008) analyzed the

meritocratic performance evaluations of almost 9,000 individual exempt and nonexempt

managerial, professional, and skilled employees, and found organizational processes often

resulted in wage inequality. Castilla (2008) reported:

> Organizational decisions over the tenure of employees eventually produce significant wage inequality: observationally equivalent employees (i.e., in the same job and work unit, with the same supervisor, and with the same human capital) with different ascriptive traits get unequal salary increases over time, even after they perform at the same level. (p. 1499)

Castilla's (2008) findings suggest in the corporate workplace Black males are subjected to

disparate impacts relative to their prospective career earnings primarily based upon their

ascriptive traits. A further review of the literature showed practices such as stereotyping,

implicit bias, and othering also negatively impact the Black male experience in the workplace.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping in the workplace detrimentally affects the perception of Black males and has

an insidious impact on their self-esteem, efficacy, physical health, and promotion. A stereotype

is a widespread, mostly negative, generalized persona designed to inform a particular narrative

about a specific person or group (Cornileus, 2010; Guy, 2014; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al.,

2008). In some instances, a stereotype may be empirically accurate; however, when it is

negative, the stereotype becomes a stigma (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Guy, 2014; Steele, 2011;

Woodson, 2016). Stigmatization, although not exclusively among white people, is synonymous

with white people's branding of another as less-than, disadvantaged, obtuse, marginalized, or

condemned. Steele (2011) proposed the shackles of stigmatization impair or devalue one's

positionality, which in turn erodes self-esteem and negatively impacts performance. An example

of a negative stereotype is characterizing Black males as lazy, angry, erratic, and incompetent,

and therefore not fit or qualified to lead in a corporate setting (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Cornileus, 2013; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Russell-Brown, 2008). In the workplace, negatively stereotyping Black males in this way cloaks them in a suit of ill preparedness and makes them easily passed over for initial employment or advancement opportunities, and further frustrates their path to the e-suite. To avoid stigmatization and be perceived as acceptable, racial minorities may be socially and personally under inexorable pressure to distort their cultural authenticity and demonstrate their assimilation or cultural fitness into an organizationally white patriarchal culture (Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Emerson & Murphy; 2014; Jamison, 2017; Smith, 2002; Steele, 2011). Coqual (2019) found merely 20% of Black males felt they could be authentic at work. For Black males, the demonstration of organizational cultural fitness is imperative for employment and or advancement.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is a social cognition consisting of one's unconscious thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward a certain people, place, or thing (Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Bottero, 2007; Devaraj et al., 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Greenwald, 2006; Phillips & Lowery, 2018; Woodson, 2016). In the corporate environment, the implicit bias of white executives may have exceedingly detrimental effects on Black male representation in executive positions. Essentially, bias is judgmentally favoring or disfavoring one over another. In the workplace, implicit bias is often associated with negative stereotypes held by white people about Black people, other people of color, or other marginalized groups (Castilla, 2008; Devaraj et al., 2018, Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Greenwald, 2006; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Steele, 2011). Negative stereotypes and marginalized views of others by whites seem to stem from the larger existential societal racist views, which may be a byproduct of white supremacy. Devaraj et al. (2018) sampled 31,356

individual observations of 4,340 people from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth.

Utilizing theories of implicit bias and stereotypes, and they found the combined effects of skin

tone, height, and gender had a disproportionately negative impact on the participants. The

findings suggested darker skinned males experienced the most dramatic and obstructive impacts

to their career opportunities, income, and overall career success. This type of obstruction that

negatively impacts a Black males' career simply by being darker skinned and male is a form of

stigmatization also known as identity threat. Identity threat maligns individuals of particular

groups to promote distinction, separation, or a lack of belonging to the larger or dominant social

group (Oliver et al., 2017; Steele, 2011). Steele (2011) conducted a series of studies with

university and college students in a myriad of different contexts including student interviews,

student forums, student surveys, experimental studies for test preparation, and observations of

student-to-student interactions to understand the impacts of stigmatization and identity threat.

Summarily, Steele found negative biases—whether explicit or implicit, or projected by others or

self-conceived—dramatically and adversely affected student performance. This stigmatization,

identity threat, or implicit bias casts a negative predisposition of Black male employees and

subjects them to being viewed by white executives as inferior and incompetent, thus unfit for

advancement irrespective of their experience and qualifications (Devaraj et al., 2018; Livingston

& Pearce, 2009; Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Steele, 2011; West, 1996). Livingston and

Pearce (2009) illustrated the powerfulness of stigmatization, identity threat, and implicit bias. A

total of 121 students reviewed random pictures of 10 Black male and 10 white male CEOs from

Fortune 500 companies, along with CEOs from various other major companies in the United

States. The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of identity threat and implicit bias

based upon facial cues. Students were asked to review a total of 40 pictures and rate them on a

scale from 1 to 4 on babyfaceness and leadership competence. Livingston and Pearce defined babyfaceness as pertaining to the structure of the face rather than a particular race, sex, or age. They chose babyfaceness as a variable for their research to correlate its impact on the success of white male executives versus the success for BMEs. Based upon the students' ratings, there was a direct link to the perception of the Black male leaders' babyfaceness and competence, and their prospective success that were not linked to their white male counterparts. The found the notion of facial cues and babyfaceness conveyed warmth and operated to mitigate feelings of anger, fear, or threat by white people. Thus, the less stereotypically threatening Black male leaders seemed to be by having a babyface and appearing warm, the more likely they were perceived to be competent and successful. The opposite was found for their white counterparts. Babyfaceness for white males was negatively correlated with competency and success in leadership positions. It is these types of stigmatizations, identity threats, and implicit biases that contribute to the hindering of Black males occupying to executive leadership positions.

According to the Devaraj et al.'s (2018), due to skin tone bias, racial minorities also experience a disproportionate number of negative impacts and outcomes in the workplace when compared with their white counterparts. Negative impacts may include episodes of alienation, marginalization, and discrimination (Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Bottero, 2007; Castilla, 2008; Devaraj et al., 2018; Greenwald, 2006; Rosette, et al., 2008; Woodson, 2016). In context, negative impacts loosely translate to a form of devaluation of skill, knowledge, and experience. When Black males are not included in topical discussions related to their scope of work, alienation may be afoot. When Black males' ideas or suggestions are not acknowledged, marginalization may be at work to diminish their contributions. When Black males are repeatedly passed over for key strategic opportunities in their purview, discrimination may be the

reason. As Devaraj et al. observed, Blacks and other racial minorities experience a

disproportionate number of negative impacts due to their skin color. Cumulative negative

impacts can be insidious and adversely affect Black males' psyche, confidence, and ultimately

their performance and progression (Brons, 2015; Jamison, 2017; Mereish et al., 2016).

Microaggressions

In the workplace, microaggressions are used by aggressors to demean, marginalize, or

bully another. For Black males, they represent another form systemic oppression inflicted

predominantly by white people. Microaggressions were first defined by Pierce (1970), a Black

psychiatrist and Harvard graduate, as "offensive mechanisms aimed at Blacks daily, which are

designed to reduce, dilute, atomize, and encase the hapless into his 'place.' The incessant lesson

the Black must hear is that he is insignificant and irrelevant" (p. 303). Other scholars have

described microaggressions as forms of pejorative or prejudicial words or behaviors that often

occur in the context of a matter concerning race or gender and are designed to be dismissive

indignities (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Karim, 2003; Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2009). Sue

et al. (2009) described racial microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send

denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group" (p. 273).

The effects of racial microaggressions on Black males in the corporate environment range, and

may include irreparable negative peer perception, diminished self-confidence, impeded career

growth, and trigger health problems (Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2009; Watkins, 2012). As

with racist acts, the perpetrator's intention is inconsequential. The adverse impact of the words

or behaviors are ostensibly both palpable and destructive to the target. Sue et al. (2009) stated

whether intentional or unintentional, "Microaggressions inevitably produce a clash of racial

realities where the experiences of racism by Blacks are pitted against the views of whites who

hold the power to define the situation in nonracial terms" (p. 335). Sue (2003), a Columbia University professor of counseling psychology and renown voice on microaggressions, declared "this [microaggressions] contemporary form of racism is many times over more problematic, damaging, and injurious to persons of color than overt racist acts" (p. 48). This is because microaggressions are largely socially accepted words or behaviors that can have insidious effects causing tremendous harm to individuals, organizations, or society-at-large versus overtly racist acts which are generally not widely socially accepted.

After an exhaustive literature review and examining numerous personal narratives of counselors of varying races, Sue et al. (2007) identified three primary forms of microaggressions: microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults. Microinsults and microinvalidations are similar, yet distinguishable. In context, the former often attempts to confirm a negative stereotype about a person or group. Microinsults are verbal and nonverbal subtle, mostly unintended, and ambiguous slights whose meanings and condescension are sometimes unfamiliar to the perpetrator, but nevertheless demeaning and insulting to people of color (Ogbor, 2001; Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2007). For example, a verbal microinsult may be a white person's seemingly benign attempt to describe a Black person perceived by them to be intelligent as articulate. Although likely intended to be complementary, articulate is insulting because the implication is that it is surprisingly impressive a Black person is coherently communicative. An intelligent impression debunks the stereotype Black people are obtuse and have a poor command of the English language (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Karim, 2003; Pitcan et al., 2018). Pitcan et al. (2018) found self-identified Black men under the age of 40, who worked in predominantly white organizations, believed competence or being viewed as intelligent was a significant factor in job performance and satisfaction. However, in the

workplace, using a Black male's command of standard English as a unique barometric measure of knowledge or intelligence is insulting because the same measurement is rarely, if ever, used to define others' abilities. Sometimes Blacks speak Ebonics, a recognized dialect of the U.S. English. The term Ebonics was first used by psychologist Robert Williams in 1973 and replaced the phrase nonstandard English as a description of the dialect that some Blacks spoke (Williams, 1975). Nonstandard English implied the dialect of English spoken by some Black people was substandard or less than—it is neither. It is simply another dialect of English. Command of the use of standard English is a false determinant of aptitude, as it does not consider cultural variations. Ebonics includes words such as *chillin'* (relaxing) and *fresh* or *fly* (nice looking), *dope* (good), and *gettin' paper*, *stackin' paper*, *paper weight*, or *bread* (getting paid). Although pervasive and easily understood, Ebonics is far from mainstream. Nevertheless, the use of language as a definitive indication of intelligence is an ethnocentric function of U.S. white elites and some middle class to segregate people and is prima facially discriminatory. The accumulation of microinsults may lead to Black male self-depreciation, and encumber career development and promotion (Castilla, 2008; Cornileus, 2010; Jamison, 2017).

Microinvalidations are intentional verbal or nonverbal behaviors, and distinguishable from microinsults in that they are negations or discounts of another's experiential reality or perspective, and can manifest as an annulment, dismissive, minimalizing, or eschewing to victim (Devaraj et al., 2018; Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2007). Examples of microinvalidations may be when a white person explains to a Black person how she does not see color, or when there are no Black executives in the e-suite or on the board of directors of an organization. The effect is to negate or dilute the Black person's experience, and deny his racial distinction, culture, and heritage (Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2009; West et al., 1995). Black males' absence from a

position of authority or power in an organization may also operate to psychologically invalidate Black person's value or attributes by subliminally signaling they are not worthy to occupy certain influential seats. Microinvalidations in this way undermine the distinct and unique thoughts, feelings, or experiences of Black males, and attempt to establish the hoary notion that everyone is the same. Microinvalidations can also lead to self-deprecation, cultural disorientation, and loss of self-esteem, which all negatively impact a Black male's ability to progress in the workplace (Brons, 2015; Guy, 2014; Mereish et al., 2016).

Microassaults are the most overt and egregious of the three primary microaggressions. Microassaults are intentionally pernicious and manifest harm by way of derogatory name-calling, discriminatory actions, actions of avoidance, or personal attacks against one's racial heritage or discrimination (Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2007). Referring to a Black person as a negro is an example of a microassault. Negro became a derogatory term ascribed to Black people in the mid-1960s. Another example of a microassault is when a white woman is walking toward a Black man, and then crosses the street to avoid contact or interaction with him. Nadal et al. (2014) found, of 506 men and women ranging in age from 18 to 66 (which 87.5% were people of color), participants of color experienced a greater number of microaggressions than white participants. They explained that intentionally avoiding a Black person by crossing the street, a white woman may be unaware her actions are a microassault and stereotypically convey Black men as inherently dangerous or criminal. This finding was supported by previous research that found Black males were viewed as hypermasculine and unintelligent and perceived to be inferior or criminal (Rivera et al., 2010; Sue et al., 2007). All three microaggressions— microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults—operate to disparage the targeted person or group in a way that inflicts insignificance, humiliation, inferiority, or condemnation (Cornileus, 2013;

Pitcan et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2007). Due to the pervasiveness and destruction caused by

microaggressions, Kendi (2019), a professor of history at Boston University and the author of

How to be an Antiracist, argued the components of micro and aggression together are

fundamentally flawed. He contended the persistent daily acts of discrimination are not minor

and more synonymous with adjectives such as abuse, causing distress, anger, depression, pain,

fatigue, and suicide. Irrespective of the phraseology, microaggressions are a source of pain and

function as obstacles that Black males have to negotiate in the workplace, as evidenced by Nadal

et al. and Sue et al. (2007).

In the workplace, microaggressions may cause irreparable negative peer perception to

Black males because the transgressions commonly occur in a room where mostly white

colleagues are present. Although at first blush microaggressions may appear to be innocuous,

they are insidious and venomous acts that, in accumulation, are harmful to the Black male's self-

esteem and reputation in the organization (Devaraj et al., 2018; Mereish et al., 2016; Sue et al.,

2009). Seller and Shelton (2003) included 267 first-year Black college students who self-

identified as Black and attended predominantly white universities, and found other groups are

more likely to react in a discriminatory way toward Black men than non-Black men.

Furthermore, they found more than half of the participants experienced microaggressions, such

as being mistaken for a service worker, being ignored, given poor service, treated rudely, or

experienced strangers acting fearful or intimidated when around them. This finding is also

reflected in Wilkerson (2020), which linked the embeddedness of race, racism, and casteism in

the U.S. culture to the presumption of natural order of white supremacy and other's inferiority

based upon appearance. Wilkerson (2020) claimed, "Caste is fixed and rigid. Race is fluid and

superficial, subject to periodic redefinition to meet the needs of the dominant caste in what is

now the United States" (p. 19). Unbridled, the accrual of disparaging remarks or actions may inevitably affirm erroneous negative perceptions of Black males held by some white peers or change views of other peers from positive to lesser. Once this stigmatization metastasizes, it is at best difficult to change and commonly impossible to eradicate (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Cornileus, 2013; Jamison, 2017; Steele, 2011).

Microaggressions also have detrimental effects on Black males' self-esteem, performance, and job satisfaction in the workplace (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Guy, 2014; Jamison, 2017; Mereish et al., 2016). The incident frequency and the audience composition are key factors that cause subconscious erosion of self-confidence (Mereish et al., 2016). Often, due to the habitual nature of the depreciatory slights and slurs, Black males begin to doubt their capabilities and eventually lose assurance, courage, and aspiration (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Cornileus, 2013; Ogbor, 2001; Pitcan et al., 2018). Compounding the significance of the microaggressions is the corporate setting in which they occur. Many times, the setting is comprised of peers and or subordinates of the Black male resulting in the consequence of the subsequent humiliation being exacerbated. The loss of self-confidence and a maligned persona are at a minimum career limiting due to the competitive nature of the corporate workplace.

Health problems are the most profound manifestation of microaggressions. Mereish et al. (2016) found in their study of 1,201 Black male participants ranging in age from 18 to 93 years men internalized offensive comments and gestures to avoid confrontations and conflicts, which leads to physical health issues. The continuous suppression of the anxiety caused by the microaggression expresses itself in the erosion of self-esteem and debilitating health problems, such as depression, high blood pressure, diabetes, and gastrointestinal disorders, which either require an absence from work or placement in positions that are less like to promote the ill-

conditions (Brons, 2015; Devaraj et al., 2018; Mereish et al., 2016). In either event, a Black

male's prospective ascent to executive leadership is disrupted if not ended because of

microaggressions.

Othering

Othering effectively institutionalizes the notion of group-based differences by alienating

a group and intentionally advantages one over another (Brons, 2015; Cornileus, 2013; Guy,

2014; Jamison, 2017; Powell & Menendian, 2016). Dumas (2010) described othering as:

> A social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance,
> and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-
> in-itself. (p. 416)

Like stereotyping, othering alienates Black males, other people of color, and anyone outside the

U.S. white majority by ascribing undesirable traits and characteristics to them. These

disparaging attributions are typically based upon appearances or behaviors and designed to

marginalize and characterize them as different, opposite, or inferior to whites (Brons, 2015;

Castilla, 2008; Cornileus, 2013; Devaraj et al., 2018; Guy, 2014). West et al. (1995) claimed,

"The fundamental precept of whiteness, the core of its value, is its exclusivity" (p. 290), and

racial otherness was the white justification for their desired subjugation and subordination of

Black people. White people deluded themselves into vilifying Black males as inferior,

incompetent, immoral, criminogenic subhumans making it easier to oppress them (Guy 2014;

Opie & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Taylor, 1998; West, 1996; West et al., 1995). According to

Russell-Brown (2008), justification for inflicting maltreatment is rationalized in the white psyche

because they commit to the notion Black people are not like the majority. An example of

othering is to characterize Black peaceful protestors, as *thugs*, *hoodlums*, and *looters*, while

white peaceful protesters are viewed as demonstrators or activists. In the United States, by

simply using these adjectives to describe the respective groups, Black protestors are depicted as

bad despite merely exercising their constitutional right to peaceful protest. Disparaging adjectives such as thug and hoodlum, also commonly ascribed to Black males while not protesting, implicitly differentiate, or otherize them as malignant and nonwhite because these words are not universally used to describe white people in the United States. However, they are used to describe nonwhites, namely Black males. In this insidious and subliminal use of words, the differentiation is complete. Once Black males have been othered, it seems to be permissible and defensible to estrange them from the mainstream and target them for unequal treatment. Smith (2019), a phenomenological study of 12 Black male leaders in K–12 education, found Black leaders felt they could not lead authentically without repercussions. He further asserted participants expressed concerns of feeling alone and targeted. Often, as the only Black male in leadership in their respective organizations, participants felt they had no one to commiserate with about the challenges of being a Black leader in a predominantly white organization. Furthermore, they sometimes felt like their decisions and behaviors were more highly scrutinized than their white counterparts. When subjected to othering, Black males are systemically made to believe they are unfit for executive leadership positions (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Castilla, 2008; Cornileus, 2010; Lowe, 2013; Powell & Menendian, 2016). Pinkett et al. (2011) emphasized Black professionals must develop strong identities to combat othering and affirm they can succeed.

By first segregating groups of people and then creating a pseudo-hierarchical order, othering also inflicts psychological and social harm to Black males (Brons, 2015; Jamison, 2017; Mereish et al., 2016). Attempting to survive in a workplace culture predicated on the proverbial use of us and them, where the latter are always Black and marginalized, has an injurious effect. Over time, damaging generalizations, negative stereotypes, and racial biases may operate to

eternally polarize groups and result in perpetuation of racial discrimination that is the bedrock of a corporate or systemic repressive structure (Collins et al., 2017; Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus, 2016).

Biculturalism

Biculturalism represents another aspect of subjugation that impedes Black male occupation of executive positions. Sociologist and civil right activist W.E.B Du Bois (1989) coined the phrase double consciousness, or what is more contemporaneously referred to as biculturalism. This phase was used to describe Black people's balancing of competing cultures, their own and the dominant white culture, within the same society (Bell, 1992; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Ogbor, 2001; West, 1996). A byproduct of white supremacy is the dictation of standard values and virtues that have historically been predecided by white, heterosexual conservative, males. Conformity to white cultural norms is signaled by adherence to the values, attire, lexicon, social group affiliations, and various other cultural demarcations (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Cornileus, 2013; Du Bois, 1989; Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013; Ogbor, 2001). White cultural norms and mores are sometimes in direct conflict with traditional Black cultural norms and mores. For example, West (1996) argued while white people are generally socialized to only be responsible for representing themselves in the community and workplace while culturally, Black people are socialized that each is responsible to represent not only themselves but also their families and communities. For Black males in the workplace, practicing effective biculturality is an imperative that yields benefit in the workplace, such as acceptance, favorability over other people of color, and prospective advancement opportunities. Thus, to successfully assimilate, Black males must decide to kill their Blackness, but keep the maleness (Kendi, 2019). Essentially, to fit into the corporate culture, Black males are required to

disassociate from their Black ethnicity or at least the projection of it while maintaining a representation of an acceptable man or white man. An unwillingness to do so may lead to career limitations or stagnation.

Because white supremacy dictates dominant norms and expectations, it is not obligated to subscribe to or even acknowledge the ideals or beliefs of other ethnicities, so it commonly does not (Cornileus, 2013; Du Bois, 1989; Karim, 2003; Ospina & Su, 2009; West et al., 1995). Others must adapt and adopt to it despite the social, cultural, or personal costs. Kendi (2019) emphasized assimilation is profoundly racist and typically positions white people as the benchmark or standard measure for all others to achieve. The necessity to assimilate into a mainstream culture is neither unique to Black people or the United States. However, Black males are disproportionately faced with the dichotomous dilemma of attempting assimilation into the white work culture, because often their success depends upon it. Their quandary is synonymous with having to consent to inherent self-denial or abandon their assimilation efforts and risk the repercussions of career limitation. The former implies complicity with their own oppression, while the latter may prevent their occupation in the e-suite (Harris-Cornileus, 2016; West et al., 1995).

Regardless, for Black males, conformity to the corporate norms and mores does not necessitate acceptance. Acquiescence to the corporate norms does not guarantee acceptance by whites in the workplace or Black males' competitiveness for jobs (Castilla, 2011; Jamison, 2017). Taylor (1998) asserted well-intentioned whites support racial equality except when "Black progress exacts or imposes a personal cost to their position of power and privilege" (p. 124). Often, it is when a personal cost is at stake that white people's disingenuous interest concerning racially diversify the company's leadership is illuminated (Assari & Lankarani, 2018;

Du Bois, 1989; Taylor, 1998). For many Black males, following the corporate prescription for promotion may lead to some success early in their careers or at the lower levels of employment (Bell, 1972; Castilla, 2011; Cornileus, 2013; Jamison, 2017). However, even then, promotion may come at a price. Using the Q-methodology, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods of study to examine people's experience, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, Jamison (2017) interviewed 50 emerging Black male corporate leaders from various industries, and found, "Emerging African American leaders in white cultures generally de-emphasize their Black social identity and experience to experience more social attraction within the dominant culture" (p. 59). For example, if a Black man in a meeting with white colleagues, passionately waves his arms while settling a point of contention, he may be perceived as an angry Black man by his white colleagues, notwithstanding this is a culturally acceptable communication style in the Black community. An angry Black man in the corporate context is characterized as unpredictable, potentially violent, and incorrigible (Cornileus, 2013; Guy, 2014; Rosette et al., 2008). This characterization can result in significant career challenges for a Black male.

Conversely, if a Black man is stereotypically acting white he may advance in the corporate workplace but be banished by his Black colleagues and characterized as a *sellout*, a *buster*, or somehow less than Black. He is then ostracized from his own community. Whether the Black male is being his natural self or complicit in compromising himself, the hazards of navigating biculturalism present dire consequences. The trauma caused by attempting to manage biculturalism in this way creates internal conflict for Black males, making it challenging for them reconcile their own cultural identity and values in the divergent organizational culture.

The effects of biculturalism in the workplace on Black males may increase the risk factor for psychological traumas, including depression, symptoms of anxiety, eating disorders,

substance abuse, and even suicide (Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Castilla, 2011; Mereish et al., 2016). Struggling to be accepted and productive in two divergent worlds can create confusion and make self-confidence and efficacy in either locale illusive. Adeptness at managing the complexities of dual consciousness becomes a strategy for subsistence, while simultaneously avoiding the perils of schizophrenia (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Cornileus, 2010; Mereish et al., 2016). The sociocultural gymnastics of biculturalism may land a Black male in a kind of cultural hinterland—a sociocultural nowhere between two or more cultures, where acceptance is desired in either but denied by both. This cultural unmooring can create social disorientation, disillusionment, and frustration. Black males experience a multitude of conflicting sociocultural norms in the workplace resulting in psycho-emotional dissonance, personal distress, anxiety, and guilt (Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Chandler & Ellis, 2011). Assari and Lankarani (2018) used data from the National Survey of American Life that examined age, gender, educational attainment, workplace racial composition, and perceived discrimination of 1,775 participants to discern how the factors affected the participants. They determined the 676 Black males examined, who worked in predominantly white workplaces, experienced high rates of discrimination and poor mental health that ultimately affected their performance and corporate advancement. For Black males, the effects of attempting to navigate biculturalism are real, dynamic, and may be harmful.

Repressive Structures

Repressive structures are powerful mechanisms of systemic oppressive barriers that operate in concert to maintain the majority's control of position, power, and wealth by thwarting people of color. The structures function as a bulwark protecting the norms, rules, and practices that restrict the development and advancement of Black males (Freire, 1972; Guy, 2014; Harris-

Cornileus, 2016; Jasmine, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008). Repressive structures are also an integral part of the systemic racism that exists in corporate America to suppress Black males in the workplace. As an organized collection of tyrannical trappings, these structures are often well established in the corporate DNA and have likely undergirded the culture since the corporation's inception (Du Bois, 1995; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Lowe, 2013; Werner, 2018).

Repressive structures assume a variety of forms to defeat the Black males' rise into executive leadership. Harris-Cornileus (2016) identified four primary structures that stunted Black male career development in the workplace: (a) negative stereotypes of Black males; (b) no appreciable recognition or appreciation of workplace diversity; (c) subjective, covert, and despotic company policies; and (d) capriciously distributed sociopolitical capital by race. Evidence of repressive structures' impact is the disproportionate lack of Black male CEOs in the Fortune 500. Merely two companies, or less than 0.5%, have a Black male CEO (Gelles, 2020). As previously mentioned, according to Coqual (2019), the Fortune 500 should have 29 Black CEOs, instead of two, based on degree completion rates in comparison with white counterparts. With components of repressive structures delineated by Harris-Cornileus presumptively working in harmony, the furtive strategy of white leaders appears to be to maintain racial homogeneity in executive positions. This curated homophily advantages other white people, while simultaneously protecting their collective interests of position, power and wealth (Bottero, 2007; Burns & Garcia, 2017 Lowe, 2013; Parks-Yancy, 2006). Employees of color seem to be merely pseudo contestants in a long-standing mock competition for promotion in an environment where systemic discriminatory practices stack the deck against employees of color. This uneven playing field makes it exceedingly challenging, if not virtually impossible, for Black males to

navigate and rise to executive levels in a corporate organization (Carter & Murphy, 2015;

Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008; Smith, 2002).

Meritocracy

For Black males, despite having the requisite job qualifications, ascension to executive

positions is still illusive (Castilla, 2008; Cornileus, 2013; Kravitz & Yuengling, 2012).

According to West (1996), meritocracy is a false principle masquerading as an objective standard

of measure that inherently devalues people of color. One of the foundational tenets of

meritocracy practiced in the corporate workplace is that opportunity and achievement are

unbiasedly awarded based upon individual hard work not inherited status (Castilla, 2008;

Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Jamison, 2017; Littler, 2013). However, Coqual (2019) concluded

nearly two-thirds of the 3,736 college-educated Black male professionals surveyed believed they

had to work harder to advance in the workplace compared to their white male counterparts.

Kendi (2019) affirmed this belief by emphasizing racist policies and practices implicitly signal

the prescribed standard measure is objective, and personal failure is just that. In other words, the

inability to meet the objective standard for corporate performance, which is most often crafted by

white males and does not contemplate diversity of style and approach to getting the work done,

is personal and unrelated to the policy. McIntosh (1990) discussed how unearned assets and

benefits received by white people are tantamount to passports, codebooks, and blank checks, but

they may be oblivious to receiving them. For example, a Black and white employee in the same

or similar job may have different criteria for advancement. While a Black employee will be

required to demonstrate every qualification on the list of criteria before advancement to the next

role, his white counterpart may demonstrate only a few, but then advance on the prospect that he

can learn and develop what qualifications he has not demonstrated at the next level. The white

employee is given the benefit of the doubt, or an unearned benefit, as discussed by McIntosh, and is moved ahead based on the opinion of white managers or executives that he has the potential to be great. This notion of subjective anticipatory greatness is practiced with dire and disparate impacts to Black male advancement in the workplace. Meritocracy prima facially and universally appears to acknowledge and reward comprehensive skills; however, Black males chronically and systemically seem to have a difficult time acquiring them. Littler (2013) explained due to the competitive and hierarchical nature of meritocracy, somebody has to win, and somebody has to lose. Not everyone will receive the same merit or any merit at all in some instances. As noted in the explanation of racial discrimination, when the training curricula is countercultural to Black learning styles or behavioral norms, a Black male's achievement may not be commensurate with the subjective and biased cultural standard for recognition (Cornileus, 2010; Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013; Smith, 2002; Werner, 2018). Consequently, his ostensible challenges may be perceived as incompetence and detrimental to his aspiration for workplace ascension.

Many times, the criterion and guidelines which meritocracy is buttressed lack strict governance or oversight. When the corporate meritocratic practices are not controlled, they seem to have significant managerial discretion. When there is less accountability and transparency in the practice, achievement and rewards may become arbitrary and capricious. The specious meritocracy is then ripe for unequal application and racial discrimination (Castilla, 2008; Littler, 2013; McIntosh, 1990; Werner, 2018). There is a popular saying that states: "If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know that he had some help" (Haley, n.d.). In context, fencepost placement is also known as the autocratic placement of one into a particular position in the workplace. The actions of placement are varied, many times surreptitious, and moreover,

exclusive of Black males and discriminatory because Black people are not in positions of power to make placements. Commonly, they appear benign at first blush but become consequential over time. For instance, a guideline for advancement to the next highest position may require an employee to have experience leading a large project. When there is a need for short-term leadership on a small project, rather than interview for the role, a white male employee is assigned to lead the effort largely because of his association with the network of white executive leaders. One or more of the decision makers, who are most likely also white, knows him, likes him, and has taken in interest in his success. Given the project is short-term, small, and there is a need to keep business moving, the assignment is swift, furtive, and does not receive much attention. However, in the future, when there is an opportunity to apply for the next highest position, this employee's experience leading that small project now becomes consequential. His small project work is consciously elevated in value by the decision makers and the requirement for leading a large project as required in the job description is subconsciously flattened. This white male employee is now a perfect fit for the new job under the guise of meritocracy; however, in reality, he benefited from the lack of assignment oversight and favor. In their article concerning the paradox of meritocracy, Kravitz and Yuengling (2012) suggested although meritocratic organizations may believe their merit practices are unbiased, the decision makers' unfettered discretion promote stereotypical racial and allow gender biases to run amok. Hence, corporate meritocratic practices and their uneven evaluation seem to contribute to the lack of Black male executive representation as an oppressive impediment to ascension.

Disparate Career Development

Corporate career development strategies may disproportionately exclude Black males or educe microaggressions in the development activities that devalues them (Guy, 2014; Harris-

Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Rosette et al., 2008). Career development consist of organized

activities designed to advance employees' skill and capabilities to promote higher levels of

performance in their current jobs or prepare them for progression to a different job.

Development activities may include skill-based trainings, mentorship, job rotations, job

shadowing, and interim job coverages (Collins et al., 2017; Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus,

2016; Lowe, 2013). Jamison (2017) reasoned leadership and career development facilitate

employees either increasing their engagement with their colleagues and their work or promoting

within the ranks of the organization. Frequently, the corporate selection criteria for career

development opportunities may be enigmatic at best. Coqual (2019) indicated merely 40% of

the 3,736 college-educated professionals surveyed believed their companies had effective

diversity and inclusion programs. Development opportunities are frequently discreetly reserved

for predominately handpicked white employees also known as golden children (Harris-

Cornileus, 2016, Jamison, 2017; Lowe, 2013). Cornileus (2013) claimed uncodified career

development selection criteria tend to lack objectivity, transparency, and accountability. The

absence of a documented criteria for selection seems to promote the consistent and unfettered

preference for golden children unduly jeopardizing Black males. Thus, a corporate culture that is

disproportionately white and ostensibly fraught with nepotism and subjectivity, may make it

exceptionally challenging for Black males to participate in career development which

systematically arrests their development and opportunity for advancement.

Career development curricula should be objective, unbiased, and equitably delivered to

all professionals to avoid inequities, bias, or racial discrimination (Bottero, 2007; Carter &

Murphy, 2015; Cornileus, 2010; Devaraj et al., 2018; Guy, 2014). When corporate development

curricula are not equitably systematized, impartiality becomes a pretense, and the likelihood of

disparate impact may be reasonably anticipated (Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Cornileus, 2013).

Again, because the corporate leadership is disproportionately white, many times so too is the

career development strategy and curricula. Leong and Hartung (2000) affirmed career

psychology and career and vocational behavior development that contributes to individual and

organizational performance "pays little, if any, attention to cultural factors and career

development theories [that] have traditionally held relevance for only a small segment of the

population, namely, white middle-class, heterosexual men" (p. 214). Patton and McMahon

(2006) reiterated despite the many studies on race and career, there is "no model specifically

developed to explain the career development of ethnic and racial groups" (p. 159). Additionally,

Barrie (2020), a career and social justice scholar, argued career development practitioners need a

more comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural concerns that impact development

opportunities, fairness, equity, and the psychosocial well-being of all employees in the

workplace. Accordingly, the curricula then fail to address the psychological, psychocultural, or

structural dimensions of racism that profoundly impact Black males in the workplace (Guy,

2014; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Mereish et al., 2016; Taylor, 1998). Phelps and

Constantine (2001) argued:

> Historically, race and ethnicity have not been included as variables in many of the major career development theories and models. The career development, behavior, and patterns of African Americans . . . have been evaluated, in large part, based on White male behavior and development. The sociopolitical and sociohistorical (e.g., racism, sexism, bias, and discrimination) realities and experiences of African Americans have not been considered along with their personal and individual realities. (pp. 171–172)

The exclusion of race and ethnicity in the curricula may be fundamentally disadvantageous to

BME representation. Thus, companies that predicate advancement, at least in part, on

completion and demonstration of comprehension of racially insensitive training and development

curricula, systemically handicap Black males' career development.

Literature suggests there are instances where career development for whites and people of color is comparable. White employees and employees of color sometimes experience equitable development opportunities and promote at the same or similar rate at the lower levels of the organization chart (Cornileus, 2013; Lowe; 2013; Ogbor, 2001). However, when the stakes are raised because the open position is at the executive level or likely to lead to an executive position, racial discrimination, bias, and favoritism sometimes reappear and the Black male employees' participation and advancement are stunted (Cornileus, 2013; Harris-Cornileus, 2016; Jamison, 2017; Lowe; 2013). Jamison (2017) contended this creates the experience of the proverbial corporate glass ceiling, a metaphoric but seeming impenetrable barrier that impedes people of color and women from advancing to higher level positions in corporate America and leads to disproportionately low representation of Black executive leaders (Phelps & Constatine, 2001).

Chapter Summary

Researchers agree factors contributing to the underrepresentation are complex, nuanced, and varied (DiAngelo, 2018; Cornileus, 2013; Lowe, 2013; Pager & Shepard, 2008; West et al., 1995). Literature confirms key factors such as white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, disparate career development play instrumental roles in the perpetuation of systemic, and oppressive policies and practices that negatively affect Black male ascension into executive positions in the corporate workplace. Future research is necessary to strengthen the connection between the underrepresentation of BMEs in the workplace and key factors prohibiting their ascension.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of both Black and white executives in the workplace through the lens of racism and propose strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions. This research examined the phenomenon of the absence of the Black male executives (BME) from the e-suite, using CRT to explore how BMEs experience four key factors in their workplace oppression: white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development. The goals of this basic qualitative study were to understand the experience of Black and white executives concerning racism in the workplace and propose strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions.

Four research questions guided this study:

1) In what ways do Black males experience racial oppression within the context of career advancement?

2) What impediments do white male executives perceive as hindering Black males' opportunity to lead organizations?

3) What existing strategies, approaches, or tactics are effective in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions?

4) What new and emerging strategies, approaches, or tactics would be more helpful in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions in the corporate workplace?

This chapter is organized into eight sections: Inquiry Approach, Methodological Approach, Theoretical Framework, Methods, Trustworthiness, Researcher Subjectivities, Limitations, and Chapter Summary.

Inquiry Approach

This qualitative study sought to examine how white supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development affect Black male executive representation in the corporate workplace. Van Maanen (1979) described qualitative research as "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p. 520). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "Critical action research studies are specifically about attempting to challenge power relations based on societal structures of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or religion" (p.56). Kemmis et al. (2014) described critical action research as directed by an intention to address and correct injustices. This study specifically focused on the obstacles and encumbrances Black males face that restrict and restrain them from executive leadership positions. Understanding how Black males experience and interpret racism in the workplace from their perspective are important components of this research. Additionally, understanding how influential white executives perceive and interpret racism in the workplace added another dimension and deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

In the United States, race continues to inequitably divide and advantage some while oppressing others. The intent of this study was to examine how key factors, in relationship to the lack of Black male executive representation, affect the experiences of Black and white male executive leaders in the workplace. By empathically connecting with Black male professionals in the workplace and chronicling the perspectives of white executives, a basic qualitative approach to this study unlocked a greater understanding of the phenomenon. From a philosophical perspective, interpretive research assumes there are multiple realities all socially

constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, knowledge is not found or discovered, but merely constructed from the lived experiences of those who have experienced the phenomenon. The intent of this research was to construct knowledge pertaining to the Black males' experience in the workplace and discover strategies, approaches, and tactics to effect greater equity-based practices to increase Black male representation in the e-suite or BMEs. Although the notion of combining critical research and qualitative interpretivism appear to be in conflict, as the former is fraught with critique and challenge, and the latter commonly embraces empathy, qualitative research has become more critical in academia. Crotty (1998), when discussing qualitative research, claimed the approach is a combination of empathic study and thought-provoking objection. It aims to understand what is, while simultaneously challenging the status quo.

Methodological Approach

Qualitative research is based on philosophy of phenomenology (Roberts, 2016). Phenomenology is the study of human lived experiences and aims to discover the meaning of experiences as lived and capture them for examination or study (Van Maanen, 2017). Roberts (2016) shared, when discussing qualitative research, "Rather than numbers, the data are words that describe people's knowledge, opinions, perceptions, and feeling and detailed descriptions of people's actions, behaviors, activities, and interpersonal interactions" (p. 143). Strauss and Corbin (1990) offered the qualitative research approach is ideal to help discover and understand the root cause of a phenomenon and to gain unique perspectives on experiences that are difficult to otherwise convey. I wanted to understand, from the perspectives of Black males, how racism, repressive structures, and disparate career development opportunities or other forms of oppression obstruct their ascension into executive leadership positions in the workplace. I also wanted to understand white male participants' perceptions of what may be contributing to Black

male oppression in their respective workplaces. I believed including Black and white perspectives was imperative to this research because it helped reveal substantively different perspectives on the same topic. These divergent perspectives were uncovered, chronicled, and examined, and were catalytic for the development of a harmonized voice to address solutions. Lastly, I wanted to understand existing strategies, approaches, and tactics that are effective and integrate the executives' perspectives into the design of innovative approaches to improve BMEs' representation in the e-suite. A basic qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the approach attempted to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Sofaer (1999), a respected health services researcher, explained qualitative methods "can be useful to conceptualize research as the process of reducing our uncertainty about important phenomena or questions" (p. 1103). Essentially, a basic qualitative approach assists the researcher in appreciating the depths of people's experiences, and why they behave the way they do (Kennedy, 2019; Maxwell, 2020; Rosenthal, 2016). This design allowed me to interview participants, observe reactions and responses to questions, understand their perspectives and perceptions, and capture how they experienced the phenomenon. As a researcher, I wanted to promote a higher understanding of the phenomenon that impedes Black males' representation in executive leadership and design mechanisms for change. I wanted to give a singular voice to the Black male perspective while marrying my findings with other academic study in search of innovative solutions.

Methods

This section explains the methodologies used to select study participants and collect and analyze data.

Study Participants

I used a purposeful sampling method to select participants for this study. Purposeful

sampling presumes the researcher is predominantly interested in ascertaining unique insight to

the phenomena of study and consequently chooses participants whom they can learn from the

most (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because my research concerned capturing and analyzing Black

and white male experiences in the workplace from multiple perspectives, purposeful sampling

ensured participants aligned with the purpose of the study. The impact of qualitative purposeful

sampling stems from its emphasis on gaining in-depth understanding from research (Patton,

2015). There are several types of purposeful sampling; however, the one most germane to this

study is criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). In criterion-based selection,

the researcher pre-decides the desirable participant attributes and then selects participants for the

study based upon the specific criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To be included in this study,

participants must have met five criteria: (a) be Black or white, (b) male, (c) hold a master's

degree or higher, (d) be currently or recently employed in an executive position as defined by

study participant criteria, (e) at a corporation (500 employees or more) or at a Sacramento

regional institution of higher education with more than 10,000 students. To participate,

candidates for selection needed to meet all five criteria. I chose to examine Black and white

males employed at major corporations and institutions of higher education for two reasons. First,

the sectors and cultures are disparate to promote yielding unique experiences to compare in the

study. Major corporations' commonly have very fast-paced and competitive work environments,

while institutions of higher education tend to be slower and more bureaucratic workplaces.

These settings were ideal for this study because they provided a diverse and multifaceted

examination of the phenomena. Secondly, both sectors have executive leadership positions that

are highly sought after, thus creating competitive work environments. Competitive work environments were important to this study because competition creates the conditions for the identified key factors contributing to the disproportionate Black male executive representation to emerge for deeper examination. Participants identified as Black or white male, had achieved a master's degree or higher from an accredited 4-year college or university, and held an executive leadership position such as president, vice president, senior manager, or dean. I chose these participant criteria because I believed they helped identify candidates who could make significant contributions to this research. The attributes of being Black and white, and male, were explicitly and implicitly central to this work. Connection to the participants' lived experiences, empathy with their challenges with racism, and their distinct cultural insights were indispensable to understanding the key factors that perpetuate and preserve the disproportionality of BMEs in the e-suite. In the Black community, educational attainment is viewed as the golden ticket to opportunity, gainful employment, and prosperity (Frazier, 1997). It is viewed as vital to the success of people of color because once achieved, it can never be taken away and quantifiably signals some semblance of equality to white people, whether the white people are educated or not. By virtue of this tenet, the educational attainment of the participants was essential to this study. The criteria of being in a position of executive leadership was indispensable to this research because the fundamental inquiry is to understand why Black males are absent from these positions. Understanding the Black male executives' perspective was vital to understanding their lived experience in the workplace and essential to uncovering strategies to increase representation.

White men may have unique perspectives about why there are so few Black male executives, thus their voices were central to this work. Chronicling their experiences provided a

more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and uncovered discrete dimensions of potential causes. Because white males disproportionately occupy the executive decision-making seats today, I believed it was particularly imperative white participants shared their perspectives and perceptions of the role race plays in the workplace to inform this study. Additionally, I believed peer-to-peer teaching and learning has immeasurable intrinsic value in education. Consequently, white study participants sharing their experiences and learning from this study with their white colleagues may yield more rich comprehension and resonation that is virtually impossible through other means. It was difficult to imagine comprehensively understanding the lack of BME representation or developing effective strategies to significantly increase BME numbers while excluding white male executive insights. Consequently, white male executives' perspective and participation in this work were an integral component of prospective and transformative change.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. Sharma (2017) described sampling as a method to select a relatively small number of participants that represent a larger predefined population of study. Purposive sampling relies on the subjective judgement of the researcher to select participants (Sharma, 2017). Purposive sampling was the appropriate method of selection for this study because the lived experiences and perspectives of Black and white executives were essential to this study; however, interviewing all was not feasible. Thus, eight participants were selected and interviewed because this sample size afforded for a diversity of perspectives, while promoting a discovery of phenomenological themes. There were more Black participants than white to protect the primary intention of understanding the Black male perspective in this research. Occupationally, participants were predominantly employees of major corporations, and a few were from institutions of higher education. I solicited participants

through personal and professional networks, blind letters of invitation to potential participants, and cold calls. Once in agreement to participate, I confirmed they satisfied the research criteria for participation by asking them each of the criteria questions during our initial interview meeting.

Data Collection

In research, data collection is the process of accumulating evidence and information related to the focus of the study that will assist the researcher in addressing research questions. Qualitative action research uses various methods of human interaction to collect data, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data for this study was collected using individual interviews and focus groups. Upon completion of the individual interviews, participants were randomly selected to participate in small focus groups to answer additional or follow up questions. The focus groups served two purposes. The first was to afford participants an opportunity to elaborate on emerging themes from the research and provide more context and insights. Questions asked during the focus group sessions emerged from responses shared during the individual interviews. The second was to member check or validate responses and themes from the interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "What questions are asked, what is observed, or what documents are deemed relevant will depend on the disciplinary theoretical framework" (p. 24). Given CRT was selected as the theoretical framework, it was imperative to understand from those that experience racism in the workplace, how it affects them. Consequently, interviews were essential to understanding the phenomenon from the perspectives of the study participants. The purpose of the small group sessions was twofold: to afford Black participants opportunities to hear other Black male workplace experiences and agree or reject what is being shared, and to observe the interactions among the

participants while together and attempt to examine verbal and nonverbal reactions and responses during the interviews. The intent of this approach was to create a more familial environment for the conversation than a one-on-one interview, in hopes of capturing more rich information not captured in individual interviews. White participants participated in small groups with other white males for the same reasons.

This study used a semi structured interview method for both the individual participant interviews and the small group sessions. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A. Each individual interview was scheduled for 45 minutes, and was conducted via Zoom, a computer video communication application. Small group sessions were scheduled for 2 hours using the same mediums. All interviews and sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed by me. I took reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality related to information obtained in connection with this study. Measures to safeguard confidentiality include issuing pseudonyms to all research participants to protect their identities, and all records will be kept in a secured location to which only I have access. Upon conclusion of my study, the data collected was maintained in a safe, locked, or otherwise secured location, and will be destroyed 3 years after the research was completed.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data was critical to answering the questions this research sought to understand, and to the overall learning process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described data analysis as the process of gathering data and making sense out it. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explained data analysis is the step-by-step process of taking pieces and bits of information and breaking them into manageable parts to try and discover patterns that may signal what is important and what is to be learned. For a qualitative study, it is a widely practiced approach to

begin data analyzation simultaneously with data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I began

coding and categorizing data at the inception of my data collection activities. This approach

promoted the timely materialization of themes, which allowed me to vet these themes with future

participants and make iterations to my research questions to produce more rich responses.

I used the constant comparative method of data analysis to analyze the data. Constant

comparative is an inductive and comparative data analysis approach for analyzing data and is

commonly used in qualitative studies (Glaser, 1965). Essentially, the constant comparative

method consists of collecting data from one source and comparing it to data collected from a

different source. Analysis of the data included randomly selecting an interview transcript and

discerning what the key themes, perspectives, or underlying meaning of what was shared by the

participant in response to each research question. As I reviewed the first transcript, I highlighted

key words from the text to depict the participant's words. In Vivo coding, "a word or short

phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91) will

be used to ensure the participants' voices are accurately captured. Subsequent transcripts were

reviewed using this same approach while comparing the participants' responses against the

themes learned from the first transcript. This process was repeated until all the transcripts had

been analyzed (Glaser, 1965; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Similar emerging themes were gathered

to form categories that were named or coded to readily identify major topics. Subsequent data

collected were analyzed, coded, and categorized using this same process. All data collected were

then be reviewed one final time to confirm alignment with findings. I selected this method of

analysis because I expected the experiential data and insights collected to appear varied, but

when compared with one another, compelling themes would develop—and they did. I

anticipated collecting several data including interview transcripts, notes from member checking,

and introspective notes on my learning. As a member of the subject population for this research with similar lived experiences as the Black male participants, it was imperative I sequestered or bracketed my thoughts and opinions from this research to maintain its integrity and trustworthiness. However, introspective notes, the chronicling of my own experiences, thoughts, and feelings about what I learned through this research, was valuable as a post research comparative tool that operated to heighten my awareness and perspective on this topic once the research was completed. The constant comparative was also an effective approach for this study because I imagined the learning to be iterative (Glaser, 1965). White supremacy, biculturalism, repressive structures, and disparate career development are all dynamic factors of oppression in the workplace but take on many different forms depending upon the people, culture, and location of the organization. Understanding how these factors work both independently and collectively, and the impact they have on the Black male experience was expected to both iterative and dynamic. Therefore, utilizing an inductive and comparative analytical model allowed me to adapt my inquiry and focus to where the most fruitful learning took me.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthy research is critically important to affect theory or practice in a particular discipline. Challenges arise in qualitative research because the approach is undergirded by the use of data from interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents. Many scholars deliberate about the soundness of validity and reliability associated with the interpretation of the data from these kinds of sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985), in an attempt to better align the philosophical assumption with the approach, renamed the concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research to credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln et al. (2011) suggested methodology and interpretation be two criteria to ensure

trustworthiness of the data. Regardless of what it is called or how it is done, a researcher must instill credibility and integrity into the study. Credibility is imparted in the research when there is rigor applied in the approach to ensure validity and reliability.

To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, I used triangulation to corroborate and confirm multiple data sources such as interviews, focus groups, and member checking to ensure I could capture the essence of the phenomena of why Black males are disproportionately absent from executive leadership positions. Member checks confirmed my interpretation of what the participants shared during their interviews was accurate and worked to minimize my bias. I explained my researcher positionality, so readers understand I am part of the participant population. This context and the topic of this research is in large part my lived experience. Although I recognize I have assumptions, biases, and opinions, I am confident I brought forth an objective novel perspective to add to the sparse literature that currently exist on this topic. Maxwell (2013) explained the reason the researcher makes her perspectives and biases known to the reader is not to quiet her voice rather, in the spirit of transparency, to explain how the researcher's thoughts and experiences may have influenced the study. Lastly, I solicited a robust peer review of my findings by selecting no fewer than three colleagues to review my study, to ensure its accuracy and integrity. To aid in their review, I created an evaluation rubric that established a framework for feedback on key areas of the research to ensure the data were aligned with the methodology and the findings are valid.

Consistency in measurement is imperative in qualitative research because human behavior is dynamic. Qualitative research seeks to understand the many interpretations of peoples' lived experience; thus, reliability in studying human behavior is challenging. Wolcott (2005) clarified qualitative researchers do not try and make things happen but when they do,

exact repeatability is not requested or required. To promote reliability, I comprehensively explained my methodological approach, data collection process, and the applied logic to reach my conclusions.

Researcher's Positionality

Researcher subjectivity or positionality can have a substantial effect on scholarly work. Subjectivity is the risk and awareness of the potential influence the researcher may have on the work or the work may have on the researcher (Probst & Berenson, 2014). It was important to acknowledge my personal and professional experiential lens, as it had the potential to at times inform my interpretation of the data. I am the first Black starting football quarterback, in the modern era, at the University of California at Berkeley, which at the time I attended had a predominantly white student body and alumni association. I have approximately 33 years of work experience as a former professional athlete, a manager at a major Fortune 500 corporation, a community college tenured business law professor, a community college dean and campus equity officer, a nonprofit CEO, and an associate dean at California State University, Sacramento. I am a middle-aged Black man who has earned multiple degrees in higher education, including a bachelor of arts, a master of business administration, and a juris doctorate. Later, I enrolled in a prestigious postgraduate program, and earned a doctorate in education after conducted this phenomenological study on the absence of Black males from the corporate e-suite. My personal and professional experiences, coupled with my educational achievement, provide guidance to me and affect how I interpret data, situations, and circumstances. However, to ensure accuracy and objectivity during this study, triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, and peer review were practiced along with assembling a

comprehensive literature review. This approach earnestly and effectively minimized my perspective and elevate the phenomena and research of this topic.

Limitations

As with all studies, this study has some limitations. The first limitation was the observation of the phenomena in the workplace was impossible due to the COVID-19 restrictions requiring many employees to work from home. Thus, I did not have the access to observe participants in the workplace to the extent I would have to gather enough data and discern rational themes or reach findings. However, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I am confident by conducting semi structured interviews with provocative questions via computer video communication applications, I was able to elicit and observe reactions and responses that gave me insights tantamount to workplace observations.

The second limitation was my research findings were limited to the experiences, interpretations, and assumptions of the participants. Findings from this study were not intended to be indicative of every Black male's experience or every white person's perspective in the workplace, nor were they implied to represent every workplace environment. Nevertheless, the intent of this work was to advance the learning in this subject area and offer solutions to increase the number of Black males in executive positions.

Chapter Summary

I chose a basic qualitative action research methodology to examine the phenomenon of the absence of the Black male executive from the e-suite and discover strategies or approaches to increase their representation. A fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is capturing the reality from the perspectives of the participants' everyday lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design is optimal for the purposes of this research. I chose CRT as a theoretical framework

to guide my study because CRT is theoretically intersectional. It examines many oppressive facets of the U.S. experience and is an applicable framework for observing race and institutionalized racism, which was the context of my study. The design of this basic qualitative study captured the participants' lived experiences which, when analyzed and validated, worked to progress the study of this topic, and helped create actionable strategies to increase Black males' representation in the e-suite. The components of the study design included purposeful sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher subjectivity. Participants were selected using the following criteria: (a) working at major corporations (500 employees or more) or at institutions of higher education, (b) race, (c) gender, (d) educational attainment, and (e) holding an executive leadership position by title or scope of work. I solicited participants through personal and professional networks, letters of invitation to participant, and cold calls. My data collection methodology included one-on-one interviews, small focus group session with two or three participants, participant observation, and relevant document collection. I used a constant comparative approach to simultaneously collect data and analyze it. This tactic fostered greater understanding of emerging themes and promoted accuracy and reliability. Lastly, I minimized my assumptions, bias, and subjectivity during this study by practicing triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, and peer review to ensure accuracy and objectivity. It is my desire my work may influence our understanding of the phenomenon affecting Black male representation in the e-suite.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of Black and white male executive leaders in the workplace through the lens of racism and propose strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions. This chapter focuses on the findings and results from interviews with eight study participants and small focus group conversations. It includes the research questions followed by a summary of the research findings including evocative excerpts from the interviews and focus groups, and a discussion of the results and interpretations of the study. These findings are the rich product of semi structured interviews and field notes and represent nearly 700 pages of transcription. The results and interpretation of the study stem from CRT as the conceptual framework, the literature review, and the presented findings. The chapter summary highlights key points and takeaways from the findings.

For this study, eight participants were interviewed: five Black males and three white males. Each of the participants fit the study's definition of the executive leader by currently holding the title of CEO, chancellor, executive director, senior vice president, vice president, deputy or associate vice chancellor, or the equivalent, or have held at least one of these positions in the past 3 years. Each of the participants identified as male, and either Black or white, and came from several major industries in California. Pseudonyms were used to preserve participant confidentiality and accompany participant responses. Table 1 provides the name, race, age, and occupation for each participant.

Table 1
Study Participants

Name	Race	Age	Occupation
Don	white	53	Higher education administrator
Gary	Black	56	Appointed public official
Larry	Black	61	High tech executive
Ogden	white	61	Public agency executive
Paul	Black	40	Higher education administrator
Roy	white	62	Finance executive
Steve	Black	54	High tech executive
Terry	Black	49	Nonprofit executive

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research were:

1) In what ways do Black males experience racial oppression within the context of career advancement?

2) What impediments do white male executives perceive as hindering Black males' opportunity to lead organizations?

3) What existing strategies, approaches, or tactics are effective in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions?

4) What new and emerging strategies, approaches, or tactics would be more helpful in improving the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions in the corporate workplace?

Findings

Five distinctive themes emerged from the transcriptions from eight semi structured participant interviews, two small focus group conversations, and field notes. The five emergent

findings from this study were: (a) Workplace Cultural Hegemony, (b) Black Male Traumas, (c) Impediments to the E-Suite, (d) Antiracist Actions, and (e) The Power of Networking. There was also a total of 21 subfindings assigned to the five findings (see Figure 2). Each finding and sub finding is examined throughout the chapter. As a commitment to the integrity and passion of the participants' voices, lengthy quotations are used to ensure their sentiments are communicated fully and in context.
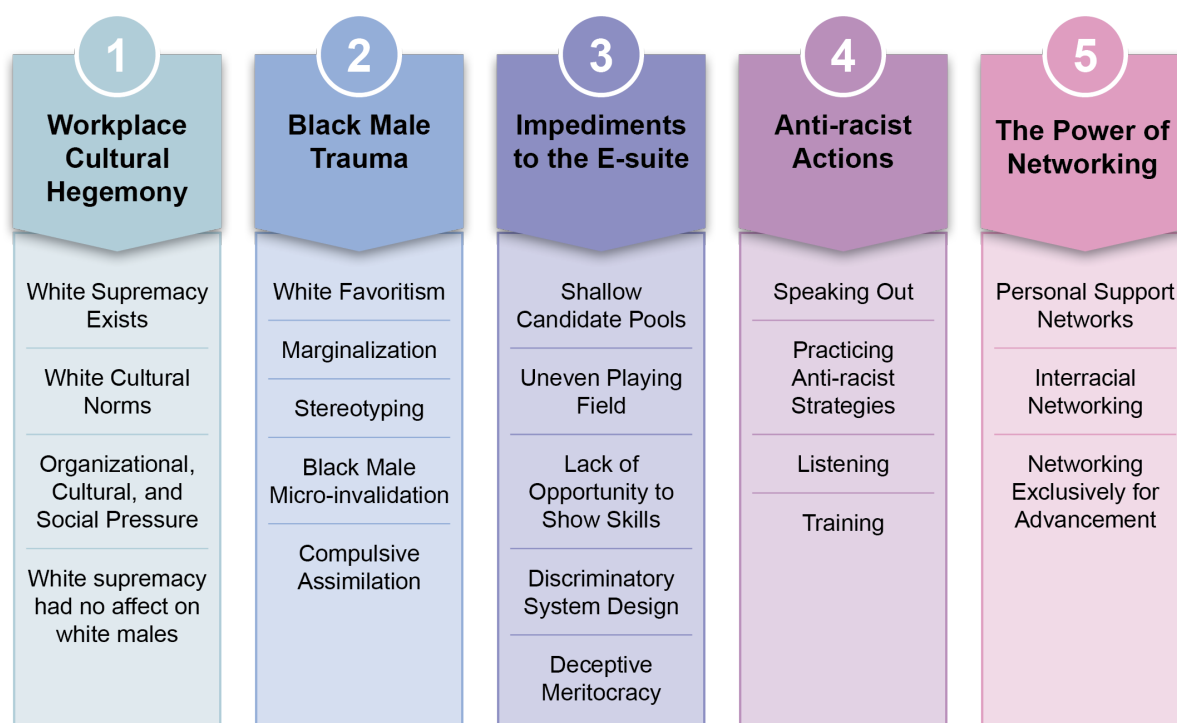

Figure 2. Emergent five themes.

Workplace Cultural Hegemony

This finding surfaced as participants described how dominant and pervasive white cultural norms and mores are in the workplace. During their interviews, participants shared workplace culture played a significant role in their experiences as employees and ultimately

impacted their performance and advancement in a variety of ways. Warrick (2015) defined

culture as "the [predominant] beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, and practices that are

characteristic of a group of people" (p. 4). Workplace or organizational culture can have a

significant impact on the morale, productivity, and behavior of its employees and affect the

organization's ability to attract, motivate, and retain talented people (Ahmady et al., 2016).

Some of the key organizational culture factors influencing the participants' workplace

experience included the presence of white supremacy, the prevailing white cultural norms and

mores, and social pressure for Black male employees to represent all Black men. The following

sections detail the participants' experiences of their respective workplace experiences as it relates

to workplace culture and detailed by the sub findings.

White Supremacy Exists

All participants readily acknowledged white supremacy exists in the workplace although

none of them clarified or clearly defined what white supremacy meant. The general impressions

from their comments were white supremacy is bad, oppressive, and pervasive. While the Black

participants discussed how they believed white supremacy had negatively affected their career

advancement, the white participants expressed it essentially had no effect on their career

trajectory or they were not aware of any impact in may have had. Larry, a Black executive,

conveyed, "I can't imagine a Black man who's working here in the United States that hasn't felt

some impact from white supremacy." Terry and Paul, both Black executives, offered similar

sentiments. Terry stated:

> This is nothing new. When you deal with white supremacy your whole life, you get
> mentally prepared. It's [white supremacy] a burden that I personally, as an African
> American male, have carried I would say well before even my workplace experience. It
> actually started when my parents would talk to me about how you have to behave, how
> you have to carry yourself, and how society, especially here in the United States treats
> African American men. Not only how they [white people] treat us but also how they

view us. So white supremacy has been a burden and a weight that I have carried since I can remember.

Similarly, Paul provided:

The workplace is a culture of white supremacy. Our system has been built on and predicated on white superiority and white supremacy. It has insidious effects. It [white supremacy] has impacted me in two ways that are very different. I think it has impacted me as a student and it's impacted me as a professional and those are two very different experiences. As a student, I was painfully aware, at times, that the system was not constructed and built for me to be successful going all the way back to middle school where I almost failed out. The system is not constructed for someone coming from my social and racial groups. The system reinforces this American caste system of white at the top. As a professional, I live with the understanding that there are those people, my colleagues, who are looking at me skeptically because I am not a white man. Essentially, people expect a white man to be in positions of authority but I'm not a white man.

Ogden, a white participant, claimed, "I will stipulate white supremacy is real." Don and Roy,

also white, agreed and shared similar views. Don said:

I think often times it's [white supremacy] cloaked or hidden and masked in some way you know? It's been a bigger impact as we've been able to identify it a little bit more maybe than we had in the past. I think that's largely because we're becoming more educated, at least I am becoming more educated as to what it looks like.

Roy shared, saying:

I think that there are clearly underrepresented populations in the work environment, but I'm embarrassed to say that until the events unfolded last year with George Floyd, I never thought to look at the demographics of my company. It [white supremacy] didn't present itself as a problem to me. But I knew when I looked at the data, we had a problem.

Although the existence of white supremacy was presumed by the participants, only the white

participants expressed doubt about any affect it may have had on their career advancement. By

affect, they explained white supremacy did not impact their work experience positively or

negatively. Ogden conveyed uncertainty about its influence, saying:

I don't know that white supremacy has directly impacted my workplace experience. Maybe that's because I think of white supremacy in its extreme form, you know neo-Nazis, KKK, or things like that.

Don was slightly more confident of white supremacy's nullity because he had not seen it in his

workplace. He said:

> I mean I don't know that it's [white supremacy] impacted my workplace experience
> immensely because I haven't seen it too much in my workplace . . . I can tell you that
> over that last few years. You know, it makes me uncomfortable essentially and then that
> starts down a conversation and so I have become more aware of it over the last maybe 3
> years . . . I'm more so than I was in the past.

White cultural norms. Black participants described their organization's culture as

having white norms. White norms and mores are characterized as behaviors and practices

deriving from traditional white European culture. Gary described the difficulty of understanding

and navigating white norms as "Lots and lots of contortions in terms of not being able to be your

authentic self and speak your truth." Paul concurred, emphasizing:

> The "normal culture" in the workplace is a white culture. For white people, without even
> understanding or knowledge of the fact that the whole work environment and your life
> and your culture is predicated on your supremacy based purely on your race. As a white
> person, the fact that your cultural norms are the baseline standard for everything means
> you rarely find yourself in a position or situation where you have to adapt. There are so
> many of these instances where day-to-day oppressive practices have been embedded into
> the culture as norms, going back to my earlier point, because our system has been built on
> white superiority. For instance, how we structure our meetings. We have Robert's Rules
> of Order, you know, points of order. All these things are things that in some way, shape,
> or form reinforce a Eurocentric model or culture which, in turn leads to in several
> instances, racist policies or ideas or ways of thinking.

Another Black participant, Steve, described how white cultural norms in his organization

promote prerogative and power for white men but are problematic and undesirable for Black

men. He said:

> Entitlement is the word that I would use because it comes to mind most. When a
> majority male [white male] gets put in a superior role, entitlement manifests itself in a
> style that suggests that he believes he can speak to people under him in ways that might
> be and actually look derogatory. The culture accepts that. Almost a sense of like. . . .you
> work for me . . . . there's a certain level of belief of power that they have over you when
> they're in that role. As a Black male, what I have found and what I have seen is
> exhibiting similar kind of behaviors you can get yourself in trouble. As a Black male
> when you are in a position of authority, you have to be very careful that you treat people
> as people and that they [white people] know and see that you treat people as people. If

you don't do that and you exhibit styles that may be more aligned to that entitlement that I mentioned with white males, you can be perceived completely differently. You can find yourself in a of lot of trouble and hot water because people view your behavior as . . . . more negative.

White participants discussed how they believed there is a universal organizational culture everyone must fit into. Roy shared, "I hope you can be yourself and be in alignment with the organizational goals, objectives, mission, and values so that it doesn't matter how you talk, you look or how you dress. It's about alignment with our values and objectives." Ogden echoed similar sentiments on a generic organizational culture everyone must subscribe to, saying:

> I think there are parts of the company culture that every employee has to adopt and assimilate into whoever they are in order to be successful. I don't know if it's assimilation necessarily, but I think it's cultural fit in the broadest sense for an organization. Cultural fit does help advancement. I mean there is no doubt about that.

Black Male Traumas

Black male participants characterized many of their experiences in the workplace as traumas. These workplace traumas included but was not limited to the emotional, psychological, and physical effects of real and perceived racism profoundly experienced by Black men. Five subthemes emerged during the interviews: (a) white favoritism, (b) marginalization, (c) Black male microinvalidation, (d) stereotyping, and (e) compulsive assimilation. The Black participants uniquely described how the traumas experienced throughout their careers impeded, obstructed, or prolonged their ascension to the e-suite.

White Favoritism

White favoritism was described as white people, in particularly white males, being desired or preferred over people of color. Participants explained how white favoritism inequitably advances white people in the workplace, and how being liked by white people in positions of power can be beneficial for their career advancement. Gary, a Black participant,

recalled an experience early in his career where he was disfavored because of the color of his

skin, sharing:

> As a hot new salesperson on the team, I go out and call on a hardware company that used to be locally owned. They listen to me and my pitch and then they didn't come back to me but went to my manager and basically told my white manager that they couldn't work with me. My manager asked why, did he do something wrong? They said it was the color of my skin. They were not bashful in saying that they were not going to work with me because of the color of my skin. It was so painful. I was hurt. It made me question did I make the right choice getting into this business.

Endearing favor is "part of the game" Black males play in the workplace. In example, Terry

shared:

> Early in my career, I saw that I was treated so much different that my white counterparts in that opportunities did not come as abundantly for me as they did them, I started behaving different. Even those that I had outperformed, had higher educational attainment, and better social skills out and were getting called up. I'm like okay, I'm over here grinding it out going above and beyond like our parents always told us we had to do but never getting the tap on the shoulder. At first, I thought maybe I just need to go a little bit harder and then I realized maybe I don't know the rules of the game. I saw that it was about relationships. I thought I'm good at that so let me start reaching to them [white people]. At first it was hard. I was met with distance. They would only let me get so close . . . nice conversations or meeting but no lunch or coffee. However, as I got to know them, I did get "sponsored by them" and doors started opening. Even to this day, when there are opportunities for business engagements, I'm always an afterthought. I have to be sponsored by someone that is white in order to be invited into the conversation.

Paul commented, saying:

> I found that it's better in our organization to establish relationships and have [white] people hold you in high regard than it is for you to be a consistent performer that nobody knows or likes. Just purely being someone who is well-liked and not be all that great at your job, you can still be progressed like a super achiever for whatever reason.

Ogden, a white executive, described the white favoritism phenomenon, providing:

> I think it's easier for a competent white man to get a promotion than a competent Black man. Where does competency and promotion bleed into an overlap area where promoting someone is just more comfortable because they look like me? I think you're so unconscious of it sometimes. You know, I go back to the comfort that unconscious bias that I'm just more comfortable with people that look like me. Relationship building is challenging because people are more comfortable sometimes with other people that look like them. Until we became more conscious of it and started implementing

measures, I do think that if you looked at it, people who were promoted were people who fit into that typical white group.

Marginalization

Marginalization was defined by participants as being treated negatively or less well than others in the workplace. Black participants described how they are marginalized in the workplace every day. Paul explained, saying:

Black men are persistently marginalized as a function of a culture and a system that has been established to marginalize Black men. I experience the trauma of having people treat me as if I don't belong because of my ethnicity because of my race. I think the experience of the Black men in my workplace is . . . . I'd say persistently marginalized. Changing the Black male marginalization is like moving a mountain because it really is engrained in how my organization functions.

Gary emphatically shared, stating:

I know there are times when I should have been insulted by someone telling me that you're not like "them" or you're not a "normal salesperson" . . . . insulting me . . . . and I felt like I had to just take that shit.

Larry described his experience, sharing:

Communication is very different. Being treated as an equal is not the case. I remember walking into the building and thinking to myself wow, very few people ever acknowledged my existence—they may talk to me but wouldn't even look at me.

Roy, a white participant, affirmed, "I've listened to the Black leaders in my organization and Black males don't believe that they have full acceptance at work or a say." Don candidly added to Roy's sentiments, explaining:

When you're a minority in a majority culture . . . . how well you speak the same way people around you speak I think is a big reason why some people have moved up within organizations and have been promoted where others haven't. I was recently reading about how that [speaking standard English] can hold people of color back and it's a part of the structural racism. It's a part of how our organization is kind of structured in a way.

Stereotyping

Black participants intimated being stereotyped by their white counterparts throughout their study interviews. The notion of mostly negative generalization about who they are as Black

people had adverse effects on their white peer relationships in the workplace and their

psychological well-being. Black participants narrated how they had trouble in the workplace

negotiating stereotypes about being misunderstood and a physical threat. Larry stated:

> Their [white people's] expectations that have come over years about our temperament have a tendency to get in the way of forming some deep relationships you need to have to progress in corporations. As a Black man, a challenge you have is if you show too little or too much emotion, it may work against you. If you're demonstrative and loud people may consider you as hostile and an angry Black man that sparks fear. If you're quiet you're aloof. It's that balance of being able to be assertive and aggressive when necessary but at the same time recognizing that you're doing it with another context because when a white male does the same thing, it's not viewed the same way. It's understanding the chess game and recognizing that individuals may have some preconceived notions about who you are and what you do.

Steve provided:

> Black males have to deal with the perception of being a threat. They [white people] view a Black male to be more of threat to the established power.

Gary stated:

> As a Black leader, some white folks were offended I support Black Lives Matter.

Paul stated:

> It's difficult managing the perception of being threatening. I mean it just goes back to me having to find ways to say the things that are on my mind and in my heart in a way that they're going to be received by people who are probably completely oblivious to the perspective. It's exhausting to do that. I mean it really is. At some point in my career, I will have a little more courage to really kind of be in that space of my authentic self. I'm just not there right now. I admire that though. But there's only three options. Either do that, I say nothing, which is unacceptable because why am I there if I'm just going smile and nod my head or I can have a Dave Chappelle *Keeping It Real* moment. Only one of them is going to result in me being heard.

Paul continued, offering:

> This conversation reminds of a Dave Chappelle skit called *When Keeping It Real Can Go Very Wrong.* In the skit, the narrator talks about how the main character Vernon, a Black man, got along great and promoted fast at the company he worked for but in his heart of hearts he felt like because he got along so well with his white counterparts that he was an Uncle Tom. After being complimented in a meeting, Vernon is requested by his white mentor to "Give me some skin!" He subsequently blows up and has this moment of

"realness" where he stereotypically says what he was really thinking. After this moment he loses his job.

Black Male Microinvalidation

Microinvalidations were characterized as both verbal and nonverbal actions that function to minimalize or dismiss the Black participants' thoughts, presence, or achievements. These, sometimes subconscious, behaviors by white people seemed to peak the sensitivity and heighten the resolve of Black participants to achieve equality or fair treatment. White participants offered sincere acknowledgement of microinvalidating behaviors. Larry, Terry, and Paul all shared compelling experiences of microinvalidation. Larry shared, stating:

> My white counterparts can lead with their opinions and people take that for granted. I am not given the same amount of credibility, so I need to bring more to the table.

Terry shared, stating:

> As a CEO, in a room full of CEOs, I'm the last to get called on. I am the last person to be introduced in group and it is very rare that I'm called out or singled out for exceptional performance.

Paul shared, stating:

> The last hiring committee I was on, I was one of two people of color, and the rest of the committee was white. There were some very specific skills that I think the department was looking for but in looking for those specific skill sets it was really a backdoor way to replicate the whiteness in the department. Because the skills that they were really looking for were things that tended to not be skills that people of color would actually pursue. People of color may have skills, but they may be represented in slightly different ways that may be more nonconventional. I had to call them out and it got really uncomfortable because it really boiled down to me basically stating that they may not see this as racist, but candidates of color were being invalidated by the same system of operation that resulted in this being the whitest department in the organization.

Nonverbal microinvalidations can be equally as impactful and harmful as verbal microinvalidations. When Black people do not see other Black people in executive leadership positions in an organization, the implicit message is Black people are not worthy to lead. Don and Ogden, both white participants, conceded the racial homogeneity of the executive leadership

in organizations can be significantly and detrimentally impactful, in particularly, to the

aspirations of a Black male. Don shared, stating:

> I don't have any direct reports that are Black so maybe that's invalidating because they [Black males] don't see anyone that looks like them but the only people who report directly to me are the vice presidents. We only have a few Black males at my institution, but I think they obviously feel very much alone—not having a lot of people that look like them.

Ogden stated:

> I think it's hard sometimes when you don't see someone that looks like you in those executive positions. And certainly, it's harder from a networking perspective to reach out to them [white people] and say how did you get there, can you help me?

Compulsive Assimilation

All participants agreed some form of assimilation into the dominate corporate culture is

required for advancement. Black participants expressed a kind of cognitive dissonance with

corporate culture assimilation because the dominate corporate culture is in many instances white-

centric. They shared how they understood the value of corporate assimilation and its benefits,

but also communicated how it is often incongruent with their own values and sense of self.

White participants offered acknowledgement of the criticality of corporate assimilation in

relationship to advancement and empathized with the challenges Black males experience

attempting to assimilate into predominantly white organizational cultures. Compulsive

assimilation characterizes the experiences Black participants articulated—the irresistible urge to

submit or conform to behaviors and norms that may be in conflict with their own personal

values, or the requirement of significant compromission to advance or refrain from cultural

compliance and risk career actualization. In concert with this sentiment, Terry declared, "People

inherently don't like different so that's why you can't be an African American and walk safely in

Orange County." Steve voiced sentiments that seemed to be shared by many of the participants

concerning the inherent internal conflict Black men experience assimilating into their white work

cultures. Steve said:

> Unfortunately, I'm in an environment where assimilation is still practiced, desired, and expected a lot more than it should. I'll be blunt, when you basically say look around, we have a room full of ducks, but we see value in bringing in some chickens. But when the chickens come in, you want to teach them how to do everything like a duck. The primary emphasis is on assimilating them [diverse employees] into the culture—assimilation can quickly dilute or diminish the effectiveness of bringing diversity into the workplace. Because of assimilation, you really can't fully take advantage and see the fulfillment of the diversity you're brining into the workplace.

Gary stated:

> Assimilation is real. Assimilation also includes lots of contortion in terms of not being able to speak your truth about how you really feel. Part of assimilation is shameful because when you assimilate you've allowed yourself to be compromised. I feel like I can't say anything about how I may really feel because I know if I do, I will ruffle feathers and, in that regard, my opportunities may become limited in terms of my growth.

Larry provided, stating:

> When I see young people coming into the workforce and saying, I just want to be who I am, I want to be completely free, that's just a little bit of a fool's game because no one is really completely free when you walk into the doors of a corporation. Everyone, even whites, are trying to fit into a box of some sort. For African Americans, the compartment is just so small that they feel very constrained—it's smaller than a white male's compartment. I think for Black men, we have a tendency to feel very much more contained and less of who we really are.

Paul shared, stating:

> Absolutely, I would not be where I am today if I did not learn how to move within certain spaces and communicate with people that look different than me. I think that you're not going to be successful in any organization if you cannot adapt and learn how to communicate and move. I have had to learn how to temper the racial stereotypes of being combative or arrogant and real aspects of my culture—unfortunately, I do have to leave some of those things at the door in order to function well at work. To what degree we [Black men] have to modify our communication style and adapt to the norms of the dominant culture may vary depending on your organization. We have to navigate our authentic selves while coexisting in these environments without compromising who we are.

> In grappling with the experiences of Black males regarding the compulsion of

assimilation, Roy, a white participant, asked, "That's interesting—I mean the word assimilate,

does that mean capitulate? I would hope assimilation would mean you can still be yourself."

Don and Ogden, also white participants, were more decisive in their views.

Don shared, stating:

> Yeah, I think assimilation is critically important and I'm learning that it is an issue or could be an issue when you're a minority in a majority culture trying to figure out how to assimilate. Being able to fit in are big reasons why people have moved up within organizations and have been promoted and gotten opportunities where others haven't. I think we have to analyze how Black men are assimilating into organizations and be cognizant of where a Black male may come from in comparison to say a white male coming into the organization.

Ogden stated:

> If it's assimilation that's required, then you need to essentially be white if you're a Black man—I don't think that [assimilation] has a or should have a place in the organization. I think the organization loses something when it requires a Black man to leave part of who he is at the door when he comes in.

Impediments to the E-Suite

Participants described several factors they believed operate as obstructions prohibiting Black males from occupying the e-suite. Many of the blockades discussed were systemic in nature, meaning organizational policies or practices may have influenced the outcomes. Participants discussed factors, such as hiring managers' lack of effort to diversify executive candidate pools with Black males, disproportionately few opportunities afforded to Black male to demonstrate their prowess, and meritocracy being a discretionary tool used by white executives to hold back Black males and elevate their counterparts. The remainder of this section discusses five subthemes that materialized: (a) shallow candidate pools, (b) uneven playing fields, (c) lack of opportunity for Black males to show their skills, (d) discriminatory system design, and (e) deceptive meritocracy.

Shallow Candidate Pools

Many participants acknowledged executive candidate pools are devoid of Black males but offered different perspectives as to the reasons why. Black participants intimated executive candidate pools were lacking Black candidates because hiring them was simply not a priority, and a facet of the "systemic design" to keep Black males out of the e-suite. Steve alleged, "Companies will use excuses like we can't find Black males," and Larry contended, "Black men exit out of the system prematurely because sometimes they find better opportunities somewhere else."

White participants also candidly admitted executive candidate pools were lacking Black males but attributed the deficiency to cliches. In example, Ogden shared, "Historically, we have been a very white male dominated organization." Don also shared, stating:

> Our pools haven't had a lot of Black men to be honest with you—so you know a lack of applicants in pool is probably the number one thing. Not having a lot of Black employees, we don't have folks moving up from within. We need to be looking for more ways to recruit more Black men. We're just not seeing the numbers in our applicant pools. So then the other piece would be are they [Black males] out there and they're just not applying for jobs or not applying for our jobs for any particular reason. Is there something that makes us unattractive to Black males?

Roy assigned responsibility for the absence of Black male executive candidates to white executives' hiring practices, saying:

> I'd argue because we haven't tried hard enough to have a bigger population of Black male candidates. Because when we hire, it's mostly a candidate pool of Caucasian candidates with a sprinkling of, you know, underrepresented populations.

Uneven Playing Field

Participants described how metaphorically the playing field is not level for Black men. There is little to no fairness or equality in the opportunities for Black men to be successful because the rules or standard of measure are different for them than for their white counterparts.

The unevenness of the playing field makes it exponentially more challenging for Black men to

get to the e-suite. Gary frankly explained, saying:

> It's just not a level playing field when white guys can be given opportunities that the perception is I had to work for—I had to earn. That's just the way it is. I don't have the right words for it. It's frustrating. I don't think it is a self-created thought process that we have to work harder than our white peers.

Like Gary, Steve and Paul perceived the playing field to be uneven as well. Steve added, saying:

> Let's be honest, from a starting standpoint, we start from a space behind others. We have to rely on the majority and need a lot more sponsorship and advocacy.

Paul stated:

> I mean I can take it all the way back to kindergarten to just how Black boys are treated differently. In job interviews, we have to make sure that we're conscious of and navigating perceptions of our identity as Black men. Brothers have been suppressed in their ability to be successful for hundreds of years so how the hell are we going to occupy positions if we don't acknowledge the fact that if you make it, you're more exceptional than your white counterpart.

Ogden, a white executive, affirmed the notion of an uneven playing field may be real, saying:

> I think when you have disparity from the start, you have to do things that bring it back to a level playing field and we've never had a level playing field, so you have to be very intentional.

Lack of Opportunity to Show Skills

Nearly all the participants communicated the lack of job opportunities or chances for

Black males to demonstrate their skills dramatically narrows the prospects of Black males

entering the e-suite. Without opportunities and visibility, participants implied change in Black

male executive representation was ill-fated. Summarily, their sentiments emphasized the need

for intentionality in recruitment, sponsorship and advocacy, and development for Black males.

Steve stated, "There has to be people who are willing to reach out and sponsor and advocate for

Black men otherwise, it won't happen."

Similarly, Terry responded, saying:

I would say it's about opportunity. It's also about relationship-based. When you are not invited to the party, you can't build the relationships to get in the game. I think you have to be very intentional about how you go about changing the face of management. When you see an opportunity to make a shift or change, you have to be very intentional about how you recruit for that position. If you want to find Black men—I promise you, they're out there.

Paul said:

We have got to nurture and mentor Black men for positions and leadership. I'm creating space and opportunity for other Black people to occupy positions and I'm helping them to be successful when they get into the organization so that they can navigate it. I'm passing on what I know. So, at a bare minimum we have got to do what we have to do to match the level of racism that has existed for hundreds of years that has allowed us to not occupy leadership positions—which means deliberate intentional policies to really create environments where people can be successful.

White participants concurred with respect to intentionality being paramount in affecting Black male representation. Additionally, they acknowledged the need to develop Black males and took responsibility for creating visible opportunities for them to demonstrate their prowess. Don responded, stating:

We need to probably develop more opportunities for Black men, not just at the executive levels, but at all levels within the organization and then ensure that just like we would for anybody that we provide professional development.

Roy said:

I have an opportunity to pick the best candidates I can. I want that to be a person of color every single time—that's the only way we are going to turn the numbers around. We just have to work harder to figure out how to get more candidates of color who can qualify for our roles.

Ogden stated:

I think you have to be very intentional about building your pathways an organization for Black male opportunities. I think you have to create visibility with projects and stuff like that and say I'm going to give this person a shot—it's up to you to do the job. Black males haven't had these opportunities and haven't been put in the way of those folks who can make hiring decisions to demonstrate their capabilities. When those opportunities appear, you don't have a good pool because you haven't nurtured Black men and brought in through the same process you have for some white men. I think that includes how you

recruit—maybe it's a combination of building the capacity within your organization so that Blacks grow over time.

Discriminatory System Design

Participants described several facets of workplace that work both independently and in concert to create what was characterized as an oppressive or discriminatory system. The system is made up of components such as workplace culture, processes and practices, and any other relevant factor perceived by the participants to be a part of the system. While participants seem to all agree the system is discriminatory against Black men, there were some slightly different perspectives depending upon the participant's race. Black participants emphatically underscored the discriminatory aspects of the system. Paul depicted his experience, saying:

> Black men are combating this system where white people are so comfortable with their privilege, they don't even acknowledge it or recognize it as something that exists—they take it for granted. There is a lot working against us to keep us from getting even qualified to apply for the job and then once we get there, we still have to navigate this same system and carry this emotional baggage and burden. Not only do I have to navigate through a system that was designed for me to fail but, when I get a chance, I still have to perform.

Gary expressed similar sentiments, staying:

> White people work a script of what they want, and this is what people go out and get. That's how the [candidate] pool gets designed of all of the people that are a "good fit" but fit into a category of people that don't look like me.

Larry added another dimension to the experience with his assertion, stating, "White folks on the average don't walk around thinking about I'm white—what a luxury not to have to think about skin color." Larry's comment echoed what Terry and Paul mentioned about Black men carrying a burden or stigma of being Black.

Although white participants acknowledged the racial inequities in the system, they tended to share more about the biased processes of recruitment and development of Black males rather than the causes and impacts of the discriminatory system or how Black men may experience it.

Ogden expressed how the history of disparate treatment toward Black men requires time to

remedy. He said:

> How you remedy the historical part of it [racial inequity] takes time because you've got
> to now go back and grow that pipeline or go outside and bring people into these
> positions—it's probably a combination of the two. It's kind of like the network, we've
> got to build a support system for Black males to help them succeed.

Don reiterated a perspective previously shared by Roy, suggesting greater effort may be needed

to specifically recruit Black men. He said:

> We somehow have to figure out how to recruit in a way to specifically call out that we're
> recruiting Black men. That's really hard to do. [My industry] is very hierarchical.
> Maybe there is better success in organizations that have flattened themselves. It would
> be interesting to see if there is better racial success in organizations that are flatter.

Roy asked a question calling into contemplation the discriminatory design of the system itself,

saying:

> If this [lack of Black male executives] is such a problem, why aren't there organizations
> that have figured this out to help companies recruit more people of color into their
> organization? I now have an executive who is responsible for diversity in the workplace.

Deceptive Meritocracy

The participants' descriptions and experiences of meritocracy in the workplace were

mixed. Some participants believed meritocracy is false and really does not exist, while others

considered meritocracy to be present but subjective and still requiring meritorious work. Black

participants generally experienced meritocracy as spurious and subjective. For example, Steve

said, "Meritocracy lives in the eye of the beholder. If you don't have the right representative in

the room, I would argue that meritocracy will not happen." Also, Larry added, saying:

> There is no such thing as meritocracy. White Americans believe in meritocracy way
> more than African Americans do because we know it doesn't exist in our world. As an
> African American male, you have to prove yourself. People don't give you the benefit of
> the doubt.

Finally, Paul responded, staying:

> I am suggesting that meritocracy is bogus. We're talking about executive-level positions. We have to get rid of the foolish notion and idea of all of this equal meritocracy. I think that meritocracy does exist it just means different things for different people in different spaces. It's not static. Meritocracy for me is very different than what it is for my white counterparts. I think that meritocracy for me means that not only am I doing it on the job, but it also means that I am my finding a way to express or translate my Blackness and my cultural identity in thoughts and opinions into a way that my white counterparts can digest what I'm saying.

White participants viewed meritocracy has more nuanced. They too described it as subjective, but also restated the necessity for intentionality when determining opportunities, relationships, and meritorious work as the keys to recognition and advancement. Roy affirmed, "Interpretation of people's work performance is largely subjective." Others elaborated more and shared the following. Ogden said:

> Again, it's not an equal playing field that's why I think as an organization, you have to be very intentional about taking steps to ensure that opportunities are based on competency and skill rather than those things that you pretend don't exist but are influencing you anyway. Someone who is better at relationship building is more inclined to get the better assignments which leads to advancement. But I do think people who were promoted were competent and could do the job.

Also, Don said:

> I think meritocracy is probably the way you move up within the organization although I think often times people are given an opportunity based upon some skills. I definitely think you try to structure a place that by merit you perform well you move up.

Antiracist Actions

In describing antiracist actions, they practiced to combat white supremacy in the workplace, participants identified four key approaches: speaking out, listening, practicing antiracist strategies, and training. When explaining their approaches, participants related a variety of tactics, including attempting to reason with others to see their point of view, establishing employee resource groups to create voice for underrepresented workforce populations, and bringing in subject matter experts to edify the workforce about antiracist

strategies. It was difficult to discern the effectiveness of the various methods, but participants seemed to be committed to their respective efforts.

Speaking Out

Many characterized speaking out as a longer-term strategy that over time will yield benefit and change. Multiple participants explained the need to be assertive in speaking up and how the executive voice is a powerful one. Don shared, staying:

> I call it out if I see anything that appears racist at all on our campus. I call it out. We also espouse what our values are so the people can see them—we've got them up on our webpage and we've tried to do things like that.

Gary added, stating, "I focus on being very clear about the words that I use and how I communicate with everyone as an equal or everyone having the same opportunity to compete."

Larry and Terry continued thematically with a similar message of assertiveness. Larry said:

> As a strategy, recognizing that there are times I just simply have to assert myself in such a way that does not make people uncomfortable. How do I actually help this person see my point of view and what do I need to do to get them comfortable with that? It's just managing and picking the time to do that.

And Terry said:

> I will continue to bring up social and societal challenges that we are all facing and be verbal about it from a company perspective and how we won't tolerate it. During Black History Month, I will highlight MLK, Malcolm X, and Harriet Tubman.

Ogden expounded on the powerful voice of the executive by highlighting the importance of the messaging and the need to encourage continuous dialogue, saying:

> It's about messaging. I think your voice as CEO is really important because a good CEO is first and foremost a storyteller—you have to communicate what is acceptable and unacceptable in the workplace. I think we have to continue to talk about race and racism within the organization and have those really uncomfortable conversations because racism is an uncomfortable conversation. I took a very active role in messaging the organization about the George Floyd issue.

He went into greater detail about the importance of who the speaker is how who is speaking may

dilute or heighten the resonance of the message, saying:

> It's great if you go out and speak to people but it's much more powerful if you're in a community of color and you have a Black man speaking to a Black audience. You have to make sure people see themselves in that speaker.

Paul enthusiastically acknowledged he regularly spoke out against racists actions or words but

sometimes was less than confident about his efficacy. He confessed, stating:

> They [white people] are able to find reasons to justify doing things that in my mind are racist. When I am the only one in the room who speaks out, often times I am not able to compel them to see things from a different perspective.

Listening

Some participants shared listening was one of the most powerful and enlightening

methods they have practiced in terms of understanding the experiences of racism and the impact

on Black men. When asked how he would describe the Black males' experiences in his

workplace, Don humbly responded, saying, "I can only answer that from talking to them and

hearing from them what their experiences are like. I think they feel very much alone not having

very many people that look like them [in the workplace]."

Roy took a similar, but more formalized, approach by establishing employee resource

groups, offering:

> The most important thing I've started to do is listen—we have formed ERGs [employee resource groups]. I started listening to my workforce and I started hearing about how people feel. We have created an infrastructure to listen to our employees on a regular basis to hear what they have to say about our creating a culture that everyone can feel like they belong to.

Gary followed suit and said, "I lead the ERGs and my message to others is I hear your stories;

you have a voice here."

Training

Antiracism training emerged as a theme among participants to combat oppression in the workplace. Although a few of the training approaches were more common, others' expressions were not as common, and conveyed the frustration felt by some of the participants concerning the owner of responsibility for being educated in this space. Larry ardently stated:

> White people have to start saying Black people aren't responsible for training me. I have to educate myself and I need to understand that this is not upon the Black male to go and teach me about all this [antiracism] stuff. I have to go through the journey.

Conversely, Gary shared Black people have the responsibility to get trained and understand their rights in the workplace when it comes to racial discrimination, saying:

> Black people need to educate themselves about their rights in this space [concerning] racist behaviors. We have to figure out how to get the training and get the experience at the table. We need to know how to bring cases or concerns with facts.

Terry and Don expressed more traditional views on training and avoided casting responsibility and accountability on one or another to get it. Terry shared, stating, "Bring subject matter experts on diversity and inclusion and belonging to talk about racism." Don added, saying: "On a regular basis, we've been doing training with our managers on what does it mean to be antiracist. Some things we can do involve professional development opportunities some involve a restructuring of the college." Ogden discussed a more innovative approach to training that included the workplace and the surrounding community, stating:

> It's more than just what's happening internally in the company. It's what we're doing externally in the community also. We need to make sure that our programs are not just unconsciously targeted towards a certain group. So, we started to refocus our programs and our approach to ensure that we were touching every community in a very meaningful way—especially those that we had left behind in the past. We did a lot of training on unconscious bias.

Practice Antiracism

Most of the participants subscribed to the notion of practicing antiracist actions but had somewhat varied methods of how they did it. The actions ranged from trust building to organizational strategic planning. The most common action shared among the Black participants was individual relationship building. However, Paul expressed resentment and confusion in practicing antiracist actions, stating:

> I do it [practice antiracism] but it makes me resentful. As a Black man, how do I do that? Like how do I practice antiracist policies to get someone to not treat me as if I am less than them? I will say that I am unapologetically pro-Black in my hiring practices and in my mentorship and who I spend my time with.

Steve, Larry, and Terry discussed building allies, gaining trust, and role modeling exemplary behavior as effective antiracism strategies. Steve said:

> I build allies with people who I know are the ones who will represent effectively when they see behaviors that we think are white supremacy in the workplace. Overtime, I was able to build strong allies across racial lines with people that didn't look like me.

Larry added, stating: "I think you have to be able to not only gain the trust of people that you're working with, but also trust has to be deep enough that you're able to confront issues." And Terry provided his input, adding: "I continue to try and be the beacon of light and hope and the model for how people of the world need to perceive each other and live our values right."

White participants mostly emphasized more of the organizational strategic approach to exercising antiracist actions. Don reported his organization developed an equity plan comprised of several tactics designed to promote antiracism. He said:

> In trying to support antiracism, we've developed a plan, it's not as focused on antiracism as it is equity, but we've developed an equity strategic plan for a lack of a better term, and I think we've worked on items. We've identified what we need to do as an [organization], some of the things involve our hiring practices and things we can do to better recruit. We have about 80 things that we've identified or things that we need to do so that we can be a better organization so that we can ensure that we're not you know, practicing racism ourselves institutionally.

Similarly, Roy's organization conducted an examination of his employees' compensation based on demographics to ensure equity. Roy stated: "We are conducting a pay equity analysis—I didn't know about the issue until last year." His organization also supported Black history month activities. He said: "The Black employees took advantage of Black history month—they had programs every week."

While Ogden shared the more organizational strategic approach to practicing antiracism, he also offered perspective on relationship building to promote personal growth and development in the space, stating:

> Tactically, it's ensuring that your workplace strategies support diversity, equity, and inclusion and that goes to how you recruit employees, making sure that all of your interview panels are diverse, and it goes to supporting various alliance groups in your organization and making sure that they have voice.

Lastly, Ogden confessed, saying, "It's not like I can ever pretend to understand what your experiences are as a Black man, but I can create some awareness that I wouldn't have had otherwise through conversation and through a friendship."

The Power of Networking

Participants described a variety of perspectives concerning the power of networking with others in the workplace. Black participants shared their views on the virtues of networking, not only with one another but also with white colleagues, and acknowledged how central interacting with colleagues is to their very persistence in the workplace. They predominantly perceived networks as providing support, a sense of belonging, and an opportunity to learn workplace behaviors from their white counterparts to be viewed more favorably. White participants described networking as vital only for advancement, but not fundamental to their persistence. The remainder of this section discusses the three subthemes that emerged from the individual

interviews: (a) personal support network, (b) the influence of interracial networking, (c) networking exclusively for advancement.

Personal Support Network

Four out of the five Black participants expressed how critical the support provided by a social network is to them enduring the inherent racial and cultural challenges in the workplace. White participants did not share they valued or used their social networks for personal support. In describing the value of having a social network, Paul and other Black participants shared the significance of having support in navigating a stressful work environment, along with having champions in your corner. Paul said:

> Your network provides you an outlet release from some of the norms, the stresses of working in a normed environment and normed culture of white environment. I mean having guys that have my back means everything—like pushing me out there for promotional and professional development opportunities.

Paul continued, sharing:

> First and foremost, having other people of color to connect with, especially Black and brown people, makes a difference. I think being at a certain level, when you run across another professional of color you tend to link up very quickly. Having relationships within affinity groups gives me a core network of people that I know go through the same things and have my back 99% of the time.

Steve offered a very similar sentiment by characterizing a social network as social capital and providing a sense of belonging in the workplace. He said:

> One reason a social network is valuable is just making sure that you kind of feel like you've got a support system. A social network allows you to have a support system when you are dealing with something. Your network lets you know that you got people there you can lean on. I mean the social network is huge. You talk about social capital, and I think it's valuable for a multitude of reasons.

> A strong social network gives you a sense of belonging. Having a strong network allows you to hear and understand things that you may not naturally hear.

Terry affirmed his peers' sentiments by simply stating, "Because I was affiliated with this leadership program, I am most likely 10 years ahead of where I would be career wise."

Larry succinctly offered a slightly deeper perspective in terms of the racial makeup of the social network. In alignment with a view previously expressed by Ogden about the power of Black people speaking to other Black people, Larry asserted, "African Americans can learn more from each other about doing things sometimes than from other people." He also shared a more constructive viewpoint, explaining:

> I think having a good network is always important—as part of that also comes both formal and informal networks. What happens sometimes is when you don't join these networks because you're too busy, you just miss out on these opportunities to connect with other Black executives.

The Influence of Interracial Networking

Three out of five Black participants described how some networking with their white counterparts positively affected them in the workplace. Their explanations included how interracial social networking influenced the way they behaved, how they thought about themselves, and their career trajectory. White participants did not express a perspective concerning interracial networking. Paul confessed by studying his white counterparts, he created his own style and found some sort of confirmation. He said:

> When you study white people, how they do things, you can modify and create your own style then emulate aspects of what makes them successful without compromising who you are culturally. Having relationships with white professionals I think gives me validation from those who may otherwise look at me and kind of question why I'm there. Despite white supremacy, working outside of the affinity groups and having relationships with white professionals has been helpful too.

Gary shared an interesting experience he had once he began to play golf, a predominately white sport. He stated:

> Once I started playing golf and learned to play well, I noticed that I was getting invited to some opportunities that I wasn't included in before and then I started closing deals on the golf course. My networking clearly has changed now—I understand when you network there's value to how you do it.

Indirectly, Larry seemed to confirm both Paul's and Gary's experiences, stating, "You know, in our world as African Americans, oftentimes our connections are too small, and we create echo chambers—we find people who think like us and do things like us." In other words, there may be value in expanding social networks to include white counterparts.

Networking Exclusively for Advancement

As described in the preceding sections, Black participants portrayed social networking as simply being vital to their persistence in the workplace. They spoke about receiving personal support and deriving a sense of belonging from the workplace networks they created. White participants had a slightly different perspective. Although they did not gain personal support or necessarily view interracial networking as value-added, they uniquely and almost exclusively perceived networking as the key to career advancement. Don, Roy, and Ogden all described social networking in a similar fashion: critical, imperative, and an important determinative. Don said:

> Work relationships become really important because that's how you build relationships with somebody and then you know of course, that's how you move up within the organization. I think it has helped me in a huge way. So, if you have more social contact with somebody within the workplace, I think the better your odds are of getting recognized, building that relationship, and moving up within the organization.

Roy added, saying:

> Yes, I think it was critical. I think it was imperative to have a social network within the company. That's how you demonstrate your ability to lead—to develop a reputation of integrity and respect. If you just stay in your own space and you don't interact with anybody, nobody knows who you are. People don't know your capabilities; you don't have a forum to demonstrate what you can do.

And Ogden stated:

> I think it's very hard if you don't have a network. I think it's just easier to build the network and be around people that look like you. That's how the network gets built up but it's also what makes it so hard for people of color. When it comes time to choose who's going to get the job or get that project or get that work, that network helps out a

lot. I think that the network is crucial, or maybe not crucial, but it's an important determinative. It certainly is one that puts a pretty strong finger on the scale. It's been important largely because I am a big believer in mentors who ended up being my bosses who ended up putting opportunities in my path so I could demonstrate my skills.

The findings discussed in this chapter revealed five distinct themes that emerged from eight semi structured participant interviews, the review of more than 700 pages of transcription, and two small group forums. These five central themes represent the participants' perception of the impact of white supremacy on their careers, traumas experienced by Black males in the workplace, Black male impediments to occupying the e-suite, antiracist actions practiced in the workplace, and the power of networking. Participants, who were all executives from various industry sectors, disclosed personal insights into their workplace experiences from their unique perspectives as Black and white men.

Summary

This chapter discussed in detail the findings of the study and represented them in five central themes that materialized from the research. The findings were presented through the narrated experiences of the individual research participants, and include: (a) Workplace Cultural Hegemony, (b) Black Male Traumas, (c) Impediments to the E-Suite, (d) Antiracist Actions, and (e) The Power of Networking. Additionally, four discrete study results were identified from the findings, individually interpreted, and presented in correlation to relevant literature to gain greater insight into the participants' experiences in the workplace. The results included: (a) white supremacy and white norms ubiquitous and dominant in the workplace, (b) a connection between Black male traumas and social networking at work, (c) Black male impediments to the e-suite universally perceived, and (d) difficulty discerning the efficacy of antiracist actions. The findings, results, and interpretations discussed throughout this chapter provide the foundation for the recommendations offered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of Black and white male executive leaders in the workplace through the lens of racism and propose strategies to increase Black male representation in executive leadership positions. This was accomplished through an examination of literature and fieldwork, which included comprehensive one-on-one interviews with eight participants, small focus groups, and the review of field notes. These activities provided me insight into how participants, through lived experiences, perceived race and racism in the workplace.

I applied a basic qualitative research approach to understand how the participants interpreted their experiences and discern what meanings they attached to them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through field research and my qualitative data analysis, the participants communicated their perceptions of how they experienced race and racism in the workplace. From their rich descriptions, five themes emerged from the findings: (a) Workplace Cultural Hegemony, (b) Black Male Traumas, (c) Impediments to the E-Suite, (d) Antiracist Actions, and (e) The Power of Networking.

Subsequently, study results were garnered from the research findings, and juxtaposed with relevant literature. Results suggest white supremacy and white norms are ubiquitous and dominant in the workplace, there is a connection between Black male traumas and social networking at work, Black male impediments to the e-suite are universally perceived, and it is difficult to discern the efficacy of antiracist actions.

The conclusions from this study were derived from the research questions and the detailed descriptions of the participants lived experiences discussed in Chapter 4. The four

research questions are addressed in a discussion of the trauma Black males experience in the workplace, impediments keeping Black males from occupying the e-suite, antiracist actions practiced to combat workplace racism, and the power of interracial networking. The following section includes a discussion of the conclusions reached from this research, answers to the research questions, recommendations, a summary, and my research reflections.

Discussion

This section of the chapter analyses the results of the study derived from the interview findings and sub findings. Four discrete results were identified: (a) white supremacy and white norms are ubiquitous and dominant in the workplace, (b) a connection between Black male traumas and social networking at work, (c) Black male impediments to the e-suite universally perceived, and (d) difficulty discerning the efficacy of antiracist actions. Each of these results offers a synopsis and deeper comprehension of the participants' experiences, explanations, and views.

Result 1: White Supremacy and White Norms Are Ubiquitous and Dominant in the Workplace

Although white supremacy was never clearly defined during the interviews, all the participants acknowledged the existence of it. Based upon their responses, white supremacy seemed to be generally interpreted as bad, oppressive, and pervasive. On the reality of white supremacy, one participant discussed how unimaginable it is for a Black man in the United States to not have felt its impact. Another participant simply stipulated to the existence of white supremacy, and a third proclaimed how white supremacy is nothing new, a life-long burden that Black men carry around. Unanimously, participants divulged white supremacy, by any interpretation, was present in the workplace.

Interestingly, white supremacy's impact on workplace experiences differed based upon the race of the participant. Black participants discussed how the standard corporate norms and mores are undergirded by white supremacy and promote power and prerogative for white men while disadvantaging and oppressing Black men. One Black participant stated:

> The system is not constructed for someone coming from my social and racial groups. The system reinforces this American caste system of white at the top. As a professional, I live with the understanding that there are those people, my colleagues, who are looking at me skeptically because I am not a white man.

Other examples of white supremacy's embeddedness and dictation of the corporate norms included using Robert's Rules of Order in meetings and speaking standard English in the workplace. Both exemplars are Eurocentric in origin and are more likely than not to be part of a white male's socialization in the United States, but not a Black male's socialization. However, when the dominate culture norms are practiced inappropriately, Black males in particularly are viewed as deviant and their lack of command of the norms has dire career limiting implications. Pitcan et al. (2018) noted similar findings. In examining the experiences of 12 corporate Black men who worked in predominantly white organizations, they found participants who were viewed as less competent by white superiors and peers experienced a sense of implied or presumed inferiority, lower performance, and low job satisfaction.

Conversely, white participants described how they experienced no impact by white supremacy and believed in a dominant universal corporate culture that exists in the workplace. They portrayed a culture that is more benign, organic in nature, and indifferent to race and ethnicity. One participant explained how he hoped a person could be himself in the workplace, stating, "in alignment with the organizational goals, objectives, mission, and values so that it doesn't matter how you talk, you look or how you dress." Another participant shared he believed "there are parts of the company culture that every employee has to adopt and assimilate

into whoever they are in order to be successful." Again, white supremacy was given little to no attribution for the design of organizational values or the parts of the company culture that every employee must adopt. A third white participant expressed, "I don't know that it's [white supremacy] impacted my workplace experience immensely because I haven't seen it too much in my workplace." This perspective is implicitly in alignment with what some intellectuals have asserted. Researchers claim whites in executive leadership positions practice racial homophily because it is easier to relate to others who look like them, thus tacitly making the notions and accusations of white supremacy appear to be misguided and ineffectual (Bottero, 2007; Opie, & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Yuan & Gay, 2006). White executives attempt to avert the negative impacts of white supremacy by racially insulating themselves from diversity. A commonly used insulating tactic to maintain white homophily is to dismiss a candidate of color from an interview process by declaring the person is not a good fit into the corporate culture. When explaining the mandates and virtues of a universal organizational culture, a white participant in this study said, "I don't know if it's assimilation necessarily, but I think it's cultural fit in the broadest sense for an organization. Cultural fit does help advancement. I mean there is no doubt about that." Likewise, researchers claim this tactic is designed to maintain the legacy of white male leadership to protect white power and privilege (Bottero, 2007; Opie, & Morgan Roberts, 2017; Yuan & Gay, 2006).

Result 2: A Connection Between Black Male Traumas and Social Networking at Work

In this section, Black male traumas and social networking will be discussed, followed by a synopsis explaining the connection between the two.

Black male traumas. Black male traumas were defined in this study as various forms of mistreatment inflicted upon Black males in the workplace. As previously noted, traumas

included the emotional, psychological, and physical effects of real and perceived racism profoundly experienced by Black men. An analysis of participant interviews yielded five subthemes: (a) White Favoritism, (b) Marginalization, (c) Black Male Microinvalidation, (d) Stereotyping, and (e) Compulsive Assimilation. Further examination of the findings uncovered a connection between Black male traumas and social networking at work. The following section briefly explains both and the connection between the two.

All participants, Black and white, either personally, observationally, or anecdotally acknowledged the reality of the traumas Black male's experience in the workplace. Black males described instances of being victims of white favoritism. Despite being qualified and capable of performing a particular facet of their job, their white counterpart would be preferred and requested. Devaraj et al. (2018) observed 4,340 people and sampled 31, 356 individual observations. In correspondence with the participant's perceptions, they found the combined effects of skin tone, height, and gender had a disproportionately negative impact on the participants. The findings suggested darker skinned males experienced the most dramatic and obstructive impacts to their career opportunities, income, and overall career success. Black participants also unanimously declared they must work twice as hard to achieve the same recognition as their white counterparts. Coqual (2019), a national survey of 3,736 respondents to better understand the Black professional experience in the workplace, confirmed the same when determining 59% of Black men feel they must work harder to advance in the workplace, compared to 15% of the white male counterparts who felt the same. During an interview for this research, a Black participant alleged, saying:

> It's better in our organization to establish relationships and have [white] people hold you in high regard than it is for you to be a consistent performer that nobody knows or likes. Just purely being someone who is well-liked and not be all that great at your job, you can still be progressed like a super achiever for whatever reason.

In conceding the practice of white favoritism in the workplace, a white participant confessed, saying, "I think it's easier for a competent white man to get a promotion than a competent Black man."

Black male participants explained how they are regularly marginalized or treated negatively in the workplace which was anecdotally confirmed by white participants. One Black participant simply stated, "Being treated as an equal is not the case." Similarly, Seller and Shelton (2003) found non-Black groups are more likely to react in a discriminatory manner toward Black men than non-Black men. Moreover, they found more than half of the participants experienced being mistaken for a service worker, being ignored, or given poor service. Another Black participant shared, as function of the workplace culture and system design, Black men are marginalized. He continued, confessing, "I experience the trauma of having people treat me as if don't belong because of my ethnicity because of my race." A third Black participant declared most plainly, saying:

> I know there are times when I should have been insulted by someone telling me that you're not like "them" or you're not a "normal salesperson" . . . . insulting me . . . . and I felt like I had to just take that shit.

White participants affirmed, by way of narratives from Black colleagues, Black males do not have full acceptance at work. One participant summed up the sentiment, saying:

> When you're a minority in a majority culture . . . . how well you speak the same way people around you speak I think is a big reason why some people have moved up within organizations and have been promoted where others haven't. I was recently reading about how that [speaking standard English] can hold people of color back and it's a part of the structural racism. It's a part of how our organization is kind of structured in a way.

Black male stereotyping, microinvalidation, and compulsive assimilation are additional forms of Black male trauma. Each emerged as a subtheme from the findings, as explained by Black participants, and were either explicitly or implicitly attested to by white participants. Black participants discussed having to control their emotions and refraining from being too

demonstrative to avoid being characterized as threatening. Culturally, Black people can sometimes be expressive with their hands while speaking to effectuate a higher level of communication. This kind of expression is occasionally misunderstood by others as the Black person being angry or out of control. Coqual (2019) affirmed 80% of Black males felt they could not be authentic at work. A Black participant shared, staying, "If you're demonstrative and loud people may consider you as hostile and an angry Black man that sparks fear." Other Black participants cited similarly perspectives and experiences.

Black male microinvalidation arose in the findings, as both verbal and nonverbal actions that operate to minimalize or dismiss the Black participants' presence, thoughts, or achievements. Although not always done consciously by others, the impact of microinvalidations is no less harmful. Black participants summarily perceived their white counterparts are regularly given the benefit of the doubt in most workplace situations, and they are often the last in the room to be called upon despite their positionality in the organization. White participants, whom were all CEOs or presidents, described how they did not have a Black person much less a Black man directly reporting to them. One of them admitted, saying, "I don't have any direct reports that are Black so maybe that's invalidating because they [Black males] don't see anyone that looks like them but the only people who report directly to me are the vice presidents."

This is quintessential microinvalidation. When Black people do not see other Black people in executive leadership positions in an organization, the implicit message is Black people are not worthy to lead. Coqual (2019) highlighted the same, determining the Fortune 500, an annual list that ranks 500 of the United States' largest publicly and privately held companies,

should have 50 Black CEOs instead of three based on degree completion rates in comparison with white counterparts.

Lastly, compulsive assimilation depicts the internal conflict or cognitive dissonance Black males experience in the workplace. This personal discord is caused by the tension Black males must resolve while attempting to coexist and thrive in a workplace culture that is white-centric dominated, and commonly incongruent with their own culture and value systems. Black study participants alleged assimilation into the white work culture is necessary for advancement. One participant blatantly disclosed, stating:

> I'll be blunt, when you basically say look around, we have a room full of ducks, but we see value in bringing in some chickens. But when the chickens come in, you want to teach them how to do everything like a duck. The primary emphasis is on assimilating them [diverse employees] into the culture—assimilation can quickly dilute or diminish the effectiveness of bringing diversity into the workplace.

Jamison (2017) interviewed 50 emerging Black male corporate leaders from various industries and aligned with this perception, finding Black leaders in white cultures feel the need to compromise their Black social identities to fit in. Another Black participant revealed, "Assimilation is real. Assimilation also includes lots of contortion in terms of not being able to speak your truth about how you really feel." A third participant summarized the perspective, claiming, "We have to navigate our authentic selves while coexisting in these environments without compromising who we are."

White participants generally agreed with Black participants' characterization of the demand on them to assimilate into the workplace to advance. One white participant candidly contended, saying:

> If it's assimilation that's required, then you need to essentially be white if you're a Black man—I don't think that [assimilation] has a or should have a place in the organization. I think the organization loses something when it requires a Black man to leave part of who he is at the door when he comes in.

Although there was some contemplation given by one white participant to the correlation between assimilation and capitulation, it was settled by affirming the hope was people could assimilate into the workplace culture and still be themselves.

Social networking. Social networking was identified by all participants as vital and influential in the workplace but had different perspectives of its function. Black participants viewed social networking as critical for personal support and value in interracial networking. One Black participant confirmed, "One reason a social network is valuable is just making sure that you kind of feel like you've got a support system." He continued, offering, "A strong social network gives you a sense of belonging." Other Black participants shared similar thoughts about the significance of networking such as, "Because I was affiliated with this leadership program, I am most likely 10 years ahead of where I would be career wise," and "When you study white people, how they do things, you can modify and create your own style then emulate aspects of what makes them successful without compromising who you are culturally." For the Black participants, collegial support seemed to represent community, safety, family, and learning. Thus, they were fervently unanimous in their beliefs that social networking made a meaningful difference in their workplace experience.

Divergent from the Black participants' beliefs about the importance of social networking in the workplace, white participants did not particularly gain personal support from networking or necessarily value interracial networking. Rather, they almost exclusively viewed networking as fundamental to career advancement. One white participant stated, "Work relationships become really important because that's how you build relationships with somebody and then you know of course, that's how you move up within the organization." Another proclaimed, "Yes, I think it [social networking] was critical. I think it was imperative to have a social network in the

company. That's how you demonstrate your ability to lead—to develop a reputation of integrity and respect." The third white participant confirmed what was previously shared and highlighted an interesting relationship among networking, race, and who gets selected for jobs. They said:

> I think it's very hard if you don't have a network. I think it's just easier to build the network and be around people that look like you. That's how the network gets built up but it's also what makes it so hard for people of color. When it comes time to choose who's going to get the job or get that project or get that work, that network helps out a lot. I think that the network is crucial, or maybe not crucial, but it's an important determinative. It certainly is one that puts a pretty strong finger on the scale.

This perspective was particularly insightful because it illuminated perceptions of white favoritism and elusive meritocracy previously expressed by the Black participants.

Connection between Black traumas and social networking. For the Black male participants, the connection between Black male traumas and social networking was comprised of consequence and their desire to persist in the workplace. Black participants candidly described lived experiences as executives in the workplace that caused them to feel frustrated, angry, marginalized, and bewildered. One participant explained, stating:

> Black men are persistently marginalized as a function of a culture and a system that has been established to marginalize Black men. I experience the trauma of having people treat me as if I don't belong because of my ethnicity, because of my race.

Another Black participant confessed, saying:

> I know there are times when I should have been insulted by someone telling me that you're not like "them" or you're not a "normal salesperson" . . . . insulting me . . . . and I felt like I had to just take that shit.

Their depictions of the trauma they experienced were grouped into the five subthemes previously mentioned. Their narratives were both revealing and reverberating.

Black participants exclusively portrayed social networking as personal support and found value in interracial networking with their white counterparts. They described the benefits of having a social network in the workplace as a support system, a release from the stresses of

working in a white-normed environment and providing a sense of belonging. Smith (2019) identified complementary findings in his research. They found Black leaders felt alone and targeted in the workplace, and like they had no one to commiserate with about the challenges of being a Black leader in a predominantly white organization. Workplace social networking addressed these concerns. One participant declared, "Having guys that have my back means everything." White participants solely viewed social networking as a practice to stimulate career advancement.

Based upon the Black male participants' explanation of the traumas they experienced in the workplace, the desire or requirement of personal support to persist is a natural consequence. To navigate and manage the practices of white favoritism, marginalization, microinvalidation, stereotyping, and compulsive assimilation, Black males require a refuge, a retreat, or a sanctuary. They find that safe place in social networking. Whether in one-on-one relationships or affinity groups, Black males associate social networking as a necessary coping mechanism for the workplace.

Result 3: Black Male Impediments to the E-Suite Universally Perceived by Participants

All the participants acknowledged Black males experience unique impediments or obstructions in the workplace that negatively impact their representation in the e-suite. In reflecting on their experiences, Black participants described their perception of a lack of intentionality and prioritization by their white counterparts to diversify candidate pools with Black males. The sentiment was by diversifying the candidate pool, the likelihood of hiring Black executives would be exponentially increased, which is not what white executives really want. Black participants also highlighted inequities observing their white counterparts being given opportunities they, Black participants, must work hard for merely because they are Black.

Again, this experience was affirmed by Coqual (2019), which found 59% of its Black male participants felt this way. These inequitable practices equated to perceptions of an uneven playing field Black males experience in the workplace and was linked to the lack of opportunities Black males get to showcase their abilities in high visibility projects likely to lead to recognition and advancement. Devaraj et al. (2018) supported the belief of an uneven playing field, finding Blacks and other racial minorities experience a disproportionate number of negative impacts due to their skin color when compared to their white counterparts. Devaraj et al. helped to identify and connect Black male inequitable maltreatment in the workplace to other research and recognized impediments and challenges they must navigate to get to the e-suite. The nexus among the research is an accumulation of negative impacts, such as episodes of alienation, marginalization, and discrimination, can be insidious and adversely affect Black males' psyche, confidence, and ultimately their performance and progression (Brons, 2015; Jamison, 2017; Mereish et al., 2016).

Black participants also identified a discriminatory workplace system, which in their view functioned as a blockade prohibiting more Black men from occupying the e-suite. The discriminatory system described is tantamount to workplace culture, values, norms, and mores that are undergirded by white supremacy and rife in white privilege. These mores advantage whites and disadvantage Blacks, thus translating into greater representation of white males and the disproportionate representation of Black males in the e-suite. A Black participant imparted, stating, "White folks on the average don't walk around thinking about I'm white—what a luxury not to have to think about skin color."

Lastly, Black participants derided workplace meritocracy as nonexistent, subjective, and a sham. By and large, they simply viewed the principle of meritocracy as a workplace policy or

practice to continue to discriminate against them. Castilla (2008), an analysis of nearly 9,000

meritocratic performance evaluations that in the corporate workplace, suggested Black males are

subjected to unequal salary increases over time, and other disparate impacts relative to their

prospective career earnings primarily based upon their racially attributable traits. These findings

give merit to the assertions Black males make about the lack of validity of meritocracy, and its

impartiality as reliable measure of talent and achievement.

Although the white participants acknowledged Black male employees face distinct

challenges, in some instances, their perception was slightly more nuanced. For example, white

participants candidly acknowledged the perception the workplace playing field is uneven and

disadvantages Blacks. One participant's opinion provided frank context; they said, "I think

when you have disparity from the start, you have to do things that bring it back to a level playing

field and we've never had a level playing field, so you have to be very intentional."

White participants were also forthright in conceding Black males did not get equitable

opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Unanimously, white participants agreed Black males

need more opportunities to prove their prowess and they also need the same professional

development that is afforded their counterparts. A participant stated:

> We need to probably develop more opportunities for Black men not just at the executive
> levels but at all levels within the organization and then ensure that just like we would for
> anybody that we provide professional development.

Again, although plainspoken concerning some e-suite impediments for Black males, white

participants were slightly more subtle about others. On candidate pools lacking Black

candidates, they attributed the deficiency of Black candidates to an organization's history of only

hiring white people or maybe a lack of interest by the candidates. One participant admitted,

"Historically, we have been a very white male dominated organization," and another explained

white executives have not tried hard enough or been intentional about recruiting and hiring Black candidates.

Notwithstanding their acknowledgement of racial inequities in hiring, white participants were elusive about the root of shallow candidate pools, inequitable hiring practices, and the practice of meritocracy. When discussing the notion of a discriminatory workplace system, they seemed to readily defer to longstanding biased processes as the reason. One participant expressed a sense of perplexity or puzzlement by the lack of Black male executive candidates, saying:

> If this [lack of Black male executives] is such a problem, why aren't there organizations that have figured this out to help companies recruit more people of color into their organization? I now have an executive who is responsible for diversity in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the overarching sentiment of the white participants was a need to take more action and responsibility to address the disparity of Black male executives.

Lastly, whereas Black participants viewed meritocracy as nonexistent, subjective at best, and a sham, white participants agreed it is subjective but perceived it to be somewhat of a trustworthy measure of talent and achievement. As previously cited, Kravitz and Yuengling (2012) suggested a paradox in meritocracy exists because meritocratic practicing organizations may believe their merit practices are unbiased, and the decision makers' unfettered discretion promote stereotypical racial and gender biases to run amok. One white participant in this study offered an interesting triality in his explanation of the practice of meritocracy, providing:

> Again, it's not an equal playing field that's why I think as an organization, you have to be very intentional about taking steps to ensure that opportunities are based on competency and skill rather than those things that you pretend don't exist but are influencing you anyway. Someone who is better at relationship building is more inclined to get the better assignments which leads to advancement. But I do think people who were promoted were competent and could do the job.

On the one hand, he acknowledged the playing field is not equal, then he spoke to the intentionality of ensuring competency and skill, and finally conceded, saying, "Someone who is better at relationship building is more inclined to get the better assignments which leads to advancement." This explanation epitomizes the Black male perception and experience. Meritocracy is not equally applied, there are competency and skill requirements that are sometimes obscure and inarticulable, and, at the end of the day, relationships are really all that matters. A white participant, describing white favoritism, said:

> I think it's easier for a competent white man to get a promotion than a competent Black man. Where does competency and promotion bleed into an overlap area where promoting someone is just more comfortable because they look like me? I think you're so unconscious of it sometimes.

Result 4: Difficulty Discerning the Efficacy of Antiracist Actions

Although many participants were emphatic and passionate about their antiracist actions many were also nonresponsive or lacked confidence in the effectiveness of their efforts. Several participants described relationship-based approaches such as conversations with colleagues, creating employee resource groups to elevate the voices of the underrepresented employees, and the use of subject matter experts to provide training. Although seemingly genuine and worthwhile antiracist efforts, measuring their efficacy poses a challenge because racism and white supremacy are amorphous. Moreover, systemic change of any kind often requires the redistribution of power which white executives hold in the workplace and do not seem to readily be willing to reallocate. There were four sub thematic antiracist actions that emerged from the findings: (a) Speaking Out, (b) Listening, (c) Training, and (d) Practicing Antiracism. The following is a brief discussion and interpretation of each.

Speaking out. Most participants described speaking out or calling out racism as a commonly used antiracist tactic. Participants seemed to perceive it was incumbent upon them to challenge racist behavior whenever they experienced it. One white participant said:

> I call it out if I see anything that appears racist at all on our campus. I call it out. We also espouse what our values are so the people can see them—we've got them up on our webpage and we've tried to do things like that."

A Black participant added, saying:

> As a strategy, recognizing that there are times I just simply have to assert myself in such a way that does not make people uncomfortable. How do I actually help this person see my point of view and what do I need to do to get them comfortable with that? It's just managing and picking the time to do that.

Another Black participant acknowledged observing racist behavior by his white colleagues and speaking out against it but was not confident about his ability to single-handedly influence outcomes. They said:

> They [white people] are able to find reasons to justify doing things that in my mind are racist. When I am the only one in the room who speaks out, often times I am not able to compel them to see things from a different perspective.

Notwithstanding their desire or commitment to denounce racism, none of the participants shared evidence supporting how effectual their actions were. However, it may be nondebatable that speaking out against the mistreatment of others is essential in the fight against racism and has no effect.

Listening. Just as speaking out against racist behavior was a commonly used antiracist tactic by participants, for white participants, listening was also central to contesting workplace racism. All the white participants explained they did some form of listening to Black colleagues, peers, and employees to better understand their experience in the workplace. One participant held informal one-on-one conversations with Black coworkers or in small group chats, and

another participant formalized employee experience discussions by forming employee resource groups. A white participant commented, saying:

> The most important thing I've started to do is listen—we have formed ERGs [employee resource groups]. I started listening to my workforce and I started hearing about how people feel. We have created an infrastructure to listen to our employees on a regular basis to hear what they have to say about our creating a culture that everyone can feel like they belong to.

White and Black participants viewed listening to Black coworkers to gain valuable experiential insight that may not otherwise be known to them or easily understood or observable in the workplace. When asked how he would describe the Black males' experiences in his workplace, a white participant subserviently responded, stating, "I can only answer that from talking to them and hearing from them what their experiences are like. I think they feel very much alone not having very many people that look like them [in the workplace]." A Black participant shared he used employee resource groups to hear employees' stories and experiences and confirm with them that they had a voice in the workplace.

Just as speaking out against the mistreatment of others likely has some level of antiracist efficacy, listening to others should also. Although, there was no indication from participants that listening to one another was effective at combating racism, listening is a critical component of empathy, and its effectiveness may be implied to some degree. Dovidio et al. (2017) found the quality of the contact, speaking and listening, was more effective in creating empathy among the participants than the quantity of contacts or interactions. Additionally, when the contact is conducted with a balanced number of majority and minority participants, its effectiveness in reducing racial discrimination increases (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013).

Antiracist training. The theme of antiracist training emerged with a couple of opposing perspectives concerning who has the responsibility to train or educate whom on antiracism in the workplace, and where the training should be focused: internal to the organization, or internally

and externally in the community. On the responsibility to train, one Black participant insisted

white people should be accountable for training themselves about how to be antiracists, saying:

> White people have to start saying Black people aren't responsible for training me. I have
> to educate myself and I need to understand that this is not upon the Black male to go and
> teach me about all this [antiracism] stuff. I have to go through the journey.

Another Black participant maintained the responsibility to educate about antiracism rests with

Black people, providing:

> Black people need to educate themselves about their rights in this space [concerning]
> racist behaviors. We have to figure out how to get the training and get the experience at
> the table. We need to know how to bring cases or concerns with facts.

> Generally, white participants expressed more traditional conceptions of training, such as

contracting with subject matter experts. One white participant shared, saying:

> On a regular basis, we've been doing training with our managers on what does it mean to
> be antiracist. Some things we can do involve professional development opportunities
> some involve a restructuring of the college.

There were also slightly different approaches communicated by the white participants in terms of

who should participate in the training. One participant discussed the internal training programs

offered at their workplace, and another contended training should be broader and include the

community. The latter proposed, stating:

> It's more than just what's happening internally in the company. It's what we're doing
> externally in the community also. We need to make sure that our programs are not just
> unconsciously targeted towards a certain group. So, we started to refocus our programs
> and our approach to ensure that we were touching every community in a very meaningful
> way—especially those that we had left behind in the past. We did a lot of training on
> unconscious bias.

Interestingly, Ben et al. (2020) asserted:

> Training and education initiatives, and particularly cultural diversity/competence
> programmes, have been widespread, yet not much is known about the extent to which,
> and circumstances under which, they effectively address racism. (p. 211)

In all the antiracist training approaches shared by the participants, there did not appear to be a right or wrong or stronger or weaker approach just different approaches to the same antiracism work.

   Practicing antiracism. Like antiracist training, practicing antiracism materialized as a subtheme most participants subscribed to but had various designs of practice it. Black participants by and large viewed the practice of antiracism as an individual or human-based approach. A Black participant affirmed, saying, "I build allies with people who I know are the ones who will represent effectively when they see behaviors that we think are white supremacy in the workplace." A different Black participant conveyed bitterness and frustration when describing how he practiced antiracism. He confessed, saying:

> I do it [practice antiracism], but it makes me resentful. As a Black man, how do I that? Like ho w do I practice antiracist policies to get someone to not treat me as if I am less than them. I will say that I am unapologetically pro-Black in my hiring practices and in my mentorship and who I spend my time with.

His sentiments hearkened back to the question previously posed—who is responsible for training whom with respect to antiracism? Should white people be accountable to train themselves, or should Black people responsible to them? Ben et al. (2020) discovered antiracism efforts in an organized setting such as a workplace, although well intended, sometimes have unintended consequences that may decrease their effectiveness. Black male resentment for white people not taking accountability for their own learning and for the discriminatory practices that exists in the workplace was a common underlying theme shared by many Black participants.

   Contrary to the Black participants' belief antiracist practices should be personal in nature, white participants essentially viewed antiracism as an organizational strategy. For instance, they described developing equity strategic plans and conducting pay equity analyses as exemplars of practicing antiracism. Although organizational strategies such as these tend to have human or

personal impact, they also tend to be less tangible than human interaction. One white participant

stated:

> In trying to support antiracism, we've developed a plan, it's not as focused on antiracism as it is equity, but we've developed an equity strategic plan for a lack of a better term, and I think we've worked on items. We've identified what we need to do as an [organization], some of the things involve our hiring practices and things we can do to better recruit. We have about 80 things that we've identified or things that we need to do so that we can be a better organization so that we can ensure that we're not you know, practicing racism ourselves institutionally.

Another simply claimed:

> Tactically, it's ensuring that your workplace strategies support diversity, equity, and inclusion and that goes to how you recruit employees, making sure that all of your interview panels are diverse, and it goes to supporting various alliance groups in your organization and making sure that they have voice.

Again, whether there was a preference for a more individual or human methodology to practicing

antiracism or an inclination to be more strategic, there was no suggestion or substantiation of

efficacy by the participants. The favored approach seemed to be based more on stylistic

preference. It is most likely due to the complexity and convolution of racism, both approaches

are essential.

Implications

The primary focus of this study was to understand the lived experiences of Black and

white male executive leaders in the workplace to better understand why there are so

disproportionately few Black males in the e-suite. Two fundamental questions guided this

research:

- Why are there not more Black males in executive leadership positions?

- What can be done to improve Black male representation?

The research questions were specifically aimed at both Black and white executives, to gain

insight into their understanding of their workplace experiences through the lens of race and

racism. Research Question 1 was central to this study because it presumed racism exists in the workplace and functioned as the foundational premise of the research. Research Question 2 was designed to uncover the white participants' perception of potential barriers that may obstruct Black males' path to the e-suite. Research Question 3 served to identify commonly used antiracist practices in the workplace, and Research Question 4 afforded an opportunity to discover prospectively new and emerging practices. The conclusions reached in this study emanate from these research questions and encompass both the findings and results that emerged.

Research Question 1: In What Ways Do Black Males Experience Racial Oppression Within the Context of Career Advancement?

The experiences of workplace racial oppression for the Black male participants in this study can be mainly described as culturally disadvantageous and traumatic. In the context of career advancement, Black males characterized their experiences as adversely impacted by organizational white supremacy rife with white cultural norms that operated to suppress their career advancement. Moreover, the traumas participants expressed were the result of working in racially oppressive environments. The five categories of traumas that emerged from this study included white favoritism, marginalization, stereotyping, Black male invalidation, and compulsive assimilation.

Organizational culture functioned to disadvantage Black males and advantage their white counterparts. Commonly, conservative white males with anachronistic or traditional views develop the norms and mores for an organization and require adherence for achievement and advancement. As a result, allusions of white supremacy and tenets of white norms undergird many workplace cultures and invariably create racially and culturally segregated subgroups.

Black males described difficulty navigating organizational white cultural norms and having to compromise being their authentic selves to fit in. They also shared how conventional organizational cultures advantage their white male counterparts by promoting privilege, power, and entitlement based upon race. Due to the pervasiveness of white supremacy in the workplace, white men have representation and acceptance, and rarely find themselves in a position of having to adapt. Conversely, Black participants expressed how the lack of cultural belonging in the workplace was a significant factor in their feeling ostracized and oppressed. Summarily, white participants expressed a hope and desire all employees could be themselves in a more universal organizational culture, rather than one fraught with white supremacy and racism.

The Black male traumas described in this study also served as substantial factors in obstructing Black males' career advancement. Traumas such as white favoritism, marginalization, and stereotyping worked to minimalize Black males' skills and prevented them from getting opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and compete to join the e-suite. Feeling marginalized and mistreated in the workplace because of their skin color, Black males learned to *play the game*. Playing the game is a phrase used to describe how Black males adapt their behaviors and mannerisms in the workplace to not be seen as a threat or unintelligent, and more suitable to white people. In this way, they endear white people's favor and can potentially gain their endorsement or sponsorship which may lead to opportunities for advancement. Black males described these comportments as painful and hurtful. In recognizing the traumas expressed by Black participants, a white participant confessed he believed it was easier for a competent white man to get a promotion than a competent Black man.

Likewise, Black male microinvalidation and compulsive assimilation are two additional forms of traumas that inflicted pain and depicted how Black males experienced racial oppression

in the workplace. Participants, both Black and white, described verbal and nonverbal disparagement as equally hurtful, disheartening, and at times angrifying. Verbal microinvalidations included Black participants having to support their opinions in a meeting with additional information to be considered valid, while their white counterparts' views were simply taken for granted. This behavior undermines the thoughts and confidence of Black males. An example of a nonverbal microinvalidation in the workplace is having no Black males in an executive position in the organization. This signals to aspiring Black male executives they are not welcome or worthy of occupying the e-suite, whereas his white counterpart sees himself well represented and belonging in the e-suite. Black male microinvalidations were also described by Black participants as significant factors in fortifying their resolve to achieve fair treatment.

Compulsive assimilation uniquely affected the Black male workplace experience because of the internal conflict the notion produces. The need to assimilate into a culture that is incongruent with one's personal values may evoke a cognitive dissonance that creates confusion and resentment. Black participants described their frustration of not being able to coexist in their difference in the workplace. In other words, Black males expressed aggravation with their discomfort and inability to be themselves and exemplify their cultural values in an environment that is different and does not recognize, value, or appreciate their customs, norms, or beliefs. They also shared how cultural assimilation requires contortion of their principles and beliefs and mandates a compromise that leaves them feeling shameful. Again, they described having to adapt their behaviors and mannerism to be acceptable to white people and the associated painfulness. Analogously, white participants acknowledged assimilation as a critical component of career advancement with one participant bluntly, stating, "If it's assimilation that's required, then you need to essentially be white if you're a Black man."

In the end, Black male participants described their experience of racial oppression in the workplace as being culturally disadvantaging or not fitting in the organizational culture and suffering traumas that work to hinder their occupation of the e-suite. White participants offered hope and desire all employees could see themselves in a universal culture—one where everyone fits in and thrives.

Research Question 2: What Impediments Do White Male Executives Perceive as Hindering Black Males' Opportunity to Lead Organizations?

White participants acknowledged there are several systemic or organizational obstructions that exist for Black males prohibiting them from occupying the e-suite in greater numbers. They specifically discussed shallow candidate pools, in terms of having disproportionately low Black male representation, as a major contributing factor to the lack of Black male representation in executive positions. Due to candidate pools having low or sometimes no Black male representation, selection of Black males for jobs is challenging at best. White participants attributed excessively low Black candidate pools to something they may be doing to make their organizations unattractive to Black male candidates, the existing racial composition of their organizations or leadership teams not appearing welcoming, or possibly their lack of intentionality in recruiting Black males to apply for jobs. Black participants generally agreed with their counterparts' assessments.

White participants also conceded the playing field may not be level for Black males. They suggested Black males are not offered the same opportunities as whites; thus, it is difficult for them to achieve and be represented at the executive levels at the same or equitable rate as whites. Again, Black participants concurred.

The lack of opportunities afforded to Black males to demonstrate their leadership prowess was also communicated as a significant impediment to their prospects for executive leadership. White participants unanimously shared intentionality in identifying and selecting Black participants for development was paramount to increase representation. In addition to intentionality in the selection process, white participants described identifying high visibility projects and professional development as key ingredients for successfully increasing Black male e-suite representation over time.

Lastly, from the perspectives of white participants, systemic or operational bias was viewed as a contributing impediment hindering Black males' opportunities to lead organizations. Operational bias was described similarly to the lack of intentionality in the recruitment and development previously discussed. Black males are underrepresented in the e-suite because they are not selected and prepared for executive opportunities in the same way their white counterparts are. The need to purposefully recruit and develop Black males was perceived as a prospective remedy to this disadvantageous practice.

Research Question 3: What Existing Strategies, Approaches, or Tactics Are Effective in Improving the Equitable Representation of Black Males in Executive Positions?

Participants characterized their existing strategies to improve the equitable representation of executive Black males as antiracist actions. Four key actions emerged from the findings: speaking out, listening, practicing antiracist strategies, and training. Although participants were passionate about combating antiracism and committed to their efforts, it was difficult to determine their actions' effectiveness.

Speaking out against racial discrimination and bias was portrayed by most of the participants as a long-term strategy. The anticipation was this tactic would take time before its

benefits would be realized because it necessitates influencing how others view race and racism. Some participants described how they focused on being candid and clear in their conversations with others when talking about race and equity, but others promulgated their organizations' values as a form of antiracist communication. Other participants noted the race of speaker and the number of speakers matter. Specifically, when Black people are speaking to other Black people the communication is more compelling and when more than one person speaks out against racism, the perspective may be more persuasive.

Listening for understanding was described by white participants as one of the most impactful methods they practiced to improve Black male representation in executive positions. They admitted they lacked the lived experience and understanding of what it is to be Black. Consequently, whether formally or informally, listening to Black peers and staff for understanding has been a powerful part of their learning about race and racism. Implicitly, white participants indicated they would use this learning to effect Black male representation in the e-suite.

The other antiracist actions were training and antiracist practices. Although seemingly similar, they were distinctly described. The former addressed more conventional methodologies of antiracist education, such as individual or group classroom style learning approaches, and the latter concentrated more on individual activities or organizational strategy efforts. Despite diversity and equity trainings' long history of futility, nevertheless, it was noted by participants as an antiracist action. Interestingly, central to the discussion of training was who was responsible to train whom. Are Black people responsible for training whites, or should white people be accountable to train themselves? There were no clear answers, only differing viewpoints.

Regarding antiracist practices, Black participants described an individual relationship building approach. Developing trust with their white counterparts and creating antiracist allies was perceived to be common tactics. Contrary to the individual relationship building approach, white participants were inclined to rely on strategic planning such as equity plans and pay equity audits to support their antiracist practice.

As previously mentioned, although ostensibly motivated by the participants' passion and commitment to improve the equitable representation of Black males in the e-suite, none of the antiracist actions discussed produced tangible evidence of efficacy.

Research Question 4: What New and Emerging Strategies, Approaches, or Tactics Would Be More Helpful in Improving the Equitable Representation of Black Males in Executive Positions in the Corporate Workplace?

This study's findings suggest the emerging strategy to improve the equitable representation of Black males in executive positions should be steeped in relationship. Black participants universally described social networking as providing personal support and creating a sense of belonging. Moreover, they expressed interracial networking, networking between and among different racial groups, was value-added because it provided an opportunity for them to study their white counterparts' behavior, and then adapt and align their own with the dominant culture without excessively compromising themselves.

Although white participants did not communicate social networking provided personal support or a sense of belonging for them, they did disclose they exclusively use social networking for career advancement. They portrayed social networking and having relationships with executives as tremendously advantageous, and a critical component to their career promotions. In the spirit of transparency, one white participant also divulged, saying, "I think

it's just easier to build the network and be around people that look like you. That's how the

network gets built up but it's also what makes it so hard for people of color." These statements

were simultaneously powerful and reflective of impenetrable social barriers people of color, in

particularly Black males, face when trying to network with white executives. All the

participants' perspectives, purposes, and experiences concerning social networking have merit.

Thus, an emerging strategy to increase Black male e-suite representation should logically be a

combination of their utilizations of social networking: personal and developmental support,

interracial networking, and career development.

A new and emerging strategy was derived from a combination of the findings from this

study and commonly used existing strategies. Findings from this study were noted in a previous

section. Commonly used existing strategies include formal and informal opportunities for

colleagues to socially interact with one another. Usually, these kinds of interactions are

accomplished through peer association, affinity groups, and mentorship. Although Black males

often have peer associations and are members of workplace affinity groups, they generally are

not privy to executive mentorship. Executive mentorship provides strategies and tactics for

navigating workplace customs and practices, while developing and preparing aspiring executives

for the e-suite. Black males' deprivation of this career advantaging benefit, regularly afforded to

their white counterparts, hinders their readiness to hold executive positions.

A possible novel approach to increase Black male executive representation would be to

design strategic programming for interracial networking that specifically targeted Black males

and equity-minded white male executives to work together, to provide personal and

developmental support for each other that lead to career advancement for Black males: it could

be called the relationship model. Although this proposition may seem unimaginative, antiquated,

or even superfluous at first blush, there is no evidence to suggest a program like this exists or has been practiced with the requisite courage, specificity, intentionality, and pervasiveness to demonstrate its latent efficacy. In this innovative design, Black males would get their personal and developmental needs addressed by the designed strategic programming and white executive relationship building specifically designed to meet their career aspirations. White executives in this study claimed listening was one of the most powerful and enlightening antiracism methods they have practiced to understand others' experiences of racism, specifically the impact of workplace racism on Black men. The relationship model would promote even greater listening and understanding of the Black male workplace experience by white executives because of their increased interaction with Black males. Furthermore, for white executives, learning about workplace racial oppression directly from the aggrieved encourages a higher sensibility, which is essential for diversity and equity allyship, advocacy, and action.

The new relationship model would also mandate a fundamental change in the behavior of white executives for its success. It would necessitate they reassign their current practice of subjectively identifying aspiring white staff members for development and redeploy those efforts to prioritize Black males. The challenge to do this is not in the practice, rather in the perception when applied to Black males. Although identifying individuals for development may be perceived as special treatment, it is the same special treatment that is given to specific individuals in organizations. This good ol' boy network, a form of white favoritism, has contributed to the racial disparity that exists today at executive levels. Conversely, in addition to changing behaviors, the relationship model may promote a change in mindset. When Blacks and whites interact more, they may learn they are more similar than dissimilar. In this way, stereotypes, attitudes, and perceptions about one another may be affected for good.

The analogous question previously referenced in this study reads: How does a turtle get on a fencepost? As noted by Haley (n.d.), "Anytime you see a turtle up on top of a fence post, you know he had some help." The relationship model strategically, developmentally, and intentionally puts Black males there too, on a fencepost in the e-suite.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings, results, and conclusions of this study. Because of the anticipated racial demographic inversion in the United States, people of color are expected to make up of most of the working class by 2032. By 2043, they will be the majority population in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; Wilson, 2016). Correspondingly, racially diverse representation in the e-suite, coupled with prowess in leading a workforce that is principally made up of people of color, will become essential to an organization's success. For these reasons, in addition to creating equitable executive leadership opportunities for Black men, I offer recommendations to increase Black male representation in the e-suite.

Executives from various industries and organizations participated in this study, and my recommendations were centrally constructed from their lived experiences. Conceptually, organizations may be using similar recommended approaches to increase Black male executive representation, but those that are not may benefit from implementing some or all recommendations from this study. Nevertheless, before implementation, organizations should consider each recommendation in the context of their existing organizational culture, commitment to racial equity, resources to support the work, and individual and collective accountability for increasing Black male e-suite representation.

Recommendations for Action

- Intentionally promote relationships between aspiring Black male executives and white male executives.

- Design formal bidirectional mentorship curricula to support the relationship development between aspiring Black males and white male executives; The purpose of this modeling is to provide career support and coaching for the Black males and executive awareness and coaching for the white males to collaboratively increase Black male e-suite representation.

- Develop an organizational culture that promotes a sense of belonging for all employees; Eliminate the racialization of buildings, literature, and organizational communication; Increase the awareness of the virtues and values of difference; Supporting and celebrating diversity and its benefits should be a highly regarded fundamental tenet of the organization.

- Dedicate organizational resources, including people, money, and space, to support opportunities for learning and development. Racial equity is not program, it is a mindset; beliefs and attitudes developed over time that guide thinking and sensibilities. Mindsets require development; thus, dedicated resources to advance equity-thinking are essential to creating racial equity and representation in the workplace and should be prioritized.

- Create and enforce organizational accountability for upholding equity-centered values; Predecide what happens if equity-centered policies, practices, or procedures are not adhered to; Universally apply accountability to all employees regardless of title, years of experience, or intention.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Direct future research on a larger sample of Black and white male participants to gain more representative data on the lived experiences of each.

- Research more deeply the relationship between the workplace traumas Black males experience and their underrepresentation in the e-suite.

- Conduct a deeper examination of the impediments that obstruct Black males' career path to the e-suite focusing on their causes and removal.

- Research the impacts of Black male traumas, as discussed in this study's findings, to understand their influence on Black males' performance in the workplace, psyche, and physical health.

Summary

This study focused on the absence of Black males in the e-suite and offered a qualitative analysis of the insights and perspectives of both Black and white male executives. There were two fundamental questions in this study:

- Why are there not more Black males in executive leadership positions?

- What can be done to improve Black male representation?

The findings reflect the contrasting and corresponding views of the participants on race, racism, and Black males' experiences in the workplace, with respect to the lack of Black male representation in the e-suite. Additionally, this study examined existing strategies and innovative and emerging strategies to increase Black male representation in the e-suite. The research offered data confirming Black males' absence from the e-suite is equally complex and convoluted, and the strategies for increasing their representation are altogether political and polarizing. The data are complex and convoluted because they consist of many lived experiences and perspectives that are varied, yet integrally interrelated. The strategies for increasing Black male executive representation are political and polarizing because although the approaches are connected to views and opinions, those views and opinions are often diametrically opposed.

Participants identified several key factors as contributing to the disproportionate representation of Black males in the e-suite. Black male participants described predominantly white organizational cultures and workplace traumas, including experiencing white favoritism, marginalization, and stereotyping, and spurious meritocracy, as central obstructions between them and executive seats. Although white male participants concurred with much of the Black male experience, they implied organizational processes and practices along with personal

accountability were critical components of their counterparts' absence from executive leadership. White males unpretentiously assumed accountability, at least in part, for the absence of Black males from the e-suite, by asserting their lack of intentionality in the recruitment and development of Black males was essential to the lack of executive representation. Although no one factor discussed is singularly responsible for the disparate number of Black male executives, in the aggregate, these factors along with many others are discriminatory toward Black males, detrimental to notion of equity and equality, and effective at keeping Black males out of the e-suite.

Black males overwhelmingly view themselves as challenged, qualified, and capable of executive leadership. They acknowledge their challenge in their daily battles against racism, stereotyping, and marginalization in the workplace. Maintaining a sense of self-worth and self-esteem without capitulating personal values and beliefs for career advancement is psychologically and physically exhausting. They believe they are qualified for executive leadership positions because they are both educated and experienced, and possess prerequisites commonly regarded as desirable and frequently deemed as qualifying for their white counterparts. Lastly, because they are experienced, they often have demonstrated the requisite prowess to meet the demands of the executive role. So why are there not more Black male executives? As the United States becomes more diverse, understanding and addressing this phenomenon is critical if we are ever to become a post racial society. Implementing the relationship model in the workplace may be a pivotal first step.

Researcher's Reflection

For me, this research fostered what I call dynamic learning. Dynamic learning is learning that is filled with continuous scholarship, inquiry, nuance, passion, and emotion. My research

was personal, developmental, and affirming; it was also cathartic in ways I could have never imagined. Demographically, as a person who holds similar identities as Black participants in this study, I have a similar lived experience of oppression in the workplace. Accordingly, some of my findings were anticipated, while others were unexpected and edifying. Pivotal to this study were the rarely divulged insights and viewpoints shared by the white participants. Their perspectives were vital to linking the intersectionality of white supremacy and workplace culture to the Black male experience and their absence from the e-suite. Aggregated, these narratives made for rich, illuminating, and meaningful findings and results. I found it particularly empowering to develop a greater understanding of history, learn about different experiences in the workplace, and appreciate similar and different personal perspectives.

This research has forever changed me. In my view, reflection, contextualization, and understanding are essential for growth and development. After completing this study, I have a new framework for my lived experiences as the first Black quarterback at the University of California, Berkeley, a manager at a major Fortune 500 corporation, a higher education business law professor and administrator, and a nonprofit CEO. I understand myself and my environments in much more comprehensive and dynamic ways that have increased my comfort and confidence in who I am as a Black man. I now stand upright and self-assured in my person, my presence, and my Blackness.

This work also provided me a renewed appreciation, optimism, and aspiration for the future of relationships between Blacks and whites. It is my hope this study will do the same for others by causing them to reflect on our shared history as Americans, examine current circumstances for Black males in the workplace, and understand why this work is so important.

Moreover, it is my desire this research will be used for good and affect people in ways that inspire appreciable learning, commitment, action, and transformational change.

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APPENDIX A: EXECUTIVE PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. How has white supremacy impacted your workplace experience?
2. What antiracist strategies do you practice to combat white supremacy in the workplace?
   a. Specifically describe how your strategies are effective.
3. How important is assimilation into the workplace culture for career advancement?
   a. Explain how white supremacy plays a part in workplace assimilation?
4. How has your workplace social network affected your career opportunities?
5. How would you describe the experience of Black males in your workplace?
6. How would you describe the practice of meritocracy in your workplace?
   a. Explain how you know racial equity is factored into the practice.
7. Why are there not more Black males in executive positions at your workplace?
8. What do you suggest should be done to afford more opportunities for Black males to occupy executive positions with organizations?
   a. What specific actions do you employ to support that?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share that I may not have asked you about?