

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

**IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AMONG BLACK ADMINISTRATORS
AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS**

A Dissertation in
Higher Education

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2020

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Abstract

Higher education's history of race-based exclusion and marginalization goes against the values of a new diverse and multicultural learning environment as imagined in a modern-day society (Hurtado et al. 1999; 2012). For Black administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) that history has structurally positioned their identities as inferior to their White counterparts, both in and outside of the academy, by inscribing their identities as "othered" or "minoritized." As identities are considered to be "the social positioning of self and others" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), the minoritized aspects of these identities are, therefore, connected to systems of racial oppression and discrimination that infiltrate the experience of Black administrators, faculty, staff and students alike. This qualitative study uses a narrative inquiry approach to interrogate the racialized experiences of Black administrators, which are unrecounted throughout literature and practice. In efforts to better understand the unique processes of identity negotiation that Black administrators engage for achieving modes of *coherence*, *connectedness*, and *agency* at PWIs, this study uses a lens of Critical Race Theory to provide the counternarrative of the minoritized administrator. Findings in the study reveal that Black administrators' identities at PWIs are incongruent to the constructs of a space dominated by the presence of Whiteness, which is maintained through systems of racism and oppression. Therefore, the study offers insights for Black administrators who seek to successfully negotiate their identities in spaces that have historically positioned them as inferior.

Key words: identity negotiation, higher education leadership, predominantly white institutions, critical race, counternarratives, Black administrators

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Acknowledgements

I dedicate this dissertation to my Aunt Kathy. You truly are the wind beneath my wings and even when the wind is still, I am constantly reminded that you are here. I would like to thank my family for loving me, my sisters who I love; I love you A.M.P. Also, 2-6 ANNNT! My nieces and nephews who are so little right now, I hope one day you will see that I would have quit before I started if it weren't for you. To my friends who have supported me along the way and that have given me the strength to continue even when you had nothing left to give, thank you! I.I.I.

To my beloved HBCU, the illustrious Fayetteville State University, my love for you will never fade. I will never forget where I came from and the experiences that shaped me into who I AM today (ATTITUDE Check?! BRONCO PRIDE!). To my McNair/Trio family, look what WE have done! I am so proud of us and I hope this serves as a source of motivation to you as we continue to *challenge* the world through Dr. McNair's legacy. My UC/Cincy family, I am ready to one day be back in the Nati!

To my Mentors: Dr. Almeida; Dr. McNeill-Blue; Dr. Sherrice Allen; Mrs. Rasheedah Parsons; Jeff Womble; LaShanta McCorkle; Joe Ross; Prof Berry; Jeff Capel; Dr. Hyman; Dr. Aus; Ms. Niki; Valda Bronston; Stephanie Davis; Dr. Westmoreland; Dr. Banjo; Dr. Zoller; Dr. Bates; Doc Abercrombie; Tamar; Ms. Benita; Dr. A. Green; Dr. Garces; Dr. P; Dr. Dinkins (that's both of y'all because I can't); Tambra; Aunti Teresa; Dr. King and Barry; and my forever Chancellor, Dr. James A. Anderson and Mrs. Nancy Anderson. The list goes on, but please charge it to my head and not my heart.

My wonderful committee, thank you! Dr. Dowd, I so am happy to have shared this experience with you, looking forward to more years of scholarship as we continue to *bend toward justice* and equity. Dr. A, thank you for showing up and being you, unapologetically!

Your presence at Penn State changed my life forever. Dr. Ward, I will forever owe you for the passion and dedication you bring to my work. Thank you for keeping me charged up and ready, always! Dr. Boldt, since day one I have always been able to count on you to keep it real. I am grateful to have your perspective and experience as a part of this dissertation. Dr. J, thank you for coming back for round two! You have shaped my life for the better and I am forever and always appreciative of your unwavering guidance and support.

Special thanks to my participants in this study. Thank you for the work that you do! Thank you for standing in the face of adversity and taking it in stride. Thank you for sharing your experience with me and the world. You matter! Not just to me, but to all the Black and Brown faces that see themselves in you. Thank you for choosing to love us and thank you for choosing to love yourselves.

“If it had not been for the wind in my face, I wouldn’t be able to fly at all.” -Arthur Ashe

Chapter One: Introduction

The troublesome history of higher education completely contradicts the values of a new diverse and multicultural learning environment as imagined in a modern-day society (Hurtado et al. 1999; 2012). For Black¹ administrators that history has structurally positioned their identities as inferior to their White counterparts, both in and outside of the academy inscribing their identities as “othered” or “minoritized.”² As identities are considered to be “the social positioning of self and others” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), the minoritized aspects of these identities are, therefore, connected to systems of oppression and discrimination that infiltrate the experience of Black administrators, faculty, staff and students alike. This is especially true in institutions that appeal to the majority population (Powell, 1999). The instances of oppression and discrimination within are not isolated occurrences. The rapid increase of diverse populations into the academy has caused higher education institutions to respond with a sense of urgency to demands for making campus environments more equitable and inclusive (Black Liberation Collective, 2018).

While the trend for hiring minority administrators is growing at a slow rate, increasing nationally by only three percent over a fifteen-year period, Black administrators still represent the highest number of minority administrative positions at seven percent (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017).³ Traditionally, because the White administrator identity has been characterized as dominant, those who hold the dominant identity are easily afforded the opportunity to rise from

¹ The terms “Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably throughout as appropriated in popular discourse. The terms have been identified by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as similar “race/ethnicity” categories for “a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.”

² The words “othered” and “minoritized” act as verbs to highlight the “ongoing social experience of marginalization of minority groups.” (See Chase, Dowd, Pazich, & Bensimon, 2014, pg. 671).

³ These findings are from data that was collected between 2001 and 2016 and compared by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR).

the ranks of faculty, to dean, vice-president, and frequently to the presidency (Jackson, 2003; Johnson, 1969).⁴ The dominant identity of administrators, seen as White and male, positions the expectations for “effective” leaders to be individuals that lead under the guise of a traditional hegemonic system (Bryman, 2007; Kezar & Lester, 2010). Inclusion of minoritized populations is stagnant. However, as the population of administrators at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) slowly becomes diverse, minority administrators are expected to act in their administrative identities and do so with the same resources, knowledge, and expectations as other majority administrators throughout the institution and the academy as a whole. This can present a tension for Black administrators who learn to become, behave, and lead as an administrator within the context of a White-dominant space requiring a certain negotiation of one’s identity (Jackson, 2002; Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009; Ting-Toomey, 2015).

Higher education has grown into a diverse arena and the need for Black administrators at PWIs is even more pressing than it was 50 years ago when civil rights advancements allowed for their presence in the academy (Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Johnson, 1969). The “othered” identity the Black administrator represents when entering the dominant space is a symbol of change within traditional institutional cultures. However, that identity is incongruent to the norms of White dominant space. When Black administrators seek to achieve congruence between their racial identity as “Black” and their professional identity as an administrator, a process of identity negotiation is required. The concept of identity negotiation stems from Goffman’s (1959) understanding of a “working consensus.” Goffman (1959) presented the concept as an agreement which is made between organizational actors regarding the roles in which they will assume in the

⁴ Identifying terms such as White and Black are intentionally capitalized throughout in order to create and maintain parity among the Black racial identity in comparison to the already accepted White dominant racial identity. This practice was borrowed and modified from critical scholar, Lindsay Pérez Huber (2009) who intentionally rejects standard grammatical norms.

organizational structure. Swann, et al. (2009) built on this concept positing that consensus is formed through interactions and those interactions unfold through identity negotiation. Identity negotiation occurs when individuals transform themselves as collaborators and develop mutual obligations, common goals, and some degree of commitment to the already established institutional culture (Swann, et al., 2009). Negotiation is vital to the success of the minoritized administrator and serves as the “interpersonal glue” (p. 2) that creates bonding relationships between them and their institution.

Statement of the Problem

What happens when the professional identity of the Black administrator is not affirmed within their institutional community and as minoritized administrators they begin to experience oppression and discrimination? The Black administrator experiences incongruence between their situational identity⁵ as an administrator at a PWI and their core identity⁶ as Black in a dominant space. Winter (2009) explains the identity schisms in the academic workplace as tensions already complicated by the identity of a ‘academic manager’, where the values of the administrator are congruent with the organization’s discourse. The tensions related to finding congruence as an academic manager is further complicated by the contrasting identity of a ‘managed academic,’ where the values of the administrator are incongruent with the organization’s discourse (p. 121). The identity schisms experienced by a managed academic are similar to the Black administrative experience, as minoritized individuals find important aspects of their identities to be incongruent with the dominant values of a White space (Jackson, 2003). The tensions that arise when

⁵ The use the term “situational/situated identity” refers to an individual’s identity within a specific, circumscribed context or situation, such as the work environment (See Swann et al., 2009).

⁶ The use of the term “core identity” is an extension of the concept of core symbols, which tell us about the definitions, premises, and propositions regarding the universe and the place of humans (See Jackson, Johnson, Hecht, & Ribeau, 2019).

negotiating these identities present complex understandings between an individual's personal values tied to aspects of their core identities and the values in which they are to uphold as an administrative professional in the organization. Therefore, it is time for a reimagining of the identity of the Black administrator at a PWI, a task that is taken up within this study.

While recent literature has shifted focus to attempt to better understand the diversification of professionals in higher education (Fikes, 2004; Gasman, 2011; Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Waring, 2003; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015), the literature still lacks the perspective of the Black administrator as it relates to their negotiations of identity. From an organizational lens, this perspective is important to the field of higher education and its institutions within. As administrative identities become more diverse, the “organizational sagas,”⁷ which help to maintain an institution's identity and give further pride to the identities developed by the actors within, have remained the same. Organizational sagas develop through our collective understandings of what it means to be a higher education professional and help to determine how we behave and respond to a shared goal. Due to the hegemonic values tied to this organizational concept our understandings of diverse experiences within become limited as well. The lack of attention to racial diversity in organizational and higher education leadership scholarship is also considered in this study and the reimagining of both served as motivations for the research.

Furthermore, scholars and practitioners have neglected, in both literature and practice, to establish role models for Black administrators and affirm their identities within higher education institutions. Because PWIs have not restructured dominant traditions and practices for Black administrators to approach the administrative roles they hold in ways that promote identity

⁷ “Organizational saga” is a collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group. (See Clark, 1972).

congruence the process of identity negotiation is further complicated. Higher education's lack of effort to affirm identities of Black administrators further problematizes the development of their core and situational identities and can have major effects on the ways in which they "perform, commit, engage, maintain relationships, and survive" (Swann, et al., 2009) at PWIs in comparison to White administrators. Instances where Black administrators have successfully negotiated their identities are not always explicit. Exceptions include the stories of negotiating administrative and racialized⁸ identities experienced by, Dr. John Slaughter, the first Black President of Occidental College, a private, mainly white institution, and Dr. Ruth Simmons, the first Black President of Brown University, an Ivy League institution. Yet, these occurrences remain anomalous within the context of higher education.⁹

In addition, the institutional cultures of PWIs have not fully become inclusive to those who have historically been minoritized and now hold administrative positions of power (Perna, Gerald, Baum & Milem, 2007). Bolman and Deal (2017) posit that for effective leadership "in a world of chronic scarcity, diversity, and conflict, the nimble [administrator] has to walk a tightrope: developing a direction, building a base of support, and cobbling together working relations with both allies and opponents" (p. 214). Arguably literature that attempts to define 'effective leadership' relies on the characteristics of a White-male dominant identity (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, the limited strategies available on the tightrope of effective leadership are accessible only to an administrator who holds the dominant White administrative identity within the context of a predominantly White institutional culture. This study explores alternative

⁸ The term "racialized" is used to explain the experience of those who are racially minoritized to be connected to systems of oppression that are innate of organizations, hierarchies, and processes that value Whiteness as a credential (See Ray, 2019).

⁹ See Wallace (1996) for more background on Dr. John Slaughter and Ausmer (2009) for more background on Dr. Ruth Simmons. Both of these works reference the impact that each of these administrators had on the field of higher education in serving as senior-level administrators at prestigious institutions.

strategies for administrators from racially minoritized groups to provide insights on how to successfully negotiate their identities within a White dominant space and become effective leaders.

This study examined identity negotiations among Black administrators, while highlighting the experiences they encounter throughout these processes. The study follows historical understandings of the minoritized positioning of Black administrators as “othered.” Willinsky (1998) explains being “othered” to be an inferior status that is inherently tied to colonialism throughout U.S. history. Scholars who study race critically have also suggested the historical underpinnings between colonialism and racism calling attention to the racist hierarchical structures that have maintained governance over all political, economic, and social domains since the beginning of that history (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Therefore, racism serves as the source of Othering and a continued positioning of people of color to be different from Whites.

Following this historical context, I fully consider the intersectional nature of Black administrators’ “othered” identities to interrogate the complexities of being both a racial minority and an administrator in spaces where racial discrimination and oppression are institutionally and structurally embedded. I do so by exploring the negotiations of an individual’s “situated identity” within a specific, circumscribed context or situation, such as a PWI. This is further explored by understanding the negotiations of an individual’s “core identity” characterized by core symbols that represent salient or personal beliefs about themselves. The tensions that arise from incongruence between these two identities was examined to better understand how Black administrators can effectively lead in their situated identities, while still maintaining aspects of

their core identities, which scholarship contends to be more salient and important to the individual (Jackson, Johnson, Hecht, and Ribeau, 2019; Swann et al., 2009).

The Purpose of the Study

Higher education leaders are expected to perform their administrative identities within the constructs of normative ideologies and logics. Normative ideologies and logics are embedded into the everyday agendas at higher education institutions prompting administrators to act in modes of leadership, governance, and management in order to promote and achieve agendas within (Hattke, Blaschke, and Frost, 2014). As these modes are connected to the normative cultures of PWIs, they are also similarly connected to and influenced by systems of racism and oppression. For instance, when students of color broke into protest about a non-inclusive culture present at The University of Missouri (Mizzou), a transition of administrative leadership at the university allowed for a Black administrator to serve as the interim president following resignation of President Tim Wolfe (McMurtie, 2016). Interesting in this example are the ideologies and logics that Michael Middleton, an esteemed Black lawyer and higher education professional, had as resources for restructuring the non-inclusive culture at Mizzou while serving as interim president.

Swann et al., 2009 suggest that the ideologies and logics of an organization are communicated through various methods of discourse that include symbols, language, and practices offered throughout administrative templates. However, for Middleton, these ideologies and logics were historically embedded at the institution and finding ways to navigate the issues of non-inclusive cultures under dominant assumptions serves as an example for the need to fully understand how diverse administrators approach normative situations. This is even more important for Black administrators who while performing or acting out their administrator

identities engage in a process of identity development that is unique and seemingly adverse to the normative cultures at PWIs. Similar to Harper and Quaye (2007), who explored racial identity development among Black student leaders at PWIs, I take a “racially aware” stance to interrogate the processes of identity negotiation among Black administrators in the same spaces.¹⁰

Trivellas and Dargenidou (2009) posit that “the study of leadership in colleges and universities is problematic because of the dual control systems, the conflicts between professional and administrative authority, the unclear goals and other special properties of normative, professional organizations” (p. 296). This study explores these systems at play in specific communities of practice (Lester & Kezar, 2017) to provide a fresh perspective for Black administrators at PWIs as they negotiate their identities as administrators and attempt to achieve identity congruence in a dominant space. Critical Race Theory provides a framework for understanding the systems of oppression and racism inherently experienced by Black administrators negotiating their identities at PWIs. I seek to provide a “counternarrative” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) to the majoritarian stories offered in dominant literature on higher educational leadership especially as it relates to the process of identity development (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008; Kezar, 2007; Lester & Kezar, 2017).

Understanding the perspectives of Black administrators also brings “othered” voices to the forefront. As the minoritized administrator’s perspective is scarce throughout higher education literature, studies focused on adding these narratives also contribute further implications for diversifying higher education leadership practice and development. Goals of this

¹⁰ To take a “racially aware” stance means to keep race at the forefront of the study’s design. This includes aspects of reviewed literature, selection of chosen frameworks, development of research questions, research methods, and throughout data analysis.

study were to: (1) introduce the concept of identity negotiation into higher education leadership literature that considers the social positioning of the Black administrator at PWIs, (2) interrogate the importance of understanding these complex processes with a specific emphasis on racial identity, and therefore, (3) offer a critical model for examining the processes of identity negotiation for administrators who are members of racially minoritized groups.

Using a combination of frameworks and concepts mentioned above, this study took a narrative approach towards critically exploring the following guiding questions:

1. In what ways do personal and/or salient aspects of Black administrators' identities align with their job-related identities as administrators at PWIs? In what ways do they not?
 - What specific challenges do administrators face due to the racism and oppression tied to the minoritized aspects of their identities?
2. How do Black administrators negotiate their identities outlined by the institution and what strategies are used to do so?

Significance of the Study

This study was inspired by the concept of “identity negotiation” as introduced by scholarship attempting to understand organizational behavior and the processes of identity negotiation at work. Specifically, Swann et al. (2009) noted the importance of identity negotiation processes for achieving identity congruence while at work. In their work on organizational behaviors, Swann et al. (2009) suggested the effects of incongruence on individuals' performance, commitment, withdrawal, quality of relationships, perceived fairness of their institution, and overall health and well-being (p. 11-13). The authors offer modes for identity negotiation that considers the sense of *coherence, connectedness, and agency* necessary

for the positive outcome of identity congruence within an organization. However, Swann et al. (2009) neglected to consider the ways that identity negotiation is challenged by discrimination and oppression, as identities of racial minorities are by nature incongruent to the identity of a predominantly White organization. Therefore, Swann et. al (2009) essentially neglected the minoritized experience.

Scholarship that has similarly explored identity negotiation in higher education tends to focus on experiences of the student. Studies as such argue for student's sense of belonging (Harper, 2009; Hurtado, Ruiz Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Strayhorn, 2018) as an important motivation and goal for positive identity development. This sense of belonging is similarly connected to the effects offered above by Swann et al. (2009) for achieving identity congruence within an institution. Identity has further been defined to be a fluid and iterative construction between the individual, the organization, and its actors (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Swann et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider the ways in which Black administrative identities align at higher education institutions leaving a sense of racial belongingness that may lead to a positive experience for Black administrators negotiating their identities.

In subsequent chapters, I will explore the literature on topics such as the history of becoming and being a Black administrator at PWIs and the common experiences noted throughout such as othermothering/fictive kin, tokenism, coping, and cultural taxation. These topics help to frame the experience of Black administrators negotiating between multiple identities at PWIs. I will also explain the theoretical frameworks and how they connect to each other to help inform the guiding research questions. I will then detail the design of the study by

explaining the methods for data collection and data analysis. Finally, I will include drafted protocols presented in the appendices.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Through an organizational lens, the structure of U.S. higher education institutions illuminates a distinctive type of American organizational culture that mirrors the racial antipathy of broader societal constructs (Bennett, 2004; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Black administrators within this culture therefore are exposed to racism and oppression that impose upon the processes of both being and becoming an administrator in a dominant space. As race has not been at the forefront of organizational leadership discourse, critical examination of the unique experiences of being part dominant of institutions as such and negotiating multiple identities within, is long overdue (Nkomo, 1992; Rolle, Davies & Banning, 2000; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). The purpose of this chapter is to present the reviewed literature and theoretical frameworks for related to the study.

I begin with presenting the history of the presence of Black administrators throughout U.S. higher education and a summary of their experience from a minoritized perspective. In doing so, I consider the concepts of “tokenism” (Kanter, 1977), “othermothering/otherfathering” (Brooms, 2017; Griffin, 2013; Guiffrida, 2005), coping (Patitu & Hinton, 2003), and cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994), as they have been conceptualized throughout the literature. I then introduce important frameworks such as Critical Race Theory, the use of counternarratives, and identity negotiation as critical lenses towards understanding the experiences of Black administrators at PWIs.¹¹ These frameworks are situated well inside the critical terrain as they follow a socially critical stance. The frameworks allow for examination in the relationship between the individual and the organization moving towards social vision and change (Foster

¹¹ To be *critical* in the social sciences is to map and analyze the interplay between the agency of the role individual and the structures that enhance or limit that agency. This study follows practices and traditions in a critical manner by exploring the various tensions that arise in relation to power differences. (See Gunter, 2009).

1989). Critical scholars are also skeptical of addressing the issue of racism through liberal agendas because of the normalizing implications caused by the invisibility and denial of racism expressed by White people (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). This study follows a critical stance towards interrogating the effects of institutional racism.

In subsequent sections, I then discuss the concept of communities of practice (Lester & Kezar, 2017) to describe how challenging it becomes for Black administrators to navigate within them at their institutions. I conclude by connecting “institutional work” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) as an important framework that offered implications for study findings.

Becoming a Black Administrator: A Faulty Representation

The American Council on Education recently reported that minorities make up only thirteen percent of all college presidents (ACE, 2017). Furthermore, African Americans account for seven percent of the entire full-time administrative population across all U.S. post-secondary institutions (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). “Since the late 1960s, there has been a substantial increase in the number of senior-level African American administrators at traditionally White institutions” (Brown, 1994). Statements regarding data suggest considerable growth, but the visibility alone of minority identities does not present an accurate representation of the Black identity among administrators in U.S. higher education.

Dominant practices for increasing diversity at higher education institutions have been considered inequitable (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Garces, 2014; Garces & Jayakumar, 2014). As institutions attempt to make racial and cultural diversity more visible in representation, they have struggled to maintain equitable and inclusive environments in order to support diverse racial identities. The current rationale for diversity has been developed to increase the numerical representation of minority students, faculty, staff, and administrators. For instance, admissions

policies follow race-conscious policies that seek to increase diversity as prescribed by the U.S. Supreme Court (Garces, 2014; Moses & Chang, 2006). However, scholars have cautioned on the implication of making decisions based off traditional practices and rationales as decisions as such move away from the real issues of discrimination, inequality, and injustice that are both legally and systematically embedded within academic institutions (Bell, 2003; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Garces, 2014; Guinier, 2003; Moses & Chang, 2005).

Hypervisibility has become a marker for signaling that institutions are achieving diversity and therefore, equity, which is further affirmed by the illusion of a “post-racial” society.¹² The small increase of minoritized administrators throughout U.S. higher education makes the representation of a Black administrative identity more visible.¹³ However, visibility alone misses the mark as representation does not remove the implications of living in a racialized world. The idea of Black administrators not experiencing racism and oppression is a common misconception that assumes a position of power cushions the racialized experience (Feagin, 2006). It is important to understand how higher education views “visibility” as a marker for representation and the ways in which being a visible minority can have an impact on the experience of a minoritized administrator. Attending to faulty representations that only account for Black administrators in offices of diversity; curtailing the promotion of false perceptions regarding opportunities; and, problematizing our current diversity rationale offers a reimagining of the ways we research and conceptualize the minoritized administrative experience.

¹² The term “post-racial” stems from a U.S. context introduced mainly after the two-term Presidency of America’s first Black president, Barack Obama. It refers to an “era in American history where problems of inequity can no longer be convincingly linked to race.” (See Anya, 2017, p. 10).

¹³ The terms “Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably throughout as appropriated in popular discourse. The terms have been identified by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as similar “race/ethnicity” categories for “a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.”

Visibility and representation as inadequate remedies towards a racialized experience is evident in the currently low representation of minorities overall in fulltime administrative positions. The misconceptions about representational diversity in higher education institutions also promote discrepancies found in comparisons to the diversely growing U.S. population as it relates to higher education's diversely growing student body. Discrepancies and faulty representations of racial diversity further indicate that we have made little progress since historical civil rights advancements that afforded opportunities to Blacks in higher education (Cook, 2012). This study takes up the call to more critically examine the practices and rationales that allow for faulty diversity representations (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Garces & Jayakumar, 2014; Moses & Chang, 2005). In the subsequent sections, I briefly detail the history of Black administrators in the academy and present their experience as a minoritized one.

History. Prior to the Civil War, there was not much emphasis on supporting Blacks in higher education. In fact, with the insidious system of slavery rampant through the U.S., little attention was given to the educational implications of the racial situation (Alexander & Alexander, 2017, p. 680). The establishment of the first Morrill Act of 1862, which provided funds for the development and support of land-grant institutions, made higher education more accessible for working-class Americans of the time. The second Morrill Act established in 1890 required states with racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for Black students if the state's current land-grant institution was restricted for White students (US Dept. of Education, 1991). A great number of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were founded prior to the establishment of the second Morrill Act. Scholar activists alike note the mandate within the Act that ensured the "just and equitable" distribution of educational funds from the government (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). The mandate

presented a false language, and therefore practice, regarding federal funding placing HBCUs in a lower identity status than PWIs.

The Act also allowed for legal segregation of higher education institutions further establishing hierarchy and status among institutions and for those employed and enrolled within them. The effects on status quo positioned PWIs as superior and led to an exclusion of Blacks from mainstream higher education. A hegemonic culture upheld by laws, customs, and traditions practiced throughout PWIs further excluded African American faculty and administrators throughout most U.S. higher education (Myers, 2002). Legal segregation imposed by court decisions as within the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) created a standard of “separate but equal” allowing for inequitable opportunities throughout education and employment specifically between Blacks and Whites (US Department of Education, 1991).¹⁴ “Separate but equal” became the law of the land; thereby inequities persisted through already established HBCUs and perpetuated exclusion from majority institutions. Much later, the G.I. Bill of 1945, opened educational access to veterans, including African American veterans, making available both educational and administrative opportunities at PWIs (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, & Stewart, 2006).

A Minoritized Positioning. While the representation of Blacks at majority institutions increased into the 1950’s, the experience of those in administrative positions remained a “minoritized” one given the unsupportive and oppressive climate of higher education. The case of *Brown v. Board* (1954) served as a challenge to the “separate but equal” doctrine that plagued educational institutions into the civil rights era. The decision in the case rendered by the U.S.

¹⁴ The case sought to challenge the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment by questioning a Louisiana law that allowed segregation on their state railroad systems. In the majority opinion written by Justice Brown, the Supreme Court permitted the law applying the “separate but equal” doctrine to enforce the specificities of the Fourteenth Amendment. Justice Brown, in his majority opinion, made reference to the ‘establishment of separate schools for white and colored children’ that had held validity in power of the legislature (Alexander and Alexander, 2017, p. 683). Brown’s opinion and the Court reasoned that “separate but equal” was not meant as racial classification system, but rather a “good faith” exercise that was to be used at the discretion of state police.

Supreme Court held that the “separate but equal” doctrine upheld in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was unconstitutional. Segregation in public schools and public life was legally struck down. One year later in *Brown II* (1955), integration was mandated with “deliberate speed” (Alexander & Alexander, 2017). However, *Brown v. Board* and *Brown II* did not remedy the unequal systems throughout higher education. Almost ten years later, Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* was established to buttress prior rulings by providing an equal opportunity to those participating in federally assisted programs and activities. The Act also established protections to individuals from discrimination based on race, color, and national origin. Title VII, under the same act, also sought to prohibit discrimination in employment as this was also a societal problem of the time (Alexander and Alexander, 2017; Wright et al., 2006). In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson, issued two Executive Orders that required federal contractors to follow an affirmative action stance calling for equal opportunity in employment and educational access for minority groups and women (Alexander and Alexander, 2017; Garces, 2014).

Moving into the 1980’s, the policies on affirmative action contributed to a practice within majority institutions to appoint African American administrators into positions as directors of special services and TRIO programs¹⁵ or directors of affirmative action (*ie. Directors of Diversity or Equity Offices or Chief Diversity Officers*). The positioning of Black administrators as coordinators and directors within programs and offices as such only make way for prestigious-sounding titles (Wright et al., 2006). Ultimately, the authority, decision-making power, and status expected to come with such titles followed historical patterns of inferiority. Nevertheless,

¹⁵ The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs (See U.S. Dept. of Education, 2018).

despite this historical positioning, there is still a heightened sense of visible representation regarding Black administrators at PWIs today. For PWIs, the presence of minority administrators affirms the idea that opportunities to succeed are available and equal to all individuals regardless of their background or race and that we have achieved racial parity in higher education. The visible representation of minorities also presents a false perception of opportunities available to Black administrators. The false perception of opportunities presents further tensions for Black administrators who wish to increase representations of their minoritized identities at PWIs and render faulty implications relating to salary, promotion, and power (Jackson, 2003; Patitu et al., 2003; Wright et al., 2006).

While the increase of minority administrators has increased visible representation of Black administrators throughout higher education this is a false indicator of progress towards reaffirming minoritized identities within. The numerical increase in the minority population at U.S. post-secondary institutions and among minority-college graduates in the U.S. overall has begun to outnumber the representations of Black administrators in the academy (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017).¹⁶ This has caused a burgeoning of responsibilities for Black administrators who represent the few minorities at U.S. post-secondary institutions. As our current practices for responding to responsibilities of the student rely on the default responses from White administrators, this study focuses on the minoritized experience.

Being a Black Administrator at a PWI: Common Experiences

Black administrators are subjected to a racialized hegemonic system created out of a history of racism, classism, and sexism (Smith, 1984). In his revolutionary piece *Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Dubois (1903) shared four unique principles of Black leadership: (1) leadership is

¹⁶ Bichsel & McChesney (2017) found that in 2016, 38.5 percent of the U.S. population were members of minority groups. The portion of college graduates who were members of minority groups came in at 26.7 percent.

the primary responsibility of college-educated Blacks; (2) teachers are primary members of a Black leadership structure; (3) it is the responsibility of Black leaders to prepare, guide, and direct the broader population of African Americans; and (4) there are distinctive roles for African American leaders in a racialized society. However, the underlying effects of systemic racism have positioned these principles, similar to the position of minoritized peoples, as inferior.

U.S. higher education scholarship has ambiguously defined what it means to be a “leader.” Leadership and what it means to be a leader have historically followed the “great man” theoretical frame, which focuses on identifying the innate qualities and characteristics possessed by great social, political and military leaders who have traditionally been White men (Northouse, 2010). Instead of explicit definitions, dominant understandings of “leadership” have focused attention on researching, theorizing, and cultivating an “effective leader” (Cohen and March, 1974; Bryman, 2008). These understandings of leadership have been crafted under the guise of Whiteness.¹⁷ However, as witnessed in the principles proposed by Dubois (1903), the ways of defining and describing leadership in a more racialized way omit very important histories given the recent shift of leader identities throughout U.S. higher education. Instead, the prominent behaviors associated with “effective leaders” have been centered in a White-male dominated hierarchy leaving successful effective leaders to be characterized as heroic, autonomous, results-oriented, and individualistic (Kezar & Lester, 2010; Cohen and March, 1974; Bryman, 2008).

Behaviors such as providing a clear vision, being considerate, acting as a role model, having credibility, or creating a positive atmosphere (Bryman, 2008) may seem universal, but the history of minoritized peoples complicate this for Black leaders. As discussed above, the history of Black administrators throughout U.S. higher education has positioned their identities as

¹⁷ Whiteness here is used to describe both the identities and social structures that are created and maintained under the idea of dominance given by way of White racial privilege (See Warren, 2009).

minoritized. The effects rendered throughout this historical positioning have major influence on the ways Black administrators approach their leadership behaviors in a predominantly white space (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Jackson 2003; Rolle, Davies & Banning, 2000).

The situation of Black administrators seeking to become “effective leaders” under the guise of Whiteness is in part connected to what Diane Gusa (2010) has coined as “white institutional presence.” When conceptualizing the concept, Gusa considered the impact of Whiteness at PWIs. In her exploration, Gusa found how embedded ideologies at PWIs present the following attributes of: 1) white ascendancy, which is thinking or behaving off the benefits of Whiteness 2) monoculturalism, or favoring one culture over the other 3) white estrangement, such as distancing of Whites both socially and physically from people of color, and 4) white blindness, or presenting a color-blind ideology and thinking that people of color are immaterial as the norm at institutions as such (p. 472-479). These attributes rendered from a white institutional presence have been socially constructed from White supremacy at PWIs and explicit instances of racism are not necessary for an oppressive and discriminatory experience for Black administrators. Gusa (2010) further explains how the embedded ideologies become a part of the “language, cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge” at PWIs (p. 465). The resulting perpetuating systems of racism and oppression may also further influence how Black administrators experience leading in a racialized institutional culture.

Common Experiences. Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin (2006) posit that there is not one “best way to lead” (p. 5). For this reason, exploring the experiences of Blacks who assume positions of leadership in dominant spaces can add value towards understanding what is experienced by racialized leaders throughout U.S. higher education even outside of PWIs (HBCUs, Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), etc.). Literature across disciplines has presented

the experiences of racialized leaders, which is different than experiences of White leaders whose identities match the hegemonic systems of predominantly White organizations. The following sections outline common experiences for Black administrators at PWIs as described in the literature.

Kanter (1977) posited the term “tokenism” to explain the experiences of women as minorities in a male dominated business society. The term “racial tokenism” has also been considered, which suggests that Blacks are placed in high status or positions of visibility to be experts in race-relations within the organization (Kelly, 2007). However, this understanding has been contested by previous scholarship that suggested African American women in leadership, specifically those who are often seen as “tokens,” tend to have no real political power to enact within an organization (Moses, 1997). The singling out of Black administrators as tokens also presents tensions with other Blacks who disfavor assuming positions of power in this way. This tension can lead to division within the Black academic community resulting in feelings of tokenization from being one-of-few minorities in a position of power within a dominant space.

Isolation was another experience suggested by Kanter (1977), yet her study on “tokenization” only included a small number of Black participants. Jackson (2001) explored the concept of isolation in his study of African American administrators, noting that Blacks at PWIs experienced unwelcoming climates on their campuses leaving administrators to feel excluded and isolated. Isolation and exclusion can manifest into feelings of disconnection among Black administrators from the campus community ultimately resulting in relocation or disinvestment.

The experience of being one of few minorities, while being an isolated one, does not happen in silos (Wilson, 2012). In fact, studies that have explored the perspectives of Black faculty suggest unique experiences of becoming “othermothers” or “otherfathers” (Brooms,

2017; Griffin, 2013; Guiffrida, 2005). This concept originally suggested that the roles of African American women leaders followed a historical trend of serving as the community “othermother” or caretaker (Allen, 1997; Collins, 1990). Griffin (2013) described the ways in which Black faculty (men and women) acted as “othermothers” throughout their interactions with Black students resulting in both negative and positive outcomes. Negative outcomes were related to time and commitment that came with mentoring Black students. The expectations overall to mentor Black students, however, were uplifted by positive outcomes suggesting that faculty felt a sense of closeness and shared understanding, all of which were unique to faculty. The findings suggest that the workload and direct interaction with students through “othermothering” is experienced exclusively by Black faculty. However, the mere fact that Black administrators are naturally a part of an informal “fictive kin” network suggests that they will also engage in this practice as well.¹⁸

Another common experience among Black academics is expressed in finding ways to cope with being the minority. Harley (2008) suggested that African American faculty members tend to experience greater amounts of stress related to promotion concerns, time restraints, home responsibilities and governance activities. Coping has been identified as a dominant mechanism for responding to the stress felt throughout. Bandura (1986) has explored the concept of “coping” as an affective process which becomes a way of dealing with the anxieties and pressures and acts as a mediator towards an individual’s internal process towards self-efficacy.¹⁹ Patitu and Hinton (2003) also likened this experience to include the coping strategies by African American women

¹⁸ Fictive kin are individuals who are not related by blood, marriage, or union, yet, maintain a kinship relationship. It has been suggested that African Americans naturally engage in fictive kin relationships and become a part of larger fictive kin networks more commonly than non-Hispanic Whites (See Taylor et al., 2013).

¹⁹ People's self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles (See Bandura, 1986, p. 1176).

administrators (and African American women faculty) at PWIs. The data collected in two separate studies conducted by the researchers found that African American women faculty and administrators expressed having to cope with hostile environments, prejudice, racism, and sexism in their work environments. Relevant to Patitu and Hinton's (2003) study is Bandura's (1986) conceptualization of "coping efficacy." This concept is defined as the efficacy or confidence one has in coping with or managing complex situations. Research has yet to explicitly explore "coping" as it relates to the experience of African American administrators at PWIs, given that regardless of gender, minoritized administrators will have unique accounts of the ways in which they cope while negotiating their identities in spaces of oppression and racism.

Another common experience that has been noted throughout literature is the added cultural taxation imposed by dominant structures that exist throughout society, which assumes that minorities are best suited for specific tasks because of their race or ethnicity (Padilla, 1994). While taxation comes in many forms cultural taxation is an effect of what is assumed about another person's culture. Black administrators are assumed to be experts in diversity, expected to be educators to White colleagues, and, serve as a cultural liaison, all while taking time away from their own work to fix social and cultural issues at their institutions. Hirshfield and Joseph (2011) expanded on the on the concept of cultural taxation to introduce *identity taxation* to include the intersections of an individual's gender and race. In their study that interviewed 66 faculty members they found that while gender presented differences in experiences across participants, the most notable difference was when race was taken into consideration. For example, women faculty noted accounts of feeling tokenized, pressures to mentor, and prejudices faced as women. But unique to female faculty of color, were pressures in being diversity representatives, serving as mother figures, and being viewed as having less authority.

To be considered an effective leader one should be able to assume a position of strength, while working towards the promise of a better future and more equitable and inclusive work practices within their institution. However, the dominant ambiguous understandings of a White-male, individualistic leader neglect to consider the “relational” aspects of being a leader in a growing diverse place (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2007). The commonly shared experiences of Black administrators in dealing with feelings of tokenism, othermothering/fathering, having to cope, experiencing cultural taxation make more important the need for interrogating their relationships while interacting in a White dominated space. The experiences found within the literature paint a negative picture for Black administrators as they navigate their leadership roles at PWIs. For this reason, this study produced alternative ways for negotiating a Black administrative identity that counter these negative experiences.

Theoretical Frameworks

The following sections present the key theoretical frameworks of the study. I first explain the importance of taking a critical lens towards understanding the experiences of Black administrators at PWIs. This involves the use of ‘Critical Race Theory’ as a framework to interrogate the normalization of administrative leadership behaviors throughout higher education, which suggests that there is one way to lead and therefore all leaders should exhibit (Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglas, 2013). This study also takes up the earlier call from Bensimon, Neuman, and Birnbaum (1989) suggesting for more “multi-dimensional” research and viewpoints on leadership experiences. I also introduce ‘counternarratives’, a tenet of CRT, to bring to light the minoritized experiences of Black administrators. I then detail the aspects of ‘identity negotiation’ (Ting-Toomey, 2015; Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009), and present this as critical approach for understanding the process of negotiating between the dual identities of being both Black and an

administrator in a dominant space. Finally, I detail the concept of communities of practice (Lester & Kezar, 2017) and discuss how Black administrators encounter a negotiation process while enacting common tasks of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Critical Race Theory. Originally conceptualized by Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier and Kimberle Crenshaw, Critical Race Theory (CRT) looks to expose the racism built into our societal structures and uses story-telling as a means to do so (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, Gillborn, Ladson-Billings 2009). Aside from the emphasis of telling the counter-story, major tenets of CRT assert the following: a) there is a permanence of racism throughout society; b) Whiteness is a property interest used to benefit the majority; c) benefits or opportunities for minoritized populations are afforded through interest convergence with the majority; d) it is essential to lift notions of colorblindness, neutrality of law, and incremental change through a critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This study maintains the assertion that racism is permanent throughout society and, therefore, endemic to structures and systems that exist within. The notion of Whiteness as an interest of property is also relevant to this study as PWIs, like the one presented in the study, are what Ray (2019) describes as “racialized organizations,” where Whiteness serves as a credential, giving legitimizing power to White identities within. CRT tenets suggest that opportunities for minoritized populations are achieved to serve the interests of Whites, an insight that informs this study. Further, an awareness, gained through a CRT lens, that color-blindness serves Whiteness informs the ideological underpinnings of this study. Yet, these tenets do not speak to the discursive and hegemonic construction of Whiteness, as witnessed at PWIs. Therefore, attention is focused in this study on the permanence of racism, counterstorytelling, and, Whiteness as property, which center Black administrative identities, experiences, and voice.

Maintaining a focus on identity within this study, I rely as other CRT scholars in the field of communication have on the concept of particularism, keeping in mind the idea that identity is always relative to the context of one's life (Littlejohn and Foss, 2012). The concept of race is socially constructed, and racism is a real entity that has become normalized and systemically embedded into our institutions and structures throughout society. CRT scholars seek to disrupt the socially constructed systems that lead to oppressive and discriminatory practices by critically interrogating the dominant ideologies that uphold them.

CRT can also be understood as a movement grounded in “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 2). It provides the anti-racism scholar in education with a framework to envision and “transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of [people] of color” (Solórzano, 1998, as cited in Espino, 2012). Scholarship throughout higher education leadership that utilizes CRT as a framework draws on the various tenets to interrogate dominant systems and provide a “race(cialized)” perspective (Gasman, Abiola, & Travers, 2015; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015; Parker and Villalpando, 2007). Given the critical lens necessary for exploring the systems of oppression and discrimination faced by Black administrators, CRT serves as an important guiding framework to elicit the counter-stories of Black administrators.

Counternarratives. A major issue throughout higher education, and society, is that we tend to place more value on the socially constructed master narratives that have become normalized. According to Harper (2009), master narratives are dominant accounts that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups, and such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) introduce counterstorytelling as a

useful approach to education research. They define this as a method of telling the stories of people who are often overlooked in the literature, and as a means by which to examine, critique, and counter majoritarian stories (or master narratives) composed about people of color. The terms counterstorytelling and counter majoritarian have also been considered counternarratives (Littlejohn and Foss 2012).

In this study I will provide the counternarratives of Black administrators at PWIs, to amplify the voices of those who hold minoritized identities and challenge the master narratives already “scripted” against them. One critique about narratives is that they are fictional stories; but, Solórzano and Yosso differentiate critical race storytelling from fiction by saying, “we are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios. Instead, the ‘composite’ characters we develop are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data” (2002, p. 36). Therefore, counternarratives provide a real-life account of what it is like for Black administrators negotiating their identities within a dominant space.

Identity Negotiation a Critical Approach. The term identity can be understood as “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586). The term has also been extended to include an individual’s multifaceted identities of cultural, ethnic, religious, social class, gender, sexual orientation, professional, family/relational role, and personal image(s) based on self-reflection and other categorization social construction processes (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Therefore, identities are not fixed entities that emerge at a single analytical level, instead they operate at multiple levels simultaneously. Assuming or performing our identities is what makes the identity development process a “process of action” (Darragh, 2016). As Black administrators begin to learn and perform their administrative identities at PWIs, they further establish who they are both as Black and as an administrator. The concept of identity negotiation

can be defined as the processes whereby relationship partners reach agreement regarding “who is who” (Swann et al., 2009, p. 2).²⁰ Black administrators learn who they are as an administrator through various negotiations of their identities while interacting with the institution, its constituents, and their internal/external peers. Therefore, the ways in which Black administrators perform, behave, and communicate their identities on multiple levels all while in a White space and in a role historically positioned foremost White male and female identities, sheds light on the negotiation process.

Swann et al. (2009) further explored the process of identity negotiation in the workplace, considering how the negotiation process can affect work outcomes regarding job performance, organizational commitment, withdrawal, turnover, relationship quality, perceived fairness of the organization, and an individual’s health and well-being. In examining organizational behavior authors suggested that interrogating these outcomes helps to reveal strategies that can be leveraged for organizational change and innovation. Important to the current study is the concept of “identity congruence,” which if achieved, can lead to optimized performance and creativity, as well as foster a sense of connectedness to an organization (Swann et al., 2009, p. 19).

For Swann et al., (2009) identity congruence is necessary within the identity negotiation process. In their conceptualizations around identity negotiation the authors posit that an individual’s situated identity, their notions of self within a specific context (administrator) and their chronic identity, or longstanding notions of the self (Black), rely on a sense of *coherence*, *connectedness*, and *agency* in order for identity congruency. These aspects of coherence, connectedness, and agency must be iteratively established and achieved through a bonding relationship between the individual and their organization.

²⁰ For more background on the establishment of “who is who” in an organization and the agreement in regard to role positioning within interactions see foundational discussion in Goffman (1959).

Furthermore, the individual seeks clarity, cooperation, continuity, and compatibility from the organization, which is often expressed by organizations through various logics and ideologies. The logics and ideologies of an institutions serve as cultural artifacts and can be presented either in formal contracts (job descriptions, performance evaluations, compensation agreements, etc.) or psychological contracts (formal trainings, socialization engagements, and expectations) (Swann et al., 2009). Thornton and Casio (2008) suggests that logics are ‘the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality’ (p. 101). In the case of Black administrators at PWIs, institutions communicate the logics and ideologies through the different types of contracts that specify job-related expectancies. This study will investigate how Black administrators’ core identities as Black connect to the dominant logics presented to them in their situated identities as administrators.

The institution also, either formally or informally, sets up the boundaries or “consequences for violating those expectancies” (Swann et al., 2009, p. 9). When individuals fail to perform their situational identities as administrators in the ways outlined by the institution, the consequences can have varying outcomes on the identity negotiation process. The negative outcomes and effects are what Swann et al. (2009) considers to be examples of incongruence.

There are multiple levels of identity developed throughout the negotiation process which include both personal and social characteristics of identity (Jackson, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 2015). Different scholarship has taken unique approaches towards exploring the processes as they relate to specifics within each field. For instance, scholarship in the field of education that involves the exploration of identity negotiation of administrators does not explicitly present the negotiation

process as an approach towards achieving congruency, but instead focuses on the challenges minoritized administrators face while adopting specific negotiations within (Brooms, 2017; Griffin, 2013; Guiffrida, 2005; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). As these works read as challenges to processes of negotiation, presented together, they highlight the importance for more explicit mentions of identity negotiation for minoritized administrators. Scholarship within the field of linguistics has transitioned overtime towards more critical approaches considering the socio-cultural aspects of constructing and negotiating identities through language socialization (Anya, 2017; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Ochs, 1993). This research suggests the importance of considering the ways in which language learning can be critically interrogated to understand how the processes of “being and becoming” are unique to different groups and communities throughout the negotiation process.

Communication scholarship has also taken a critical approach towards interrogating the negotiation process through interactions between intercultural groups, also considering the unique nature of individuals’ socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences (Dorjee, et al., 2014; Jackson, 2002a; Ting-Toomey, 2015). Jackson (2002b) introduced the theory of “cultural contracts” in which he likened the intercultural negotiation process to that of signing a housing contract. This theory conceptualizes the process between an insider (real-estate agent) and outsider (client) as a process towards achieving mutual goals to benefit both parties. These goals are essentially achieved through successful identity negotiation expressed as contracts. Each contract expresses a different level of negotiation which is mutually achieved by all those involved in the process (Jackson & Elmore, 2017).²¹

²¹ Three types of contracts described by cultural contracts theory include: ready-to-sign (assimilation expected), quasi-completed (occasional accommodation expected), and co-created (mutual respect expected).

As Black administrators negotiate their minoritized identities at PWIs, it is important to consider how this negotiation process can ameliorate the negative experiences that are commonly expressed given the nature of oppressive and discriminatory systems they are exposed to. The process of defining “who is who” within an institution is a collaborative effort that involves both the administrator and the institution itself. Furthermore, as aforementioned research suggests we cannot remiss the socio-cultural histories of either. Taking a critical lens towards understanding the negotiation process in a higher education context is important. Especially as Black administrators are situated within cultures incongruent to their own "as they attempt to reach out and hold back at the same time, to seek for mutual validation, and yet at the same time to protect their own vulnerability" (Ting-Toomey, 1986, p. 126).

Navigating through Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (CoP) have been conceptualized throughout higher education literature as voluntary groups where members share a passion and personal interest in promoting knowledge and learning through interactions with other members and within their disciplines. It has been suggested that CoP are typically located within a single organization involving people connected by common tasks or agendas (Kezar, Gehrke, and Bernstein-Sierra, 2017). An example would be a group of administrators who share a common goal of academic success. The goal for academic success would typically mimic aspects of an institutions mission and from here, administrators may develop strategies for achieving the goal. A key characteristic of CoP is the established relationship between design and identified goals. Wenger and colleagues (2002) describe that the goal of design is to bring out the community’s own internal direction, character, and energy. CoP leadership is modeled after distributed leadership, a set of collective social processes engaging multiple actors (Lester and Kezar, 2017, p. 18). Administrators within a

university are a part of a core team of individuals that span across the institution, internally and externally. In their roles as leaders, administrators act as stewards of the missions and agendas promoted within CoP.

For Black administrators, navigating a CoP with goals and designs that are incongruent with their core identities can be challenging. As PWIs adopt normative and rational practices that administrators must follow in order to successfully do their job, the strain becomes even more complicated when the history of a Black administrative identity is considered. The question then becomes, can a Black administrator assume agency while navigating in an oppressive CoP? The answer again is complex but can be better understood with knowledge of the institutional work that administrators enact while trying to promote a specific goal such as, institutional change. Institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) highlights that there is a rational identity that administrators must assume within their CoP and further exploration into the concept could add value to dismantling perpetuating systems.

Institutional Work

Institutional work is the “purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). Within institutional work is the concept of embedded agency or “how actors whose thoughts and action are constrained by institutions are nevertheless able to work to affect those institutions” (Ziestma and Lawrence, 2010, p. 189). Applying the organizational framework of institutional work allows for important implications towards an understanding of an individual’s ability and access to ‘agency’ given their organizational and social group status (Battilana, 2006). Therefore, by interrogating the identity negotiation process of Black administrators and the construction of

their administrative identities in collaboration with the institutional culture, my scholarship can add to important discussions around the concept of “embedded agency.”

Institutional work can be further linked to an ideology introduced by Meyer and Rowan (1977), which understands the adoption of “rationalized myths” that become traditions and practices constructed to achieve organizational goals. This ideology was extended to include the concept of “isomorphism” where institutions respond to external and internal pressures to survive in three distinctive ways: mimetically, coercively, and normatively (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The isomorphic nature of institutional cultures requires that institutional actors engaged in institutional work adopt beliefs and “logics” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) that essentially uphold the “rationalized” myths or traditions found within the academic community. In the context of U.S. higher education, this becomes problematic as Black administrators attempt to establish their embedded agency to work against the very systems that oppress and discriminate against them.

Exploration of identity negotiation among Black administrators can offer important insights for those engaging in institutional work. The perspectives that Black administrators express while constructing their identities at PWIs challenge the traditionally rationalized institutional cultures presented in dominant institutional logics. As the goal is for Black administrators to find value in the logics of their institution, it is important to consider the various ways that Black administrators interact with their administrative roles and their awareness of identity specific categories and labels presented within these logics (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). For instance, concepts such as Gusa’s (2010) “White institutional presence” discussed above show that people respond to and make decisions based off the cultures they are situated within. Interrogating the Black administrative experience specifically, may also provide important insights into how Black

administrators can also achieve a sense of agency while constructing and negotiating their identities (Ochs, 1993). For these specific reasons, institutional work served as an important framework for outlying implications of the study.

Chapter Three: Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods for data collection and data analysis used to explore answers to the research questions presented in the study. The design of this study was set up to interrogate the negotiations of identity as experienced by Black administrators at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In order to better understand these negotiations, I have borrowed from Swann, Johnson, and Bosson (2009) in their conceptualization of identity congruence as it helps to draw out the critical tensions between an individual's situated identity, their notions of self within a specific context (administrator) and aspects of their core identity, or personable or salient notions of the self (Black). To explore the tensions that Black administrators face narrative inquiry methods were used. These methods were informed by a "racially aware" (Harper and Quaye, 2007) critical lens. Selected participants were asked to provide narratives that characterize their experiences of negotiating identities as administrators while navigating the conditions of a traditional White male administrative role at PWIs. Henceforth, important aspects of CRT, such as counternarratives, were employed to help in the critical interpretations of the racialized experiences of members from this minoritized group.

In this chapter, I provide my rationale for employing qualitative methods, and more specifically the use of narrative inquiry as an approach within the study and my use of theoretical frameworks such as CRT and identity negotiation as guiding epistemological assumptions. These epistemological assumptions also informed my researcher positionality, which is presented thereafter. I then briefly discuss a completed pilot study that provided insights for the study. This is followed with a breakdown of the research design to include: the study setting, participant sample and selection criteria, methodological procedures, data collection, data analysis, and the

use of critical discourse analysis and typology as an analytical technique. The chapter concludes with a discussion on self-reflexivity and confirmation.

Qualitative Methods Rationale

This study draws heavy on the use of qualitative research methods. Maxwell (2013) suggests that the qualitative research process is an interactive one, as the process is not linear, and therefore, studies designed as such should be flexible to the change in interaction with the study. He further posits that qualitative research is:

- 1) The meanings and perspectives of the people you study, seeing the world from their point of view
- 2) how these perspectives shape and are shaped by their physical, social, and cultural contexts
- 3) the specific processes that are involved in maintaining or altering these phenomena and relationships (p. viii).

My study responds to one of the major intellectual goals of qualitative research as suggested by Maxwell (2013), which calls for an understanding of meaning from the perspective of your participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) take a similar stance towards the goals of qualitative research stating that it is “an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explores a social or human problem.” Therefore, the researcher builds “complex, holistic picture; reports detailed views of participants; and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 2).

The utilization of qualitative methods in this research design creates the space for Black administrative perspectives in the higher education leadership literature. Participants were given the chance to provide perspectives that depict their own personal experiences, and this data was analyzed as autobiographies from the participants. In their autobiographies, participants responded to prompted questions about their identity development experiences in a three-page

maximum narrative (Anya, 2017; Atkinson, 1998). I also collected and analyzed individual semi-structured interviews, documents and other related discourse such as: specific job-related descriptions and personal administrative biographies. In addition, I conducted two observations of the selected participants during monthly scheduled group meetings. As this study is exploratory in nature, it was important for these qualitative methods to be considered in the research design.

Narrative Inquiry Approach

In addition to employing qualitative methods, I used a narrative inquiry approach for the study. Researchers who use narrative inquiry as an approach are interested in the stories that people tell about their life experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2007). These stories are elicited from oral accounts requested as written stories and through interviews. This process of “storying” has been used in various disciplines such as history, organizational theory and social science (Polkinghorne, 2007). Narrative inquiry was popularized in education research by Clandinin and Connelly (1998) in their exploration of telling stories to interrogate classroom and curriculum experiences in the wake of U.S. school reforms. They positioned education to be at the core of narrative inquiry stating that,

We see living an educated life as an ongoing process. People’s lives are composed over time: biographies or life stories are lived and told, retold and relived. For us, education is interwoven with living and with the possibility of retelling our life stories (p. 246).

The processes of becoming and being an administrator through identity negotiation is an iterative and ongoing experience for Black administrators at PWIs (Jackson, 2002b; Swann et al., 2009; Ting Toomey, 2015). Clandinin and Connelly (1986) also note that narrative inquiry can be used as a methodology to study “how humans make meaning by endlessly telling and retelling stories

about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (1986, p. 385). Constantly reflecting on their experiences in both becoming and being an administrator allows Black administrators to express how they make meaning of their identity negotiation processes. The use of a narrative inquiry approach also allows for an “experiential, multidimensional, and relational understanding” to be developed from a researcher standpoint (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 224). Therefore, narrative inquiry was best suited for understanding the experiences of Black administrators as it drives for the interpretation of holistic content, drawing on important data obtained through transcripts and documents to be solicited from participants (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Critical Race Theory and Identity Negotiation and their Epistemological Assumptions

In conjunction with to qualitative research methods and a narrative inquiry approach, I also used the theoretical lenses of Critical Race Theory and identity negotiation. These frameworks provide epistemological assumptions that guide the design of the study. Epistemological assumptions provide “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know,” (Ahmend, 2008; Crotty, 2003). The use of these frameworks and their guiding assumptions help to decide what knowledge is possible throughout the exploration of the study. Essentially, these frameworks worked together to critically interrogate the identity negotiation processes as experienced by Black administrators.

Critical Race Theory focuses on “studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p. 2). Race is not a fixed term, but rather one that is fluid, constantly being shaped by political pressures, and informed by individual lived experiences (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Using this assumption, my view of reality is based on power and identity struggles related to the minoritized administrators’ lived experience in a racialized

organization where Whiteness serves as a credential, giving agency and legitimacy to White identities within (Ray, 2019). CRT provides a framework for communicating the experiences and realities of those who are oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In this study I drew on aspects of this framework to present the counternarratives of those who are, through a historical lens, left out of the master narrative inscribed onto their situated administrator identities.²²

Identity negotiation focuses on the processes of determining “who is who” through interaction and therefore considers the processes of being and becoming throughout the process of identity development (Anya, 2017; Swann et al., 2009). As a framework used in this study, I view the process of identity negotiation as a “fundamentally iterative process that involves a series of transactions between [administrators] and their [institutional contexts]” (Swann et al., 2009, p, 5). Interrogating this process with a critical lens is important towards re-telling the participants lived experiences while negotiating their identities.

Researcher Positionality

Aside from taking a critical positionality as a doubly marginalized individual myself (Black, gay male), I maintained a racially aware stance to interrogate the processes of identity negotiation among Black administrators at PWIs. As noted in chapter one, this stance is inspired by what was introduced by Harper and Quaye (2007), who explored racial identity development among Black student leaders at PWIs and has been affirmed throughout the higher education literature.

²² Jackson and Hogg (2010) discuss the concept of “inscription” by providing an example contending that the idea of Black masculinity developed under a Western guise has inscribed identities to the body of a Black male. The authors suggest that there is no actual meaning to the physical body until cultural and social constructions inscribe meaning to it. In this study I consider the master narratives of people of color to be aspects of the inscribed identities imposed upon them by a dominant White culture.

My own experiences attending a historically Black college and university (HBCU) for my bachelor's degree and transitioning to PWIs as a graduate student for both my master's and doctoral degrees also helped to inform my stance. When transitioning into the PWI academic setting I found it difficult to find role models of color to help mentor my career aspirations of university administration. The literature, too, lacked affirming notions of what it meant to be a Black administrator and I often felt ostracized from the leadership identity in higher education.

In fact, while serving as a Student Affairs professional during my master's work, I learned first-hand that race and racism are socially constructed and acted out in systemic ways in an institutional setting. Instances, like the racially charged murder of unarmed Black male, Samuel Dubose, who was shot by a White University of Cincinnati police officer in the summer of 2015²³, have remained with me and continue to shape my understandings throughout life. Taking a racially aware stance allowed me to keep the racially minoritized experience at the forefront of my research design and data interpretation. This in turn allowed for more relational and multidimensional analysis of the participants' lived administrative identity development experiences as presented in the data.

Research Questions

As presented in chapter one, this study takes a narrative approach towards critically exploring the following guiding questions:

1. In what ways do personal and/or salient aspects of Black administrators' identities align with their job-related identities as administrators at PWIs? In what ways do they not?

²³ My Master's thesis entitled *Using Situational Crisis Communication Theory to Interrogate a PWIs Response to a Campus Racial Crisis* published in 2016, provides a detail account of the death of Mr. Samuel Dubose. Dubose was the fourth Black male to lose his life under care, supervision, or in interaction with the University of Cincinnati Police in just a short 20-year period.

- What specific challenges do administrators face due to the racism and oppression tied to the minoritized aspects of their identities?
2. How do Black administrators negotiate their identities outlined by the institution and what strategies are used to do so?

Insights from Pilot Study

In the fall of 2018, I conducted a pilot study focused on similar questions presented above. For this study, I used similar theoretical frameworks of identity negotiation and Critical Race Theory to include literature that outlined the Black administrative experience at a PWI. I chose to focus on three participants for this pilot to gain a varied perspective. I also chose to keep the gender and administrator position open in order to solicit participation that may have provided different or unique perspectives than those discussed in the literature. Out of the three participants, two identified as Black women and one identified as a Black man. Aside from being a part of a similar community of practice in a unit focused on multicultural affairs at their institution, each of the participants had attended HBCUs for their undergraduate degrees as well.

The findings from this pilot study are connected to experiences that were presented in the reviewed literature. For instance, given the background and common identities of each of the participants, their stories were consistent with the phenomena of “othermothering/fathering” (Brooms, 2017; Griffin, 2015) and the challenges in regards to establishing legitimacy and competency (Gutierrez y Muhs, Flores Nieman, Gonzalez & Harris, 2012) in a White-dominated space. Participants also expressed the need for achieving identity congruence, a key aspect of the identity negotiation process as mentioned here in chapter two. This was evident in their approaches to finding ways to identify with other Black professionals at their institution and joining Black subgroups in the community in order to establish a sense of connectedness. These

findings illuminate the need to better understand the identity negotiation process in order to reveal useful strategies for Black administrative identity development.

Study Setting

The setting for the study was aimed to be at a PWI. I was specifically interested in identity negotiation among Black administrators at PWIs and wanted to maintain focus on their experiences navigating a White space. Other considerations for the study setting involved conducting a comparative study that included Black administrators at HBCUs. However, I chose not to proceed in this way in order to keep the focus within a similar community of practice (CoP), where administrators share common goals and processes for achieving them.

As mentioned in chapter two, CoP are typically located within a single organization involving people connected by common tasks or agendas (Kezar, Gehrke, & Bernstein-Sierra, 2017). Also noted, Black administrators at PWIs lead under the guise of Whiteness. The positioning of their identities as minoritized inserts the issues of power and inferiority embedded within the histories of PWIs. Therefore, critical examination of the specific communities of practices that Black administrators lead within is necessary (Gusa, 2010). For this reason, I chose to conduct research at one PWI that offered a sample of participants who were in a shared CoP. There are a few characteristics of CoP to consider when researching within one CoP, these include: individuals situated in one office/department, a particular sub-group with a common goal, or individuals who have similar titles/roles across departments at the institution.

Additionally, I ensured that the institution had certain characteristics such as: 1) predominantly White (over 50-percent White student population overall) 2) public, non-profit institution 3) had a history that represents a traditional White-male leadership 4) had a general purpose or mission of promoting research, teaching, and service and 5) was deeply connected to

resources, networks, and relationships that appeal to White dominant audiences. These institutional characteristics are important because identities shaped within the institution are fluid, and therefore, contextual to the space of development.

The Traditionally White University (TWU) offered a promising site for data collection as the institution's characteristics aligned with those mentioned above.²⁴ TWU is a public, four-year degree, land-grant institution located in northeast of the U.S. and has a general mission of research, teaching, and service. TWU is one of the few U.S. higher education institutions to have administrative positions designated to serve as "multicultural" and "equity" leaders within individual colleges and programs at the institution. The multicultural and equity leaders at TWU are connected to a specific CoP and therefore, share common goals and agendas in their individual offices at the institution.

Participant Sample and Selection Criteria

In this study I was interested in Black administrators and their experiences in negotiating their identities at PWIs. Due to my interactions with and knowledge of various programs focused on recruiting and retaining underrepresented minorities at PWIs during my undergraduate, graduate, summer, and internship-based studies, I was familiar with a number of minority administrators who oversaw such programs. Through them, I gained access to a group of administrators who were all a part of a sub-group at TWU focused on diversity and inclusion. Among the almost twenty individuals in the group, fourteen of them identified as Black and their genders were mixed (8 women and 6 men). In order to gain a robust collective of narratives, I sought to secure at least half (7) of these individuals as participants.²⁵ A sample of seven

²⁴ Traditionally White University (TWU) operates as a pseudonym for the university in the study.

²⁵ To allow for anonymity of the participants identities, I purposefully chose not to include all the Black administrators within the group in this study.

participants offered varied perspectives and served as a substantial representation of participants for the process of narrative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I developed my relationships over time in this study, which contributes an extremely important aspect of the study design. Borrowing from aspects of action research, this study pays close attention to the importance of trust between the researcher and participants (Kemmis & Carr, 2003). The time devoted to creating these relationships was an essential part of establishing trust with the participants throughout the research process. As an agenda of this research was to remain critical throughout interpretations, I also took into consideration that trust is a political endeavor and that my critical interpretations were to be made in collaboration with my participants (Gutiérrez, Engeström & Sannino, 2016; Kemmis & Carr, 2003).²⁶ This was important as they, too, were exploring their experiences of identity negotiation throughout the research process.

I had previously developed trusting relationships with each of the administrators in the diversity and inclusion group, which led to their willingness to serve as participants. The trust that we had built over time also carried into the data analysis as I was able to analyze their Black administrative negotiation experiences to provide more informed narratives. Also, because of the time invested into these relationships, each of the participants was aware of my research and the goals I had for the study. Each of the administrators that I interacted with during my doctoral studies continued to be invested in my research process. We were constantly engaged in conversations about the development of my work. Each of those administrators' level of investment created a willingness to serve as participants in my study.

²⁶ Kemmis and Carr (2003) contend that trust is a political endeavor in critical understandings as it promotes a view of a good society as democratic and committed to extending collective opportunities for all members of society. This also requires paying attention to the politics connected to the administrators' personal and professional identities that may result in heightened emotional reflections regarding experiences in negotiating identities.

I also followed a criterion sampling strategy to select my participant group, which involved me searching for participants that “met some sort of criterion and that could be useful for quality assurance” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). Taking into consideration the sample above, the following criteria provided guidance for participant selection in the study: (1) identify as Black; (2) work in administrative role at a PWI; and, (3) be within a similar community of practice at the institution.

Recruitment of participants included a recruitment script that was sent via email to those administrators who met the criteria listed above (See Appendix A). Once I identified and confirmed participants for the study, an informed consent document was given to each of them. The informed consent requested the individual’s participation in writing, a Black administrative autobiography. Participants were also asked to submit a selected administrative bio, allow me to visit scheduled meetings for observations, and participate in multiple semi-structured interviews (See Appendix B). The Black administrative autobiography served as a reflection opportunity for the participants as they were asked to respond to prompted questions (See Appendix C). However, because this was an individual task to be completed by participants on their own time, the format of each written document was not be the same.

Pseudonyms were created for each of the participants to provide added anonymity in the final report. As a collaborative effort, I provided the option to have parts of the participant’s comments be omitted from this final report in the informed consent. Doing so maintained the trusting relationship that was established between myself and the participants. The reference to pseudonyms of their administrative identities in the final report was also noted to the participants within the informed consent. I also provided confirmation that other members in their CoP would

be kept confidential to ensure that comments relating to shared experiences within were non-identifiable. This can be found within the attached participant recruitment script (Appendix A).

Administrative level of position (low, mid, high) was assigned to each participant based off the collective group. For instance, low-level administrators in the study occupied roles related to student affairs personnel with titles such as: Student Specialist Manager, Assistant Director, or Coordinator. Mid-level administrators in the study occupied roles such as: Director, Assistant Dean, or Unit Lead. High-level administrators in the study occupied more senior roles such as: Associate Dean, Dean, or Vice Provost. The different levels of position also follow current structures presented throughout higher education leadership literature (e.g., Gasman, Abiola, & Travers, 2015; Jackson, 2004; Rosser, 2004). Assigning administrative level of positions specific to the collective group of participants also offered anonymity to their identities.

Methodological Procedures

This study employs various narrative inquiry methods for data collection and analysis. Data collection involved methods such as interviews, document analysis, and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once data were collected, I took an iterative approach (Charmaz, 2006) going back in forth with literature on identity negotiation using a critical race lens to develop codes for further analysis. This process was followed by a critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2001) across the multiple forms of data to generate themes that provided as thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and answers to my research questions, as well as perspectives to me as an outsider. Subsequently, I explain here my process of data collection and the use of CDA as a narrative approach. I also detail a typology analytical technique which I used to aid in distinguishing themes across the data (Tracy, 2013). Finally, I

conclude with a brief explanation of self-reflexivity and confirmation and the limitations to the study.

Data Collection

The data collection process began by obtaining autobiographies from the participants as part of the life-story methodology (Anya, 2017; Atkinson, 1998). The autobiographies were focused on aspects of the participants' Black administrative identity and various prompts for reflection were offered. Prompts included: consider your family background and what parts of your identity mean(t) the most at home; experiences being Black throughout formal schooling and trainings; motivations for becoming an administrator; experiences in engaging with White administrators in your role, etc. (See full list in Appendix C). These prompts were developed based on notions of historical and social aspects of identity that were referenced in the reviewed literature on Black administrators. This is important as the critical lens offered through Critical Race Theory requires that I pay close attention to the participants' historical and socializing experiences of both becoming and being Black administrators.

Participants in the study wrote their autobiographies independently and submitted them as documents for my initial review. I also collected administrators' posted job descriptions as outlined by the university and had each participant submit their selected administrative bios used for marketing and websites. Once these documents were obtained, I followed up with one-on-one semi-structured interviews that lasted about one hour each (See Appendix D).

In addition to the requested documents and interviews, I also conducted two observations at monthly scheduled meetings held by the participants. As a part of the administrative duties, participants were all expected to attend the meetings with updates and reports from their individual departments regarding efforts enacted to promote group goals. The meetings were

scheduled for one-hour and I attended two different meetings for observations of the participant group in their administrative roles. During the observations I took notes on what I seen and heard at the meetings following a standard observational protocol template (Creswell and Poth, 2018; See Appendix E). Observational notes were included with participant autobiographies, their selected administrator bios and the fully transcribed interview data for a complete analysis to ensure triangulation.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Data Analyzation Process

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a form of discourse analysis and is most effective when interpreting data from interviews, transcripts, and other forms of discourse. According to Wodak (2001), discourse can be understood as a

complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as 'texts' that belong to specific semiotic types, that is genres (p. 66).

Discourse analysis generally focuses on patterns of language outside of the text, while CDA focuses more heavily on the discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result from it (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 1993). CDA attempts to interrogate the patterns of power presented within discourse so the researcher can critically explain the language or identities throughout the data. As suggested by Van Dijk (1993), unlike other discourse analysts, critical discourse analysts should take a sociopolitical stance, because it aims to bring about change through critical understanding.

CDA was an integral part of the data analysis process as it provided an avenue for using a critical race lens to interrogate the identity negotiation among Black administrators. I also took a

three-pronged approach towards analyzing the data critically, which was already established and affirmed in previous identity scholarship (Anya, 2017). This approach involved me (1) describing the oral, written, and embodied discourse; (2) interpreting the relationship between the discourse and the discursive processes; and, (3) explaining the relationship between discursive and social processes such as tensions relating to power, negotiation, and identity development within the Black administrators CoP. Each of these approaches were used to provide unique and in-depth comparisons across all data collected.

Typology Technique

In order to better explain the data in its entirety, I used a technique used within qualitative research called typology. Typology is a classificatory system for “ways of doing something” (Tracy, 2013, p. 211). This technique helps researchers take bigger concepts and connect them to smaller concepts that relate to the study. Typologies can make up a subset of the analysis or frame an entire study (Tracy, 2013). An example of this type of analytical technique was carried out by Orbe and Allen (2008) when trying to find out how matters of race were studied and articulated throughout articles in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research (JACR)*. Using articles that were written over the course of 22 years, the authors developed a race scholarship typology of six different genres of race-centered scholarship. They found that most JACR articles fell under a genre called “White scholarship” and were able to note that there was a lack of articles that discussed the “experiences of people of color and Whites as multidimensional, similar and different, and inextricably linked” (p. 206). While this technique develops a system of classification, Thornton and Casio (1999) also employed this technique in their study that identified unique institutional logics throughout the higher education publishing industry. In their study, they analyzed interview transcripts and historical documents to categorize the different

types of logics present between the years of 1958-1990. Following these examples, the typology technique was helpful in compiling data extracted from discourse and interviews into separate categories (or themes) related to identity negotiation in the study.

Self-Reflexivity and Confirmation

As offered by Macbeth (2001), reflexivity leads the analyst to “take up the knots of place and biography and to deconstruct the dualities of power and anti-power, hegemony and resistance, and insider and outsider to reveal and describe how our representations of the world and those who live there are indeed positionally organized” (p. 38). More specifically, positional reflexivity helps to align methodological rigor with critically disciplined subjectivity and decenters the researcher (Macbeth, 2001). It was important to consider my position as a researcher throughout the study. As Black male with aspiring career goals in university leadership, there was a close social distance between me and the participants in the study. While there were many intersections of our identities that were similar, engaging in the process of self-reflexivity allowed for critical interpretations to be made.

Emmanuel et al. (2004) suggest, reflexivity is the act of continuous and iterative reading and listening to the data with a reflective consideration for self, participant cross-checking, and context to provide transparency in the data analysis process. During the initial phases of data analysis, analytical memos were created for each participant in the study by the researcher. The memos offered a visual representation of the data evolving from “raw” form, to interpretations, and then findings. Participants were each given the opportunity to cross-check the memo that summarized their experiences as reflected in the data, offering further confirmation to researcher’s interpretations. In order to maintain dependability throughout my analysis, I

maintained consistent reviews of my data analysis process in consultation with members of my committee to ensure saturation in the findings.

Limitations

This study used a narrative inquiry approach to help tell the stories of Black administrators that counter the master narratives imposed upon them. Other methodological approaches, such as ethnography or grounded methodologies were considered for data collection and data analysis. However, due to the nature the of relationship that was established between “the researcher and the researched” (Huber et al., 2013, p. 217) throughout narrative studies, the use narrative inquiry provided more valuable and relevant insights.

Insights offered in the study’s findings maintain a strong focus on race, in addition to the understanding that Whiteness is a credential (Ray, 2109) of PWIs. For this reason, insights and conclusions drawn from the study present differently to the reader depending on core aspects of their identity. This is because the study’s alignment with notions of Whiteness as property present the White identity as having a dominating nature over minoritized identities, such as Black administrators.

Also, because this study is about identities, and more specifically minoritized identities, there was caution in over-essentializing them. To essentialize an identity in this study refers to the philosophical theories that groups of people have fundamental qualities. To be anti-essentialist is simply to not place value on those specific qualities and assume people are the way they are because of socially constructed group identities. (King, 2008; Pennycook, 2001). I let the data inform me of how Black administrators negotiate their core and situational identities. Yet, there is a sense of essentialization that comes with identifying a specific identity and making interpretations based off said identity. To ensure that the participants minoritized identities were

not over-essentialized, I made interpretations that affirmed aspects of their Black identities rather than negate them. Finally, due to the sensitive nature of administrator identities throughout higher education, I included narratives that the participants feel most comfortable with being used in this final report. This was important not only for the participants, but for the institution and communities of practice within as well.

Chapter Four: Results and Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results and findings that emerged from my analysis of data collected from seven Black administrators focused on the ways they were negotiating their identities at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In the previous chapter, a qualitative approach of narrative inquiry was presented as the best method to critically analyze the data. Narrative inquiry involved the process of breaking down the data and making interpretations across all forms of data (semi-structured interviews, Black administrative autobiographies, selected biographies/job descriptions, and observations).

The data analysis was informed by a review of relevant literature on the Black administrative experience and guided by the conceptual frameworks of Critical Race Theory and identity negotiation, offering a critical lens for coding and interpretation. Results developed through this analytical process to produce findings that answer the guiding research questions. The structure of this chapter is as follows: (a) introduction of participants through snapshots and vignettes presented in descending order of length of time at institution; (b) presentation of results; and (c) presentation of interpretations as findings.

A snapshot is offered in this chapter to provide context on the participants level of position and years in their administrative role at Traditionally White University (TWU; pseudonym for institution used in study; See Figure 1-1). In addition to the participant snapshots, vignettes were created to offer more background related to participants' identity negotiation and identity development. Participant snapshots and vignettes provide a summary of participants' identities as referenced in interviews, Black administrative autobiographies, biographies, and observations.

Results and findings are also presented in this chapter. The results that emerged through data analysis are summarized into 11 themes that are presented in this chapter in Table 1-1. Results offer important insights to the experiences participants in the study had in negotiating aspects of their core²⁷ and professional identities²⁸; the challenges they faced related to racism and oppression; and, strategies for negotiating minoritized identities at a PWI. Findings are summarized into interpretations made that respond to the guiding research questions, which are also featured again here in chapter four.

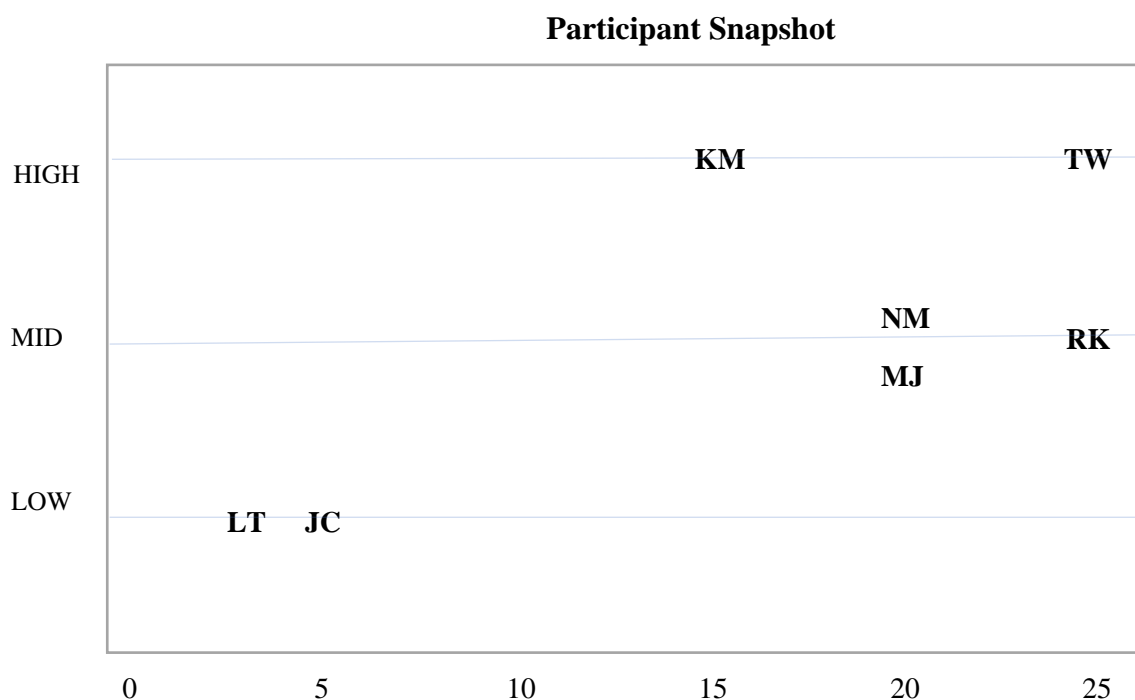


Figure 1-1: Snapshot of Participant level of position and time at institution.

Y= Administrative Level of Position²⁹; X=Years in Administrative Role

²⁷ An individual's *core* identity is characterized by core symbols that represent salient or personal beliefs about themselves that prescribes definitions, premises, and propositions regarding the universe and the place of humans in a specific context or community (See Jackson, Johnson, Hecht, and Ribeau, 2019).

²⁸ An individual's *professional* identity is related to what Swann, Johnson & Bosson (2009) have termed as "situated identity," or identity within a specific, circumscribed context or situation. In the context of the current study, the participants' professional identities are situated as administrators.

²⁹ Low-level administrators in the study occupied roles related to student affairs personnel with titles such as: Student Specialist Manager, Assistant Director, or Coordinator. Mid-level administrators in the study occupied

Participant Vignettes

Toni Wilson (TW)

Toni Wilson is a high-level administrator at Traditionally White University (TWU). Her experiences growing up in the White suburbs of an urban city offered early awareness of her Black identity. Through this experience she became attuned to the racial dynamics and tensions of being Black in a White space. Toni grew strength from her parents' constant reminders of a "strong and confident" Black racial identity. Toni's decision to attend college and focus on counseling was also influenced by her racialized experiences growing up in a time where "race defined who you were." As a counselor, Toni gained affirmation through interactions with underrepresented populations, completely aware of the intersections in their experiences as minorities.

Toni's motivation to become an administrator was so that she "could be in a position to influence and make decisions" instead of "simply carrying things out after decisions were already made." Her desire to work in a position focused on equity was in part due to her own challenges in a process of self-verification, but also because of her exposure to stories of pain and oppression she witnessed as a counselor. Toni was also aware that as a Black woman, being viewed as a professional meant getting a terminal degree. As she transitioned into higher education, she used her awareness of self and as a professional to find an institution that offered a mission aligned with her identities. She was adamant in saying, "...if I don't believe in it or it doesn't sit well with my professional ethics or my personal ethics, I'm not taking that job."

Toni offers this advice to anyone seeking to gain fulfillment in their workplace identities. Toni is also well-informed of the impact that racism has at places like TWU, having been at the

roles such as: Director, Assistant Dean, or Unit Lead. High-level administrators in the study occupied more senior roles such as: Associate Dean, Dean, or Vice Provost.

institution for over 25 years and getting all her degrees from predominantly White institutions. Toni believes her identity at TWU counters the norms of an administrative position, as she has been one of few Black women to reach senior administrative status at the institution.

Kelly Melvin (KM)

Kelly Melvin is a high-level administrator at TWU. Kelly grew up in the deep south surrounded by strong relationships among intermediate family members. Her parents, and only sibling, still call her daily while she is at work. Kelly's Black identity is embedded within her cultural upbringing of being around other Black people in school, church, and neighboring communities. After graduating from a religious all-girls, Black, high school, she attended a historically Black university in hopes of finding similar connections to Black people.

As an administrator, Kelly channels her own life experiences, such as her transition into PWIs as a graduate student, where she felt the pains of being "one of few" and "feeling a culture shock." Her personal experiences shaped her administrative identity as she knew that she would work to mitigate the challenges for students of color seeking graduate education at PWIs.

Having now been at TWU for over 15 years, Kelly has taken up the call to be "all things fix-it when it comes to diversity." However, she still struggles with TWU's inscription of her identity in her job description as someone who "promotes the values of inclusive excellence." Kelly feels this inscription of identity does not speak to the functions of her job as described, largely because, TWU does not have a clear mission for achieving inclusive excellence leaving room for ambiguity. Kelly considers a predominantly White culture to be the "nemesis" of diversity leaders at places like TWU making their positions visible, without providing any authority.

Kelly also feels there is a lack of culture present at TWU that is not separate from the “dominant views of the world.” For her, creating a “culture of success” within her unit at the institution is a way to counter the negative perceptions of minority students that her office advocates for. By promoting this culture and helping underrepresented minority students (URMs) achieve success, Kelly chooses to let the metrics of what she gets done speak to the naysayers.

Mary Jacobs (MJ)

Mary Jacobs is a mid-level administrator at TWU. Like other participants in the study, Mary’s identity as a Black woman became a salient part of who she was early in life. She begins her story by paying homage to her family roots, describing a cultural experience infiltrated with racism and oppression. Mary’s parents grew up in the south during a time of segregation. As a young woman, Mary developed “radical” notions of race in America through the social and cultural experiences passed down by her parents.

Mary’s Black racial identity continued to develop during college where she attended a historically Black university in the 1970’s. After college, her professional identity became infused with her personal identity as a Black woman. The hypervisibility of her identity in a space designed for a White male presented various challenges in moving up the professional ladder. Yet, she found connection in her work environment with people who “shared a mutual desire to be in service to Black people.” Having had the social and cultural experiences of Blackness, Mary’s connections to communities of practice that supported Black people provided affirmation to her identity and continues to serve as a source of motivation for her to do the work.

Mary was the first participant in the study to mention a cultural shift that took place in the late 1980's at institutions like TWU, which involved civil rights cases against PWIs regarding their enrollment of URMs. While Mary was not at TWU at this time, she mentioned how diversity positions were created as a response to what became a nationwide issue and serving as "band-aids to a healing wound." Mary feels that after being at TWU for more than 20 years, her presence still serves a purpose bigger than what she is given the capacity to do.

Nathaniel Moore (NM)

Nathaniel Moore is a mid-level administrator at TWU. He is originally from the town where TWU is located and provides a deep historical lens to the study. His experience growing up in a rural, predominantly White space shaped a salient identity of Blackness in relation to White others. He spent most of his time as a child watching old war movies that honored a White male identity. As an attempt to locate his identity as a Black male, he grew a close relationship with a family member who became a civil rights leader, serving as the president of a local Black activist group. While this experience provided a counter to the negative depictions of Blackness he witnessed in popular media, Nathaniel's racial identity development was further challenged when he and his sibling were called "niggers" when he was just nine years old.

These negative experiences prepared Nathaniel to live in a "White dominant society." He chose to attend a PWI and raise his children in the area he grew up in. Nathaniel was one of the only participants to consider TWU to be a "place like home." In reference to the connections he has had with White colleagues, Nathaniel mentioned that "most people do not think I act Black enough." However, this perception of his identity presents challenges to his authenticity, as Nathaniel felt at times, he cannot fully express his Blackness. Nathaniel was around TWU in the 1980's during the nationwide civil rights lawsuits and he also mentioned the impact the lawsuit

had in creating a position like his. The negative experiences Nathaniel has had remain with him, serving as sources of motivation for working as a professional at TWU. He finds solace in knowing he and his family have been able to succeed in the space and works to provide that opportunity to other URM's by tackling diversity issues at TWU.

Robert King (RK)

Robert King is a mid-level administrator at TWU. He is the only participant to serve as a mid-level administrator for over 25 years. While his title has changed over time, the function of his role has stayed the same. Like other participants, Robert achieved saliency in his Black identity early-on in life. His confidence in being Black stems from support offered by his parents, but also through mentorship and connectedness to other Black families in his predominantly Black hometown.

Throughout his experience in the public-school system, he became familiar with discrimination and dismissive behaviors shown by teachers, not just towards him but other minority students. Robert chose to attend a historically Black university and feels that his own educational experiences provided him the “template for what the downside” was for students of color in educational spaces. This motivated him to become an administrator and serve as an advocate for URM's at PWIs.

In his experience at TWU, he developed a network of allies that value the expertise he brings in achieving diversity. What has further sustained Robert at a PWI is his optimism that “if we can generate the allies necessary to sustain change, we may get there.” He feels that his tenure at the institution is a small testimony to that change. However, he noted the challenge of being a “visible minority,” questioning if his positioning was just a check mark to uphold

institutional standards. This uncertainty is exacerbated by the fact that Black males are often placed into administrative roles for optics, with no real authority.

Leslie Thomas (LT)

Leslie Thomas is a low-level administrator at TWU. Like other participants in the study, Leslie developed saliency in her Black identity early-on in life. She was exposed to racism as a child growing up in a predominantly Black, urban area and attending a predominantly White religious school. While in school, Leslie began to become aware of her Blackness in relation to White others. As one of two Black students in her classroom she dealt with White students questioning her identity. When it came time to choose a developmental space for college, she chose to attend a historically Black college.

Leslie mentioned that while at her HBCU, she felt a “sense of connectedness and belonging.” In that space, her identity as a Black woman was affirmed and the foundation for her administrative identity development was laid. Having been exposed to prominent Black professionals, Leslie received mentorship and guidance that prepared her for graduate education at a PWI. She described her experience as a graduate student as “draining” and “overwhelming” due to the “lack of support” offered throughout her program. Her experiences dealing with racism and oppression are what motivated her to become an administrator and serve students of color.

As an administrator, Leslie finds comfort in being an advocate for URMs. Her personal identity goals in serving underrepresented populations are further validated by the functions outlined in her job description. However, Leslie mentioned that being a young Black professional at TWU causes a disconnection within other aspects of her personal and social identities. She attributes this disconnect to the added pressures of being young, Black, and a

woman. Leslie describes these aspects of her identity as “gendered racism” claiming that she has struggled over the past three years in her role, trying to find balance between her personal life and who she is expected to be as a young, Black professional woman.

Jackie Collins (JC)

Jackie Collins is also a low-level administrator at TWU. Her story starts in a Midwestern, Red state, embedded with histories of racism and discrimination through political redlining and instances of racialized trauma. Jackie remembers her experiences of growing up Black as a “life-long search for self-worth” in a place where her most sensitive identities were not valued. This prompted her identity as a Black woman to develop through internal reflections of self. Jackie chose to attend a historically Black university in search of defining her professional identity as an academic. She became aware at a young age that to excel as a Black woman in society, she would need to become more competitive by enhancing her professional profile.

Jackie’s reasoning for working at a PWI was due to her comfort in knowing that she “could grow professionally and still have an impact because of who [she] was as Black woman” as she felt the void of diversity in the academy. While she found a community of like-minded individuals at TWU that affirm her professional identity, Jackie feels that her age has a major effect on her ability to make connections. She mentioned that most of the women professionals in her community have children, which she does not. This presents a barrier in establishing personal connections, so Jackie relies on her external networks for support.

After serving in her position for five years, Jackie feels that she has made an impact as a Black administrator, but she noted that the institution does not fully support her professional development. Jackie ascribed this to the “lack of value seen in diversity professionals at PWIs overall.” She then mentioned that “students of color” are what keep her at TWU, as her

experiences with colleagues have not always been positive. The negative experiences that Jackie has had leaves her uncertain about the future of her career development at TWU. She laughed off her uncertainty claiming that if picking up and leaving was not so hard to do, “it would already be done.”

Results

There were various themes that emerged throughout the data analysis that reveal the experiences of Black administrators negotiating their identities at PWIs. The themes were derived from data collected in interview transcripts, participant autobiographies, their selected administrative biographies/job descriptions, and through observations and verified across each of the data sources. This process involved me critically analyzing the data using a three-pronged approach describing, interpreting, and explaining the data (Anya, 2017) as it relates to power, negotiation, and identity development of Black administrators at PWIs.

Table 1-1 shows the 11 themes which emerged from this process of data collection and analysis. The first two themes (I am Black, It’s Seamless) respond to the first guiding research question that asks, “In what ways do personal and/or salient aspects of Black administrators’ identities align with their job-related identities as administrators at PWIs? In what ways do they not?” The two themes offered here speak to the alignment of participants’ core and professional identities at TWU. As depicted in the table below, participants gained a sense of pride in their Blackness early-on in life and this core aspect of their identity was articulated as being “seamlessly” tied to participants’ professional identity as administrators focused on diversity efforts.

The second part of the first guiding research question is to understand the specific challenges that Black administrators face due to racism and oppression. There are 4 themes that

respond to this part of the question (There has to be Clarity, Reaffirmation of the Totality, and Embedded White Dominance/You Know More About Diversity than Me, Always Being On). These themes together help to articulate the uncertainty that Black administrators at TWU felt regarding their professional identities. The desire to be recognized and reaffirmed through various parts of the Black administrative identity negotiation process posed challenges that participants attributed to the dominant presence of Whiteness³⁰ at TWU. For instance, another theme that responds to this part of the question revealed instances where Black administrators were challenged on their experiences and expertise in diversity by White colleagues. The consistent pressures to perform and behave in comparison to White colleagues who undermined their expertise left participants feeling like they always needed to be “on” in order to adhere to dominant expectations.

Lastly, the second guiding research question asks about the specific strategies that Black administrators use to negotiate their identities. There are 5 themes that respond to this question (I had Trust, Developing a Network, In touch with Students, Let Me Get an Ally, What My HBCU Taught Me). Participants felt most connected to communities within and outside of TWU where trust was established. Social networks served as an opportunity to maintain trust and therefore, establishing trust became a goal and a strategy for Black administrators negotiating their identities. Trust was also maintained through connections with students of color who provided affirmation to the work and experiences of Black administrators at TWU. As another strategy, participants suggested the importance of gaining allyship among White colleagues through building strategic relationships. For participants in the study who attended a historically Black

³⁰ Whiteness describes both the identities and social structures that are created and maintained under the idea of dominance given by way of White racial privilege (See Warren, 2009).

college or university (HBCU), there was a unique sense of professionalism that is rooted in Blackness, which Black administrators carry with them throughout their identity negotiation. In the table below a brief description of each theme, as well as, counts of the individual occurrences as examples related to the theme is provided.

Table 1-1: Results Summary.

Identity Negotiation Theme	Description	Occurrences
<i>"I am Black"</i>	Gaining a sense of pride and awareness in Black identity early-on.	14
<i>"It's Seamless"</i>	Personal identities as Black became "seamless" with job-related functions of doing diversity work.	22
<i>"There has to be Clarity"</i>	Need for clarity regarding administrative identities that leads to affirmation in the work outlined by the institution.	6
<i>"Reaffirmation of the Totality"</i>	Constant need for reaffirmation of the totality of their identities.	10
<i>"Embedded White Dominance"</i>	Dealing with White dominant structures and systems that become a part of institutional culture at PWIs.	17
a. <i>"You Know More about Diversity than Me"</i>	a. Feeling personally attacked when White administrators act superior regarding diversity.	8
<i>"Always Being On"</i>	Adhering to expectations of excellent performance, dress, and wit under the constructs of a predominantly White space.	3
<i>"I had Trust"</i>	Maintaining trust through experienced social networks, finding trust in intergroup relationships, and developing trust with other Black people.	5
<i>"Developing a Network"</i>	Finding community with like-minded people rather than specific interactions related to race.	13

<i>“In Touch with Students”</i>	Understanding of the experiences and language that engaged students of color.	11
<i>“Let Me Get an Ally”</i>	Making strategic personal connections.	8
<i>“What My HBCU Taught Me”</i>	Attendance at HBCUs offered identity development through a sense of racial belongingness and self-verification.	8

I am Black

Throughout the study, participants provided reflections that highlighted the various ways their identity as Black was salient. All the participants took advantage of the prompts offered in their Black administrative autobiographies by beginning their narratives with reflections centered around familial roots, religious affiliations, and education. Participants’ narratives collectively described gaining a sense of pride and awareness in their Black identity early-on. For participants in the study, identifying their Blackness became a personal journey intensified by the histories of racism and oppression tied to their minoritized identities. According to Mary Jacobs, locating her Black identity was an opportunity to pay homage to family roots. Paying special attention to the experiences her parents had growing up Black in the south and how those experience shaped her identity, Mary mentioned:

I cannot begin to tell my story without first paying homage to my family roots. Like most African American families, I have been deeply influenced by my family’s birth in the segregated south. Both my parents were born and raised in the same town, during the early 1930s depression era. Their experiences were steeped in the cultural and racial experiences of being Black and economically impacted by Jim Crow political oppression. My parents experienced segregation similar to many families, as they were shielded by the protection of living in Black neighborhoods, with Black teachers, ministers, stores

and the intention of creating a safe harbor despite the injustices they observed and were cautioned about. Since both parents grew up in the same small community there is a lot of similarity in the social and cultural experiences they passed on to me and my siblings.

Toni Wilson also noted an early awareness of her Black identity when she moved from an urban Black space to White suburbs at the age of ten. She referenced the impact that her parents had in maintaining a sense of pride in her identity.

I am Black as are my parents and brother. I became keenly aware of my racial identity at age ten when my parents moved us from an urban Black neighborhood to the White suburbs of [the city] in the 1960s. Fortunately, my parents kept us strong and confident in our racial identity.

Robert King mentioned a similar experience towards gaining saliency in his Black identity through familial roots, religious affiliations, and education:

[My parents] infused in us our sense of being Black, confident, and capable of accomplishing anything if we put our efforts in it... our community though mixed had several Black families that we engaged with daily mainly at church. Family connectedness was essential in my upbringing and my family also placed a high value on education, the constant message was you are preparing yourself for opportunities that they could not have access.

In his experience of gaining confidence in his Blackness, Mr. King also adopted a unique philosophy regarding exposure to racism. He added:

I operate from the philosophy that we all have been bathed in the waters of racism. Doesn't matter who we are.

Mr. King's perceptions around how we experience racism further highlights the effect that racism's history in the US has on the process of minority identity development, especially in relation to White others. Still through negative perceptions of their identity imposed from White counterparts, participants were able to establish saliency in their Blackness. For instance, when Toni moved from the city to the suburbs her identity became more visible to Whites, but also more visible to her.

I mean I don't think I really knew I was Black so much before we moved out of the city because everybody was Black. So, at some point the integration happened, this is the 1960s and the school I was in was talking about busing and so people were talking about all these Black kids coming. That's what my little White friends were talking about, all these Black kids coming... it's hypervisibility, your curiosity is like you're in a little zoo or something I mean with kids our own age coming and staring and looking and they've never seen a Black person.

She continued to express her identity development experience as one that was embedded with racism and oppression.

My brother and I were the only two Black kids in our elementary school. The one Black teacher at the school taught music. We got very tired of the other kids asking us if that was our mother. I think the three of us were the only Black people the kids had ever seen. Our next-door neighbors on one side of us never spoke. They literally ran back into their house if they happened to come outside and the same time that we did. I was one of 7 Black students in my high school graduating class of 500... I realized how well my parents' move to the suburbs had prepared me for being Black in a predominantly white world.

Leslie Thomas had a similar experience developing saliency in her Blackness in relation to Whites.

While [growing up] I was placed in private school up until middle school, when I moved. While in a private, Catholic school I often had students ask me “why you so Black.” I was extremely aware that I was Black at that age. I was one of two Black students in my classroom environment.

Leslie’s reflection depicted the racialized experiences expressed by other participants, which for Nathaniel Moore, posed a threat to a positive identity development.

Growing up as an African-American in a predominately White area was difficult. [A close relative] was a [civil rights leader and part of Black activists groups] and my sibling and I were under a death threat by a White supremacist group out of [a small neighboring town]. I’ve also experienced instances where people called me the “nigger” for no reason other than I was Black.

In all, participant reflections highlight that establishing saliency in Blackness came through familial roots, religious affiliations, and education where they gained a sense of pride and awareness in their Black identity early-on. All those experiences were tainted by negative perceptions about their minoritized identities that are tied to the history of racism and oppression throughout the US.

It’s Seamless

In expressing their identities as administrators, participants mentioned how their personal identities as Black became “seamless” with the job-related functions of doing diversity work and being advocates for students of color at PWIs. Kelly Melvin affirmatively stated that her role of

gaining access for underrepresented students was a salient piece of her identity and that her Black identity informed this work:

I'm pro-Black, let's just put it that way. And I understand marginalization of minorities, period. So, of-course, that's going to inform the work that I do. It's a salient piece of the work that I do, because I still believe that there's work to be done in this marginalization, of people of color, or communities of color, or when it comes to academic and access, right? So, part of my social identity in gaining access is definitely a salient piece in my job. How does it fit? It's seamless. It's who I am.

Kelly also articulated an awareness of self-verification within her administrative autobiography writing that, “[I am completely] aware of my Blackness and what it means for me to do diversity work.”

Similar to Kelly, Mary Jacobs also has a strong awareness of the impact of her Black identity as it relates to her being an administrator focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion at a PWI.

As a person of color, as a Black woman in this environment, you are always, you're doing the work. You are the work... the idea that who I am as a Black woman, cannot be separate from the workplace.

Jackie Collins alluded to the importance in finding alignment and being comfortable in one's personal identity, especially as a minority.

Being Black, finding alignment, it does matter, and it does play an important role, and you have to be comfortable with how it's being played at different times, because not everyone wants the Black factor to be a thing. But it is our lived experience and becomes what we do and not everyone shares that.

When asked how her personal and administrative identities aligned, Toni Wilson presented a tension in separating the two.

I go back and forth with the personal to professional. I always feel like... When I'm in a work setting the personal is the professional, and by that, I mean again back to the function of the agency or the mission, that's my only goal is to have the institution live up to what it says in its written documents it's supposed to be doing.

While participants expressed saliency in their administrative identities, Toni's mention of the institution's goals and job descriptions also showed a discrepancy in how Black administrators perceived their roles compared to how their roles were presented by the institution.

It's my overall job to work with the president and the president's cabinet to ensure, help ensure that all faculty, staff, and students have an environment where they can come and thrive at whatever they're attempting to do... that's considering how the university describes my role. But, honestly, I couldn't do this work, I wouldn't do this work in diversity without that background personally. It's just how I approach diversity. That does not always match the way my job is described.

Nathaniel Moore's experience also speaks to the challenge in establishing saliency while performing tasks outside of the functions written in his job description.

I do enjoy being administrator, and with any job, it has its good and bad points. The good points include generating ideas, exploring ways to improve the program, and just making things happen, mainly things outside of my job description.

Each of the participants provided reflections to the job descriptions written for them by the institution. With the focus of diversity, their reflections showed alignment in being Black and

serving as advocates for students of color. Mary Jacobs emphasized the importance of recruitment as outlined in her job description.

My primary role is recruitment and retention of underrepresented, underrepresented minorities, ethnic and racially underrepresented students, both undergraduates and graduates... a part of that responsibility would be identifying talented students, talented undergraduates, either for scholarships or either through recruitment mechanisms.

Leslie Thomas' perceptions of her job functions were similarly stated:

It's listed that I will design, administer, coordinate and evaluate comprehensive recruitment programs, and retention activities, but we also have a really big student advocacy piece that is not fully mentioned. I think that that is the main thing that we do when students come to the office, we're immediately dropping things to hear situations, figure out what's going on, and put out fires.

Kelly Melvin also added the aspect of student advocacy, which is also not explicitly stated within her job description.

Part of that job is student advocacy, so if you would consider anything, all things, it would be student advocacy manager in some instances, and any position that would be in the office would have a similar nomenclature. In addition to that, that means we do all things programming, and implementation of programming around recruitment, retention, and professional development for underrepresented minorities.

Overall participant reflections noted the importance of establishing saliency in both personal and administrative identities. For their personal identities, awareness of Blackness was established early-on in life through various interactions. Some of those interactions were in relation to White others and presented negative perceptions of their personal identities that were

tied to the history of racism and oppression in the US. Yet, participants' administrative identities, also developed in a space in close relation to Whiteness, still provided opportunity for saliency as the functions written in job descriptions align with personal experiences in being part of a minoritized group. The chance to serve as an advocate for underrepresented students furthers that saliency; however, this function is not presented in descriptions offered from the institution.

There Has to be Clarity

The data also revealed many challenges towards Black administrators achieving identity congruence while serving at PWIs. A major challenge mentioned by many of the participants was the need for clarity regarding their administrative identities and further affirmation in the work they do as outlined by the institution. Participants felt challenged in how TWU defined their roles, which they considered to be a result a lack of institutional responsiveness in establishing equitable behaviors and expectations as it related to their job functions as individuals charged to promote diversity. Mary Jacobs expressed that:

Nobody has talked about, "What is our diversity mission?" I mean, I have one for my office, I have a strategic plan for my office. Has nothing to do with this process. It does with my boss because we worked that out... It's my job. But who else knows it, reads it, thinks about it? Where's the leverage?

She went on to say explain how the lack of clarity within the institution's diversity mission affected her identity development suggesting that, "there just has to be clarity. And I'll do everything I have to help you in having it, because not only did they have unique expectations from me given the university's dynamic. So, there were expectations of them, like a particular dean, that there were not expectations of the previous dean. So that informs in this particular role, Yet, it's not clear who we are."

Toni Wilson added to this perspective, speaking to the responsibility of the institution in providing a structure for support and affirmation for administrative identities:

It's like we don't exist. As much as we want it to be equitable, as equitable as we can, these systems were not designed to support or enhance the careers of administrators. I say that to people sometimes. Okay it's not right to get pigeonholed, but this system's not designed for that purpose...but I think you have to have the realistic understanding that this is not a system designed to do what you would like it to do, and it's not going to do it. I mean it's just not setup that way. Got to balance those two realities. You might have to come here and go as high up as you can go or be here as long as you can, and then parlay that experience into some other setting besides higher ed where you could be very successful.

Leslie Thomas mentioned a similar challenge more specific to the lack of clarity provided to administrators of color. She raised concerns with the ways that positions like hers were described through the dominant paradigm of human resources and the expectations that come in taking the role.

I mean, it's the HR title. That's fine, the HR title is that. However, that's not what they look for when they're looking at that. The university's title, and this is probably... not a diss to the institution, but it's more about the descriptions of diversity that the institution is comfortable with. Outside of these roles, I can't think of a majority person in any of these roles.

Leslie was referencing her title as it is described through the standardized human resource job posting. In her opinion, Leslie felt that there was still a need for clarity in how an administrator tasked to achieve diversity is described through a human resource lens. Leslie struggled with the

fact that the diversity positions at TWU were mainly filled by people of color, yet there were no people of color within HR to help make decisions on job descriptions, postings, and hires. This perspective was common among the participants throughout their reflections. Nathaniel Moore summarized the challenge overall mentioning that, “you're supposed to be connected to this space, but because of your personal identity, there's a bit of a disconnect in seeing how the institution goes about it.”

Reaffirmation of the Totality

Another challenge presented by the participants was the constant need for reaffirmation of the totality of their identities. During an interview with Robert King, he explained this “reaffirmation” in describing the various spaces at TWU where his identities outside of being an administrator were affirmed.

I've been sought out to be on other advisory committees or councils, task force in the university for different things. I've been sought out across my fraternity for those same types of things. I've been sought out in some of the professional organizations I belong to. I've had the opportunity to exhibit and excel in leadership and make a difference at a variety of different levels, both professionally and socially in other arenas above and beyond what I do on a daily basis here, which is sort of what? A reaffirmation of the totality of who I am.

As a newer administrator, Leslie Thomas also shared that her full identity was not being recognized and therefore, reaffirmed by TWU. She noted the obstacles regarding the lack of support for doing her job and attributed this experience to the institution not recognizing “silent” aspects of her administrative identity.

I think that one of the challenges that often go overlooked, especially in these roles, are the silent roles, but I think that we often don't get enough recognition for our silent roles.

The roles that we do that were not on our job description... it is something that we don't get enough recognition for, and it is kind of limiting when you're trying to do your job.

Mary Jacobs, who has served as an administrator for more than 20 years, expressed this same challenge noting the lack of resources that TWU offered to administrators of color as an effect of racism and oppression.

So much is expected, too much is expected. And so, I think we're always trying to prove, "It's important, it's important. I'm going to show you," and then the institution doesn't move back and do what it does for every other professional and give you what you need to be good... I think it's unique to Black and Brown people in other communities is to wonder. Because of bias and oppression. The White people I work with don't wonder if something's because of racism. You're never far from it because you know, you've lived a life impacted in that way. The trick for me is not to let it, to take... That's where the colleagues, that's where the understanding and the self-valuing to never let it undermine. I mean, to try to keep a balance and to have perspective.

Nathaniel Moore offered a unique perspective having grown up in the town where TWU is located. Like other participants, he took an administrative position to enhance his professional skills in “directing an academic support program, managing a professional staff, developing and managing a budget, and to continue developing leadership skills.” However, he expressed that:

I think that a lot of my colleagues here on campus see me more as White than they do Black, so there is no affirmation as minority for me, just sidebar opportunities for me to develop as a professional, but from a dominant stance that is very colorblind. I am used to

that though, growing up here has shown me that the White community would rather see you as one of them, which causes them to treat you as what they see as equal. I would actually prefer them to see, “hey, he is Black” and “we should acknowledge that”...they will never really ask for your thoughts because they are afraid they cannot control the response so they kind of create their own reality.

Kelly Melvin added to this perspective and provided an interpretation that questioned the value of development offered from TWU due to the institution’s homogeneous nature.

As far as development for mid to senior-level management, I don't think [TWU] has a solid structure. And I think we need to do a better job at developing professional development for those levels of management, but I don't even know if I would welcome it from the institution that is so homogenous. I would definitely say that the reason we're bringing in outside people is because the inside people don't listen to the inside people who are tasked with doing this job. While we might say that we become the authority on things diversity, but that's when you have to put a band-aid over a stab wound, is at the eleventh hour. When, we're not consulted all along.

Embedded White Dominance

One of the major challenges revealed throughout the data analysis was dealing with embedded dominance of Whiteness at TWU and throughout the academy. This challenge was articulated by participants as dealing with White dominant structures and systems that become a part of institutional culture at PWIs. The level of Whiteness that exists within these structures and systems impacts Black administrators’ level of commitment, their adherence to expectations, and responses to institutionalized racism.

The first example of Whiteness creating dominance over the Black administrative identity is witnessed in TWU's commitment to a diversity initiative. The initiative developed because of a national trend driven by diverse students demanding college and university campuses become more inclusive (Black Liberation Collective, 2018). However, TWU chose to proactively develop an initiative that promoted institutional inclusion and provided opportunities for engaging in civil discourse. Mary Jacobs was the only participant to mention this strategic initiative and how directives from the initiative impacted her commitment to the institution.

You have a unit embedded in an academic college, that's in the forefront of the practice, the advancement, even the understanding of what the diversity mission is...but it's coming from a White dominant lens. Do they even know how or have a plan to achieve these goals in a diverse way? I mean, I do because even when I heard of the roll-out, and it was important, and it was a branding of commitment, right? We're [committed]. Well, I'd like to say I was [committed] before there was ever a [strategic initiative] in place. But was I committed to their understanding of diversity? No. I have my own experiences as a person of color.

She went on to add that "Thinking about how you get things done when people don't want you to get things done, unless it's their way. There is an art form, and I think it speaks to a resistance, sometimes a hostility. It speaks to racism that still exists in the academy. Bias, resistance. All of those things that we continue to work against. And it's not all the time. But [TWU] adopting this initiative brought to light the way that we have to have accountability across the board and I wondered if those who created it were being held accountable for their Whiteness and where those values of diversity came from."

Nathaniel Moore also expressed the pressures of adhering to dominant expectations and the impact it has on his personal and administrative identities. He noted that when in meetings he is expected to present “as a very professional, polished individual” and that he “will be dressed appropriately.” Adhering to these expectations has taken an emotional toll on Nathaniel’s personal identity performance as he claimed he learned “to pretty much stay silent in certain meetings” and “to really measure [his] words.” He mentioned this while reflecting on how TWU inscribes an “White male leadership identity” that every administrator must adhere to. Nathaniel considered this to be a result of the dominant White culture at TWU saying:

I think that that has come around because of the environment that we work in, you are expected, even though you are a person of color, you are expected to act as White as possible. So in other words, in the way that you talk, in the way that you act, in the way that you think about things, the expectation I think is that you do it under the understanding of being more White than being Black, Latino, Hispanic, Asian, what have you...because we live still in a White dominant, White supremacy society, where there is systemic racism still, institutionalized racism involved, I would argue that a lot of the job descriptions and competencies that are developed for those various jobs are seen more through the eyes of a White male than they are through the eyes of an African-American male, African-American woman, Latino male, Latino woman, and down throughout the whole spectrum... I would argue that that, when someone creates that type of job or that type of position, that's what they're looking at. They're looking it through White male eyes.

Nathaniel placed further accountability on the institution as he continued to describe the impact of embedded White dominance on administrators of color.

When a race issue or diversity and equity issue occurs on this campus, or in the community, that issue is to be dumped into our laps, because we are considered the diversity professionals. Mind you, I've never formally trained in diversity and equity, never. You will find that most diversity professionals at this university, are persons of color. And I think that because of the job description of that position, the issue given to a person of color, But, there's no training there... yet you have people who've been working here for years... And they don't have the chance to even train the new people that come about. There's nothing there because dominant people have experienced racism differently and then try to come in and train us to do our jobs, but it's not effective. The expectation is you already have that in you, if this is a diversity issue, so I'm going to just plop in your laps and let them take care of it and then we go on with our own business. The institution has not progressed from that model.

Kelly Melvin added to this perspective providing validation to Nathaniel's concern of institutional racism. In describing her experience as a senior-level administrator, Kelly also suggested that racism had become institutionalized at TWU. She noted the institution's history of Whiteness and the impact it had on positions like hers.

We're still in the same space, because you've created these positions with no power, and no authority, and like I said, prior to... We're not called into action until we're putting a band-aid over a stab wound. Or, where, at this point, it's the eleventh hour, and you need some assistance. These [diversity] positions, while depending on where it sits, may have authority, in doing and changing things at the institution, this institution is so large that there's so many moving parts that one position, one wheel in the cog, can be moving, but this other one over here is going to stop it. In some departments, where we can stimulate

the recruitment pool for minority applications, if you will, the decisions are made internally, and the diversity leaders in the departments really don't have a say so because as history tells us- Whiteness prevails and that power is intrusive.

For Robert King, a mid-level administrator with over twenty-five years of experience at TWU, institutional racism was a “surreptitious entity” upheld within the institution’s White dominant leadership structure. When asked about the level of agency he had within TWU’s structure, Robert called out the power that leadership at the institution had in setting the “pulse” for others. He stated, “agency is what's [offered within our leadership structure].” However, Robert questioned who could achieve agency within a White dominant leadership structure.

It's a more active structure that sometimes can be benign. Because these structures to me, comes back to the leadership over that structure. Now, that leadership over that structure is one who infuses that option of agency and the importance of that level of participation and engagement. Then they're setting a pulse. They're setting the heartbeat for it to flow fully through the structure.

Robert finished by answering his own question simply adding that, “the structure looks out for those who have decision making authority and we have very few people of color in that leadership pool.”

You Know More About Diversity Than Me

Through the Whiteness that is perceived as embedded within systems at TWU came another challenge that created tensions in relationships between Black administrators and their White colleagues. Participants cited times when White administrators acted as if they, as White people, knew more about diversity than them. Participants explained that in these interactions, they felt personally attacked, given their individual experiences with racism and oppression.

White administrators acting superior around topics of diversity ultimately undermined the level of expertise of the Black administrator and left them feeling novice.

Robert King expressed that his knowledge has been challenged when “somebody will think they know more.” He described a time when this happened, causing his personal and professional identities to be called into question.

I had one Associate Dean who didn't fully appreciate my understanding of my expertise. And did not fully embrace what I had to offer. You would think them being a senior administrator would give them a broad perspective, but their actions showed that they did not have the lived-experiences or know-how to make change. So, they targeted me, a fellow team member to make me feel less than and make them look better.

Toni Wilson noted a similar experience in dealing with a White male colleague. However, her interaction was layered with tensions in both gender and race and provided limited response strategies to her as Black woman, who was expected to act under the constraints of professionalism.

Many times, I have felt much more knowledgeable than they are since my expertise is in the area of diversity and inclusion...I can recall a time in my career when a White male colleague behaved as if he knew more about diversity than I did. I let the President know about the situation since this colleague was also a member of President's cabinet and then I took that colleague to lunch to talk through what was problematic about his behavior. The latter was foreign to my colleagues, they were not used to such a direct way of responding. But I was limited in how I could respond, and I knew that I did not want to take senior leadership's advice to file a report. They were not privy to the nationwide

cases of Black women presenting a claim of discrimination against a White man or how the policies in place impacted my response to his behavior differently.

Mary Jacobs also experienced a White male who claimed to know more about diversity than she did. In describing her experience, Mary highlighted the pain and detriment posed to her overall health and well-being from superiors' lack of understanding. She shared her experience, while holding back tears, saying that:

I think what I didn't understand, I was blindsided. I was invited into a meeting and God above covered me to just somehow have what I needed for that meeting. Because I felt my boss, a White male, was setting me up not realizing the pressure he was in from the Dean. And I had some feeling... How do I explain this? I don't think the Dean really got it all the time. It being the diversity work, her own gaps in knowledge and understanding... but I felt sacrificed.

Outside of personal attacks, Jackie Collins expressed a challenge in the day-to-day institutional functions at TWU that called into question her administrative identity, particularly as it related to performance reviews. Jackie exclaimed that the process for review was a dominant process that “stems from dominant decision-making” and therefore, “a White racial perspective.” She added:

Just having my unit head and coordinator overlook... using their format for review, and then having that information that they chose to put there... translated from the person, typically a White man who has to write the evaluation or whatever... I think that what these positions have created is us being an authority on presenting an argument to the majority that, you know, these things are legitimate and they need to have it, whether it be for Black and Browns, or whether it be for a community of White folks, women or what have you. As a Black woman being reviewed on increasing diversity, it does feel a

bit condescending, but I know through my experience that those reviews do not translate into who I am as a professional. It all depends on the value that White colleagues see in the argument for diversity I am making.

Jackie mentioned this to be a constant challenge because of the way that Black administrative positions were inscribed at TWU. She also noted the mismatch between expectations and behaviors written in job descriptions by the university and aspects of her personal identity.

Kelly Melvin was the only administrator to mention interactions with faculty members. Her experience showed the mismatches in both approach and language towards achieving diversity at a PWI.

The challenge is that you have to prove that you're an expert in the field, right? So, you show the data points. So, you have to speak their language. I have faculty status, but I don't have to have faculty status to tell you what's appropriate, and what the literature says around this...this is my job and focus, that should be sufficient enough to show my level of expertise and not have it called into question- but speaking with language used in literature and using concepts they are familiar with is a way to do so... linking the practitioner piece so that they can see it and showing them... in their language. Show them what they understand; data, figures, and numbers.

Feeling personally attacked by White colleagues who claim to know more about diversity than Black administrators is an extension of the embedded White dominance at TWU. This theme revealed tensions in the workplace that caused Black administrators to feel undermined and undervalued in their level of experience and expertise regarding diversity. Black administrators chose different responses depending on the status or level of position of the White colleague

whom they were offended by. However, the dominant perspectives that come with a culture of Whiteness precipitated underlying tensions.

Always Being “On”

A common challenge expressed by participants was the feeling of always having to be “on” while at TWU. Participants mentioned TWU’s unique “college town” atmosphere where the external community became infused within its institutional community adding extra pressures of being “on” even when not at work. Kelly Melvin described the feeling of always being “on” as “adhering to expectations of excellent performance, dress, and wit under the constructs of a predominantly white space”, mainly out of fear in being perceived as different.

For Kelly, this pressure was most present during her daily work interactions as she serves in senior-level position where she is usually the only person of color in the room.

Anytime I'm in a meeting that's with upper level leadership, or senior leadership, outside of those meetings that are designed for people of color. The upper level meetings, where I'm the only person of color, and then when it's person of color time, or like, on time. I'm the minstrel show for the conversation. Or when I'm the only person at the table discussing diversity issues when it's a university imperative.... But the things that are associated with the institution, that are loosely or strictly associated with the institution, I would say, socially and professionally cause pressure, because you're still always on. Kelly’s comparison of her experience in meetings to a “minstrel show” highlights the aspect of performance and therefore, the expectations that Black administrators feel they are to adhere to at PWIs. Kelly mentioned being the only person of color in the room, which adds to the pressures of performing or being “on” on demand.

For Leslie Thomas, a lower-level administrator with closer interactions to students, the pressure of being “on” impacted her personal life outside of TWU, as well. In her reflection, she contended that, “I often feel like I need to be on at all times because I constantly run into my students from other colleges in everyday spaces like the bank, grocery shopping and even a local bar. Sometimes you cannot turn it off and just take your wig off, so to speak.” Her reactions, while presented as comic-relief, were intensified by Nathaniel Moore who also expressed a disdain for adhering to expectations of a dominant space. He stated:

Well if I show up in khakis and boat shoes during a meeting or professional development, I am not taken as serious. It’s almost like wearing the mask because I can never feel like myself or show up as such. I have had many times I wanted to come in with a durag and gym clothes, but I know that would be the first thing people noticed rather than what came out of my mouth. But I seen a well-respected speaker come and do a talk, the whole time he kept adjusting his hiking shoes. A student in the audience actually asked him if had been hiking in the area and they had at least a five-minute conversation in the middle of his talk about the brand of shoes and places for hiking. That was so odd to me. Culturally I’m not too into hiking and I almost felt like I should start googling places, not to hike, but to just find my way into the conversation.

I Had Trust

Participants’ experiences offered various strategies for negotiating Black administrative identities at PWIs. A major strategy that emerged from the data was the importance of establishing trust. Participants suggested tactics such as maintaining trust through experienced social networks, finding trust in intergroup relationships, and developing trust with other Black people. Mary Jacobs, a mid-level administrator at TWU for over twenty years, reminisced on a

time in her career where she felt most connected to her trusted social networks. She insisted that the experiences that those in her social network had, created a professional connection among them. Mary mentioned that the trust and understanding offered to her from TWU colleagues over the years also provided guidance for doing her job. She stated:

Some of it is just because people I've worked with for maybe 18 years are gone, and they were my social network, they were my professional connection. I had trust. They had experience. They had gravitas. After you're here that long, many of them created the [diversity office]. To have had that as a friend, someone who created [the diversity office], and to understand where the bones are and who to talk to and who not to say things around, that is still a mechanism for getting things done, understanding. Not going cuckoo.

Jackie Collins offered a similar tactic for finding trust in intergroup relationships. However, Jackie's approach differed from Mary's, as she felt that trust could be found outside of social networks. For her, if there were common goals shared among and across groups, deeper connections could be made.

I would say, figure out what your goals are, and then what you have to do to get those goals, and then, align yourself with people that can help you get those goals. And it doesn't necessarily have to be social relationships. Definitely, somebody... get with somebody that can help you get where you want to go, and that you trust to help you get where you want to go.

A few of the participants mentioned instances when trust was not established, which resulting in disconnection and isolation. In each of the instances, trust was not achieved in interactions with other Black professionals. At times, participants began to question the Black

racial consciousness, or the values and perceptions that individuals had of their Black racial identity. For instance, Kelly Melvin shared what she described as a “disappointing” experience where another colleague of color began to compare the success of their individual units, which she later added left her feeling a sense of distrust.

There was a person who identifies as a person of color, that I feel is constantly coming for... I wouldn't even just say me, I would say [my unit] as a whole, for whatever reason, and it's really disappointing, more so than anything, because when you think about you being in this predominately white space, you would think that, you know, people of color would kind of stick together. Especially if you have a commonality, common goals to see certain students succeed. And just working in the same sort of spaces. But, it's like, when we get in these meetings, where we're talking about diversity, it's like this show of who's doing more, who has less. And it's like this disgruntled type of vibe that you just get as soon as this person walks in the room, opens their mouth about anything. You can ask a question and the question is answered with such venom, which sometimes comes off as self-hate.

Leslie Thomas also had issues in developing trust with other Black people, even though her first instincts were to look for people who identify like herself. This presented further challenges to developing her social identity that she attributed to being at a PWI. She admitted:

I just feel that my social identity suffers being here. Because, I'm not very trusting with people, and the friends that I do have...but I look for people like myself first in finding connectivity. Being at a predominantly white institution, you just have to tread lightly. Sometimes people are not as trustworthy or trusting... you can't trust them, so of course, I will always look for myself first, but I still don't feel like I have a certain level of

connectivity, or just a connectedness to that particular person, because I know we are within the same race. And we look the same. Not every Black person has the same experience so I don't always assume we will connect. But I will say I question the diversity agenda of other Black colleagues, especially those who do not promote it through their work. Maybe because being at a predominantly white institution you'll get a lot of people who do not want to talk about diversity or they think them just being here is enough. But for me, I need to know you get my work regardless of your experience so that when I am not at the table, I can trust you to have my back.

As a high-level administrator, Toni Wilson, provided a different perspective in developing trust with other Black people. Toni decided to reflect on what her role was in creating a trusting environment and shared a time when she was unsuccessful in doing so. In what became a critical reflection of her own actions, Toni mentioned that she struggled with this overall, because not everyone will perceive your "intentions as genuine." She reflected on her challenges stating:

I've done some mentoring, so to speak, here. Some successfully and some not successfully, like some people left. I said to this young woman who was a new director of a center on campus, I said, "You really need to have a vision for how you think the work should be done and you need to communicate that"... the way she was being received was very negative...but I could see she was struggling. We had some long talks. We would go into town and sit in a coffee shop for two hours. I'd be giving her some advice and talking about strategic plans and all that. For a good while she seemed to be open to it. I mean she kind of initiated it, asked if she could speak with me. Then after a while I could see her just shutting down. It was all getting to be too much. She wasn't happy, she

stopped interacting with me and some other Black administrators. All of a sudden we became the enemy, she didn't trust us.

Toni's experience is different because establishing trust in her unit at TWU was something that she felt as an imperative in her job as a senior administrator. She attributed the challenge in creating a trusting relationship with another Black woman colleague to power dynamics that she felt "flooded" the Black community. For Toni, the level of trust she assumed was developing between her and her colleague became mystified by a sense of competition in position and status.

Developing a Network

Another strategy that emerged throughout the data analysis was developing a network. This strategy was similar to establishing trust, but examples revolved around finding community with like-minded people rather than specific interactions related to race. For instance, Leslie Thomas mentioned that while difficult to develop personal and social networks, she was able to find community in her professional connections. She stated, "I've found community with people who are like minded in the sense of moving forward. It's a no-nonsense space because we know this is the job that we have to do."

Like Leslie, Nathaniel Moore was also able to identify a community that provided an opportunity to develop personal connections. In his reflection, he stated:

I feel more connected when I am part of the [student success services] community, the outside [student success services] community, and in [that] community here at the institution, than I am with the university community.

Leslie and Nathaniel were unique finding community and developing networks tied to their professional identities. Other administrators at TWU offered strategies focused on developing networks through personal connections, considering the challenges in being one of few

minorities at a PWI. Like, Mary Jacobs, who said even though they were not physically there, her most valued network were family and friends. Mary went onto add:

I think when you are in an environment, you build a community. And this is a tough community to build. I'm a social person, I haven't had problems with that, but in terms of real confidants, there's just a couple. And so, I've given far too much to this work and I made it through with my own social community. My own religious network and so on.

Jackie Collins' approach to developing a network was similar to Mary's. However, Jackie brought up the impact of gender norms as it related to expectations for women to have children. She automatically self-selected herself out of this network, stating that, "I knew I didn't fit in with women who had children here, because in my social community most of the women of color who did unfortunately did not have the time to work." She added, "If I found one good friend, or two good friends that I can bounce things off of, then it didn't necessarily have to be within my position, or my career. I was fine, because I had another social outlet that I could depend on a little bit more than the social outlet that is here, professional and whatever."

For some participants, in order to feel part of a network both their personal and administrative identities had to be involved. Yet, connecting the two was not always easy. Kelly Melvin mentioned how difficult it was to blur her personal and administrative identities stating that:

It's very difficult to have a personal relationship with people at work because you have this professional relationship, and not everything is separable. They can't separate. A lot of people can't separate. They don't know how to separate the personal from the professional. So, having a personal relationship, or my personal identity, inside of this space, is difficult, but I look to things where some common ground exists, like I look to

other things. And I'm not necessarily looking for people of color in all cases, because there's "skin-folk" and "kin-folk". And so, I've found mentors, and places where I can exist that don't necessarily have to deal with my job.

Through observation at an external meeting, Kelly also revealed that she and others serve on the executive board for a group that coalesces to discuss Black affairs in the TWU community. She mentioned that her participation in the group was voluntary and that a chance to serve in a leadership position made it more meaningful network.

Similarly, Robert King mentioned networks where he had opportunities to serve in a leadership position for a group that represented Blackness. For instance, during an observation at a Black student event, Robert was asked to speak on the behalf of a Black-Greek Lettered Organization (BGLO) that he had served as an advisor to while at TWU.

Throughout the study, Toni Wilson was the only participant that mentioned a proactive tactic for developing a network prior to taking an administrative position at a PWI. She confidently stated:

I always talk about that when I'm getting hired on the front end. Here's the organizations I need to belong to, conferences are three times a year, I expect to go, I expect to be funded, all that. I work all that out on the front end... That's what sustains me. I have colleagues from all across the country doing this work that I stay in close touch with, so that's really a great support and informational network for me and I wouldn't want to do the job without that, without those colleagues and those connections.

Toni insisted that this tactic required a lot of pre-work and experience that is typically offered in graduate programs through exposure to conferences and workshops unique to different academic fields. Toni added that at TWU "we have a Black women's group and it is support staff,

administrative assistant staff, administrators like myself, and faculty, and we get together once a month and have lunch where they bring our lunch and then once or twice a year we go out and then my office budget will pay for us to go out. That's a really important support network, it's been a life-line I think." She continued saying:

I interact with administrators across the institution, particularly with Human Resources, the Provost's office and the Student Affairs office. Outside of the institution, I'm part of a liberal arts diversity officer group and I'm a board member and officer of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education. Both groups are comprised of administrators. I also serve on one or more community agency boards of directors wherever I work. Many of those board members are administrators as well.

In her reflection, Toni articulated an institutional practice taking place at TWU, where she found a supportive network. Her reflections supported the notion that Black administrators' identities were more connected to their professional identities when aspects of the personal identities were present and vice-versa.

In Touch with the Students

Another common strategy that emerged throughout the data was the importance of being in touch with students of color. Participants were adamant that they bring unique advocacy as Black administrators to TWU, especially when it came to their understanding of the experiences and language that engaged students of color. For instance, in grappling with the value placed on diversity leaders at TWU from other administrators, Mary Jacobs praised students for their understanding and the visibility they bring to her identity.

Diversity leadership is important and ought to be part of executive teams. I don't think my dean would ever have said, "Oh, you're part of exec"...Maybe she would have. I

mean, I'm saying that out loud, but I don't think so. And so being in tune with students has offered a presence of valuing. And I say valuing because I think what your visibility is has everything to do with the recognition and valuing. And whether or not people accept it or value what you're saying or doing. It's still a part of your work that says, "We have to talk about these things." Where else would [devaluing] might have happened? Did it happen when I went to graduate school? That's when you need a network and experience. That's when you got to call, as they say, call a thing a thing. We can do that as Black administrators in ways that others cannot and I think students of color value that, but that value is not shared with upper-level administration at the university.

Each participant had their own similar reflection of what it meant to be in touch with students. Leslie Thomas added her experiences as a student at an HBCU to the work that she does for minority recruitment at TWU. She offered a strategy for increasing the value of diversity work by highlighting the unique benefits in having Black administrators with diverse experiences.

Because when we're talking about recruitment, Black colleges and institutions are used to White schools coming to poach their students. And so, for us to go, it becomes a little more palatable, and for us to serve in a sort of care giving role. We become the person who's at those institutions who takes care of the student. We speak the language of the student. The assumed language of the student, even if the student is Black or Brown and coming from privilege, we still speak the language of the student. And it benefits the institution when we're going to situations where we have to communicate with HSIs, Hispanic serving institutions, or HBCUs, historically Black colleges or universities.

Kelly Melvin added to the value of Black administrators being in touch with students at TWU as she reflected on a meeting where she was the only administrator of color.

They actually started to talk about Brown students in a deficit way and in that room, I became the only advocate for the students of color. It was clear they did not have the background and knowledge to address concerns specific to our students.

Robert King also noted the importance of being in touch with students. He referenced a devaluing of culture that students of color may be exposed to in any White space while offering the suggestion of being a “step ahead.”

Institutions are not isolated from the ways of the world. That's why we have to be in touch with the pulse of students... You know, the [blatant acts of racism] or whatever, it doesn't matter. Those are the things that you have to be in tune with and you have to be a step ahead of.

After being at TWU for over twenty-five years, Robert offered insight on the cultural history of the institution. He reflected on a time where there was a diverse network of administrators and faculty of color who added to the culture of support for students of color.

There was a whole culture that was going on. So, there was this vibrance and stuff, so you had these people of color who were in touch with students and knew how to respond to their issues through experience. There was a group of people with experience and knowledge in changing diversity... I was surrounded by people that I could use as that buffer and other agents, and to send students to. To send students to somebody they could identify with.

Let Me Get an Ally

An important strategy that emerged in the data was getting an ally. Participants mentioned the “dilution of a network of Black administrators” at TWU. Getting an ally was offered as a tactic for them to do their job as diversity leaders. Kelly Melvin said that finding allyship was a motivation for her to stay at TWU. Robert King insisted that allyship was a “strategic professional connection” with White colleagues and that sometimes “it was necessary.” He stated:

People say you'll win more flies with honey than you will with vinegar. Or more bees with honey than you will with vinegar, even better, whichever way it goes...I think you've got to align yourself with somebody who can champion the things that need to get done in addition to you. Unless you came into a position with faculty rank or tenure, to be in a role like this or have that wealth of experience with the letters, with the doctorate, then you're going to be confronted, always being second guessed...And some moments it'll be very overt, other moments it'll be very covert. That's why you need to have been able to make others aware of your competence and understanding in ways so that now they can be a good champion or a voice for you in those situations. I've learned over the years, okay. Let me get an ally. Let me get senior faculty. Let me get one of the shared professors or somebody to push it forward, and then I will make out a statement later. Because now that person has planted a seed that I can then water and make it bloom a little bit more. Trust me, finding a White ally who believes in the work you do is a rewarding and validating experience.

Toni Wilson added the perspective of a senior-level administrator who is often called on for guidance and support in communication of institutional messages from TWU. Like Robert, she considered adopting allies to be a strategy for enacting change.

I see myself as an internal change agent and to me what that means is I've got to get messages across to people in a way that they can hear it because these are the people I'm really going to be working with on an ongoing basis. Unlike an external change agent who you might see very appropriately staging a protest and out there with the bullhorn and the signs and all that, which all has a place. That's not really good for internal change agent. It alienates people and people feel like they're getting hit with a hammer and then they don't really want to collaborate with you when there's a whole lot of work you have to do and collaborate on. I've got my own goals and so I'm going to do it in a way that it's going to get me to my own goals. I'm not going to use a hammer if another way, if a little tiny mallet will have the same effect. Engaging colleagues as allies can help because they might have the privilege to do that external stuff. Sometimes because of their race, or their position, or what have you. It's a strategy for the overall goal.

What My HBCU Taught Me

Five out of the seven participants attended HBCUs for either undergraduate and/or graduate education. Through their experiences at HBCUs, strategies were offered to them that they still use in their professional careers at a PWI. The data showed that their HBCU experience had a major impact on their identity development offering a sense of racial belongingness and self-verification. Kelly Melvin reminisced on her decision to attend an HBCU saying that she felt “there would be individuals that who were pursuing higher education that knew what it was like to be minority.” She was aware that her attendance at an HBCU would provide an understanding to who she would become as a Black professional. Kelly added, “that experience continues to influence how I show up and choose to present myself at work.”

In her work as an administrator, Kelly has also used her HBCU experience to pushback on normative decision-making processes at TWU. She mentioned a time where she took offense to a comment made about the recruitment of HBCU students as this was an attack to her personal and professional identities.

So, head of an academic department, was sitting around the table, making selections for the recruitment. The science, technology, engineering, and mathematics person makes the comment that we don't select from these schools, and those schools referenced where HBCUs and HSIs. I am a proud alumna of an HBCU. I was offended by that, but then, in the words of my father, my Afro came out and I just became the Black woman at the table who had to explain to her what the problem was with her statement. By the time I was done, I don't think I needed to remind her of my position, being that I am part of a unit, that actually oversaw her department and others. I was more senior than her, again a graduate of an HBCU.

The confidence and assurance of self that Kelly gained at her HBCU was similarly shared among other participants in the study. Robert King also received a sense of racial belongingness and self-verification that remains with him at TWU.

My HBCU experience was being around PhD Black men who went to school in the '30s at University of Chicago. Another one, University of Michigan for their doctorates. Only place they could teach was HBCUs. And how they were committed. And seeing them and how they carried themselves and the style, the elegance of who they were and no nonsense. Talking about accountability, responsibility, so that fit right in with the whole household I came up out of...I always tried to emulate my teaching style to some of the things that they did. Be knowledgeable. Just be able to talk about something. Don't see no

notes, no nothing. It was like it was off their head, it's there, it's embedded, rich, and it's alive. It's alive. You felt it. You felt their passion. It's like you could almost see it. Now, I am confident, I am thorough. If there's anything, that is what that HBCU experience polished in me. It was those faculty, how they carried and how they presented themselves.

Leslie Thomas' HBCU experience was also inspiring and important to her identity development. She reflected on an experience with a Black woman faculty member who was invited to teach a course at her HBCU. This experience shaped Leslie's professional identity and like other participants, remains with her while at TWU.

[My HBCU] laid the foundation for what a Black administrator looks like...Honestly, I remember strong Black women at my HBCU. I took a course with someone well-known and respected in African American history...she always had a style and grace that exuded intelligence. You could always tell how much she truly cared by how she listened to each perspective. She showed up every day dressed like what we would for a conference or business meeting. Every time I go to something where I have to show up as my professional self I think of her and how in awe I was of her.

Findings

Findings for the study emerged through an iterative process of interpreting themes as they relate to the two guiding research questions. Each question provided a catalyst for the categorization of themes, which were identified through a technique called 'typology' (Tracy, 2013). After collecting the data, themes were further analyzed through a three-pronged approach that involved describing, interpreting, and explaining the data (Anya, 2017) as it related to power, negotiation, and identity development of Black administrators at PWIs. Direct quotes

from participant interviews, administrative autobiographies, and personal biographies were analyzed to provide support for my interpretations of themes. The emergent themes were presented as results and findings were then derived using the epistemological lenses offered in the conceptual frames of Critical Race Theory and identity negotiation to respond to the individual research questions.

Question One: In what ways do personal and/or salient aspects of Black administrators' identities align with their job-related identities as administrators at PWIs? In what ways do they not?

Personal or salient aspects of the participants' identities are depicted through a strong awareness of their Blackness. The theme *I am Black*, shows that participants established saliency in their Black identities early-on in life. This awareness and saliency in Blackness is passed on through familial connections, mostly from parents who had experienced racism and oppression in the US during a time of Jim Crow and racial segregation. Therefore, participants' identity as Black is tied to a culture of racism and oppression that inscribes "core symbols" of who they are personally and socially (Jackson, Johnson, Hecht, and Ribeau, 2019; Jackson, 2004). Core symbols tell us about the definitions, premises, and propositions regarding the universe and the place of humans (Jackson, Johnson, Hecht, and Ribeau, 2019, p. 30). In the context of African American culture, the core symbols of Blackness highlight the racialized social systems³¹ throughout the US as experienced by Black people. For participants in this study, establishing saliency in Blackness early-on infused a core identity that remains with them as they navigate spaces of identity development such as in school, church, or their communities.

³¹ Racialized social systems refer to societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races. Systems that are racialized provide a unique set of social relations and practices that distinctively categorize hierarchies of race (See Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Scholarship that explores the process of identity negotiation in the workplace considers an individual's core identity as the *chronic*, longstanding beliefs about themselves and therefore identities personal to them (Swann, et al., 2009). However, results in this study reveal that Blackness was not perceived as chronic, but rather as a "core" component of who the participants are. As each of the participants reflected on their personal identity development, the history of racism in the U.S. continued to be influential in their understanding of their minoritized positioning as Black people in society. Participants have a sense of pride in their Blackness, similar to the pride they have in familial, religious, and community relationships.

Participants consider their experiences in Blackness to align closely with the experiences they have as administrators. The nature of work described by each participant in the study is situated within a specific community of practice designed to achieve diversity at TWU. Therefore, in relation to the context of a PWI, participants' administrative identities are *situational* to a specific circumscribed situation or role (Swann, et al., 2009). The situated identities of Black administrators at TWU show alignment with their core identities in the theme *It's Seamless*. Participants describe a coherence between the two identities through job-related functions focused on supporting underrepresented minorities, working in communities of practice related to their Blackness, and personal experiences of minority identity development.

Swann et al. (2009) posit that people pursue personal goals that satisfy their needs for *coherence*, or a sense that the world fits with past experiences (p. 5). For participants in the study, the opportunity to work with underrepresented minorities and serve as advocates in a predominantly White space provides the opportunity for building a coherent relationship with their personal experiences in being Black. Participants' awareness of who they are as Black offers a chance to see themselves in their work. The coherence established in their core and

situated identities ameliorates some of the negative experiences that participants have in interactions with White colleagues. Interactions with other underrepresented minorities, particularly students of color, offer compatibility in the identity negotiation process, thereby leading to identity congruency.

However, the results reveal that participants' Black identities were not fully aligned to their situated identities as administrators. Black administrators experience the most incongruence outside of communities of practice focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. In these spaces where Black administrators cannot find a relation to prior experiences in developing an awareness of their Blackness, they began to note the history of dominant ideologies of Whiteness that seek to position their identities as inferior. While Black administrators situated identities are "seamlessly" aligned to their core notions of Blackness, quite often that experience is rooted in a history of racism and oppression, presenting challenges in the identity negotiation process.

Question One Follow-Up: What specific challenges do administrators face due to the racism and oppression tied to the minoritized aspects of their identity?

Results also revealed commonalities among the challenges that Black administrators at TWU faced because of their racial identities. The themes that respond to this follow-up question capture the essence of what it means to be a Black administrator at a PWI. These themes bring to light the challenges that Black administrators face in achieving identity congruence throughout the identity negotiation process. Black administrators at TWU feel a sense of uncertainty regarding the expectations and behaviors associated with their situated (administrative) identities as they have been inscribed by the University through job descriptions written by and for a White male identity. The uncertainty that Black administrators feel creates a deeper desire for racial belongingness that is not available when they are subjected to the dominant White ideologies

embedded at TWU. Black administrators at TWU also express a strong inclination to adhere to the dominant cultural norms of the institution and its external community.

Participants agreed that *There Has to Be Clarity* in the descriptions of their situated administrative identities. The challenge presented is mostly because the goal of achieving diversity at TWU is ambiguously defined and understood across the different communities of practice at the institution. This causes ambiguity in how Black administrators who are charged with improving diversity at TWU perceive the expectations around behaviors and performance in their roles. The findings in of this study support the importance of organizational leaders promoting a culture in which organizational roles, and the behaviors associated with them, are clearly delineated (Swann et al., 2009). This will foster clarity of identities, which participants in this study articulated as essential just so they can “exist” in the space.

Clarity in identities is communicated through both formal and psychological contracts presented by an institution (Swann et al., 2009). Formal contracts present expectancies in situated identities through job descriptions, compensation agreements, performance evaluations, etc. In contrast, psychological contracts are provided through socialization processes such as trainings, professional developments, and other implicit organizational interactions (Conway & Briner, 2005; Rousseau, 1995; Swann et al., 2009). For low-status minorities, failure to express themselves as expected by dominant group members causes more uncertainty because they fear that members of the dominant group will reject them for being different (Polzer, Caruso, and Brief, 2008; Polzer, Milton, and Swann, 2002). The lack of clarity in the identities of Black administrators at TWU creates a stronger desire for them to develop a connectedness through racial belongingness and affirm the full spectrum of both their core and situated identities.

Participants express the challenge in seeking a *Reaffirmation of the Totality* of their identities at TWU. Specifically, as administrators charged with fixing “all things diversity” at their institution, participants’ desire to be valued for the silent work that they do outside of the listed functions within their job descriptions. Participants feel that TWU does not provide opportunities through training or support and resources that cater to the core aspects of their identities. Participants choose to seek affirmation through finding connectedness to their racial past as minorities. Yet, through achieving connectedness to a past filled with racism and oppression, there is an added cultural tax³² on the Black administrative identity in their negotiation process. Participants’ perceived their “all things diversity” identities as limitations to accessing agency at TWU.

Establishing agency, or sense of competence (Swann et al., 2009), was similarly presented as a challenge when choosing how to respond to the cultural norms of TWU. The theme *Embedded White Dominance* is inspired by what Diane Gusa (2010) coined as “White institutional presence” and presents a major challenge towards achieving both coherence and agency as a Black administrator. Black administrators remain fully aware of the insidious nature of Whiteness that becomes embedded at PWIs. Participants spoke to the structures that exist within TWU that have become embedded through “language, cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge” (Gusa, 2010, p. 465). Formal decisions and practices at TWU such as adopting a diversity initiative, dealing with issues of diversity in general, and responding to racism in the academy follow a White dominant structure. This structure, as characterized by one

³² Cultural tax or cultural taxation refers to the obligation to show good citizenship toward the institution by being an ethnic and cultural representative for the marginalized group one is a part of (E.g. Being the expert on issues of diversity, serve on affirmative action or diversity committees, and educate members of the racial majority. See Padilla, 1994).

participant in this study, follows “descriptions and competencies that are developed for [Whites] causing various jobs [to be] seen more through the eyes of a White male.”

Participants are challenged in adopting strategies for doing their jobs because they feel less committed to the way that diversity becomes articulated at TWU. In fact, 5 participants mentioned they felt obligated to “act as White” as possible in order to navigate their roles. At the same time, they are completely aware that Black administrators make up only seven percent of senior administrative positions throughout US higher education institutions (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). Therefore, Black administrators at TWU continue to respond to issues of diversity even when they feel the issues are being “dumped into [their] laps” with “positions with no power, and no authority,” as one participant in this study said.

The embedded Whiteness at TWU also creates challenges for Black administrators presenting competently. As an extension to *Embedded White Dominance*, in the theme *You Know More About Diversity Than Me* Black administrators expressed feeling that White colleagues at TWU personally attacked their agency as diversity experts that comes through their lived-Black, racialized experiences. The emotional and cultural toll of these attacks impacts the overall health and well-being of Black administrators at TWU as they describe their experiences with painful reflections of feeling “blindsided,” “sacrificed,” and “undermined.” These feelings come through in interactions with White administrators, but also in interactions with faculty who do not speak the administrative language.

There is also an abuse of power being imposed through formal performance review processes at TWU that evaluate Black administrators on their performance in achieving diversity through a White dominant lens. Given the dynamic of mainly White male senior-level supervisors at TWU, the Black women in this study sensed gendered racism is communicated

when they are evaluated on their diversity performance. This is, partly, due to the contrast in identities between White men and Black women, but also, because of the White dominant structures at TWU that inscribe a White male identity to positions of leadership. Participants in the study are further challenged in choosing how to respond to feelings of incompetence and lack of agency, always ensuring that they are performing in ways that show their experience as minorities adds value to their work.

Another challenge and threat to the agency of Black administrative identities is the need to *Always Be "On."* Participants describe always being "on" as adhering to expectations of excellent performance, dress, and wit under the constructs of a predominantly White space. For some participants in the study, this results in a feeling of second-guessing their presentation of self both in and outside of TWU's community. Out of fear of being rejected for not presenting as expected, Black administrators adhere to notions of Whiteness that are dominant at TWU. This leaves a heavy burden on Black administrators as they feel they cannot turn off their situated identities and just be, even when going to the grocery store, bank, or out for leisure in the community. Being one of few Black people in and out of the institutional community is difficult and causes Black administrators to perceive unfair expectations regarding performance in comparison to their White colleagues.

Question Two: How do Black administrators negotiate their identities outlined by the institution and what strategies are used to do so?

In the context of a PWI, Black administrators are few and far in between. The rarity of seeing a Black administrator and the surreptitious continuation of Black professionals being pigeonholed into positions of diversity cause hypervisibility to the people present (Jackson, 2003). Navigating this predominantly White space as a minority requires a strategic negotiation

of identity for achieving congruency in who you are as an individual and who the institution describes you as. In this study, I focused on strategies that Black administrators enact while negotiating their core and situated identities, in order to achieve congruency between the two.

The next theme offered by participants in the study addresses challenges to *developing trusting relationships*. Trust is defined as a pre-condition for those engaged through networks that must be established and maintained within interpersonal relationships in order for collective action to be successful and effective (Marsh, 2015; Marsh 2012; Kezar, 2011; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007). In workspaces trust therefore becomes a “politicized endeavor” for those working towards shared agendas that helps shape the work being conducted (Gutiérrez, Engeström, & Sannino, 2016; Kemmis & Carr, 2003). Participants in the study stressed the importance of establishing trust as a strategy for gaining a sense of connectedness, or positive relations with valued others (Swann et al., 2009, p. 5). Connectedness is important as trust is gained through connections made in social networks. Black administrators at TWU feel this sense of connectedness more so in interactions with external social and professional networks than in internal networks. This is in part because participants perceived a lack of Black racial consciousness, or salience of Blackness, among other Black professionals at TWU whose work is not focused on diversity.³³

Another theme offered by participants speaks to the importance of *developing networks*. TWU is located in a rural and predominantly White area, which limits the opportunities for compatibility among Black administrators as there are few people that match this identity in the space. Participants developed networks with like-minded individuals, mainly friends or family,

³³ Low salience of Blackness is the first stage of Nigrescence as summarized by William E. Cross in 1994. Nigrescence models present the stages that African Americans navigate when experiencing a major shift throughout their racial identification. According to Nigrescence, when individuals reach a higher salience, a reconciliation of their personal identity that connects them to others will take place.

or in communities of practice that had a similar focus on diversity. Internally, the institution provides spaces for like-racial and gender identities to collect, such as Black women's luncheons, but all participants prefer the connectedness they have created and maintained on their own. In fact, the most favorable networks were ones where both core and situated identities of the Black administrator can exist and, therefore, both identities affirmed.

Similarly, participants suggested developing strategic interactions which are discussed in the theme *Let Me Get an Ally*. As a mechanism for coping with the stressors of being a minority focused on diversity at a PWI, Black administrators at TWU strategically develop allies with White colleagues. Coping is defined as an affective process which becomes a way of dealing with the anxieties and pressures and acts as a mediator towards an individual's internal process towards self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). For Black administrators at TWU, coping means being strategic in order to be effective. Identifying White colleagues who value diversity and believe in the work the Black administrators do allows opportunities to develop connectedness, as well as the chance to increase the agency of the Black administrator.

Another strategy for increasing agency offered by participants in the study is being *In Touch with the Students*. As professionals who have the lived experience in being part of a minority group, Black administrators at TWU add value in interactions with students of color. The value that Black administrators bring to the predominantly White space creates a purpose that is connected to past experiences and therefore, provides coherence. This strategy is used in unique ways to counter the devaluing of the Black administrative identity and presents a positive affirmation for Black administrators in the opportunity to act as advocates for students of color. Literature suggests that close relationships like those between Black administrators and students of color at TWU develop into a supportive familial-like structures called, fictive kin (Taylor,

Chatters, Woodward, and Brown, 2013). In her study, which examined Black faculty who developed othermothers or caregiving relationships with Black students, Griffin (2013) revealed positive outcomes of closeness, social support, and shared understanding that offered deeper connections. While participants in the study are not related to students at TWU by blood, marriage, or union, the common experiences they have in being members of minority groups creates a connection that Black administrators enacted as advocacy.

The last theme offered in the study considers the impact of attending an HBCU. This theme is unique to the 5 participants in the study who attended historically Black colleges and universities for either undergraduate or graduate education. Those who attended HBCUs not only gained networks that help to sustain them now while at a PWI, but they also gained a unique internalization of professionalism that counters the prevailing expectations of presenting as professional in a White space. While adhering to the expectations and behaviors of a predominantly White institution and showing competence, Black administrators are in fact drawing on past experiences and influences rooted in their Black histories. HBCU graduates' experiences in seeing Black professionals dress, perform, and act in an academic setting remains with them reinforcing an act of pride, rather than a challenge when adopting these behaviors in a White space. This presents an opportunity for Black administrators to keep to those traditions while affirming their sense of agency.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

This study was designed to interrogate the experiences of Black administrators at a predominantly White institution (PWI) as they negotiate who they are personally and professionally in the space. As a qualitative research design, narrative inquiry methods were used to investigate and capture the lived experiences of the participants in the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, Black administrative autobiographies, selected biographies/job descriptions, and observations to create participant narratives that depict their experiences. Analysis of the data involved the categorization of themes through a typology technique. Deeper analysis included the use of a three-pronged approach to describe, interpret, and explain the data. This process of critical discourse analysis produced interpretations regarding the identity negotiation experience as it relates to power, negotiation, and identity development of Black administrators at PWIs.

In this chapter, I will provide a summary of interpretations supported by results and findings from the study. The narratives of the participants within the study are a culmination of 7 individual semi-structured interviews (1 with each participant). Transcriptions of these interviews served as pieces of discourse that were analyzed and compared to 7 individually written Black administrative autobiographies (between 3-7 pages each), 7 individually selected biographies/job descriptions, and 2 observations in professional group settings that lasted 1-hour each. I will discuss the themes that emerged through the process of data analysis and synthesize the findings as they relate to the study's research questions, revisit the conceptual frame of identity negotiation, provide theoretical and practical recommendations, and present conclusions to the study.

Summary of Study

The study was an inquiry into the experiences and life-stories of seven Black administrators who work at a PWI (pseudonymously presented as Traditionally White University, TWU). The study (1) introduced the concept of identity negotiation into higher education leadership literature that considers the social positioning of the Black administrator at PWIs, (2) interrogated the importance of understanding these complex processes with a specific emphasis on racial identity, and therefore, (3) offered a critical model for examining the processes of identity negotiation for administrators who are members of racially minoritized groups. In addition to the conceptual frame of identity negotiation, the study used critical race theory to interrogate the experiences of Black administrators developing coherence, connectedness, and agency in the context of a predominantly White space. The use of critical discourse analysis to interpret the experiences of Black administrators allowed for deeper reflections related to power, race, and oppression. Consistent with a tenet of critical race theory, findings serve as counternarratives to the master narratives created for Black administrators under the guise of Whiteness at PWIs.

Statement of the Problem

In the context of higher education in the U.S., Black administrators at PWIs continue to face the challenges of being underrepresented, undervalued, and ultimately, misunderstood. The histories of racism and oppression that infiltrate our systems and institutions are upheld by ideologies and practices within that maintain an inferior, minoritized positioning for Black administrators (Jackson, 2003, Johnson, 1969, Powell, 1999). The problem for Black administrators at PWIs is that they are to navigate a space where their identities as Black are incongruent with the administrative identities assigned in formal job descriptions at TWU; as leadership positions in this capacity are typically written for and held by White men. Scholarship

that explores identity negotiation in the workplace has just begun to consider how race can complicate the negotiation process making it more difficult for minorities to compete and perform under the expectations of Whiteness. We have also yet to see the Black administrative identity negotiation process to be researched in this way throughout higher education literature aside from work that investigates the experiences of Black women faculty, staff, and student affairs professionals (Fikes, 2004; Gasman, 2011; Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Waring, 2003; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Research that investigates the identity development of minorities in higher education typically focuses on the importance of belongingness and connectedness of the student, in order for successful and positive identity development (Harper, 2009; Hurtado, Ruiz Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Strayhorn, 2018). The current study highlights the importance of considering the ways in which Black administrative identities align at higher education institutions to create a sense of racial belongingness that may lead to a positive experience for Black administrators negotiating their identities.

Guiding Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study and offered direction towards my interpretations of results and findings:

1. In what ways do personal and/or salient aspects of Black administrators' identities align with their job-related identities as administrators at PWIs? In what ways do they not?
 - What specific challenges do administrators face due to the racism and oppression tied to the minoritized aspects of their identities?

2. How do Black administrators negotiate their identities outlined by the institution and what strategies are used to do so?

Discussion of Themes

Participant narratives created through data collection and analysis of various pieces of personal discourse offered unique insights to the identity negotiation process for Black administrators at a PWI. Navigating a predominantly White space in a role such as an administrator becomes complex for someone whose identity is directly inscribed as “othered” through a history of racism and oppression.³⁴ The process of identity negotiation in this study was interrogated through inquiry that focused on exploring aspects of alignment, if any, between the personal and professional identities of Black administrators.

There are two themes that respond the first question of the study offering insight to how Black administrative identities are aligned. These are: (1) I am Black and (2) It’s Seamless. As a follow-up to the first question, challenges specific to the Black administrator were explored.

There are four themes that respond to this part of the question: (1) There has to be Clarity, (2) Reaffirmation of the Totality, (3) Embedded White Dominance/You Know More About Diversity than Me, and (4) Always Being On. The second and final question of the study sought to reveal strategies for identity negotiation as offered by Black administrators. The five themes that respond to this question are: (1) I had Trust, (2) Developing a Network, (3) In Touch with Students, (4) Let Me Get an Ally, (5) What My HBCU Taught Me.

In order to make meaning out of themes, an iterative process involving constant reviews of relevant literature was enacted. This process of analysis gave meaning and value to themes that led to interpretations from various data collected. The first two themes (I am Black, It’s

³⁴ The words “othered” and “minoritized” act as verbs to highlight the “ongoing social experience of marginalization of minority groups” (See Chase et al., 2014, pg. 671).

Seamless) derived from the exploration of alignment between core and situated identities and offer meaning to finding coherence, a mode of identity negotiation where individuals develop a sense that the space they are in fits with past experiences (Swann et al., 2009, p. 5). If coherence is not achieved between one's core and situated identities, tension regarding true feelings or personal beliefs about who they are expected to be at the institution will arise that can be exhausting and overwhelming (Hochschild, 1983; Swann et al., 2009). Participants articulated alignment in being Black and being administrators charged with diversity, offering coherence in their roles at TWU.

However, participants' Blackness did not always relate to a positive experience as challenges were expressed that were perceived as a result of dominant White ideologies at TWU. Participants reported that outside of the coherence offered in their roles as diversity administrators, it was difficult to find places where they could "exist." This feeling was matched with perceptions of unclear descriptions of the participant's administrative identities as inscribed by majority leaders at TWU, resulting in disconnect. Swann and colleagues (2009) posit connectedness as another mode of identity negotiation, where individuals develop positive relations with valued others (p. 5). Themes that speak to the challenges (There has to be Clarity, Reaffirmation of the Totality, Embedded White Dominance/You Know More About Diversity than Me, and Always Being On) expressed by participants in the study support the importance of establishing connectedness in order to achieve identity congruence throughout the negotiation process.

Themes related to identity negotiation strategies in the study also offer meaning and value based on relevant literature. The overarching meaning of the strategies (I had Trust, Developing a Network, In Touch with Students, Let Me Get an Ally, What My HBCU Taught

Me) speaks to the levels of agency that Black administrators assume at TWU. Agency, or sense of competence (Swann et al., 2009), was established by participants in ways that counter the negative perceptions of their identities as Black, which is tied to histories of racism and oppression. Agency was witnessed through participants enacting these strategies to show competence. Positive appraisals from students of color and White colleagues who valued diversity work offered affirmation and agency to participants.

Synthesis of Findings

Themes in the study emerged through a method of critical discourse analysis that involved a step-by-step process of categorizing elements of the data as responses to the guiding research questions using a technique called “typology” (Tracy, 2013). Deeper meaning was made through a three-pronged approach that involved describing, interpreting, and explaining the data (Anya, 2017) as it related to power, negotiation, and identity development of Black administrators at PWIs. The following is a summary of interpretations and findings of the study.

Finding Alignment

Participants in the study were adamant in noting the awareness of their Black identities but were not remiss in mentioning the histories of racism and oppression tied to them. The sense of awareness that they had developed came through various interactions experienced in life, some positive and some not. Through interactions and experiences with immediate and close family, classmates at school, and peers in church and the community; participants reported their Blackness as a salient and personable part of who they were. All the participants referenced that saliency was established early-on in life. As a process of self-verification, participants noted the importance of establishing a sense of pride in who they were personally, mainly because either their parents, elders, or mentors lived in a time of racial segregation in the U.S. and that pain and

discrimination was passed down to them. Some participants mentioned establishing awareness in Blackness in relation to Whites. This experience was referenced through examples in being one of few people of color in either their childhood and adolescent settings and having to come to terms with their Blackness while dealing with the imposed notions of White dominant ideologies, and essentially, racism. Still, Blackness was not seen as an illness nor a negative, but rather a symbol of pride and connection to past experiences with family and friends.

While serving in their administrative roles at TWU, participants mentioned how critical it was for them to find alignment with their past experiences in Blackness. Blackness is a part of their core identity and, therefore, remains with them throughout life. Participants referenced establishing saliency in their administrative identities by describing the functions written into their job descriptions by the university. All seven participants noted aspects of their job to be self-verifying and affirming to their personal identities as Black. As administrators tasked to achieve diversity at TWU, past experiences in dealing with racism and oppression were noted as preparation for performing well in their roles. Participants mentioned being passionate about serving as advocates for underrepresented students because they were able to relate to the student personally. Participants agreed that separating their personal and professional identities was not possible given the nature of the work they do as diversity experts. To maintain passion and drive in the workplace, participants attached themselves to goals and initiatives that resonated as responses to the gaps experienced throughout their own identity development as academics. For instance, the five participants who attended HBCUs each had relationships with administrators at HBCUs and other minority serving institutions (MSIs) where they strategically recruit URM students to TWU for graduate school. Participants noted that they offer a unique sense of personalness to

students who share this experience and then are recruited to TWU, which their White colleagues cannot offer.

Noting the Challenges

Participant reflections offered insights regarding the challenges they face as Black administrators at a PWI. Participants expressed feeling that there was a level of uncertainty about who they were expected to be as administrators as articulated by TWU within job descriptions. The concern over ambiguity in the Black administrative identity was something that each participant mentioned. One participant in the study expressed the need for clarity for Black administrators regarding their identities and shared a major concern in the way that TWU understood its mission for diversity. The uncertainty noted by participants was attributed to non-supportive structures, non-inclusive human resource titles and descriptions, and unclear direction that were all embedded into the culture of TWU.

Another challenge that participants noted was their identities as administrators not being fully recognized or understood by TWU. Tensions in the way that Black administrators at TWU are depicted through formal job descriptions and dominant understandings of a traditional White male leadership structure create the need for a reaffirmation of these identities. One participant mentioned being involved in organizations and committees at TWU where they were able to serve in other capacities outside of the written descriptions of their administrative role. This was offered as an affirming practice that provided them with the opportunity to excel beyond what is expected of them in being known as an administrator charged with achieving diversity. One participant also mentioned the need for being recognized for the “silent” work that is done behind the scenes of the delineated job tasks. Other participants also mentioned feeling undervalued and underappreciated in their roles. Silent work was expressed as being a resource

for students of color at any given time of the day, regardless of what was scheduled on the calendar.

The challenges faced by Black administrators at TWU were articulated by participants as White dominance that embeds cultural practices and creates structures of Whiteness at the institution. This challenge was not presented as unique to TWU, but a characteristic that participants mentioned as the overall culture of PWIs. Participants in the study noted the pressures in feeling like they needed to adhere to the cultural norms and expectations of Whiteness and, as one participant suggested, “to act as White as possible.” Participants also agreed that at TWU, most administrative positions were, created with a White male identity in mind and, therefore, carried expectations and required behaviors that were not connected to their experiences as Black professionals. A major concern raised by participants was the effect of an embedded culture of Whiteness on the professional development opportunities offered to administrators at the institution. One participant mentioned TWU’s history of racism, which they felt forced the institution to create positions for diversity administrators. However, because participants felt that their positions were made from crisis, they questioned any training and development offered to them because of TWU’s homogeneous culture.

Examples of White administrators acting as if they knew more about diversity issues than Black administrators were expressed by the participants as attacks to their personal identities. Participants shared painful accounts of interactions with White colleagues where they felt challenged and undermined in their experiences in being minorities. Many of these attacks were direct and public, during meetings or work-related gatherings. While some were more indirect attacks that were embedded in formal institutional practices such as job performance reviews. Overall, participants noted the challenge in always having to be “on” and adhering to the

behaviors and expectations of embedded Whiteness. Because TWU's external community is so closely connected to campus and the institution, participants expressed feeling like they can never really be themselves, but instead a more polished and "White" version.

Negotiation Strategies

Strategies for negotiating Black administrative identities at a PWI were shared throughout the study. Black administrators at TWU suggested that one of the most important aspects of negotiating their identities was establishing trust. Trust was gained through social networks that participants became a part of in the community at TWU. Having an established sense of trust within social networks offered opportunities for participants to seek guidance in doing their job. The network did not always include other Black people, but trust was something that could also be established in intergroup relationships where individuals are linked through common goals or agendas. One participant mentioned a moment where trust had not been established with another Black woman. In this instance, not being able to maintain trust felt personal to the administrator who was a Black woman herself and caused strain on their professional relationship as well. Participants also noted the importance of developing a network as a similar strategy related to trust. Some networks were gained through organic interactions that took place between various departments and units at TWU, while some participants mentioned being a part of networks tied to professional and academic associations they were a part of.

Another strategy offered by Black administrators at PWIs was finding spaces where both their personal and professional identities could both be performed and, therefore, affirmed. For instance, all the participants were involved in an external group of professionals that coalesced to discuss and address the status of Blacks in the TWU community. As members of the collective,

they can discuss experiences relevant to them while also serving in the capacity of an executive board member. This allows for both the core components of their Blackness and their experiences in leadership to be at the forefront of their presentation of self at the same time. Participants mentioned this to be an affirming experience.

Consistent affirmation of identity is sought by Black administrators at TWU. Participants in the study suggested that one strategy that adds value to their work is being able to be in touch with students of color. As diversity leaders, participants expressed feeling undervalued and less important than other administrators. However, the sense of awareness and pride they each had established in their Blackness offered a unique perspective in the value that they offered to students of color at TWU. Having someone who looks like them, having someone around who speaks their language, and someone who shares their lived experiences, are all Black student perspectives that Black administrators suggested White administrators could not typically provide to students of color. For those in the study who attended HBCUs, recruiting students of color to TWU for graduate school created an opportunity to act in a “care giving” role when they were out representing the institution.

Allyship was another important strategy for Black administrators negotiating their identities. One participant mentioned the importance of gaining a White ally because of the diluted network of Black administrators available to connect with at TWU. As diversity leaders, participants expressed the difficulty in getting everyone else to see the value in the work that they do at a PWI. Participants felt gaining an ally in a White colleague could essentially provide a sort of stepping stool for promoting initiatives and agendas related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Another participant noted that not everyone will have the same response to certain goals, especially just because they are the same race. For instance, one individual may lead in

protest, while another may try a more covert approach. Black administrators at TWU pay attention to these characteristics of others around them in order strategically negotiate their identities.

The last strategy offered to Black administrators is specific to those who have attended an HBCU. Participants in the study who had a collegiate experience at an HBCU continued to be influenced by that experience in their work as administrators at PWIs. Through their HBCU experience participants mentioned a sense of racial belongingness and self-verification that affirmed who they were as Black. Narratives from participants highlighted the appreciation that each of those who attended an HBCU had for the mentors, professionals, and administrators in that space. Participants affectionately gave examples of being inspired by famous Black faculty and administrators at their HBCU. For instance, one participant reminisced on taking a course with a well-known scholar and poet and being enamored by the way this professor dressed and behaved as a professional. Another participant mentioned witnessing a well-known civil rights leader speak while at an HBCU. In both examples, Black administrators noted how influenced they were in their understanding of what it meant to be a Black professional. This speaks to a unique internalization of professionalism that was introduced to them at an HBCU. As administrators at a PWI, they keep these experiences with them and when showing up to be “on” they are tapping into a culture of Blackness that they established early-on in life.

Revisiting Identity Negotiation Theory

The concept of identity negotiation is defined as the processes whereby relationship partners reach agreement regarding “who is who” (Swann et al., 2009, p. 2). In workplace environments, context is an important piece to consider throughout the negotiation process as individuals within are seeking to achieve congruence in their identities as an individual and a professional. Context

is important because, depending on the context, certain people will not be as successful as others in negotiating identity and achieving congruence may not be possible. Throughout the process of identity negotiation, when incongruence emerges, interpersonal relations will be turbulent and difficult and can be detrimental to individuals and the larger organization (Swann et al. 2009, p. 4). Incongruence can affect work outcomes regarding job performance, organizational commitment, withdrawal, turnover, relationship quality, perceived fairness of the organization, and an individual's health and well-being. In contrast, if congruence is achieved throughout the identity negotiation process, it can lead to optimized performance and creativity, as well as foster a sense of connectedness to an organization (Swann et al., 2009, p. 19).

Another often left out, but necessary piece to consider in identity negotiation is an individual's *race*. For instance, scholarship has posited that minorities tend to rely on implicit rather than explicit modes of identity negotiation when they feel that they lack social power (Polzer, Caruso, and Brief, 2008; Polzer, Milton, and Swann, 2002). This study interrogates the modes of negotiation through in-depth exploration of the Black administrative identity development in the context of a PWI. Similar research on identity negotiation in the workplace focuses on specific examples related to establishing *coherence*, *connectedness*, and *agency* to achieve identity congruency (Swann et al., 2009). These components must be iteratively established and achieved through a bonding relationship between the individual and their organization throughout their process of identity negotiation. In what follows, I will revisit these concepts through explanation of how each was either challenged or achieved by participants negotiating their identities in the study.

Coherence

Coherence, or a sense that the world fits with past experiences, is a personal goal for people negotiating their identities (Swann et al., 2009, p. 5). Participants' core and situated identities were aligned at TWU when their experiences in Blackness were related to the work they were engaged in as diversity leaders. Saliency in Blackness was developed early-on in life for the participants in the study and the core components of who they are as minorities came from a history of racism and oppression throughout the U.S. Interactions with Black family members and with peers in school, church, and the community offered self-verification and a sense of pride to the participants as Black people.

Swann et al. (2009) posits that there should be coherence between the different identities that individuals negotiate, both within a single relationship and across multiple relationships (p. 16). Failure to achieve coherence leads to incompatibility and, therefore, incongruence. Participants achieved a level of coherence through serving in diversity positions and affirmed their purpose at a PWI by serving as advocates to students of color. The coherence established between their core and professional identities at TWU benefits them as minorities, as well as the institution. The institution can function efficiently in accordance to policies and protocols that are managed by Black administrators when they have established coherence.

Connectedness

Developing positive relationships with valued others offers the sense of connectedness (Swann et al., 2009, p. 5). For participants in the study, connectedness was achieved through establishing trusted social and professional networks. As professionals in a very close-knit college town, participants relied on external social networks as outlets to the personal challenges faced in a predominantly White space. The low numerical representation of Black administrators at TWU also made it difficult to establish internal social networks that would offer stronger

connections for participants in the study. Instead, Black administrators at TWU chose to engage in strategic professional relationships with White colleagues who could serve as allies and advocates for them as minorities.

Participants indicated feeling undervalued in their roles and provided examples that revealed how their positions were created as a response to diversity issues at TWU. Outside of working in communities of practice focused on diversity, Black administrators felt that they did not even “exist” at TWU because their job descriptions did not speak to their full identities, but instead to a culture of accepted Whiteness. The institutional ambiguity regarding Black administrative identities at TWU created a tension as important parts of Black administrative identities were perceived to be left out to make the dominant White population feel comfortable. Research suggests that violating norms of perceived interpersonal fairness in the organization may undermine feelings of connectedness (Lamertz, 2002; Swann et al., 2009). In this case, the institutional culture had created a disconnection and diminished the sense of belongingness for Black administrators.

Agency

Lastly, individuals in the workplace desire a high-level of agency in order to show competency and effectiveness (Swann et al., 2009). Presenting as competent and establishing agency creates a positive sense of self that is expressed in job performance. However, if individuals fail to perform favorably related to job function, agency is undermined (p. 6). The agency of Black administrators at PWIs already starts at a point of incongruence developing under tensions between their core identity as Black and their situated identity as an administrator in a racialized organization (Ray, 2019). Participants in this study expressed an oppressive culture at TWU that is closely related to what Diane Gusa (2010) coined as “White institutional

presence.” Simply put, at institutions where White people are dominant, a culture of Whiteness becomes embedded in the psychological and physical properties of that space. The presence of Whiteness at TWU creates an inferior positioning of the Black administrative identity leaving their administrative performance and practices up for interpretation.

Another negative impact on the agency of Black administrators at TWU caused by a White institutional presence arises from pressures of feeling that they are to adhere to standards of Whiteness. Participants expressed feeling like they could not respond authentically to situations of adversity because they would be perceived as incompetent, noting the added cultural tax because of their racial identity. In fact, one participant mentioned that that expectation is to “act White as possible.” Furthermore, participants mentioned that they felt expected to perform, dress, and show up in this manner even when they are not at work because if a colleague was to see them dressed down, they may be perceived as incompetent as a professional. These fears matched with the challenges in being a professional of color at an institution structured around a culture of Whiteness further complicate the process of establishing agency for Black administrators.

Study Implications and Recommendations

The study offers theoretical implications, as well as practical recommendations relevant to higher education practice. Organizational theory that investigates the culture of higher education institutions and the various communities within is relevant to the findings in this study. The two theories that provide insight are: “communities of practice” (Kezar, Gehrke, and Bernstein-Sierra, 2017; Lester and Kezar, 2017; Kezar, 2011) and “institutional work” (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Ziestma and Lawrence, 2010). Practical

recommendations from the study are relevant to the experiences of those who served as participants, and therefore, are specific to Black administrators at PWIs.

Theoretical Implications

Communities of practice (CoP) in higher education represent a collective of voluntary groups where members share a passion and individual interest in the promotion of knowledge and learning through interactions with colleagues both in and outside their disciplines (Kezar, Gehrke, and Bernstein-Sierra, 2017). Within these individual groups, members become connected by a common task or agenda and are motivated to bring out the community's internal direction, character, and energy (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002). Leaders of higher education institutions, like the administrators in the study, serve as stewards within CoP and provide guidance towards achieving the community's overall goal.

The findings in this study support the notion that CoP involve a variety of multifaceted dimensions of knowledge that requires the engagement of multiple actors (Kezar, Gehrke, and Bernstein-Sierra, 2017). For instance, participants in the study were adamant in making "strategic professional connections" with White colleagues as allies. As achieving diversity was the shared goal for Black administrators in the study, participants were strategic in identifying non-people of color that valued this goal to invite within their community. This ultimately benefitted CoP focused on diversity, but as an institutional goal the entire TWU community benefitted from these strategic relationships as more support and leverage were offered.

Further evidence to delineate the principles and practices of CoP (Kezar, Gehrke, and Bernstein-Sierra, 2017) was produced by this study. The principles and practices that were enacted at TWU were: (a) naturally evolved community, (b) opportunities for open dialogue with outside perspectives, (c) welcomed different levels of participation, (d) developed both public

and private community spaces, (e) combined familiarity and excitement, and (f) created a regular rhythm within community (p. 220-221). However, the one principle that was not fully achieved and should be considered as it relates to theory is “a focused value on the community.” While Black administrators mentioned feeling motivated to do their job, participants also expressed feeling undervalued by the overall institutional community and felt inferior to their White colleagues. Therefore, it is important for TWU to consider creating an environment where Black administrators feel valued and motivated to work towards achieving goals within their CoP.

Another theoretical implication of this study is related to the theory of institutional work (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Ziestma and Lawrence, 2010). Institutional work is the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). Participants’ CoP in the study and the work they do towards achieving diversity at TWU is an example of institutional work. The theory was born from the concept of neo-institutionalism, which was introduced by Meyer and Rowan (1977), in their conceptualization of “rationalized myths,” which are myths that stem from traditions and practices constructed within organizations in order to achieve their goals. This work was extended to include the concept of “isomorphism” where institutions respond to external and internal pressures by imitating others who are deemed successful, attuning to cultural expectations and dependencies, and developing norms that are further legitimized through formal education (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). However, the issue of neo-institutional theory in general is that it offers macro-level explanations for phenomena that implicitly involve individual behaviors and neglects to provide a basis for the construction of a theory of individual behavior (Battilana, 2006, p. 670).

Scholarship that does focus on the individual behaviors related to institutional work is supported within this study. Most specifically is the work offered by social change scholar, Julie Battilana on the theory of *embedded agency*. Battilana (2006) posited that an individual's ability and access to 'agency' fluctuates given their organizational and social group status. Findings in this study support how race can have an impact on the agency of an individual, as Black administrators at PWIs naturally hold a minoritized positioning in comparison to White colleagues because of the histories of racism and colonialism in the U.S. (Wright, Taylor, Burrell, and Stewart, 2006). Because individual, organizational, and institutional dynamics are always interrelated (Battilana, 2006) it is important to consider the effects of an individuals' race on the embedded agency they can achieve.

As members of minoritized groups, participants in the study offered various challenges to and strategies for achieving embedded agency. Challenges support the notion that an individual's social position will influence the access they have to enact agency (Battilana, 2006). Because of the social positioning of participants' identities as Black, challenges were perceived to be a result of Whiteness that dominated TWU's practices. The perceived Whiteness created the opportunity to engage in divergent change³⁵ at TWU, where Black administrators adopted strategies that were specific to increasing the agency they have as minorities.

Practical Recommendations

The study was designed to interrogate the experiences of Black administrators negotiating their identities at a PWI. Participant narratives were compiled into pieces of discourse from data collected in semi-structured interviews, Black administrative

³⁵ Divergent change is change that is not typical within the dominant structure or response to policy and/or practice in an organization. Individuals who are belong to lower status social groups are more likely to conduct divergent change than individuals in high status social groups (Battilana, 2006).

autobiographies, selected biographies/job descriptions, and observations. Recommendations offered in the study serve as defining experiences of Black administrators negotiating their identities at PWIs. Findings revealed that Black administrators are not part of the institution in the same ways as White colleagues because of the histories of racism and oppression that infiltrate institutions of higher education and situate Black identities as inferior. Also, because the process of identity negotiation at PWIs is prompted by incongruency of entering a racialized organization (Ray, 2019), Black administrators navigate their identities in ways that are specific to their experiences as members of minoritized groups. The following recommendations provide insight into their negotiation process.

1. **Seek positions that provide coherence to aspects of core identity.** Black administrators should look for jobs and positions that have functions that align with past experiences. When there is not alignment incongruence will occur and can affect an individual's job performance and commitment to their institution. Alignment with past experiences in life, or coherence (Swann et al., 2009) requires an honoring of the Black administrative identity at PWIs. Black administrators with capacity to do so should also negotiate to create such positions and ensure that job descriptions do not follow normative ideologies.
2. **Demand clarity from institution/supervisor in your role.** To foster clarity of identities, organizational leaders should promote a culture in which organizational roles, and the behaviors associated with them, are clearly delineated (Swann et al., 2009). Black administrators should have clear goals for doing their job effectively and be invited into the process of defining roles and the terms of successful performance.
3. **Engage in strategic relationships.** Strategic relationships with White colleagues are necessary. In order to maintain a positive health and well-being in their personal identity,

Black administrators should be strategic in the ways they engage with professional others.

4. **Establish trust in networks.** Trust is required in networks and must be established and maintained within interpersonal relationships for the collective to be successful.

Therefore, trust becomes a politicized endeavor for every individual in the network as they work towards achieving a shared goal that benefits the whole. The greater the trust among a group, the more effective cooperative efforts are towards a common goal (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007). Black administrators should seek to establish trust in their professional networks, which may lead to a deeper sense of collaboration and, therefore, connectedness to their institution.

5. **Understand the system is racialized.** The experiences of Black administrators at PWIs negotiating their identities are tied to histories of racism and oppression that are insidious throughout higher education institutions in the U.S. It is important to be aware of these histories and the influence they have in creating structures and systems that maintain distinctions among racial categories. It is also important to understand the hierarchies of race that develop out of these distinctions and how certain races are privileged economically, politically, and socially.

Future Research

This study was designed under the scope of qualitative traditions that offered methods for collecting and analyzing data related to interviews, discourse analysis, and observations. Future research could attempt to explore the process of identity negotiation using quantitative methods of surveys, polls, and questionnaires. A particular interest would be collecting quantifiable data to compare the experience of Black administrators across various institutions on a wider scale.

However, maintaining the current design offers opportunities to explore the different levels of administrative position (low, mid, high) with focus on one level.

Future research would interrogate the levels of administrative positioning and how these are determined at the onset of organization development as “racialized.” Borrowing from Ray’s (2019) conceptualization of racialized organizations, would be an important addition to understanding the complexities of negotiating minoritized identities at PWIs and the levels of legitimate participation³⁶ that is offered to them within. Studies as such should consider implications offered above and recommendations for studying individual identities within, rather than the macro-level identities of organizations. An example of analysis that focuses on tensions at the individual-level of the administrator is presented in Dowd and Elmore (2019) through their use of vignettes to explore the experiences of administrators participating in individual processes of decision-making, while serving the needs of a collective.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to interrogate the experiences of Black administrators negotiating their identities at a PWI. Collectively, participants in the study represented various levels of administration. Participants also varied in age, gender, and time at the institution providing a wide range of experiences and insights regarding the Black administrative experience. Seven participants individually sat through semi-structured interviews that each lasted about 1-hour. Transcriptions of these interviews served as pieces of discourse that were analyzed and compared to 7 individually written Black administrative autobiographies (between 3-7 pages each), 7 individually selected biographies/job descriptions, and 2 observations that lasted 1-hour each. Findings revealed that Black administrators are not a part of the institution

³⁶ Legitimate participation relates to the ways in which newcomers begin to learn the behaviors and expectations of their roles from those already respected within an organization (See Lave and Wenger, 2001).

and its culture in the same way that they perceive White administrators to be and the identity negotiation experience is one that is racialized.

As a conceptual framework, critical race theory was used throughout the study to maintain a focus on race, racism, and power and to provide the narrative of the Black administrator that counters the master narratives imposed on their identities. Black administrative narratives created in this study offer a space for Black voices to be included in higher education literature. The perspectives that Black administrators add to the literature is a step in the right direction towards affirming who they are as institutional leaders.

This study can offer important insights for PWIs regarding their leadership structures and the expectations and behaviors for administrators within. Findings from the study can be most helpful in understanding the identity development of professionals who are members of minoritized groups. As the landscape of higher education continues to grow into an arena involving diverse knowledge and identities, it is important that we consider how to further support that diversity.

In conclusion, PWIs in the U.S. are not isolated spaces and, if anything, we must begin to acknowledge the history of racism and oppression that is still present at institutions as such. Black administrators are an important to PWIs, not only because they support students of color in ways that White administrators cannot, but also because they are experts in more things than “diversity” and we should do more as a collective to ensure that their identities are supported.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Script: Negotiation of Identity Among Black Administrators at PWIS

Greetings [Multicultural/Equity Leader],

My name is Branden D. Elmore, and I am a third-year, PhD Candidate in the Higher Education program, at the Pennsylvania State University. I am conducting a research study examining the identity negotiation of Black administrators at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). If you meet the participation criteria: a) Identify with Black racial identity, b) Hold an administrative position at a PWI, and c) Are within a community of practice focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, I would like to extend an invitation for you to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in:

- Providing a 1-3 page autobiography that speaks to your Black administrative identity and experiences in negotiating aspects of your professional and personal identities;
- Providing 1-2 paragraphs of a selected personal administrative bio;
- An individualized audiotaped interview anticipated to take no longer than 1 hour;
- No more than 2 observations of your already planned administrator meetings where I will visit to observe you in your role.

I am interested in learning more about your experience as an administrator at a predominantly white institution, and most importantly, your experiences in negotiating important parts of your identity while acting in your role. All aspects of participation are important to my goal of gaining more insights into the ways that Black administrators can be most successful at PWIs.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant and the identity of anyone mentioned within or outside your community will remain anonymous during and after the study. I will provide pseudonyms for you, your institution, your office/department, members of your community, and any affiliated networks you reference throughout.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me via email at bde9@psu.edu.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Mr. Branden D. Elmore, MA
PhD Candidate, Higher Education
The Pennsylvania State University

APPENDIX B

Black Administrative Identity Negotiation: Informed Consent

Title of Study: Identity Negotiation Among Black Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?

This study is being conducted by Branden D. Elmore, a Doctoral Candidate in the Penn State University Higher Education Program.

What is the purpose of this research study?

To explore the negotiations of identity that Black administrators experience while serving in administrative roles at PWIs.

Who will be in this research study?

The participants focused throughout the research process are those who (1) identify as Black; (2) work in administrative role at a PWI; and, (3) are in a similar community of practice at the institution.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?

You will be asked to provide a Black Administrative Autobiography in the form of a 1-3 page write-up that conveys your experiences in negotiating your identity as an administrator. You will also be asked to provide a 1-2 paragraph administrator bio. In addition, you will be asked to participate in an interview. During that time, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences in negotiating your identities as an administrator at a PWI. You will also be asked questions about your experiences in interacting with the institution, colleagues, and the academic community at large. The entire process will last up to 1 hour. Finally, I will attend and observe 2 planning meetings where you act in your role as administrator.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?

The risk is not expected to be more than you would have in daily life. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all your responses will only be used to narrate the Black administrative experience throughout the study.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

You will probably not get any direct benefit from being in this study. However, your participation may help yield important insights for alternative processes for negotiations of identity in a dominant space.

What will you get because of being in this research study?

You will not be paid or given anything to take part in this study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?

If you do not want to take part in this research study you may simply not participate. You have a choice whether or not for particular aspects of your comments in the interview to be used in the final report. However, there is a place at the end of this paper to mark your choice.

How will your research information be kept confidential?

Information about you will be kept between myself as the researcher and you as the participant. Only information that you agree speaks to your experience will be placed in the final report.

Data collected from your interview will be kept in a safe and trusted storage database provided to Penn State affiliates and kept secure through personal ID access. Your consent documents will be kept securely and separately. Federal law requires that we keep your consent documents for at least three years after the study ends.

The data will be stored indefinitely and I reserve the right to use this data for future research purposes. Also, if the data from this research study becomes published you have the opportunity to co-author and, therefore, be identified by name.

Agents of Penn State University may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

What are your legal rights in this research study?

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Branden D. Elmore, PhD Candidate, Higher Education, Pennsylvania State University (bde9@psu.edu).

The Penn State Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the Penn State IRB at (814) 865-1775. Or, you may call the Penn State VP for Research at (814) 863 9580, or write to the IRB, 330 Building, Ste 205, University Park, PA 16802, or email the IRB office at irb-orp@psu.edu.

Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?

No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip any questions that you don't want to answer.

You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Branden D. Elmore at bde9@psu.edu.

Agreement:

I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

YES, you may use my comments from the interview

NO, I do NOT want you to use my comments from the interview

Participant Name (please print) _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

BLACK ADMINISTRATIVE IDENTITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

THANK YOU for participating in my research project. Findings from this study will help me in the examination of negotiations of identity among Black administrators at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and provide insights to answer questions posed within my dissertation proposal. The data source collection process for this project requires that all study participants write a Black administrative identity autobiography.

What is a Black administrative identity?

Your racial and ethnic identity as Black is a part of who you are. However, your professional identity of being and becoming an administrator also becomes a part of who you are. Both of these identities therefore become a part of your behavior as you engage in daily interactions and processes that require you negotiate between the two.

What is a Black administrative identity autobiography?

It is a personal account of an individual's life experiences in constantly negotiating between and within the two (Black and administrator).

How long or "fancy" should the Black administrative identity autobiography be?

Length varies among individuals. People usually write as many pages as it takes to tell a complete, detailed, and descriptive story. For this project, I ask for AT LEAST THREE DOUBLESPPACED PAGES. As for style or presentation, please do not worry. This autobiography is not for a grade, nor to judge your writing skills. I just want to learn about your background and experiences in identity negotiation.

What should I include in my Black administrative identity autobiography?

Every autobiography is unique and tells the individual story of one learner's experience. Your particular story might include:

- Your family background, where you're from, what parts of you identity mean(t) the most at home, similar aspects of your parents' or siblings' identities, familiarity or connections to identities in your neighborhood
- Experiences in being Black in elementary school, high school, college or informal experiences among friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, caregivers
- How you were taught administrator identities at the institution, how you personally learned (or not), your strategies to succeed or just survive in performing these identities; favorite mentors, experiences, professional developments
- What motivated or interested you to become an administrator, or conversely, what bored or turned you off
- Spaces within current role where you have to perform the administrative identity the most
- Contact/interactions with other administrators both in and outside of the institution
- Friendships and romances with both other Black colleagues, administrators, etc.
- Knowledge of or exposure to the administrator identity via institutional language (job description, expectations, titles you hold)
- Feelings of identification with, or perhaps, estrangement/social distance from White administrators
- Racial, cultural, ethnic, gender, issues related to expressing yourself or engaging other administrators (whether similar or different identities)
- Desires and plans for future employment, future promotions, continued engagement as an administrator

(consider, "Would you remain at a PWT"?)

These are only ideas and suggestions for topics to include in your Black administrative identity autobiography. What you eventually write should be about what, in your opinion, is most relevant to say about or how you feel you should best describe your particular journey in negotiating between and within the two identities.

Will my name be used when discussing this autobiography?

ABSOLUTELY NOT! Nothing about the participants in this study that can potentially identify them to others will be seen or known by anyone but me. All names will be changed and your contact info, never revealed.

By what date should I complete and submit my autobiography?

Please email your autobiography in an attached MS Word document to bde9@psu.edu as soon as you can, but by no later than midnight on **[DATE]**.

THANK YOU once again for helping me with this inquiry. If you have any questions whatsoever, please email me at bde9@psu.edu.

I LOOK FORWARD TO LEARNING ABOUT YOUR
JOURNEY IN NEGOTIATING YOUR IDENTITIES AS A
BLACK ADMINISTRATOR!

APPENDIX D
BLACK ADMINISTRATOR IDENTITY NEGOTIATION
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I am interested in learning more about your experience as an administrator at a predominantly white institution and most importantly, your experiences in negotiating important parts of your identity while acting in your role. The purpose of this interview is to understand more in-depth the ways in which you navigate your identity as a _____ within this space. This is all a part of a bigger study in which I hope to gain more insights into the ways that Black administrators can be most successful at majority institutions.

I expect to use what I learn from the interviews to:

- Better understand the identity negotiation process for Black administrators
- Make connections to broader aspects of institutional and academic culture that either impede or support the identity development process
- Interrogate the ways in which certain minoritized identities are not supported within the academy and provide recommendations to counter these issues

Since the information shared here is being used as a part of my data collection, I will follow IRB practice around interviews. Meaning that:

- The interviews are individualized and all information will remain confidential. You will not be identified in materials that stem from the research process and your comments may be in the final report only with your approval. I will be sure to check with you throughout this interview for any information that you would not like to be included in the final report. I respect our relationship and seek to maintain the highest standards of confidentiality as possible at all times.
- Also, it is important to note that your participation is voluntary. This means that you may withdraw from the interview at any given time or skip any questions that I ask.

To assist me in capturing and accurately portraying your responses, I would like to audio-record this interview. Do I have your permission to do so?

The interview should take about 1 hour.

Before the interview begins, are there any questions that you have?

Interview Questions

I would like to begin by asking you to state your name and title/role at _____ (INSTITUTION).

Thank you, now for a few general questions.

1. What kinds of things do you do as [INSERT TITLE] (t)here?
2. How long have you been in this role as [INSERT TITLE]?
3. In what ways would you describe you own personal or social identities being a part of this role?

(This is a conversational start to help put the interviewees at ease. This helps to set the tone for the interview by placing the interviewee's identity as an administrator at the forefront. This introduction is important towards understanding how they interpret their role.)

Coherence around Institutional Logics and Ideologies of Admin Roles

4. How would your institution describe your role as an administrator?
 - a. What behaviors are expected of you?
 - b. In what ways do (did) they communicate your role? (job descriptions, compensation agreements, expectations)
5. Can you describe any formal trainings or socialization engagements where you have to enact these behaviors as communicated by your institution?
6. In what ways do you feel that your own ideologies and beliefs (personal identities) are congruent with how the institution has characterized and communicated your role?

Personal Experiences and Identities

7. What are your own personal goals and aspirations as an administrator?
8. Where do you feel most connected at the institution?
 - a. Most disconnected?
9. Can you give an example of an oppressive moment or where you felt your personal identity was attacked while doing your job?
 - a. What about your identity as an administrator? Which was most affected?
 - b. Consider a successful moment where you felt most supported or connected as a minority.

Achieving Agency while Navigating as a Black Administrator

- c. In your experience, what are some of the barriers to success faced by minority administrators?
 - a. What strategies have you used to address these barriers, and how successful were those strategies?
 - d. Where (or how) have you gained the most support and guidance in your role?
 - e. What general advice would you give to a newly positioned administrator in order to be successful in their role and perform?

Closing Questions

- b. If you were to be doing in any other type position or role at the institution you are at, what would it be and why?
- c. Are there any questions or final thoughts that you have that I have not covered?

APPENDIX E**OBSERVATION GUIDE:**

Meeting _____

Observation #:	
Event/Setting Observed:	
Date and Time of Observation:	
Location of Observation:	

Purpose of observation:**Significance or importance of observation:****Brief summary of observation:****Where might this observation lead?** (Consider connections to power, institutional culture/identity, administrator's professional and personal identities):**Observation Field Notes:**

VITA

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EDUCATION

Pennsylvania State University, August 2020 PhD, Higher Education <i>Bunton-Waller Fellow</i>	State College, PA
University of Cincinnati, May 2016 M.A., Communication Studies	Cincinnati, OH
Fayetteville State University, May 2014 B.A., Communication Certificate, Professional Writing <i>FSU Honors Program</i> <i>Ronald E. McNair Scholar</i>	Fayetteville, NC

PUBLISHED RESEARCH

MA Thesis, Advisor: Dr. Ronald Jackson
University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH May 2016

- **Elmore, B.** "Using Situational Crisis Communication Theory to Interrogate a PWIs Response to a Campus Racial Crisis", This Study Analyzed University of Cincinnati Administrators and Their Responses to the Death of Samuel Dubose

PUBLISHED ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRIES

- Jackson, R., **Elmore, B.** (2017). Cultural Contracts. *International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*
- Jackson, R., **Elmore, B.** (2017). Black Masculinity. *International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*

PUBLISHED CHAPTERS

- Dowd, A., **Elmore, B.** (2019). Leadership for Equity-Minded Data Use Towards Racial Equity in Higher Education. In Kezar, A., Posselt, J. (Eds.), *Administration for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education: Critical Perspectives for Leadership and Decision Making* (Ch. 10). Routledge.

UPCOMING CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- Dinkins, T. C., **Elmore, B. D.**, & Preston, S. D. (March 2020). Understanding Identity Development When Working Through Hierarchical, Generational, and Racial Tensions. NASPA, Austin, TX.
- Dowd, A., Watts, A., **Elmore, B.** (TBD). Politics and Performance: Neoliberalism and the Logics of Racial Disposability in Performing Arts Programming. AERA, San Francisco, CA.