

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SUCCESS FACTORS OF AFRICAN AMERICA MEN  
IN EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN  
ARKANSAS HIGHER EDUCATION

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SUCCESS FACTORS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MEN IN EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN  
ARKANSAS HIGHER EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

I would like to thank my best friend, cheerleader, encourager, coach and wife, Andrea. Thank you for encouraging me to go back to college and pursue my education. I never imagined that conversation would result in the many wonderful things we have experienced. Thank you for being patient as I have struggled balancing many demands to complete this project. I am indebted to you for carrying much of the responsibility for taking care of our busy family, managing our active home, and still being supportive. I would not be who I am without you...it goes without saying; I love you very much and am blessed to be sharing life with you. Now it is my turn to cheer you on. I can't wait to see all that you accomplish as you take the next step in your journey.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The many civil rights leaders of the 1960s optimistically hoped that with the demise of once officially-sanctioned forms of segregation and discrimination, black males would have increased access to the mainstream of American society (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007). Specifically, the early leaders expected that blacks would be in a better position in every way—financially, psychologically, legally—to sustain viable marriages and families. Instead, a number of black males find themselves in bleak situations, with minimal numbers fully exploiting the opportunity of higher education, one of the premier catalysts to success.

Daniel (2007) asserts that changing demographics in America have contributed to the rapid diversification of higher education institutions. According to Becker, Krodel, and Tucker (2009), institutions of higher education are invaluable forces for community change through both students and the engagement and advancement of the larger community. For African American youth, there remain a number of factors related to their ability to achieve academic success. This success, at the earliest of their academic careers, is vital as it ultimately impacts African Americans' ability to succeed at the highest level of academia.

Conversely, one would find it very challenging to demonstrate or measure the desire of a human being to consciously choose to not succeed in life. While the definition of success is very broad and somewhat contextual based on culture and time, it can be assumed individuals possess some desire to achieve –something.” Some examples might include earning a living in support of a family or completing a college education. More

practically, it may include something as simple as surviving the streets of south central Los Angeles beyond age 18, or learning how to read. Regardless, individuals have an innate motivation to accomplish or succeed at something during the brief period they occupy earth. According to Maxwell (2007), success is defined as finding a way to contribute to the welfare of others, or becoming all one can be with the goal of helping others be all they can be.

For one particular group, African American males, success is a phrase that has escaped many who have fallen prey to the stereotypical thought of at least a segment of society. In spite of the fact that the majority of the nation and global community have witnessed and embraced the election of America's first President of color, large numbers of African American men continue to struggle to escape the constraints of a culture of underachievement. Unfortunately, the number of African American males fighting academic underachievement and, ultimately, failure remains staggering.

Examining this phenomenon is crucial to creating proactive strategies aimed at multiplying the success of African American men from various arenas of society and minimizing the tendency of African American men to point any and all of their failures to one of society's most consistent nemises, racism (Ballentine & Roberts, 2010). It would be thoughtless to imply that racism does not exist, as it clearly does. However, some of America's most prominent civil rights leaders invested great energy in fighting for an America that would simply recognize and accept individuals because of their strengths, discipline and work ethic, not merely their race.

One of the keys to such success is education and, more specifically, higher education. According to Hall and Rowan (2001), African American males have

historically failed in higher education for various reasons including but not limited to racism and various other forms of oppression. Although it is not the exclusive cause of failure, the manifestations of racism are deeply rooted in the American psyche and are reflected in the practices and policies, however subtle, of higher education today” (p. 3).

According to Crawford and Smith (2005), minority faculty and administrators often face significant barriers on predominantly White campuses. These barriers frequently include feelings of loneliness, isolation, racially motivated discrimination, and other challenges that inhibit their academic career success and tenure. In Crawford and Smith’s opinion, America’s academic leadership does not appropriately reflect America’s racial and class diversity as the country stands on the cusp of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, organizational and leadership authorities suggested for an organization to remain relevant and functional it must be attuned to changes in its surrounding environment and possess a willingness to make adjustments deemed most necessary for survivability, effectiveness and relevance (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Morgan, 1997).

While such change may be a reality in the mind of the theorist, the suggested philosophy has yet to be adopted and implemented by the practitioners of a large number of educational systems across America. Arguably, this continued struggle could simply be a by-product of social reproduction, whereas a society has an innate ability to reproduce after itself (Kaufman, 2005). Morgan (1997) detailed the vital functions of an open system by metaphorically describing it as a living organism, dependent upon positive interaction with its environment as a means of safeguarding survivability. Morgan further introduced a term pertinent to the discussion of diversity of education leadership known as requisite variety. Morgan asserted that

Related to the idea of differentiation and integration is the principle of requisite variety, which states that the internal regulatory mechanisms of a system must be as diverse as the environment with which it is trying to deal. For only by incorporating required variety into internal controls can a system deal with the variety and challenge posed by its environment. Any system that insulates itself from the diversity in the environment tends to atrophy and lose its complexity and distinctive nature. Thus, requisite variety is an important feature of living systems of all kinds. (p. 112)

This philosophy speaks directly to issues related to diversity in America and, specifically, diversity within the leadership structures of America's education system. Some would argue that our current education system failed to maintain an appropriate requisite variety within its leadership ranks, resulting in a lack of internal controls capable of dealing with the variety and challenges posed by the current environment, which is rapidly becoming diverse. One may question whether such a small representation of people of color has perpetuated leadership structures that lack sensitivity to the needs of diverse student populations. Furthermore, it is conceivable that the hallowed halls of academia will continue to produce leaders and systems ill-equipped to effectively deal with the unique challenges of educating people of color. However, this challenge can be addressed through knowledge sharing about the unique needs of the diverse groups frequenting our college campuses. This is a paramount issue with far-reaching impact as the low number of African American leaders within America's higher education system has direct impact on the number of African American leaders in other sectors of society. Objectively, one could argue these shortcomings are simply the result of unprecedented growth and dramatic shifting of our population. It is conceivable these shortcomings are the by-product of a system not willing to make the necessary adjustments in response to changes within its host environment. Notwithstanding, low numbers of African American leaders

in our education leadership structure remains a challenge as America continues to rapidly diversify.

Population diversity in growing countries is not uncommon. In the case of America, it is tremendously important to consider a phenomenon known as the “Browning of America;” that is, the increasing number of people of color that now call America home. This trend has the proclivity to drastically impact various facets of America’s economic and social structures. Moreover, the economic and academic conditions of America’s minority groups, to include people of color, will undoubtedly influence the economy as a whole. According to Trombley (2004), by 2050, nearly half of the U.S. population will be comprised of non-white citizens. The earning potential of citizens entering today’s workforce directly impacts each citizen of the country. As such, it is vitally important to meticulously examine the issues related to meeting the needs of our diverse population, particularly, our student populations, and ultimately, the professors and administrators responsible for the development of these future generations. Specifically, it is incumbent on academic leaders to develop initiatives aimed at bringing minority education and professional achievement to a level of equity and excellence if America’s workforce and industry are to remain competitive in the global marketplace.

Current research suggested a lack of interest among minorities in education related occupations. However, the lack of interest in educated careers may simply be a symptom of a much broader and complex problem plaguing the African American community as a whole. Schiele (2000) suggested that a perennial challenge faced by African Americans is that of cultural oppression. Schiele further implied that:

Much of the attention, however, devoted to unraveling the effects of oppression on African Americans has attributed African American social problems to oppression's political and economic dimensions. Although underscoring the role these dimensions play in fostering the injustices experienced by African Americans is critically important, it is just as significant to link these dimensions to cultural oppression and to conceive cultural oppression as a foundation for explaining high societal vulnerability of African Americans. (p. 207)

Schiele further asserts that cultural oppression has produced three risk factors: a) cultural estrangement, b) attenuation of Black collectivism, and c) spiritual alienation that diminished African American's ability to advance and prosper in the United States. Additionally, Schiele suggests ~~these~~ factors place African Americans at high risk of experiencing continued obstacles toward group affirmation and empowerment (2005, p.806).

According to Kambon (1992, 1998), the primary implication of cultural estrangement is the phenomenon of cultural misorientation whereby some African Americans mentally affirm and embrace the traditions and customs of European American culture. In the opinion of Kambon, these traditions differ, somewhat, from that of African Americans, while also denigrating African American traditions and customs. Kambon further suggests that ~~cultural misorientation~~ "precludes African Americans from knowing, accepting, and validating their traditional cultural worldviews while concomitantly placing them at risk of internalizing pejorative messages and images about their history and their homeland, and, by extension, themselves (Kambon, 1992, 1998; Schiele, 2000). Adopting and internalizing these messages has major implications for the advancement of African Americans. Initially, internalization can generate a sense of ethnic self-depreciation, commonly referred to as low cultural, ethnic, or racial esteem

(Belgrave et al., 1994; Brooks, 1996; Jacobs & Bowles, 1988). Kambon further suggests that:

Low cultural, ethnic, or racial esteem can prevent African Americans from viewing their ethnic heritage favorably and from providing the cultural nurturance necessary for developing maximum group self-confidence and self-pride. Without optimal group self-confidence and self-pride, the ability to acquire an independent spirit vital in establishing and sustaining social and economic structures that promote a group's interests and interpretations is minimized. (p. 207)

Additionally, cultural estrangement relates to psychological distortions of low cultural, ethnic, or racial esteem for African Americans. This puts African Americans at risk of viewing the culture and history of European Americans as supreme and universal, thus denying society the opportunity of experiencing the richness of African American culture in its purest form (Kambon, 1998). The potential danger is that African Americans may develop the belief that European Americans have constructed the most advanced civilizations and have special intellectual talents not possessed by others, thus creating a sense of worthlessness regarding major contributions to America's educational, political, and economic structures. In summation, cultural estrangement may restrain many African Americans from acknowledging the presence and importance of their human particularity, thus hindering the group's ability and willingness to share and educate others about the unique experiences and perspective of African American men as related to the shaping of human history. Furthermore, estrangement hinders the development of institutions that infuse interpretive frameworks and allow for the protection of a group's political and economic interests.

### *Black Collectivism*

In the opinion of Kambon (1998), the perceived opposition to African American advancement has compelled African Americans to coalesce and work toward common

goals of racial equality and justice, hence the term Black collectivism. Kambon further asserted this opposition may have created substantial tension among African Americans to sustain a sense of solidarity and a collective focus. Moreover, issues of racial inequality, access to wealth, education, cultural esteem, and social status associated with cultural oppression may place many African Americans at risk for compromising the overall vision of group advancement for personal gain. There are at least two forces that continue to be reinforced by cultural oppression, further attenuating the collective focus of African Americans. These forces are material deprivation and internal class stratification.

Material deprivation is the lack of items deemed as “necessities” by the majority of a population (Townsend, 1979). More specifically, items considered as necessity are the basis for measurement of the extent of one’s poverty. Meaning that, the fewer “necessities” an individual possesses, the greater the level of poverty (Townsend, 1979). Material deprivation is one of several factors impacting internal class stratification.

According to Ballantine and Roberts (2010), stratification refers to how people and groups are layered or ranked in society based on the possession of valued resources. Additionally, Ballantine and Roberts assert the existence of three assumptions that impact the stratification process. These factors are (a) people are divided into ranked categories; (b) there is unequal distribution of desired resources; and (c) each society determines what it deems a valued resource. In addition to material deprivation and internal class stratification, America’s Black community also continues to struggle with issues of political, economic, and social disenfranchisement.

According to Crawford and Smith (2005), although we have crossed the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the makeup of our nation's employers does not adequately reflect the racial diversity of America. According to Hill (1997), there is a significant disparity between Black and White Americans regarding the perception of racial barriers and employment discrimination. In the opinion of Davis (1994), diversity is a permanent fact of life in American society. However, despite its growing importance in the past decades, America continues to struggle to accept it as such. Furthermore, Davis contended that the struggle has been most conspicuous on the campuses of our institutions of higher learning. She asserts,

The surprising news is that people of color now constitute almost a quarter of America's undergraduate student body and are its fastest growing component. The disturbing news is that as this proportion of students grows, the number of racial conflicts on campus grows as well. This inevitably leads to conflict, requiring astute leadership from campus administrators. Just as we celebrate the increased presence of people of color in the student body, we bemoan their scarcity in leadership positions at colleges and universities, as well as the heightened pressures and challenges they must contend with in these turbulent times. (p. xi)

Moreover, there is the existence of some contention among college administrators on the number of qualified minority candidates to fill vacant administrative positions (Bridges, 1996). Some argue this is the result of discriminatory practices imbedded within the hierarchy of higher education, further addressed as a lack of social justice.

Social justice focuses on gaining and retaining the rights of individuals. More specifically, social justice seeks to attain and maintain equitable opportunities for underrepresented groups (Marshall & Gerstl-Peppin, 2005). Generally, these underrepresented groups include racial minorities. According to Marshall and Gerstl-Peppin, minority access to opportunities, specifically education, has shaped the

challenges facing schools over decades, even centuries. Conversely, until recently, changing political agendas at the state and local levels have resulted in increased opportunities for minorities. History records civil rights, equal employment opportunity, and affirmative action policies were developed and implemented with the strategic goal of ensuring underrepresented groups experienced some level of equity with regard to employment and education. Marshall and Gerstl-Peppin asserted that such efforts help eliminate differences between the minority and the majority. Additionally, Marshall and Gerstl-Peppin offered that

The ideal of the just society as eliminating group differences is both unrealistic and undesirable. Instead, justice in a group-differentiated society demands social equality of groups, and mutual recognition and affirmation of group differences. Attending to group-specific needs and providing for group representation both promotes that social equality and provides that recognition that undermines cultural imperialism. (p. 72)

The broader intent of such policies was to enhance the social and economic conditions of minorities by addressing issues of access and social representation. Brennan and Naidoo (2008) add that policies addressing social justice at the higher education level primarily tackle two principle functions: selection and socialization. Selection involves the filling of positions within the ranks of the economic, political, and social elites while socialization broaches the topics of equipping the selected with the ability to perform proficiently while simultaneously convincing the rest of society of the equity involved in the selection process. Additionally, Brennan and Naidoo suggest the overall philosophical approach of social justice policies is to facilitate an open society characterized by high levels of social mobility reflecting the relationship between ability and opportunity, thus providing equity and opportunity for all members of society.

While numerous initiatives have been undertaken, the necessity for social justice through policy and accountability remains. Notwithstanding, one group in particular, Black males, continues to demonstrate the existence of the disparity among the various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, thus prompting the evolution of additional policies to ensure that no group of people is forced to abort the cultural distinctiveness, language, and values that would further enrich our society.

Unfortunately, Black males embody a number of the factors that place them at a tremendous disadvantage within the realms of higher education and the global labor market. This embodiment is manifested in the form of lower educational attainment, high rates of crime, and astronomical incarceration statistics. Juxtaposed by existing stereotypical thinking that is still prevalent, these alarming statistics only serve as a reminder that there remains much to be accomplished in the arena of educating the Black male, as well as educating society about the Black male. The lack of prominent Black male influence has left Black Americans to believe they have fewer national leaders whose charisma or plans stimulated them to challenge the extant social system. According to McClellan (2006), this phenomenon is unfortunate because many Americans are not exposed to Black men in the role of worker, husband, father, mentor, spiritual leader, educator, and community leader. This exposure could come by way of relationships and connections formed through mentorship which is a process of connecting an individual to a person of superior rank, experience, and outstanding achievement for the purpose of sharing social capital through modeling appropriate behavior (Savage, Karp & Logue, 2004).

To address the phenomenon from a modern perspective, McClellan (2006) offers the following cogent argument on the Black male:

In contextualizing the voice of Black men, I would be negligent not to offer a historical lens to view the plight of Black men in the United States. The Black male has had a multiplicity of problems prevalent in the 1980's and continues to manifest in different areas of society. Although the Black male is a visible figure in the minds of many Americans, he is a member of the least understood and studied of all sex-race groups in the United States. He is a husband and father, son and brother, lover and boyfriend, uncle and grandfather, construction worker, minister and ghetto hustler, doctor and mineworker, and auto mechanic and presidential candidate. Unfortunately, these roles are distorted by various forms of media depicting him as a violent criminal, as an endangered species and as lacking the capacity to learn. Black men are frequently labeled as shiftless, lazy, immoral, mentally deficient, as well as being "hypersexual" athletes. The negative images of Black men are salient in the minds of Americans. This dysfunctional image is how he is perceived in public consciousness and how he comes to see and internalize his own role. (p. 14)

Nevertheless, there are promising numbers of Black men who defy the perceived odds and achieving the highest levels of personal and professional success. However, this success is not attained without some cost. According to Bridges (1996), talented young African American men who are starting the climb toward successful, rewarding careers in America discover the ascent up the ladder is plagued with pitfalls (p. 748). One notable difference in the experiences of today's black students may be a matter of prioritization.

In the opinion of Smith (1989), earlier generations of Black Americans placed a great deal of emphasis on educational attainment, as it was commonly believed to be the key to social mobility and individual economic success and competitiveness. Additionally, educational achievement was supported through a strong sense of spirituality. According to Dantley (2003), spirituality is a sort of nexus of inspiration, meaning-maker, and motivation in the lives of African Americans. Spirituality constructs the notions of calling, a sense of purpose, and an individual's mission. Although the

combination of these factors, education, and spirituality, certainly serves as catalysts to success, Williams–McElroy and Andrews (2000) assert that no single determinant of economic success has the impact of education. Gordon (1999) suggests that

If the effectiveness of education rest on such resources and they are unequally distributed, it is reasonable to anticipate the effects of education will be unequal. The achievement distribution data correlate highly with the data on access to these forms of capital. Our notion of affirmative development is conceptually grounded in possible approaches to offsetting the negative effects of the mal-distribution of access to these forms of educational capital. While the most direct approach to the solution of the problem of mal-distribution would involve the redistribution of income, wealth, and related resources, it is not reasonable to believe that such a radical solution would resonate with much of 21<sup>st</sup> century America. It is possible, however, that even a compassionate conservative society will see it to be in the best interest of the nation to organize its' social institutions and services so as to remove the negative effects of such mal-distribution on the academic and personal development of its people. (p.30)

Failing to consider Gordon's assertions could leave African Americans in a position of huge vulnerability with regard to the acquisition of new social capital necessary for social mobility (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2009). According to Ballantine and Roberts (2010), this lack of social mobility may be realized as a latent dysfunction of social reproduction theory.

According to Cerulo (2004), social reproduction theory suggests that existing social, economic, and cultural conditions work to reproduce in future generations the same social class divisions, thus creating an impenetrable glass ceiling. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1977) suggests the aspirations of lower-class children are dramatically and adversely affected by their class position. Bourdieu further asserts that the lower class child lives in a social world hostile to the American dream. According to Smith (1989), the roads to both individual mobility and group competitiveness (if not liberation) were paved with increased schooling (p. 416).

Since the end of the civil rights era, Black men have struggled to find a place of true legitimacy within American society. Harvey (1999) offered,

In the three decades which predominantly white institutions of higher education have been desegregated, some important gains have been made, although in regards to matters of race, serious problems and difficulties continue to exist. One important index of progress is the elevation of African Americans to significant positions within the hierarchy of the administrative structures of predominantly White colleges. (p.1)

As leaders and researchers seek to explore areas of equity at all levels of the higher education arena, a number of social factors must be considered. According to Larson and Ovando (2001), geographic divides in our society isolate individuals by race, ethnicity, and class. Such isolation produces strain in the relationships among various racial and ethnic groups as well as social classes. However, America's current higher education system touts itself as one that offers equitable access to employment and higher education opportunities. Furthermore, the system is said to be one which allows students from various racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds ample educational opportunities as well as interactions with students and educators from various racial and cultural groups. Because of the isolation and division between the racial, ethnic, and social class groups, many students, and administrators alike find it particularly awkward in communicating with and understanding students and colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

Notwithstanding, because of the increased diversity of the current student body composition, many administrators and faculty find themselves being forced into entering relationships with racial and ethnic minorities for the first time (Larson & Ovando, 2001).

In the opinion of Knight (2003), increasing demographic shifts and policy changes in higher education, coupled with a high stakes testing culture, have evoked debates at the national, state, and local levels over the best way to promote access to

postsecondary institutions. Additionally, many argue that policy changes will promote excellence for all students, staff, and faculty. Conversely, some contend these changes perpetuate inequitable K-16 structures and limit access to 4 year campuses for working class Black students, staff and faculty alike. This point is of vital importance to African American researchers as they are a part of a population that continues to be underrepresented at higher education institutions. To impact effective change, more equitable structures for postsecondary access must be produced. Notwithstanding, these structures must move toward understanding the multiple facets of African American administrators, leaders, faculty, and students who identify with and live in multiple worlds (Knight, 2003). This understanding will produce additional educational opportunities and prove to be beneficial for all stakeholders.

According to Gordon (1999), educational opportunities, whether fair or unfair, and academic achievement, are closely related to the social divisions associated with race, ethnicity, and social class. Astin (1982) believes that higher education represents an important means for improving the social and economic condition of Blacks in the U.S. Increasing numbers of African American men are negotiating these social division hurdles and achieving success as leaders. Although the concept of leadership *success* in terms of positions held, education, and professional accomplishments is very important, it tends to be oriented toward measurable, replicable phenomena; thus, to acquire a deeper understanding, leaders and researchers must seek to examine the challenges and experiences of African American leaders through multiple research approaches to challenge the ontological perspectives of previous researchers with the intent of providing useful insight and meaning to the existing, but limited body of literature.

## Statement of the Problem

As the student populations of higher education institutions continue to become more racially diverse, and America becomes more diverse, it is incumbent upon current and future leadership to understand the absolute necessity of diversifying faculty, staff, and administrative teams. Moreover, Becker, Krodell, and Tucker (2009) contended that economic forces attribute to the diversity of our college campuses. As such, many of the students are under-resourced – that is, without the advantage of personal and financial support systems needed to increase opportunities for success. For college administrations to achieve maximum effectiveness in reaching these students, paradigm shifts are needed in the ways teaching and learning are understood and actualized on campus. Furthermore, Murray (1997) asserted that diversity should start with the school's administration clearly voicing a desire for creating communities of color. This philosophy is vitally important at all levels of education, but particularly important in higher education, as administrators and faculty of color are known to wield tremendous influence over Black students. The initial step necessary to embark upon the journey of diversification begins with the institution's hiring process. Smith (2003) offered the following:

Undoubtedly, all employers use procedures to screen and eliminate applicants from the pool of consideration. For the most part, these procedures are based on subjective (e.g., perceptions of fit and compatibility) and objective (e.g., tests, interviews, and education requirements) criteria. Generally, these criteria should be linked to the applicant's ability to perform the proposed job responsibilities. (p. 318)

Smith further suggests that the subjectivity of the hiring process creates and aids in the perpetuation of the inconsistencies that may exist in the system, thus undergirding the difficulties for some candidates to successfully negotiate the hiring process. Moreover, these hiring practices bear a great deal of similarity to what has been referred to as the

–black box mush,” a decision making process in which the employer subjectively combines several employment practices, thus making the identification of a particular employment practice impossible.

Notwithstanding, all criteria used to make decisions about who obtains positions in higher and postsecondary education are not clearly linked to measures that are good predictors of employee performance. In some cases, the selection process disproportionately excludes certain groups (e.g., race/ethnicity and gender). These results, intended or not, are deemed unlawful employment practices under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Smith, p. 318). Although there is substantial research and literature to support the existence of great disparity in the hiring practices of non-minorities in comparison to minorities, there appears to be no impetus to ignite the much needed change process.

#### Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the success factors common to Black men who have risen to the top-tiers of leadership in the higher education arena in the state of Arkansas. Borrowing from Hutchinson’s (2001) research design, studying the demographic characteristics, professional preparation, spirituality, and support systems of current academic leaders will serve as a basis for such understanding. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information for Blacks and other minority men aspiring to become leaders in higher education. The information will also assist colleges and universities in the development of appropriate support structures to recruit and retain more minorities as well as develop better policy to aid in diversifying their campuses.

## Research Questions

This study is designed to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How do African American male administrators define leadership?
2. What leaders, African American or otherwise, played a role in the administrator's desire to become an educational leader?
3. How do perceptions of African American men serve as a source of motivation for African Americans currently serving as administrators?
4. What role does spirituality play in the life of African American male administrators?
5. What role, if any, did mentorship play in the development of African-American men serving in higher education leadership roles in Arkansas?

## Limitations of the Study

The following limitations inhibit this study:

1. This study is limited to Black men in the state of Arkansas who are currently serving in a leadership position within an institution of higher learning.
2. The accuracy of the data was limited to responses to items that participants volunteered to answer on the questionnaire.
3. The accuracy of the data is limited to the candor of the participants' answers and their attitudes towards higher education leadership positions.
4. Due to a limited research budget and time, the geographic location of this study is limited to the state of Arkansas.

5. The researcher's background and experience as an ordained minister strongly influences his philosophical and theological perspectives as the initial lens through which the world is viewed.

The interpretations of the findings from this research project were subject to the researcher's own biases, race, and gender identities. The results of this study should not be considered a comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences of all African American men serving as executive leaders in the state of Arkansas' higher education system.

#### Definition of Key Terms

The following terms will facilitate an understanding of the purpose of this study. Definitions for each term have been provided to assist the reader in grasping a better understanding of the essential elements of this study.

*Administrator:* A person who is employed in a supervisory capacity either as a Dean, Associate Vice President, Vice President, Provost, or President of a college or university system.

*Aspiration:* Strong desire and effort that are directed to personal and professional growth for career development (Hutchinson, 2001).

*Career path:* A sequence of jobs that provide experience in the field of education (Hutchinson, 2001).

*Higher Education:* Education beyond the secondary level provided by a college or university system.

*Mentor:* One who assumes a formal or informal sponsoring relationship with a professional employee, allowing that employee to work under the direction of a loyal friend or advisor (Hutchinson, 2001).

*Leadership*: The ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization (House, Mansour, Hanges, & Dorfman, 1999).

*Spirituality*: The component of our total selves and community through which we make meaning and understanding of our world. It is the foundation of values, principles, influence and ethics we exhibit in our interaction with others (Dantley, 2003).

*Primarily White Institution (PWI)*: An institution of higher learning whose population is comprised of predominantly non-minority students.

*High-Level Leader*: An executive leader at the level of associate vice president or above.

*Historically Black College or University (HBCU)*: An institution of higher learning whose population is comprised of non-majority students.

### Summary

The number of Black men serving in administrative positions in higher education throughout the state of Arkansas pales in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. With our nation experiencing rapid increases in its minority populations, the struggle with the challenge of becoming a multicultural society still exists. America and the American dream boast the opportunity for mobility and advancement. However, inequalities based on race and other ethnic differences continue to exist and threaten this dream for many (Turner, Myers & Creswell, 1999).

The intent of this study is to examine the success factors shared by African American men serving in higher education leadership positions in the state of Arkansas. The findings of this study will address which factors led to these men attaining leadership

positions as Deans, Vice Presidents, Provosts, and Presidents in Arkansas. The data will be useful to future administrators, as well as colleges and universities seeking to gain a competitive edge in the recruitment and retention of more African American men.

A thorough review and synthesis of the relevant literature on African American men in higher education, African Americans in Arkansas higher education, and a brief history of African Americans will be provided in Chapter Two. The research methodology and theoretical underpinning of the study will be discussed in Chapter Three, while both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected data will be provided in Chapter Four. Finally, results of the study, limitations associated with the study, and implications for further research will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As America's population continues to diversify, there has been discussion of how higher education leaders could initiate some strategic efforts to attract more Black men into the administrative sectors of higher education. Unfortunately, these discussions, and subsequent efforts, have not yielded the desired results across the spectrum of the higher education community. Moreover, there is very limited research and literature that examines this phenomenon, thus leaving leaders with limited resources to create initiatives and policies to increase the numbers of Black men and other persons of color entering the education profession. The past three decades of research have yielded a considerable amount of scholarship about the status of African Americans in higher education (Holmes, 2006). However, there is a paucity of research focused on career development and retention strategies of African American administrators in higher education (Wolfe, 2010). Notwithstanding, much of the literature presented in the subsequent review is a conglomerate of K-12 and higher education collections. The research and existing literature suggest the experiences of younger Black men in grades K-12 have tremendous effects on the students' desire to consider careers in education. As such, this review will present literature from a K-16 perspective as this time frame is crucial to the attractiveness of education to Black men.

The literature review focuses on a brief history of the African American experience. First, the history of African Americans, African Americans and leadership, and African Americans and education in the state of Arkansas is discussed. Secondly, the review will examine the perceptions of African American male administrators. Next, the

personal characteristics of African American male administrators, their professional preparation, spirituality, leadership, career paths, mentoring experiences, networking, and career aspirations are explored.

### The History of African Americans

To understand the history of African Americans in higher education, one must understand the basic means by which African Americans were abruptly placed in what many would consider one of history's most difficult and challenging predicaments. The predicament was slavery. Upon their arrival to America, the intelligence level of Africans was intensively debated. Early researchers contended that slaves were simply property that lacked the ability to acquire and understand higher levels of knowledge. It was further suggested that slaves were lower forms of human beings undeserving of a formal education (Fleming, 1976). Regardless of the philosophical argument, it was apparent the institution of slavery would play a pivotal role in the educational challenges of Africans and future generations of African Americans. Fleming suggested that

The basic motive for the institution of chattel slavery in America was economic, but slavery, contrary to English tradition, had to be justified on grounds other than economic necessity. Therefore, over a period of years, an elaborate system of philosophical justifications for slavery developed, as southerners used the arguments of both the Greeks and Romans, who thought that slavery was logical and conformed to the natural order of things. Building upon the Christian sanction of slavery and other arguments down to the seventeenth century, southerners moved from an initial casual defense in the late eighteenth century to a studied rebuttal of anti-slavery arguments as the nation prepared for Civil War. Intertwined with the argument for slavery was the issue of slave education, which appeared early during the colonial period. Support for limited black instruction came from the very people who also supported slavery, while the church accepted the reality of Black slavery and White supremacy, but desired to assure that the relationship worked to the mutual benefit of slaves and their masters. The church impressed upon the masters their duty to afford slaves the opportunity for salvation and, at the same time, emphasized the duty of slaves to obey their masters. (p. 311)

However, the religious arguments were met with fierce resistance, as many southerners objected to the teaching of slaves, as slaves were said to have been of a different species and not possessing a soul. Others strongly objected to their slaves receiving the sacraments associated with Christianity, as this would have elevated them and dissolved their status as slaves. Thus, according to Fleming, before the Revolutionary War, the arguments used to justify slavery precluded the slaves from acquiring an education even through religious instruction or activities. Fleming further offered that

The religious exponents of slavery believed that Blacks were slaves as a result of their sins. The leading scientists proposed that slavery was a result of black inferiority, even hypothesizing that Blacks were different, and tried to point out the physical and mental differences to support the supposition that different social endowments gave Blacks more animal qualities. They were said to be able to imitate behavior but could never be inventive, a reflection of higher mental qualities. (p. 324)

Fleming also offered,

Since the pro-slavery arguments projected the Negro as being simply inferior, belonging to another species entirely, it was promulgated in theory that the Negro could not be trained beyond fulfilling the elementary functions required of slave life. Planters discouraged religious instruction because they feared the slave would become discontent. (p. 339)

Notwithstanding, there were some meager levels of education provided to slaves, but the education that was provided was designed to simply reinforce their feelings of inferiority in an effort to reinforce their satisfaction with their position in the social order (Fleming, 1976). According to Brigham (1945), “the education of Negroes tended to be dictated by economic conditions, as well as by fear of Negro revolts” (p. 410). After 1880, Negroes were viewed as an economic asset, thus causing their education to become a secondary priority, as their individual skills and services were very valuable and profitable. This

philosophy often led to Negro slaves remaining ignorant to the benefits of education.

Additionally, Brigham offered,

The more usual sight was the entirely untutored and ignorant Negro or the Negro who had used his native ability to take advantage of the only learning available to him, the learning of the plantation, the completely extra-curricular, omnipresent education that is within arm's length of any man awake to the life around of him. (p. 410)

The end of the Civil War ushered in what some hoped would be an era of hope and promise for African Americans. However, the reconstruction period was riddled with inconsistent segregation practices for Blacks in both the North and South. Urofsky, Cushman, and Rehnquist (2004) asserted,

In the last of the great Reconstruction statutes, the Civil Rights Act of 1875, the Republican majority in Congress tried to secure by law some semblance of racial equality that could be protected by the government and the courts. It is doubtful that the country as a whole endorsed this idea, for most white Americans, North and South, believed in white supremacy. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles captured the prevailing sentiment when he wrote: Thank God slavery is abolished, but the Negro is not, and can never be the equal of the White. He is of an inferior race and must remain so. (p. 72)

This sentiment would hold true, specifically with regard to the education of “free” Blacks that were now struggling to find their place in society.

#### African Americans and Leadership

In the opinion of Henderson (2008), the largest group of professionals to provide leadership within the African American community was the educator. While the leadership provided by African American ministers, from Richard Allen in the late 18th century to Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 20th, has been widely discussed and studied, almost no attention has been paid to the role of African American male educators (Henderson, 2008). Before an in-depth discussion on leadership can occur, it is necessary

to identify and establish a definition of leadership for the purpose of this research. As such, Northouse (2004) offers the following definitions of leadership:

Despite the multitude of ways that leadership has been conceptualized, the following components can be identified as central to the phenomenon of leadership: (a) Leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs within a group context, and (d) leadership involves goal attainment. Based on these components, the following definition of leadership will be used in the text. Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. (p. 3)

DeSpain (2000) defined leadership as an imperfect art practiced by individuals who define reality for their followers while creating and nurturing a vision of a new and better reality. Bolman and Deal (2003) suggested that “leadership is universally offered as a panacea for almost any social problem” (p. 336). In the opinion of McClellan (2006), researchers have developed numerous definitions, theories, and paradigms in an effort to understand the qualities and characteristics of effective leadership. Bennis (2003) suggests that leadership is hard to define, but you know it when you see it. McClellan (2006) further adds that leadership reflects a plethora of disciplinary strategies, methodologies, and differing interpretations of the definition and contexts of its meaning. Leadership has historically been examined from a monolithic viewpoint in that it is presented outside the context of race, and somewhat generalizable to all people.

Early leadership styles and theories were void of the voice of African Americans. The “Great Man Theory” of 1869 gained notoriety by examining the hereditary background of influential and successful men. Specifically, the theory emphasized leadership on the basis of inheritance. Cawthon (1996) stated,

Prior to the mid twentieth century, the Great Man Theory held sway in the minds of those seeking to define the most elusive quality: leadership. Because there was consensus that leaders differed from their followers, and that fate or providence was a major determinant of the course of history, the contention that leaders are

born, not made was widely accepted, not only scholars, but by those attempting to influence the behavior of others. (p. 44)

The theory also supports the concept that humans cannot develop what they do not possess. Cawthon added that “no matter how great their desire to learn, unless they possess certain extraordinary endowments – unless they possess a talent that can be nurtured and developed – they will not be successful in their attempts to lead” (p. 45).

Additionally, Bass (1990) offered the following:

During the period when the theory was initially being developed, racial tensions were very tense, so that thought that a Negro could be a talented, a great man, and a great leader was virtually ludicrous. Early researchers such as romantic philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche discussed how history could be altered by the decision of a great man, such as the decision to purchase Louisiana by Thomas Jefferson, or Abraham Lincoln’s support for the abolition of slavery. Literally, the history of the world is the history of great men. It was these men whose innate abilities connected them with situational forces resulting in change. (p. 37)

McClellan (2006) further suggested that Black leaders have made substantial contributions but fail to be acknowledged and incorporated in the formation of leadership theories. Many of the major authorities on leadership provide lists and or sets of attributes, characteristics, or qualities inherent to leadership. One such example is found in *Stogdill’s Handbook of Leadership* (Bass, 1990), which offers various definitions of leadership and leadership concepts. As argued by McClellan (2006), the attributes, activities, and characteristics identified with leadership historically existed outside the realm of race. Until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, there were very few minority leaders in the forefront. However, in recent decades there has been an emergence of minority leaders (Watson & Rosser, 2007). As such, an examination of the experiences of leaders of color adds meaningful context to the development of the array of leadership theories.

McClellan (2006) reports that few studies have recorded the dynamics offered by Black men who have proven themselves to be exceptional leaders, regionally, nationally, and in the classroom. Nonetheless, Black men have demonstrated a proclivity toward being leaders committed to serving others through a cause, crusade, movement, and a campaign of humanitarian, not materialistic, goals (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf defines this particular leadership methodology as Servant Leadership. Black leaders often embrace serving those they are leading. This replicates the attributes commonly associated with servant leadership. Furthermore, McClellan (2006) adds that the leadership of Black men is an amalgamation of servant leadership and a meaning-making process and expands the borders of leadership by infusing spirituality as the major source of strength and perseverance in leadership praxis. In a study of Black male leaders by Charleston (2000), several definitions of leadership emerged from interviews with Black men and women regarded as modern leaders.” Marvus Rice, Jerry Blakemore, and Maulana Karenga, all participants in the study provided explanations.

Marvus Rice as quoted in Charleston (2000) stated,

Honesty is needed for leaders. If a person is honest, people will trust him or her, and it goes both ways. Another attribute is integrity---you got to keep your integrity. You might compromise on your pride, but you don't compromise on your integrity and your religious beliefs. And people in positions above or below recognize that....There must be avenues of open communication. This is vital in order to lead. Finally, you don't want to just send them there, you must also be committed to go there with them. (p. 223)

Jerry Blakemore detailed leadership as

A leader must have respect for basic human values. So when one really looks at leadership in terms of basic human values, it is a respect for and of life. I think we all have a responsibility that we have to hold ourselves responsible for, and we must be able to define that and realize that the reason for success is not for success in and of itself. (p. 224)

Maulana Karenga defined leadership as:

Leadership is a commitment to serve. Without the people, the various people that make up humanity, leadership does not exist. I put a high importance on values and vision. Vision and values---I can't see leadership without vision and values....And without an appropriate system of values to reach that vision and to fulfill it, that's one of the most problematic aspects for leadership of our time, and that is the lack of the capacity to generate this vision that inspires what we do. A moral, material, meaningful interpretation to life that not only gives us a fundamental way of approaching the world but calls us to a correspondent practice—that's very important to me....But then you have this transformative, this engaging leadership in which you see your mission as people empower and serve the people and transform them in such a way that they become self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation. ( pp. 225-226)

These definitions shared common themes of humanitarian efforts, morality, and spirituality as necessary components of successful leadership. Moreover, the leadership style of most Black leaders intersects within a context of collective advancement, spirituality, and servant leadership (McClellan, 2006). Black leadership, historically, operated by giving a legitimate voice to underrepresented and marginalized masses of society by building community through common bonds of trials and tribulations. Furthermore, it was noted that spirituality served as the driving force for freeing the oppressed from social injustice.

### *Spirituality and Servant Leadership*

Spirituality and religious conviction in the lives of leaders remains a topic of immense controversy. According to Jones (2002), European American academic ideology assumes "materiality" to be the absolute essence of reality. Things that are not observable by the senses and measurable through acceptable quantitative measures are not considered valid or real. Moreover, conclusions that cannot be validated by reference to observable reality are rejected. Additionally, there remains much speculation surrounding the admissibility of the causation of higher plains of reality such as those

found in various philosophies and religious perspectives. These beliefs are often relegated to the categories of irrational and nonscientific. Conversely, Jones adds the following with regards to the importance of African American spirituality:

If scholars dismiss the relevance of the spiritual dimension, then they dismiss the most likely cause of African survival in America when confronted by the horrendous and dreadful material conditions that should have logically rendered us extinct. There is little if any evidence to suggest that a reliance on material factors could explain the fact that the African captives were able to survive conditions that were clearly structured to destroy us as a people. The implicit capacity of Africans to transcend their conditions and draw from a higher moral energy plane permitted an endurance and mastery of conditions that would have destroyed a people who saw only the material plan of existence. (p. 9)

According to McClellan (2006), spirituality is the foundation of Black life.

Spirituality serves as a source of creative, integrative, animated, and transformative energy for African Americans. Additionally, spirituality is seen as a praxis that creates an ethos and cultural lens through which African Americans process, encounter, adapt to, and transcend the human experience through a spirit of self-empowerment and survival. Furthermore, McClellan suggests that in the eyes of African Americans, spirituality, and more specifically, the “spirit” is the entity that keeps African Americans grounded, pressing toward success, social justice, and destined greatness. Closely related to the topic of spirituality and motivated by a number of its tenants is the theme of servant leadership.

Servant leadership, as defined by Greenleaf (1977), is a leadership platform in which the paramount activity of the leader is serving, thus compelling others to serve in a similar manner. Yukl (2006) offered that a servant leader attends to the needs of followers and helps them become healthier, wiser, and more willing to accept their responsibility. Servant leaders also aspire to empower their followers, to teach them to

lead, and accept opportunities to serve as moral agents of society. Williams (1998) added that the servant leader is committed to serving others through their strength and energy generated through an over-arching, prophetic, transforming vision that is carefully and simply articulated. This form of leadership facilitates interaction and spiritual growth between the leaders and those being served. Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson and Jinks (2007), suggested that servant leadership is applied as a philosophical and working model of leadership that detours from commonly accepted styles of leadership. Additionally, Taylor et al. added that spiritual/servant leadership provides an integration of value systems to ensure values are not lost or sacrificed. Servant leadership was the predominant leadership style embraced by some of the most prominent figures of African American leadership during the civil rights era. According to Williams (1998), the repressive climate of racial hatred in America that spawned the 1960s civil rights movement also galvanized a generation of bold, persuasive, driven leaders who embodied the qualities of servant leadership. Attributes such as character and respect were expected qualities of African Americans that embodied this type of leadership.

Walters and Smith (1999) stated that the moral basis of African American leadership was historically a source of political currency of African American politics and a source of debate within the upper echelons of leadership. Many would support the notion that men like Douglas, Gremke, and Sam Luther Carter were men who personified leadership, specifically with regard to the conveying of vision to masses of African Americans.

According to Walters and Smith, the successful accomplishment of goals by a group in society rarely occurs by accident but by deliberate concern with strategy,

leadership and vision. Jones (2002) offers, “Their [Black leadership’s] current failure, in brief, is one of vision” (p. 2). The old guard of Sam Luther Carter, Malcom X, Elijah Muhammad, and Roy Wilkins projected vision and voice to the burgeoning frustrations of African Americans (Jones, 2002). Conversely, the absence of such leaders has left the African American community void of uncompromised exclusive leadership. Jones describes this phenomenon as the erosion of Black leadership which in essence has aided in the perpetuation of struggle, and frustration within the Black community as a whole.

### The History of African Americans in Higher Education

Although the educational attainment and social acceptance of Blacks changed dramatically through the end of 1800s into the early 1900s, it was not until May 17, 1954, that America and its Black citizens anticipated the dawning of a new era. According to Harvey, Harvey, and Carter (2004),

The United States Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision declaring that racial segregation in the nation’s public schools was unconstitutional. The court’s pronouncement, along with the subsequent declaration the decision be implemented “with all deliberate speed,” offered the impression that school desegregation would be swift and certain. The reality has been quite the opposite. Although some progress toward the integration has occurred since the *Hicks vs. Board of Education* decision, particularly in the South, across the nation, K-12 schools are significantly separated by race. While the text of the *Hicks* decision was about segregation at the elementary and secondary school level, the subtext was about justice and the equality throughout the educational arena and the entire social system. (p. 328)

Nearly 50 years after the historic ruling, America experienced substantial increases in the enrollment of African American students in colleges and universities (Wolfe, 2010). The increase in enrollment occurred at predominantly white institutions as compared to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when most Blacks receiving a college degree did so from a Historically Black College or University. However, Harvey, Harvey, and Carter

suggested there was also a continuing gap between the rates of postsecondary attainment for African Americans as compared to Whites, and that there were numerous barriers at all levels that African Americans would continue to face within the higher education arena that also needed to be acknowledged. These barriers existed for students, as well as for African Americans interested in the professoriate and administrative fields.

According to Turner, Myers, and Creswell (1999), there were certain barriers that impeded the successful recruitment, development, and retention of African American students and faculty. Turner, Myers, and Creswell suggest that —~~th~~ predominant barrier was a pervasive racial and ethnic bias that contributes to unwelcoming and unsupportive work environments for faculty of color” (p. 28). Since the professoriate served as an incubator for many future administrators, the latent dysfunction associated with low numbers of African American faculty was an extremely low number of African Americans matriculating into the administrative ranks. Harvey, Harvey, and Carter (2004) provided key insight on the status of enrollment of African American students and the value of these enrollments:

Enrollment of African American students in predominantly White colleges and universities is an important measure of racial integration, but the representation of African Americans at the faculty level also holds great significance. While, depending on the kind of institution, individual students are present at a particular institution for a period of two to five years, faculty members may be present at a particular institution for a period of three to four decades. (p. 332)

Additionally, Harvey, Harvey, and Carter addressed factors related to the proclivity of relationships and influence between African American faculty and African American students. Harvey, Harvey, and Carter further asserted,

Obviously, prior to the *Brown* decision, only an infinitesimal number of African Americans were provided with the opportunity to hold faculty positions. With this being the case, one of the key components needed for long term career success for

African American men, mentors, were scarce, particularly at predominantly White institutions (PWI's). (p. 332)

Moreover, the data continues to reflect trends indicative of the fact that America's education system is still lacking with regard to the number of persons of color serving in executive leadership positions. Additionally, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, African Americans represented only 21,047 or 9.67% of 217,518 executive, managerial, and administrative staff in degree U.S. college institutions in fall of 2007. Concomitantly, enrollment of African American students in higher education constitutes only 13% of all enrollments according to data taken from the National Center for Education Statistics (2009). Henderson (2008) suggests "this underrepresentation of culturally congruent leadership can bring about a transmogrification in the achievement of the non-white student as well as paralyzing the hope for students needing a strong and influencing African American male role model to increase probability of educational success" (pp.3-4). As such, our nation is and will continue facing a paralyzing construct of a depreciatory student identity for our minority students while other students will be deprived the rich experiences associated with exposure to leadership of diverse people.

### Mentorship

Livers and Cavers (2003) explained, "Mentoring can simply be described as a purposeful developmental relationship, generally between two individuals" (p.118). They further explained the prospect of these relationships being explicitly established by organizations within the context of a formal "on-boarding" or orientation program. According to Godshalk and Sosik (2000), "Organizations are increasingly recognizing the benefits associated with mentoring relationships, in which individuals with advanced experience and knowledge provide support and facilitate the upward mobility of junior

organizational members” (p. 291). Additionally, Godshalk and Sosik further explained the benefits of this process included effective socialization of young employees, promotion and compensation, career mobility, advancement, enhanced productivity, and job satisfaction. In summation, mentoring is vital to the process of career development. However, in the opinion of Godshalk and Sosik, “Career development involves the mentors acting as coaches to the protégé, protecting the protégé from adverse organizational forces, providing challenging assignments, sponsoring advancement, and fostering positive exposure and visibility” (p. 293). As such, the dynamics of the formation of the mentor and protégé relationship is paramount to the success of the venture.

Livers and Cavers (2003) suggest that mentors have a proclivity to choose to assist people that look like them. This notion, if valid, creates challenges based on the paucity of an African American presence in the academy. Organizations continue to place a great deal of emphasis on this process. Livers and Cavers assert,

Recognizing the benefits of mentoring, some organizations have instituted formal programs that pair leaders and protégés. Although well intentioned, these programs often fall short because of limited commitment or feelings of intrusion or duty-bound obligation in one of both parties. In addition, African Americans may feel their safety and openness are compromised if they are teamed with someone with whom they have no more in common than having their names matched through the formal mentoring programs. (p. 118)

According to Jones (2002), one of the key ingredients to academic success was mentoring. More specifically, Jones alluded to the fact that one common denominator between all successful leaders, regardless of ethnicity, was the presence of a mentor. Mentorship provided an opportunity for the aspirant to glean from the experiences, wisdom, and knowledge of individuals who have experienced a dimension of success

most professionals merely experience as a fleeting figment of their imagination (Jones, 2002). Jones further asserts that

As for me, my mentors have come in all sizes, ages, races and genders, however, they were all committed to my success as a person, as a student, and as a leader. They told me what I needed to hear but did not particularly want to hear—complimentary and non-complimentary. They encouraged and challenged me when I preferred they remain silent. Above all, they advocated for me even in my absence. (p. 1992)

In the opinion of Hutchinson (2001), mentoring, guiding, training, and supporting the less experienced professional has played an important role throughout history. The mentor inspires and motivates, and often plays an important role in the professional and career development of the protégé. Livers and Carvers also raised the question of the necessity of the mentors “looking like” the person they are mentoring and further suggest that because of the shortages of African American leadership in certain segments of society, the chances of African Americans being mentored by White men and women is fairly significant (Livers & Carver, 2003). However, once specific mentorship approach which has gained some attention, and notable success challenges this notion. This approach is most commonly referred to as a “Black male initiative.”

Black male initiatives aim at addressing non-cognitive factors associated with student success on college campuses, which serve as the gateway to the acquisition of social and cultural capital necessary for success in higher education leadership. Blount (2011) refers to this type of mentorship as one of the greatest means of motivating African American men to success. Because of the concern toward the academic progress and matriculation of African American men through the higher education system, “Black male initiatives” often garner support of an institution’s top tier leadership, to include presidents, provosts, and academic deans. This support provides budgetary commitment

necessary to connect students with tutoring, cultural experiences, and academic stimulants deemed necessary to produce well-rounded, and prepared individuals. There are some concerns with this specific mentoring approach.

Franke and Dahlgreen (1996) suggest that —Black male initiative” mentorship must be careful to not develop a relationship where mentees accept the advice of mentors without fully reflecting on their own personal views, as this has the potential of simply reproducing routines and diminishing the opportunity for their own professional and personal growth. Additionally, Schlosser and Foley (2008) raise concerns about issues of power, inappropriate relationships, and training of mentors. This type of mentorship has yielded varying results and continues to gain the attention of Black scholars.

#### The History of African Americans, Arkansas, and Education

Although the literature provides very limited research germane to the educational experiences of African Americans in the state of Arkansas, the state boasts major accomplishments which have undoubtedly had lasting effects on the educational climate. In 1877, the state saw the formation of Philander Smith College, a private 4-year college affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The mission of the college was to make education available to —freedmen,” former African American slaves displaced west of the Mississippi after the emancipation proclamation. In 1884, Arkansas Baptist College was formed. The college is the oldest Baptist College for African Americans. In 1948, Silas Hunt became the first African American admitted to attend the University of Arkansas Law School. He was followed to the University of Arkansas by Wiley Branton of Pine Bluff who would later serve alongside Matt Marshall in representing the first nine students selected to attend Little Rock’s Central High School. These students became

known as the “Little Rock Nine,” and their desegregation case captured the attention of America and eventually paved the way for African Americans to enjoy access to quality education in the state’s capital and throughout the south. Little Rock’s Dunbar Prep was founded in 1929, and earned the reputation as the premier school for blacks in Arkansas. Its college preparatory liberal arts curriculum, combined with a vocational education track, made it the only black secondary school and junior college in the state accredited by the North Central Association for Secondary Schools and Colleges (Smith, 2003).

### The Plight of African American Men

#### *Perceptions*

The plight of African American men has long been of interest to social scientists, educators, civil rights activists, and some politicians. Decades after segregation, Black men still find themselves striving to overcome what many non-majority Americans consider stereotypical behaviors. According to Bryson (1998), Black men are engaged in a constant battle against messages, stigmas, and stereotypes that are diffused in American racial mythology. Bryson suggests that various forms of media are responsible for aiding in the perpetuation of these thoughts. Additionally, Oliver (2003) specifies fictional, news, and reality entertainment as the primary contributor to these views. Moreover, Gibbs (1998) created a classification system that outlines and explains how Black men are depicted by the media. The system describes them as being deviant, delinquent, disturbed, disadvantaged, or dumb. The system, though somewhat harsh in its categorization, suggests that Black men find themselves as not being perceived as real men. This perception is the catalyst behind government, business, and educational leaders feeling justified in ignoring Black male issues.

## *Manhood*

According to Estes (2005), both Black and White men share common definitions of manhood. Estes asserted that “Manhood entailed an economic, social, and political status ideally achievable by all men” (p. 7). Additionally, manhood required the man to serve as the head of his household, responsible for the health, welfare, and vitality of his family. Estes further asserted that

A man was the head of his household: he made enough money to support his family as the primary breadwinner. He also has a political voice in deciding how his community, his state, and his country were run. Racism kept many men, especially working class black men, from achieving these attributes of manhood. This was partly by design in that white men used racism to reduce competition for jobs, for political offices, and even for women. When overt racism in the South came under attack in the 1950’s, southern white men used masculinist rhetoric to defend the privileges that whiteness and manhood had afforded them in the economic, political, and sexual spheres. (p.7)

For Black males, the ability to embody manhood met with tremendous challenge and opposition. Historically, the story of the Black male in America reads as an epic tragedy (Williams, 1998). According to McClellan (2006), Black men experienced moments of greatness, but also teetered dangerously on the edge of economic, political, and social devastation. According to Booker (2000), many of the issues related to the experiences of Black men stemmed from myths about his identity, sexuality, and gender dating back to slavery. When examined from a more contemporary perspective, most literature failed to address positive accomplishments of the Black male, and subsequent emergence of successful Black leaders in America (Cochran, 1997). The literature voiced very broad generalizations of stereotypical behaviors of Black men.

According to McClellan (2006), despite the positive efforts of some researchers, Americans are still bombarded with consistent negative images of Black men. Black men

continue to be stereotyped in roles that portray them as deviants of society.

Unfortunately, statistical data support the notion that the majority of Black men, one in three, have been involved in the criminal justice system as either inmates or parolees (Mauer & Huling, 1995). According to McClellan (2006), the 1995 *Sentencing Project* illustrated disparity between mandatory sentences of criminals convicted of infractions involving crack cocaine and powder cocaine. More specifically, Black men were identified as the primary supplier of crack cocaine, while White and Hispanic males were the primary users. Possession of 5 grams of crack cocaine carried a mandatory sentence of 5 years, the identical sentence for someone convicted of possessing up to 500 grams of powder cocaine. McClellan further asserted,

Failure to amend the disparities between the two drugs reflects a culture-wide set of misconceptions about crack – who uses it, who sells it, and what the consequences of its trade, such as violence have been. Many have also admitted that the disparities illustrate something much more disturbing, namely, a deeply embedded racist and classist undertone to our society's political, legal, and law enforcement structures which began when Black men and women were treated and objectified as subhuman during the transatlantic slave trade. The irony in such a paradox is that the social construct of race has been ignored despite the impact of their identities (race, sexuality, and gender) were and continue to be used as commodities. (p. 18)

Moreover, the existence of such undertones and disparities not only exists and impacts the perceptions of African American adult males, it further perpetuates very strong stereotypical images of Black male masculinity, specifically, one of the “gangsta-thug” model adopted by many young African American males (Reese, 2004).

According to Reese (2004), many young African American males have unwittingly adopted and embodied a single model of Black masculinity, thus derailing themselves from achieving any success and opportunity for social mobility in the United States. Reese suggested these youths struggle with visibility and acceptance in society

and have chosen to live in a counter-culture opposite of “main-stream” society. Ellison (1952) explained the plight of the African American male as a continuous struggle for identity. He asserted that:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe, nor am I one of the Hollywood movie ectoplasm. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. (prologue)

In Reese’s (2004) opinion, “More than a half century after Ellison’s famous book, *The Invisible Black Man*, Black men in America are still trying to become visible” (p. ix.). Furthermore, Reese asserted the quest to be recognized in society has manifested itself in rebellious and counterproductive behaviors to include baggy pants, bandanas, braided hair, earrings, tattoos, and through overemphasizing glamour lifestyles with detrimental consequences if sought after by other than legitimate means (ix.). Many are concerned these consequences have the potential to impact an entire generation of young Black men. Additionally, Reese addressed what may be the most vital component associated with the future of Black males: underachievement in the academic arena.

According to Herrnstein and Murray (1994), discussions of ethnic differences with regard to cognitive abilities sparked heated debates in the United States. Specifically, comparisons between African Americans and Whites, which suggested great disparities, remain at the center of the controversy. Herrnstein and Murray asserted,

The average white person tests higher than about 84 percent of the population of Blacks and that the average Black person tests higher than about 16 percent of the population of Whites. At every socioeconomic level, there is a variance in IQ between Blacks and Whites. The variance is greater among those Whites and Blacks at higher socioeconomic status. In other words, poverty and the various social challenges facing Blacks do not fully explain their underachievement. (p. 283)

Conversely, Reese (2004) argued no one has explained this perplexing phenomenon. However, in Reese's opinion, one possible answer to this ongoing struggle is simply that Blacks have embraced a culture of underachievement.

According to Sankofa, Hurley, Allen, and Boykin (2005), it is well known that many African American students achieve limited success academically in American schools. They further assert that African American student performance is inferior to that of their White and Asian counterparts. Statistics gleaned from the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) reported that African American students at the ages of 9, 13, and 17 scored lower than Whites on standardized tests of mathematics for three decades. In the opinion of Fordham and Ogbu (1986), the attitudes of African American children are a vital explanatory factor in better comprehending African American academic underachievement. Fordham and Ogbu added that young African American youth are unfortunately very aware of the limitations regarding job ceilings and other opportunities for upward mobility that will greatly impact Black people's material lives. According to Mickelson (1990), there exists a paradox between the abstract ideologies of American education and the concrete reality of everyday living of African Americans. Moreover, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that African American youths perceive the high achievement of their peers as "acting white" or selling out.

The theoretical assertions by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggested that a positive achievement orientation embraced by African American youths was affiliated with a White cultural identity. Specifically, Fordham and Ogbu asserted that

The "acting White" theory, made highly visible by national media, suggests that youth of color, and particularly African Americans, do not value education. The view itself contributes to cultural stereotyping in its failure to acknowledge the

role of solidly entrenched social stereotyping in the school adjustment and coping requirements of African Americans. (p. 22)

The “acting White” theory suggested Blacks were forced to adopt definite coping strategies to obtain success in society. These strategies were used to resolve the tensions between meeting the demands to conform to education and social demands while maintaining some sense of personal identity (Fryer & Torelli, 2005). Furthermore, such attitudes and perceptions greatly impact the career aspirations of African American males, further perpetuating this issue.

### *Career Aspirations*

Unfortunately, when considering the situation of Black men, those who willingly choose to embrace the biased and narrowly constructed stereotypes of Black masculinity will undoubtedly continue to be degraded, oppressed, victimized, and ultimately marginalized. However, those choosing to overcome these stereotypes will have a greater chance of succeeding in American society (Reese, 2004).

In the opinion of Grimmett (2006), African American boys begin formulating some level of career aspirations as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Grimmett believed that if an African American 3rd grader is asked what he wants to be, he is prone to share his goal of becoming a professional athlete, policeman, or an entertainer. Furthermore, the 3rd grader’s career template is influenced by magazines, internet, radio, video games, parents, caregivers, teachers, neighborhood adults as well as the adults involved in the child’s formal education. Bailey (2004), stated that,

Intentional career development interventions for African American boys are needed because their early career context is unique. African American males are overrepresented in special education and in the juvenile justice system, disproportionately suspended and expelled, and underrepresented in advance classes. (p. 11)

Additionally, school incompleteness, unemployment, increased drug addiction, incarceration, and premature death by violence are all the by-products of negative educational experiences (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003). In the opinion of Cook, et al. (1996), it is often assumed occupational expectations are more dependent on the surrounding contexts of a child's life than are occupational aspirations. More specifically, Gottfredson (1981) argued that "As some age they will presumably come to realize that their own job choices are particularly constrained because of past school performance, the quality of their family networks, the paucity of local jobs, and prejudices of potential employers" (p. 560). According to Cook et al. (1996), at some point during childhood it is expected that occupational expectations will be lower for African American boys, thus creating an especially wide gap between their occupational aspirations and expectations. Hicks and Butty (1999) asserted that African American males face tremendous challenges regarding the development of career aspirations. As a cohort, African American males have a propensity toward various educational ills including, but not limited to, unequal access to formal and adequate education, social alienation at schools, a high number of academic and behavior-based social reprimands, excessive punishment, suspensions, low expectations for academic achievement, and alarmingly high participation in special education programs. Davis and Jordan (1994) suggested that "children's early educational experiences have broad consequences for their future educational attainment, employment, and family relations, and negative experiences in school may serve as antecedents to a variety of social and economic difficulties" (p. 281). Cook et al. (1996), further suggested the importance of children learning from their schools, various media sources, and their parents regarding the importance of "dreaming

big” and “shooting for the stars” in efforts of taking advantage of the open social mobility systems that has begun to create new job opportunities for minorities. Additionally, some children are prone to conspicuously emulate what they deem to be successful individuals of their own race, thus finding a motivation to disregard the low expectations select teachers and others might hold for them and their peers. Unfortunately, such behaviors only seek to reinforce the existence of marginalizing practices that continue to plague some African American children. Grimmett (2006) further suggested that “Fortunately, despite these social realities, many African American males thrive. Successful African American males provide a focus for career interventions, because they possess the dynamic blueprint and skill sets from which these interventions can be developed” (p. 4).

#### *Careers in Education*

Addressing the career aspirations of African American males from a historic perspective, Quinn (2001) asserted that African Americans historically enjoyed the promise of successful careers in the education arena. Careers in education were major areas of employment for African Americans, particularly in the period prior to public school integration. According to Abney (1974), integration served as the impetus for the decrease of minority administrators in some areas of the United States. This impact was significant in the southern states and eventually forced African Americans into urban areas with large concentrations of African American students. Similarly, legislative initiatives would continue to negatively impact the recruiting and retention of sufficient numbers of African American educators with these impacts reaching into the recent declining ranks of aspiring African American educators (Smith, 2003).

In the opinion of Jacullo-Noto (1991), as recent as in the 1980s legislative actions limiting financial assistance would have a drastic effect on the number of minority candidates entering teacher education programs. Moreover, Jacullo-Noto asserted that dismantling of the Department of Education, its funds, and programs that supported the education of minorities in public schools, experienced near elimination during this period. Furthermore, Federal grants, loans, and scholarship opportunities were also drastically reduced, thus greatly minimizing the number of minorities entering education programs. Additionally, some increased career options for African Americans and the institutionalization of teacher competency testing are among the additional factors that interrupt the flow of African American male educators (Irvine, 1990). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1999), only 7.3% of America's teachers were Black. The implications of this figure are better understood through examining the rapid shift in the demographics of American school districts. There are further implications associated with the lack of African American teachers. Hicks and Butty (1999) suggested that the lack of presence by African American male educators was critical to the development of young male students who lacked a father figure as well as a role model. Furthermore, the potential of these youths pursuing careers in education are drastically minimized when they are denied the opportunity to have visibility of educators of color.

## Summary

The literature reviewed and explored the African American experience. A brief history on Africans becoming African Americans, African American leadership, African American education in the state of Arkansas, mentoring, and career exploration is examined. To gain an understanding of the complicated factors involved, the issues of Africans becoming African Americans was discussed.

The initial argument focused on how Africans came into a hostile and volatile environment that was non-conducive to their intellectual functioning, social acceptance, and ultimately, social mobility. It was speculated that blacks lacked the ability to learn and to benefit from a structured higher education setting and as a result of this philosophy, were immediately stripped of the dignity and privilege inherent to citizens of the still considerably young America. These arguments were augmented by religious rhetoric that further approved the wide-spread institution of slavery. Although slavery was a horrific experience for Africans and African Americans alike, arguably, it produced within some people a drive to position themselves to bring social justice to this marginalized group of people. This justice would be realized only after the emergence of Black men who assumed leadership roles among their people.

The leadership literature focused on the role and definition of leadership within the context of the African American community. Iconic leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Richard Allen served as leadership examples that existed outside the mainstream borders of the education arena. As such, their leadership was said to tremendously influence other African American males, prompting them to assume leadership roles in an area identified as key to the overall success of African Americans: education. Henderson (2008) suggested that the largest group of professionals to provide

leadership to the African American community was the educator. Conversely, while there is much literature addressing numerous facets of African American life, one area lacking is that of the impact of African American males and leadership roles in higher education (Smith, 2003). Notwithstanding, African Americans as a whole have contributed to the definition.

The review provided several working definitions of leadership. DeSpain (2000) defined leadership as an imperfect art practiced by individuals who define reality for their followers while creating and nurturing a vision of a new and better reality. Numerous definitions and examples were provided in the review. Each of these helped to confirm the impossibility of providing a uniform definition for leadership, as leadership in and of itself is contextual and fluid, based on the given situation and circumstances. With the case of African Americans, and more specifically African American males, a specific type of leadership was identified as most fitting. The leadership style identified was Servant Leadership.

According to Greenleaf (1977), Black men have demonstrated a proclivity toward being leaders committed to serving others through a cause, crusade, movement, and a campaign of humanitarian, not materialistic, goals. This is the essence of Servant Leadership as it involves the collective advancement of a group of people. The driving force behind this particular leadership style is often said to be closely linked to an individual's spirituality.

The literature revealed that spirituality and leadership often intersect and provide a source of motivation for leaders seeking to free the oppressed from social injustice. However, spirituality and religious conviction in the lives of leaders remains a topic of

immense controversy. Jones (2002) emphasized the importance of not dismissing the relevance of the spiritual dimension of leadership as it has most likely been the cause of African survival during the early years of persecution brought on by slavery. The literature also revealed how spirituality served as the moral basis for African American leadership. African American leadership and education were said to be essential for the social acceptance and advancement of African American people.

According to Harvey, Harvey, and Carter (2004), significant gaps existed between the rates of postsecondary attainment for African Americans as compared to Whites, and there were numerous barriers at all levels that African Americans would continue to face within the higher education arena. Until these barriers are eliminated, low numbers of African American males will have the opportunity to successfully matriculate through the faculty ranks into administrative leadership positions in the current higher education structure. One of the key components to this process is mentorship.

Mentorship was described as being vital to the process of career development. Mentorship was also described as being critical to issues relating to career aspirations and, most importantly, successful careers in education. These and other issues were important in addressing matters conveyed in the examination of the plight of Black men. From perceptions derived from long standing stereotypes to challenges relating to a clear understanding of manhood, the overall tone of the literature related on this topic voiced very broad generalizations of negative images of Black men.

Following the Chapter Two literature review, the research methodology, including the selection process for the leaders in this study, will be presented in Chapter Three. The selection process for the participants and how data are collected and analyzed will also be

included. Data analysis and research findings will be included, while the findings, the limitations of the study, and implications for further research will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER THREE

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A variety of methodologies could be employed to effectively research the success factors of African American male leaders currently serving in executive leadership positions in the state of Arkansas. The information presented in Chapter 3 is focused on outlining the primary approach applied to this particular study. This approach will be consistent with Johnson and Onwuegbuzie's (2004) multiple methods approach which includes a quantitative and qualitative phase during the research process. The multiple methods (mixed) approach allowed for the comparison of basic demographic information of African American male executives from around the state of Arkansas by coupling those findings with the rich experiences recorded during the interview (qualitative) phase.

### Overview and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the success factors of African American male academicians serving Arkansas' two year and four year colleges and universities. The study was designed to examine the experiences of African American men serving in executive leadership positions and the strategies they employed to allow them to persist and succeed. Participants of the study were encouraged to share their individual stories in hopes of gaining revelation of the deeper meaning of their experiences. Moreover, components of Cultural Continuity/Discontinuity, Cultural Proficiency, and Social Capital Theories (Ballentine and Roberts, 2010) were employed to glean a better understanding of the personal experiences of the participants of the study. This study was situated against a disparaging historical background. This historical context illustrated actions that have resulted in poor access, recruitment, and retention of Black male administrators. However, the historical background does not provide ample examples of

how Black male leaders have thrived as educational leaders, thus the purpose of this research was to examine, understand, and highlight such instances.

### Statement of the Problem

As the student populations of higher education institutions continue to become more racially diverse, and America becomes more diverse, it is incumbent on current and future leadership to understand the absolute necessity of diversifying faculty, staff, and administrative teams. Smith (2003) suggests that from an empirical perspective, little is known about what happens to African American administrators once they reach executive-level leadership positions. Notwithstanding, having African American men in these positions is vitally important to the pursuit of equity and administrative diversity.

#### *Absence of the African American Academician*

Historically, African American men have been underrepresented in school administration (Wolfe, 2010). Following the Reconstruction Era, most African American students attended racially-segregated schools that were led by African Americans. These schools relied upon teaching staff comprised almost exclusively of African Americans. Many of these schools were plagued by extreme resource constraints and relied heavily on the strong leadership provided by individuals with deep connections to their communities and its children. The connection of these leaders led to schools that became the backbone of stability for African American communities. However, after the landmark case of *Brown versus Board of Education* (1954), most predominantly Black schools saw their leadership structure change as Black educators were replaced by White administrators and educators. Unfortunately, this change in leadership caused immediate

disparity between the students and educators. This disparity was not prompted by pure malice, but rather a myriad of social disconnects that existed between the predominantly White educators and their students of color. In the opinion of Cole (2007), research suggests that students belonging to a non-majority group experience higher dropout rates and benefit greatly from the support of educators with similar ethnic/racial backgrounds as these similarities provide them with extensive understanding of the minority students' cultures and individual situations. Thus, the intent of "separate but equal" caused immediate and long lasting challenges for Black students. Many were left to believe the solution to these problems lie in recruiting and retaining more leaders of color, and more importantly, leaders with a multicultural approach to education.

However, this solution would not be easily obtained as the members of the non-majority races had historically experienced numerous obstacles that made education somewhat unattractive. This was certainly the case for Black men. Wolfe (2010) noted that during the last decade, African Americans in general were exiting the education field faster than they were entering it. These findings were quantified by reports from workshops, symposia, and conferences around the country that suggested African Americans had encountered inhospitable campus environments, marginalization, limited advancement opportunities, and a lack of mentorship opportunities. Addressing such findings is critical to bringing needed improvement to the process of building culturally inclusive institutional climates in our colleges and universities.

As Wolfe (2010) argued, diversity among higher education leadership is necessary to meet the needs of an ever-growing multicultural student population. Examining factors that have led to the success of African American administrators could

prove useful in creating strategies for the recruitment, retention, and creation of policy formation that will aid in the advancement of future leaders of color. Furthermore, the inclusion of the participating leaders' experiences into the limited existing body of literature may aid in better preparing other African Americans seeking to join the academic leadership ranks. According to Gordon (2006), educational opportunities, whether fair or unfair, and academic achievements are closely related to the social divisions associated with race, ethnicity, and social class. Bowser (2007) argues the single most important ticket for African Americans into the modern middle class is higher education. Moreover, Bowser asserts that the lack of family inheritance, wealth, and education is detrimental to African American families. In addition to the existing struggles of the African American family, there is a growing concern specifically toward the plight of African American males and their presence in higher education.

#### *Plight of the African American Male*

Researchers such as Gibbs (1998), Hare, (1984), Jordan and Cooper (2003), argued that cultural norms and values embedded in U.S. social, political, and economic institutions have historically resulted in the a myriad of challenges for African American men. In the opinion of Kunjufu (1986), African American boys have been damaged by a myriad of policies and practices that unintentionally deny African American males equal access to high quality educational experiences. Furthermore, Kunjufu added that legislation, tracking, special education, and standardized testing contribute to these problems. Additionally, Holland (1993) asserts that school failure at the high school level translates into a variety of unproductive outcomes: dropping out of school, teenage

pregnancy, crime, and drug use, all of which have serious implications for quality of life as an adult.

### Conceptual Framework

Cultural proficiency, social capital, and cultural continuity/discontinuity theories provided the conceptual framework for this study. Furthermore, the conceptual framework will aid in the subsequent reflections and experiences of African American males serving in higher education leadership roles.

#### *Cultural Proficiency*

As noted by Lindsey, Nurti-Robbins, and Terrell (2003), cultural proficiency is a way of being that enables both individuals and organizations to respond effectively to the changing social landscape of American society. Additionally, Lindsey et al. asserted that the basis for cultural proficiency stems from the desegregation of schools and the effects of discrimination in the United States. Moreover, Lindsey et al. suggested that education leaders mindful of the necessity of cultural proficiency are more prone to cultivate environments that close the door on tokenism, and in essence, stop the revolving door through which highly competent, motivated underrepresented faculty enter briefly, and exit hastily. Lindsey added that culturally proficient leaders develop a conscious awareness of the culture of their communities or school and understand that each has a major impact on all parties associated with the learning environment.

#### *Social Capital*

As defined by Hemmings (2007), social capital is “the social resources and networks that enable people to promote their own and or other’s educational achievement and attainment” (p. 2). Hemmings further asserted that social capital can be gained

through resources, both educational (e.g. books, study aids, academic tutoring) and auxiliary services (e.g., psychological counseling, substance abuse treatment, medical services, legal assistance) and is dispensed through obligations, expectations, and other reciprocal understandings within and between families and schools. According to Morrow (1999), social capital theory allows us to understand the social and political contexts of society. Morrow asserts that educators do not merely work in a self-contained environment; rather, they routinely negotiate a complex atmosphere of social class and organizational and racial politics. Social capital theory provides a framework that gives understanding to these complex tasks on both the macro and micro levels.

According to Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003), “people enact forms of capital” (p. 3). They further added that “In valuing forms of capital enacted by others, followers attribute leadership to them. In this process, leaders make use of the capitals they possess, and followers value the forms of capital enacted by leaders” (p. 3). In the opinion of Morrow (1999), social capital speaks to the interconnectedness among individuals, social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that emanate from them. Bourdieu (1991) describes social capital as a type of power with the potential of manifesting itself through prestige, reputation, and fame when the various forms of social capital are perceived and recognized as legitimate. This theory will provide a lens through which the experiences of the participants of this study will be examined.

#### *Cultural Continuity/Discontinuity*

The final supporting theory for the study is cultural continuity/discontinuity. In the opinions of Allen and Boykin (1992), cultural discontinuity alleges that

Much of the school failure exhibited by African American children can be explained in terms of cultural discontinuity resulting from a mismatch between salient features cultivated in the African American home and proximal environments and those typically afforded with the United States educational system. (p. 586)

Cultural continuity/discontinuity theory avows the existence of an imbedded conceptual framework for the examination of African American child socialization that reflects the bicultural nature of the African American community (Boykin & Toms, 1985). The theory further challenges the concept of the existence of two distinct cultures to which African American children belong. Cultural continuity indicates a degree of similarity across the home and school settings that predicts the student's achievement and motivational outcomes (Hudley & Gottfried, 2008) while simultaneously acknowledging the reality of cultural discontinuity across home and school settings, suggesting that the culture of school and home may be two very different and sometimes mutually exclusive settings, making home and school cultures quite different from each other. The theory provides a unique perspective in that it captures the uniformity, diversity, complexity, and richness of African American family life.

#### Research Questions

The research questions were used to initiate discussions on a number of topics. The questions were written open-ended with the intent of allowing the researcher to probe deeper into the respondents' experiences to glean a richer and fuller understanding of their motivations, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. During this study, the following research questions were examined:

1. How do African American male administrators define leadership?

2. What leaders, African American or otherwise, played a role in the administrator's desire to become an educational leader?
3. How do perceptions of African American men serve as a source of motivation for African Americans currently serving as administrators?
4. What role does spirituality play in the life of African American male administrators?
5. What role, if any, did mentorship play in the development of African American men serving in higher education leadership roles in Arkansas?

### Population and Sample

#### *Setting*

The geographic region selected for this study was the state of Arkansas. The researcher chose Arkansas because of his recent relocation to the state, employment by one of the state's higher education institutions, and his aspiration to executive level leadership. Arkansas presented a unique opportunity for research as its past is riddled with racial challenges, with the most notable being the events at Little Rock's Central High School, and the "Little Rock Nine," an incident that received Federal attention when then Governor Orval Faubus refused to allow nine African American children to attend Central High School after a Supreme Court decision called for the desegregation of the country's schools. In spite of its past mishaps, the state of Arkansas has made great strides in providing academic environments that are welcoming to all.

#### *African American Men of Arkansas*

Five executive-level African American leaders were purposefully selected as participants in the study. Initially, the goal was six participants, but after reaching a point

of “saturation” regarding participant responses, it was decided the sixth participant would not be required.

It is assumed that most accredited institutions of higher learning require their executive leaders to hold an appropriate advanced degree as a basic requirement and qualification for executive leadership. However, to better determine the academic background of the leadership throughout the state, a demographic survey and cover letter (see Appendix A) were sent to the office of institutional research or its appropriate equivalent office to each of the state’s 44 private and public higher education institutions. The institutions included Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Primarily White Institutions (PWI). The purpose of this survey was to ascertain the number of African American executive-level leaders currently serving, their level of education, degrees attained, where they earned their degrees (undergraduate and graduate), gender, previous positions held, years of service in their current position, and years of service in higher education. The survey also solicited participation in future interviews as a follow-on activity of this study. The survey was administered electronically and accessible via a link that was provided to the survey respondents. An electronic call for participation letter (see Appendix B) was sent to each survey respondent to aid in the creation of an interview pool. The letter contained a brief overview of the study and rationale for the purposeful participation selection process as well as a short description of the importance and benefits of this research. The men who responded with an interest in the interview phase were contacted by the researcher to determine the most convenient time and place to conduct their interview.

Once the survey results were tabulated, five executive-level administrators agreed to participate in the interview phase of the study (Patton, 2001). It is common practice for a small sample size to be chosen by qualitative researchers due to the rigorous and systematic methodology employed (Wolfe, 2010). Creswell (2003) and Polit, Beck, and Hungler (2001) suggest that phenomenological studies involve samples of 10 or fewer. The participants represented various backgrounds and disciplines but were associated with one of the three divisions commonly associated with higher education: academic affairs, student affairs, and administrative affairs. The interview participants' profiles are highlighted in a profile matrix. To safeguard confidentiality, the participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Table 1

*Participants' Profiles*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Years as an Administrator</i>	<i>Highest Degree Completed</i>	<i>Undergrad Institution Type</i>	<i>Graduate Institution Type</i>
Sam Carter	12	Ed .D	PWI	PWI
Matt May	7	Ph. D	PWI	PWI
Ron Smith	16	M.S.	PWI	PWI
Henry Hicks	27	Ed. D	PWI	PWI
Bob Michaels	38	Ed. D	HBCU	PWI

## Research Design

### *Mixed Methods Design*

Since each research methodology has its own limitations, applying both quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for comparisons of the lived experiences of the participants of this study (Hammond, 2005; Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999). Scott (2008) adds that the mixed methods approach provides for a wider perspective of the data collected and impacts how the data are interpreted. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), a mixed approach or mixed research design can be used to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret data gathered from the same subjects or site of a quantitative study. Moreover, this research approach supports the notion of a phenomenological approach to viewing and interpreting data. Bogdan and Biklen suggest that the phenomenological approach is a technique that involves researchers attempting to understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations. In the opinion of Creswell (2003), biographical studies report the life of a single individual, while a phenomenological study records and describes the meaning of lived experiences for numerous persons who have a shared experience about a particular phenomenon. Polkinghorne (1989) asserted that phenomenologists study structures of consciousness in human experience. Creswell (2003) further asserts that “the researcher needs to understand the philosophical perspectives behind the approach, especially the concept of studying how people experience a phenomenon” (p. 54). In the opinion of Wolfe (2010), the phenomenological approach is closely associated with the writings and philosophy of Edmund Husserl. Husserl is referred to as the father of phenomenology and

believed that man's greatest interest was that of studying knowledge (Morrisette, 1999).

Creswell (2003) added,

Phenomenology is the methodology in which the researcher identifies the "essence" of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Understanding the "lived experiences" marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. In this process, the researcher "brackets" his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study. (p. 15)

Additionally, a phenomenological study provides description or meaning of the lived experiences for numerous individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Wolfe, 2010).

Patton (2001) outlined the three basic steps to phenomenological inquiry. The first approach was to suspend all judgment about what is real; suspension is based on what Husserl would call *epoche*, the process of the researcher identifying his or her own biases and removing them from the phenomenon being studied (Wolfe, 2010). The second step involves reduction. Reduction is a process in which the researcher brackets the rest of the world and any presuppositions with which he or she approaches the subject to study (Wolfe, 2010). The third and final step involves the articulation of the phenomenon experience and the description of its structure (Patton, 2001).

According to Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), one of the most important steps in the research process is sampling. In Onwuegbuzie and Collins' opinion, sampling is a process of identifying a portion, piece, or segment that is representative of a whole. Additionally, sampling helps to inform the quality of inferences made by the researcher that emerge from the underlying findings.

This study employed a mixed design of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, a quantitative approach to data collection examined basic demographic

information for black males currently serving in leadership positions within the current Arkansas higher education system. A qualitative approach will aid the researcher in the examination of the success factors of African American male leaders.

According to McClellan (2006), qualitative research involves studying person's lives, stories, behaviors, the organizational functioning of social movements, and interactional relationships. Creswell (2003) asserts that qualitative research requires theoretical and social sensitivity, the construction of holistic depictions of phenomena through observations, interviews, conversations, and the use of written documents, pictures, and other available materials. In the opinion of Glesne (1999) and Rubin and Rubin (2005), qualitative research designs allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences which are best described through detailed examples of narratives and an attempt to understand human and social issues by making sense of personal stories.

#### Data Collection and Instrumentation

The study was designed to employ both quantitative and qualitative components. Data were collected through demographic surveys, in-depth interviews, direct observations, and artifacts (Hutchinson, 2001). The demographic survey gathered quantitative data, while the interviews collected rich qualitative data that provided insight into the lived experiences of other people (Seidman, 2006). In the opinion of Krueger and Casey (2000), qualitative methods emerged from social scientists' efforts to improve the quality of their research by refining their procedures. These procedures were derived from the physical and biological sciences, but many of the components proved to be too positivistic, limited in scope and thinking, and ultimately overlooked valuable data.

Therefore, other scientific procedures surfaced that proved to be valuable to social science. These procedures became known as qualitative research.

Patton (1997) added that qualitative research data offer detailed, rich descriptions, capturing variations between multiple cases. Patton further clarified the true definition of qualitative data as data that consist of detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories. Creswell (2003) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Seidman (2006) offered these thoughts about interviewing:

It is a powerful way to gain insight into the educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect the issues. As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individuals without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration. Finally, it is deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in others' stories. (p. 14)

The interview process began with an overview of the study, an explanation of the participants' role in the study, and a brief overview of the rights of the participant in accordance with the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board. Prior to beginning the interviews, the participants were required to sign an informed consent form which was archived by the researcher. Verbal consent was also secured prior to the recording of the interview sessions. A semi-structured interview protocol served as a guide for the foundation of questions for the interview. The flexibility of the semi-

structured protocol allowed for additional questions by the interviewer and more latitude of potential responses from participants (Kruger & Casey, 2000; Merriam, 1998). The interview sessions were as brief as 45 minutes and as long two hours and 35 minutes. Once completed, the interview notes were transcribed manually.

### Data Analysis

According to Wolfe (2010), data analysis in qualitative research consists of three action steps. These steps include: a) data reduction, b) data display, and c) conclusion drawing and verification. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the process of data reduction as the process of selecting, simplifying, focusing, abstracting and transforming the data. This process is necessary to make data more understandable and accessible (Kvale, 1996). Data display requires the organization of data in a fashion that permits the drawing of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, conclusion drawing and verification ensures that no definitive conclusions are drawn during the collection process (Wolfe, 2010).

The research focused on five research questions. Qualitative data were coded using an open coding process to compare and categorize the information. Particular attention was paid to the emergence of recurring themes. Merriam (1998) describes reliability as the extent that research findings are found to be replicable. Since human behavior is never static, reliability is sometimes problematic in the social sciences. Reliability and validity of the data were addressed through the use of comparison techniques among transcripts and survey responses. More specifically, the triangulation strategy was employed to address validity. This approach relied on gaining a “holistic understanding” of the phenomena to build cogent explanations of the phenomena being

examined (Merriam, 1998). Quantitative data analysis consisted of a summarization of the data received from the demographic questionnaires as well as computations of ages and years of experience of the respondents. A list of 44 colleges and universities was obtained from the Arkansas Department of Higher Education website. With the assistance of one of the state's African American leaders, a list of 17 potential participants was developed. The demographic survey, designed to gather quantitative data, was mailed directly to each of these men. According to Padilla (1980), quantitative educational research specific to ethnic minorities has a long history. Padilla asserted the earliest studies were directed toward intellectual assessment and achievement of African Americans. Moreover, Padilla elucidated the differences in educational research through a comparison of universalistic and relativistic approaches. According to Matsumoto (1994), "The universalistic approach seeks confirmation of general truths that extend across cultural groups. In contrast, the relativistic approach seeks to uncover a particular truth that is confined to a single culture or social group" (p. 128, 1994). Conversely, in the opinion of Banks (1993) and Kerlinger (1979), educational researchers have followed the social sciences in their adoption of acceptable paradigms that rest on a universal framework.

Once the interviews were completed, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Information was separated and divided into labeled folders. The labels utilized the pseudonyms for each of the five participants. After the interviews, each interview was transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read, and re-read thoroughly, for the identification of patterns and themes related to the phenomena. General notes were produced and written in the margins of the transcripts as

categories organically emerged and the analysis gradually transitioned into the second phase—coding. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) offered the following:

Developing a coding system involves several steps: You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories. They are a means of sorting the descriptive data you have collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. (p. 171)

During the coding process, the audio recordings of the interviews were replayed to allow the researcher to pay close attention to particular comments and the feeling and emphasis on these statements. This process was completed multiple times to allow patterns and themes to emerge. Significant statements were extracted and organized to form clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Initial summaries were prepared for each interview. Borrowing from Wolfe (2010) the data clusters were divided into two categories, *textual or structural*. According to Creswell (1998), the textural cluster outlines what happened, while the structural clusters outlines how the phenomenon is experienced. This process allowed for the development of composite descriptions of the meanings and essence of the lived experiences of the participants of this study (Moustakas, 1994). The findings are reported in detail in the next chapter.

### Limitations

The researcher experienced some unanticipated limitations during the research process. It was assumed the researcher would experience great success in recruiting African American men to participate in the study. This assumption was made based on the fact that the researcher, an African American man with some informal relationships with men around the state, could capitalize on what he believed to be a shared common interest: the success of rising African American education leaders. As a result, the

researcher encountered some challenges in enlisting participants for the study. An initial analysis suggested 17 candidates were eligible for the study. However, after multiple email solicitations, the researcher was able to secure seven survey responses and the assistance of five men to participate in the interview portion of the study. Although the original intent was to interview six men, the researcher believed that even with five participants, the data did demonstrate saturation.

### Summary

The research and design methodology were presented in Chapter Three. An introduction preceded the overview of the research problem, purpose, and research questions. The population and sample section described how the subjects were selected for the study. Interview protocols were discussed and the rationale for a qualitative study was defined. Data collection and instrumentation outlined the methods to be used to collect information for the study. The data analysis and research findings will be presented in Chapter Four. Finally, the research findings, conclusions, and implication for further study will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND RESULTS

A qualitative approach framed the study with support from a demographic survey that collected basic descriptive data. The researcher served as the primary research instrument of data collection throughout semi-structured interviews with the participants. The intent of these sessions was to ascertain information on factors that contributed to the success of the participants. One of the participants was interviewed via telephone, while the remaining four were interviewed in person.

The framework of the study was constructed from a review of current, relative literature regarding the history of African Americans, history of education in Arkansas, career aspirations of African Americans, and the impact of mentorship. The focus of this chapter is to a) introduce the participants, b) present the findings of the research questions, and c) provide a synthesis of the essence of the lived experiences of African American men serving in executive leadership positions in the state of Arkansas.

#### Survey Results

Seven men completed and returned the demographic survey. The survey yielded the following results. Six of the seven survey participants hold positions related to student affairs. Moreover, these men climbed the ranks via traditional student affairs positions such as associate chief student affairs officer, dean of students, multicultural affairs, advising and counseling, and enrollment management. One of the respondents was serving as a president of his institution. One of the participants ascended to his current position via a traditional academic career track. This career path included faculty assignments with following on positions to oversee special academic programs designed

to support underserved student population. At the time of the survey, the average length of the higher education careers of the men was 18.8 years. Of the seven respondents, six of the men completed their undergraduate work at Predominately White Institutions (PWI) with one completing work at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). All seven of the men completed their graduate work at PWIs. To safeguard the participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to introduce and discuss the thoughts and shared experiences of the participants.

### Introduction of the Participants

#### *Matt May*

Matt May is a high level executive leader at a state university. He is a very cordial gentleman who displayed a strong sense of commitment to students and their success. Matt successfully negotiated the rigors of obtaining full professor status while under the tutelage of a handful of individuals who took a vested interest in his success. It was apparent from the onset of our interview that Matt was very genuine and committed to assisting the researcher with this particular project. He also seemed very determined to remain engaged in continuing to add to the body of literature anything and everything that could aid in the increase of *opportunities* and *access* for people of color. Matt referenced a number of African American men who played a part in his success as a higher education leader. He also attributes his success to being a *builder*, someone with the energy, motivation, and vision to assume responsibility for programs that somewhat languished in obscurity for years. He developed these into programs of high quality, and his leadership had an impact at a local, state, and national level. In his opinion it is important to be available to the young profs and young brothers to help provide them the

guidance and mentorship they will need to obtain some level of success.” When asked about his family and his role in the family, May offered,

I bear my father’s name. I think he reared me to be the person that would step in and step up if something ever happened to him. So, he was a very loving guy, but there was a certain —staidness.” I think he wanted to nurture my autonomy and independence, at the same time letting me know that he cared. He wasn’t very communicative. We would have some superficial conversations. When I am saying that I am saying that we didn’t talk much... he had his own way of communicating. There was a certain way he would look at you that pretty much told you if he approved or disapproved. I guess he was communicative but not talkative. But he always let me know he was very supportive. I love the way he handled stress. It just seemed like he would go with the flow and accept his part of it as a part of life. Things are good, things are not good, that’s life you know. You have to learn how to handle it, and go with things.

When asked about the role religion played in his early development, May said,

I was reared in an ecumenically divided home. Not divided in the sense of angry, but divided in the sense of backgrounds. My father was the son of a Baptist, missionary Baptist minister, and my mother was the daughter of a woman who would have been a Seventh Day Adventist minister if the Adventist would have accepted women into the ministry. They do now, but didn’t then. So both of these people were more moderate than their parents were. That is how they were able to connect with one another. So, religion was always very important, particularly to my Mother, because she kind of took charge of our day to day, reared me as a Seventh Day Adventist and it was very important. My grandmother’s effect on me was very profound. I don’t think, I know I wouldn’t be the person that I am now without that strong religious connection.

### *Sam Carter*

Sam Carter is a high-level executive leader at a state college. Sam is a very personable, energetic individual with a tremendous capacity for service to others. Sam recently relocated to the state of Arkansas after being appointed to an executive-level student affairs position. Sam became an instant advocate for this research project and the researcher, and provided the researcher with very valuable information from his own research experience. Sam views himself as a “non-traditional” success in the field of higher education, as he previously spent several years in the accounting field. But after a

series of life- altering events, Sam made his way to higher education where he has experienced tremendous success and self-gratification. Sam shared pertinent information about peers and mentors who have supported him during his career. In his opinion, “We all have a responsibility to give back, to stay grounded, and to always be willing to take the time to do what I am doing for you right now.” Sam’s only request of the researcher was to keep him informed of the status of the project, and to give back by doing for others what he was willing to do for the researcher. When asked about his family and his role in the family, Carter offered the following:

There were five kids in all...mother had two sets of kids (different fathers)...one set of three that were older than me (two sisters and a brother). Our mother was a domestic worker. My biological father was killed when I was two years old. My stepfather/father figure was abusive and was a part of my life until I was five or six. My grandfather was the strong male influence for me. He was a Baptist preacher. I learned my work ethic and spiritual values came from him. A lot of preachers are in the family so it almost makes me somewhat of a rebel now. Grandfather took grandkids to cut yards to make money in the summer. He was big on church and education. He believed that “Ignorance is the worst thing in the world.” That was his motto. He had this attitude because he served as a chaplain in World War II.

When asked about the role religion played in his early development, Carter said:

“That’s what kept me. Mother was in the choir; me and my younger brother were in the choir, as well, and went to church all the time with her. My grandfather was the assistant Pastor at the church I attended prior to going to college.”

### *Ron Smith*

Ron Smith is a high-level executive leader at a private state college. Ron is the youngest of the participants and has the shortest tenure in higher education. Ron was very cordial and was the first leader to volunteer to participate in this study. Ron also attempted to aid the researcher in securing an interview with another very influential

higher education leader in the state, but was unsuccessful in doing so. Ron ascended to his current position following a traditional series of student affairs assignments. He attributes his success to discipline, hard work, and being committed to something of importance. During the interview, he stated: “If I wasn’t being paid anything, I will still gladly do this job – now because I have a family and responsibilities that may not be possible, but I really do feel that strongly about the importance of what I do, and about what we do as a college on a day to day basis.” Ron also shared his initial reluctance to adopt the title “mentor.” However, after a period of time, realized that this was simply a requirement for his position that he has come to enjoy and cherish greatly. When asked about his family and his role in the family, Smith offered,

I grew up in Tulsa Oklahoma, born and raised there. Had a small family, raised in a single parent household, and those in the community. Single Mom - my role, well, let’s see, I don’t know If I really had a role - I didn’t really have to do anything other than go to school, stay out of trouble, and graduate. I guess that was it.

When asked about the role of religion in his early development, Smith answered:

As most people, grew up in the church. Well, growing up, we had a strong association and affiliation with a real powerhouse Baptist church. At that time, the minister was one of the national leaders. If there was an issue, people in the community went to the Pastor with issues, and he helped them. He had a national office, and positions through the Baptist association. My Mom sang in the choir, I sang in the kids choir, and it seemed like we went to church all the time...sometimes two and three times a week - minimum. The rest of my brothers and sisters didn’t go, but it seemed like I was always there. We were just raised in the church!

### *Henry Hicks*

Henry Hicks is a high-level executive leader at a state university. Henry became an instant supporter of the researcher and this project. Henry is extremely energetic, cordial, and very well connected to the African American community locally, as well as

on the state and national levels. Henry ascended to his current position following a traditional student affairs track after a few brief years in law enforcement. He attributes his success to tremendous family support, hard work, and a few African American men who provided him guidance and support as he climbed the higher education ranks. Henry also has very vivid memories of the challenges of segregation. He shared:

I was very much a part of the segregated south. The separate water fountains...separate restrooms...going to the back of the restaurant...my father driving at night time to go to Detroit to visit his family because there were no hotels along the way or because he didn't want to be bothered along the way by people as well...very much a part of the old southern south.

When asked about the role his family played in his early development, Hicks responded:

I am from a little town in southern Arkansas with a population of about 1200 people. My family consisted of my mother, father. There were four of us in the family, 3 boys and 1 girl. I am the oldest of the four. If you were the oldest it meant everything came your way. You were the leader. You were expected to be the one that helped out more than the rest and had to set the tone. I grew up in a segregated school system. My last two years of high school were in an integrated high school so being in a small black community. My neighbors were school teachers at the school so that old expression about —it takes a village? I was in the midst of that village. I had my parents and I had the black teachers that were at that black school who had a very strong hand in keeping me straight, as well as my neighbors as well. My one set of neighbors within 20 yards of my house they had three older sons and those were like my older brothers. They did a good job of setting the tone, as well, so it was a neighborhood effort that kept me going.

When asked about the role of religion, Hicks enthusiastically declared:

A lot! Truly! Even in the old southern Arkansas we had very few what we call full time churches...churches where they had service every Sunday. Baptists had it on first and third, Methodists had it on second and fourth. My mother was Methodist at the time when I was growing up. My father was Baptist, so I still was in church four Sundays out of a month whereas my friends were just in there two Sundays out of a month. Any special programs in the afternoon we were there as well. Religion and faith have been a major part of my upbringing. Literally from the time you could walk from Sunday School to when I left and went to college and then I carried it on then so it was very much a part of every Sunday and during the week and in the household.

*Bob Michaels*

Bob Michaels is serving in a high-level executive leadership position at a state university. Bob was the longest-serving leader to participate in the study. Bob has over 38 years of higher education experience. His experience includes a brief career in the K-12 system prior to coming to higher education. Bob is an extremely cordial individual who willingly shared his experiences. He exudes strength and wisdom. Bob's mentorship experiences made a profound impression on him. He also attributes his drive, motivation and focus to his strong belief in God. He shared:

For me spirituality is being fortified. It's having a belief in God and knowing that that's where everything is. I start my day out...every day...with meditation and Bible Study and that's what fortifies me for the day. If I don't do it I see the difference. So I come in to my office probably at 6:30 or 6:45 and the first thing I do is my meditation and my Bible study.

When asked about the role family played in his early development, Michael's offered:

I was the eldest kid and because there was such a spread cause I'm 4 years older than my next sibling...I'm sure my parents didn't plan it this way, it just happened and it was to their advantage because it made it easier going to college. You could have one coming out and one going in, so it made it much easier to finance. But I always worked and supported myself. I am an overachiever. I graduated from my High School as valedictorian so I got a scholarship for school but you know at that time back in the 60's it was not enough to cover everything. And you know within our community as I shared it was separate but equal school system but central to everything was our church...Methodist, United Methodist. Many of my teachers were in the same church, so they were Sunday-school teachers as well and it was truly a community where everybody chipped in and helped each other. If I was seen doing something I shouldn't be doing, the neighbor could say something or the teacher would say something and it'd be almost the same as the parent. It was just that kind of community.

When asked about the influence of religion during his youth, Michaels asserted:

I don't mean to sound cavalier when I say this, but it was just second nature. The school and the church was the heart of the community and everything centered around those two institutions there. You were either involved in activities at school or activities through the church. I can recall during the summers we always had summer camp and we'd get to head off to Aldersgate, well it was Oklahoma

then because black folks couldn't go to Aldersgate. Later they opened up Aldersgate and we could go there. But our church was very progressive and they always brought in students from Philander Smith during the summer to run our vacation bible school so we had access to college students and summer camps which was kind of unheard of and the church always supported it. Our families didn't have to, the church did...the family would help some. Going to camp was an expensive deal.

### Findings

Various themes emerged during the data analysis. These themes provided unique insights into the lived experiences and success factors of African American male executive leaders. Many of the themes were verified across each of the five participants' transcripts. The themes included: (a) Leading by Example, (b) Leading, but not from the Front, (c) Leading was Natural and Early, (d) More is Expected, (e) Family Influence, (f) I Always knew I Was Black, (g) People Are Watching Me, (h) It's the Way I Grew Up and it is why I do what I do, and (i) They Didn't Call Themselves a Mentor.

Notwithstanding, the categories presented do not exactly represent the experiences of each participant as no two participants had the exact same experience (Wolfe, 2010). Also, there is not a "prototypical" set of success factors that exists despite many African American men having shared similar struggles in their experiences as a result of living in a race and class conscious society (Collins, 1990). According to Strauss (1998) and Corbin (1998), the approach to best present the findings is to place narratives in the most appropriate context to provide an illustration of the general experiences of the participants.

### Research Questions

Five research questions were developed to examine the factors that led to the success of the five participants. Specifically, the intent of the questions was to gain a

better understanding of specific factors that attributed to the participants' ascent to an executive level leadership position. Each of the questions served as a category of the phenomenon in question and will be discussed in detail (Wolfe, 2010). The questions were open-ended with the intent of allowing the researcher to probe deeper into the respondents' experiences to glean a richer and fuller understanding of their motivations, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. The data were collected and situated into various themes. Detailed and descriptive statements (direct quotes) provide the rich context of the experiences, and factors that attributed to some level of success for each of the participants. Finally, verbatim interview responses supported the researcher's interpretation of the phenomena.

### Leadership

*Question One: How do African American male administrators define leadership?*

The leadership category captures distinct definitions and understandings from each of the participants on the topic of leadership. Although each participant serves in a high-level executive leadership position, each has a unique perspective on the phenomenon of leadership. The participants felt a strong sense of responsibility to provide leadership in a variety of ways. Several themes emerged from answering questions that pertained to leadership. These themes include: Leading by Example; Leading, but not from the Front; In the Trenches with the Troops; Leading was Natural and Early; and More is Expected.

### *Leading by Example*

The findings of this category convey the thoughts of the participants regarding the definition of leadership. The participants all, in their own unique fashion, equated leadership to something related to “movement” or “example.” During the analysis, the participants shared a strong sense of responsibility for providing their teams and staff an example of leadership. Matt May described leadership by emphasizing that “leadership is about manifesting the characteristics that you want to see by the people on your team.” He further described leadership as the process of empowering people to give their best to a cause or purpose. Smith added: “Leadership is leading without leading. Leadership is being able to take a situation or entity or what have you from one area to the next area and having buy-in from everyone that is on that team.”

Carter suggested that leadership was about service. In his opinion, leading meant serving, so if he were going to effectively lead, he had to have a “heart” for serving. Henry Hicks’s definition was heavily focused on movement. He defined leadership by stating: “Leadership is the ability to influence and guide people into a direction that you would like to have them go and it’s also... (how do I say this without saying the word leading) the act of performing by example.” Finally, Bob Michaels described in a brief, succinct fashion his understanding of leadership. He described leadership as “the ability to inspire individuals to achieve a certain goal... to lead by example, to give others a living, tangible example of leadership.”

### *Leading, but not from the Front*

The essence of this theme was the responsibility of leaders to provide an example while deferring recognition and rewards to the teams they worked with. When asked to

provide their personal definition of leadership, the participants were unified in a common response and philosophy: leadership is the process of guiding or directing others. Most of them acknowledged their own inherent responsibility as a leader and how their definition and leadership philosophy had been molded by the interactions they experienced with other leaders as they climbed the rungs of the leadership ranks. All of the participants conveyed a strong belief in the fact that leadership did not entail them being “out front” with regard to whom credit should be given for accomplishments.

Michaels stated:

I choose to be under the radar. I’m not flamboyant. I’m not seeking attention one way or the other. I don’t have to be out front but I have learned through age and experience that leadership is about how to get things done without being out front. To me, that is leadership...as long as the outcome is the desired outcome.

Smith supported a similar notion and added to this discussion by stating,

Leadership is a parallel avenue in that I don’t have to be the one in the front to get the “glory” or what have you. I get gratification when those that are in the trenches and are doing the work get recognized. Do I take the charge and responsibility to push them? Sure I do. I think that is one aspect of leadership...do I have to be the one that gets the recognition for it? Absolutely not.

May added:

Being a leader is about knowing the status, and strength of the people on your team. It is about setting the example, and most importantly, being on the ground with the people that you are leader. It is not about you being recognized as much as it is about showing the folks you work with an example. I believe the leader should be the hardest worker. This is something that I do and believe as a leader.

Henry Hicks’s approach to the topic is much more related to his specific parameters as an African American leader. He stated,

Never been one to be arrogant in the first place...or boisterous or bragging. It’s just never been my nature. I don’t appreciate it when I see it in others, either. I think when you’re secure in who you are you don’t feel a need to beat someone over the head about “I am! I am! This is who I am!”

He emphasized the importance of leaders maintaining a certain level of leader humility.”

Overall, the participants were united in their belief that leadership was necessary, and best displayed from a position of support, rather than a position of notoriety and prestige.

### *In the Trenches with the Troops*

The third theme that emerged in the area of leadership was the concept of leadership occurring *In the Trenches with the Troops*. The participants shared a sense of the best leadership being provided through up-close interaction with the teams being led. Additionally, the participants believed the results of their leadership should be directed to the people who were ~~in~~ the trenches.” The results of their leadership included recognition, promotions, research opportunities, and monetary awards.

Matt May, whose scope of responsibility is the largest of the five participants, spoke with great excitement about the tremendous sense of accomplishment he experiences when he boards buses with his staff to travel the region for recruiting and public relations visits. May said,

I am the type of leader that rolls up his sleeves and gets out there and gets to work with the community and works with the people. I am not a behind the desk kind of guy. I work with the community and work with the people. We go on the road recruiting. I am on the road to work with the people, to work with the administrators.

Similarly, Smith added that ~~I~~ get gratification when those that are in the trenches and are doing the work get recognized.” Henry Hicks believed it was important to roll up his sleeves and allow people to see him get his hands dirty, as well as traveling from department to department to check on people and to let them know they are valued and that the work they are doing is important. Carter shared a similar philosophy. In his opinion, ~~It~~’s about service. If I’m going to be a good leader I have to be willing to serve.

Serve with a spirit and heart of serving.” Additionally, Bob Michaels thought his ability to serve with those in the “trenches” was based on his greater sensitivity to diversity and understanding of a myriad of student, faculty, and staff needs with which leaders deal.

### *Leadership was Natural and Early*

The fourth theme to emerge while examining the participants’ perspective of leadership addressed when in the participants’ life they actually displayed leadership. The participants had varying levels of academic success in their early education experiences. Notwithstanding, most had displayed some sort of leadership at a very young age regardless of their academic ranking and social status.

Bob Michaels actually commented that he could not remember not being a leader of something. He said:

I think I’ve always been a leader. I think about in school. I was always president of this or president of that...organizer of this...organizer of that. President of Honor Society, Student Government Association, United Methodist Fellowship...always.

Ron Smith framed his leadership experiences based on his professional assignments. His first recollection of leadership occurred when he left his hometown to take a job at a university in Louisiana. He shared,

Well, my first professional experience would be when I left Oklahoma and went to Louisiana. I went to an institution that required me to supervise. That was my first real professional experience with leading. Now in college, student organizations, and clubs, yeah I had that, but the university in Louisiana was my first experience that I had with leading where I had a staff of about five, I believe it was.

Henry Hicks’s first experience with leadership occurred much earlier. He described his first leadership roles occurring as early as high school. Hicks commented,

For me, leadership started probably in high school. I did run for class officer so I held a couple of positions in student government in high school. In college it’d

probably be my second year of college when I joined the fraternity... actually was a charter member of the first black fraternity on a state university campus, so that would probably start it because the first two years of college I was more of a follower, but after that point and time when we formed that black Greek organization, then we became more of a leader and more involved with what was going on with the campus. Definitely more involved than what was going on in the organization itself and I think campus wide my leadership skills started to flourish at that point in time.

Matt May remembered demonstrating leadership as early as elementary school. He remembered being in the first grade and seeing the captain of the crossing guard and saying to himself,

When I get here, I will be in charge of that, because I really feel I am able and will be able to do that, and before I knew it, I was the captain. It was natural. The plays in elementary school, I played the lead roles...my teacher expected it. You know, those things don't just happen. I think you have to see yourself in those roles....being the leader.

Sam Carter shared similar comments. His first experience with leadership occurred during extracurricular activities early in school. He shared,

I think the first time was in basketball, learned that leadership comes with being part of something...a team, etc. Be willing to be a part of something so you can actually display leadership qualities. I saw myself leading on the basketball team and also in math. I had a gift and so I realized I was a leader when I became a tutor and was able to teach someone something they didn't know.

### *More is Expected*

The final theme that emerged reflected the participants' belief that as African American male leaders, their individual leadership efforts were required to exceed those of their non-minority counterparts. Two of the participants seemed to freely embrace this requirement and said it was something they consistently shared with other leaders of color, as they believed this was the one factor that "evened the playing field" with regard to being considered for positions of greater responsibility. Two of the participants placed strong emphasis on the notion that more was expected of African Americans, as well as

people of color in general. Of all of the participants, Henry Hicks clearly had the strongest opinion and input to this particular theme as he described the “more is expected” phenomenon by stating,

I know that we don’t get the breaks that other folks have and that when we talk about qualifications for a position when you compete for a position it takes more than having the same hand and that’s something you have to relate to in the younger generation who thinks that everything is “on par”...it’s not “on par.” You still have to be “better than” and you still have to present yourself to be “better than” without being arrogant or something someone might call “too strong of a Black man.”

Matt May suggested that for any leader of color, it was incumbent on the individual to strive to always exceed the minimum standards. He described the efforts of leaders of color as committing to “manifesting excellence,” or simply being committed to always surpassing mediocrity.

*Question Two: What leaders, African American or otherwise, played a role in the administrator’s desire to become an educational leader?*

The second category captured the participants’ thoughts on who was the greatest influence on their decision to become an educational leader. The participants’ experiences varied and began as early as elementary school and as late as graduate school. Although all of the participants were readily able to identify leadership experiences and opportunities early on in life, the accounts of what specific leaders played a role in their career choice were very distinct and unique to each individual participant. Thus, the following responses represent an assortment of factors that influenced the participants’ ascent to executive level leadership. The overwhelming theme to emerge from this category was Family Influence.

### *Family Influence*

This theme describes the various people and events that served as the greatest motivation for the participants as they endeavored to become higher education leaders. Most of the participants admitted they did not purposefully embark on a journey to become an educational leader. However, through a certain turn of events, realized success, or intentional recruitment by an administrator, the men in this study made their way to the top tier of leadership in Arkansas' higher education system. Henry Hicks described how he was most influenced by both family and teachers. He said,

It all goes back to high school with the young teachers that were coming in that were just graduating from college...where there was not too much difference in your age and theirs telling you about the experience they had in college and what they'd hope for -ya." Some of the older teachers who were so close to my parents who were just great teachers in their own right...literally it was truly the entire faculty at the black high school that had an influence on me. Like I told you, the community was small, within a thousand yards or within less than a half mile I was probably within the most of the teachers in my school system. Most of us attended the same church. If I didn't attend with -em" at my Baptist church I see -em" at my AME church. It was an extended family. I'm still in touch with many of my Black high school teachers...the ones who are still living at this point in time in my life.

Sam Carter's account is similar in that he describes the influence of his family, specifically his grandfather, as being the most instrumental. Carter describes his grandfather's example as the foundation that gave him the confidence that carried him over the rest of the years through high school and into college. Carter also discussed his grandfather's joining a fraternity in college, and how that experience impacted his grandfather. Carter pledged to the same fraternity, and credits much of his success to this particular experience.

Ron Smith also credited his experience and success to his grandparents for having the greatest influence in his life. He described their influence by saying,

I guess, (long pause) I guess it was it was my grandmother. She was really the backbone of the family, the one that really held everything together. Even though I worked a lot with my grandfather, my grandmother was the one that really had the greatest impact on my life growing up. Growing up, I never wanted for anything, but my grandparents showed me how to “get out” of where we were.... Although I never really knew at that time we were poor, now I know that we were. My grandparents helped keep us on track so that we could get out and not have to be limited to the “stuff” they were limited to.

Bob Michaels attributed the greatest influence to his relationship with his grandparents. Regarding who was the greatest influence, he stated,

I think it'd be situational. In the home it was probably my grandparents who were always hard workers and had such a loving caring kind of attitude that it was just prevailing throughout the family. Plus I had the distinction of actually knowing my “mother's mother's mother” so I'm a fifth generation Michaels and family was probably the most important ingredient there. But then in the school setting it would have been my counselor who took a real interest in me and provided me opportunities for growth and development. And as I shared...being an overachiever I was involved in everything...the honor society, student government, the choir, the band. We didn't have football. We had basketball...and then all of the things at church and in the community.

Finally, Matt May also credited his life's greatest influence to a family member, but unlike the others, he credited his mother instead of grandparents. May shared that his mother was the person who constantly reminded him of her dislikes, likes, and her expectations. May said his mother talked to him all of the time and always made him feel like he could do everything. May also shared how his father sometimes could not make school plays or musicals, but his mother made them all, no matter what. He shared,

She talked to me all of the time. She expressed to me directly her likes, dislikes, her—uh, expectations. She made me feel like I could do anything and she never missed anything that I did. Whereas my father, he worked and then he had other interests, you know, so sometime on occasion he wouldn't make the school play or a musical, but my mother was going to be there no matter what.

*Question Three: How did perceptions of African American men serve as a source of motivation for African Americans currently serving as administrators?*

The purpose of this category was to capture the participants' thoughts on how their self-perception as a Black man motivated them during their leadership and career development. The participants' responses varied. One participant expressed strongly that his race had little to nothing to do with his motivation. Rather, his motivation was more derived from his spirituality. Notwithstanding, most of the men had strong thoughts on how their identity as Black men motivated them. Themes that emerged from this category were: *I Always Knew I Was Black* and *People Are Watching Me*.

#### *I Always Knew I Was Black*

Matt May described his motivation as being derived from his early identity as a Black man. He explained:

I always knew that I was Black because my Mother would talk about it all the time. I think in the fullness of it, it had to be high school. Because in high school, you get to know a variety of people, and in high school is when young men were starting to talk about girls that they like. I can remember that some of the girls that I liked just happened to be White and I could remember those girls saying to me that ~~my~~ "my parents would not approve," and I couldn't understand because I was a good student, never got into any trouble... I could remember this one case where the girl's parents did not approve despite my impeccable record, but the boy that she dated was truant. It was just revelatory that race matters. My mother had always been saying that to me, it was just that particular time that it reinforced that I was Black, I was different in the eyes of these other people.

Henry Hicks shared similar thoughts. When questioned about when he identified as being Black, he responded,

That one's easy. It was when I was a child. I'm 57 years old. I was very much a part of the segregated south. The separate water fountains... separate restrooms... going to the back of the restaurant... my father driving at night time to go to Detroit to visit his family because there were no hotels along the way or because he didn't want to be bothered along the way by people as well... very much a part of the old southern south. I was very young when I realized that I was Black. When you became cognizant of the fact that you could talk and things were different. You started to notice them. Like why the White folks could go in and you had to step to the side and let them move up in the line. It didn't take long when you were four, five or six years old.

Bob Michaels shared comments that were almost identical to those of Henry Hicks. When asked about his identity as a Black man he, too, responded:

I always knew it. In the school setting in particular we studied Black history. It was important to know ancestors and the role that Black folk played in our history. We had the separate but equal school system, but also during that era you had the signs over the water fountains. You had the movie theaters where we sat upstairs and the white folks sat downstairs. You had the churches that were all Black and all White...so I mean I knew it! But again because of the caring kind of environment and everybody was basically poor (you didn't basically know it but we were all poor) yet happy!

Sam Carter's comments differed from those of the other participants. When questioned about being Black, he shared a sense of basically always understanding that he was different, but not giving any real attention to whether he was Black or White as early on in life, everyone around him was like him, Black. This included the people in his neighborhood, at church, and school. However, when he was later forced to participate in bussing and desegregation of schools, he quickly realized there were many different people in the world, and he was one of them.

Ron Smith's thoughts on how his self-perception as a Black man influenced him and his leadership were similar to those of Carter in that his realization of being Black did not occur until he left home for college. Smith offered,

I guess when I first realized it, or had it suggested to me was maybe when I went off to college. It may have been before I went off to college we had a family friend who alerted us. I went to Oklahoma State. They talked to us about a situation they encountered...It had to do with a fraternity that was racist. I remember it making national news. I didn't internalize it, because it really didn't affect me. Now, I went to a high school that was quote, unquote fifty/fifty - half African American and half White. But I never once at the high school level felt like I was Black, because I really felt that it was a Black, because the school was a melting pot, even the school was in a Black part of town, it was a magnet, and they bused the White kids to the school. So I really didn't have an experience in high school..it was when I got to Stillwater for college that I had some dealings

that let me know you are ~~Black~~, and they are not!” Other than that, I don’t think there was really an issue that I dealt with.

### *People Are Watching Me*

This theme captured the participants’ thoughts on the second item related to their self-perception as Black male executive leaders. Most of the participants shared the belief that ~~people~~ were watching them.” The participants did not express any opinion as to whether or not this attention was positive or negative; rather, they simply and clearly stated they were aware of the fact that because they were men of color, and their leadership position often had them in mixed company, they believed they were under constant observation.

Sam Carter’s comments reflect the fact that he did not embrace the concept that his leadership platform and own professional development were impacted either positively or negatively because of his identity as a Black man. Carter stated,

I’m always aware of being both Black and a male, but I try not to let it determine how I deal with people or my behaviors. I base it on my spirituality and that God wants me to treat all people the same, so I try to relate from my position as a Christian more than just a Black man. But I use my position as a Black man as a platform to influence and bring glory to the kingdom of God.

Henry Hicks had a much stronger position as he stated his feelings toward being ~~observed~~” as Black male in a leadership position. Hicks said,

You still have to be ~~better than~~” and you still have to present yourself to be ~~better than~~” without being arrogant or something someone might call ~~too strong~~ of a Black man.” So I’m aware of it every day even in how I address people who are lower than me who may be white, as well as the ones who are above. That’s not to say it’s a humbling, but talk in a way where assertiveness does not come through. You don’t have to beat someone over the head with your position for them to understand that you are a person in authority.

Hicks also expressed the importance of not being too assertive as a Black man, as this could be viewed as being “too strong” and threatening to other leaders. Hicks also stated that,

You learn some things when you’re growing up in the south. How to maintain your dignity in humbling situations without irritating folks to make them want to take a club at you or something like that or go after your job. I think it’s all in how you present yourself and how you talk to yourself. You maintain that dignity but yet and still you get your point across. Never been one to be arrogant in the first place...or boisterous or bragging. It’s just never been my nature. I don’t appreciate it when I see it in others, either. I think when you’re secure in who you are you don’t feel a need to beat someone over the head about this is who I am!

Bob Michaels, the most experienced of the participants, shared simple yet important advice that leaders of color should heed: —Never compromise your integrity, nothing is worth that. Be diligent! Know that you’re going to have to work harder than your colleagues. You’re going to have to be better than your colleagues in many aspects. Know how to fly below the radar.” May shared similar thoughts to those of Michaels.

May added,

I think being a person of color should have some effect on you as – as far as driving you to excellence. I am a history major/professor, so I am trained to understand racial prejudice – there is this stereotype of African Americans that we are lazy, we don’t focus, we are not capable, and even though we know it is racist thinking that is not based in reality, it can serve as a motivator for you to manifest excellence, and to do things that have not been done before – always try to be the best and do things that have not been done before. You feel like you are fighting against that perception and that impression everyday – because I don’t feel like I can rest, I don’t feel like I can rest on my laurels.

Conversely, Smith did not share similar thoughts as his peer. He felt that since he was at a HBCU and surrounded primarily with men and women of color, there was not as much of a sense of having to “prove” anything to anyone.

*Question Four: What role did spirituality play in the life of African American male administrators?*

The purpose of this question was to gauge the participants' level of spirituality and if or how it influenced their work. All of the participants equated "spirituality" to a relationship, and/or belief in God, and named "God" specifically as the central focus of their spirituality. The youngest of the participants acknowledged spirituality as the acknowledgement of the existence of "higher power," veering away from the consensus of the other participants. From this category, two themes emerged: *It's the Way I Grew Up* and *It's Why I Do What I do*.

Matt May defined spirituality through explaining how his parents were both children of ministers in two mainstream denominations. May, who was reared as a Seventh-Day Adventist, attributes his success and commitment to others to his "religious" upbringing. He described spirituality as a foundation that provides him help. May also believed that his hard work, what he referred to as the "Protestant work ethic," was largely responsible for the success he has enjoyed thus far in life.

Sam Carter vocalized very clearly his understanding of spirituality and what role religion has played in his life. When asked about his understanding of spirituality, Carter said "spirituality in my mind is based upon your relationship with God. He further said that "how you foster and develop your relationship with God further defines your own individual spirituality." When asked about the role of spirituality, Carter responded,

Religion is what "kept" me...that's what kept me. My mother was in the choir and me and my younger brother were in the choir as well and went to church all the time with her. My grandfather was the assistant Pastor at the church that I attended before I went to college. When I went to college, I was looking for more than "hooping and hollering" at church. After I was married, I would say was the first time I experienced true teaching of the Word of God and got truly plugged in to church. I got re-baptized, became a deacon, and began serving as a teacher in my church.

Carter also commented that he is often asked if he chose the right career path as he is viewed by many as someone with a strong “calling” to ministry. He believes that his career is the perfect fit, that it allows him to “live” his ministry. This is a sentiment shared by the majority of the participants that will be addressed later in the findings.

When asked to define spirituality, Henry Hicks added the following:

For me it's to believe in God. I never learned much about other religions, Jewish, Muslim (Islam), or anything. I was raised to believe in God the Father and the Son Jesus Christ, and from day one that was heavily instilled in the Baptist religion. If you believe in Jesus Christ then you are saved, so I believe truly in the God aspect of religion.

When asked how his spirituality, or as he described, belief in God, influenced the work he did, Hicks shared,

It guides me in my principles. I treat people the way that I would like to be treated. I try to adhere to the 10 Commandments as much as I possibly can. It gives a background in which I form my daily opinions and stuff. Education is one aspect of it, but having the common sense and principles behind it to manage it and to make it work for you is another thing. So faith guides my principles in trying to make most of my decisions at work. “Is it fair?” “Is it something you've really thought through?” If it's a hard decision I'll pray before I make the decision and I will ask for guidance. Religion is a balance. It is what keeps me balanced....It is what gives me faith when I've got to do stuff...when I need the courage when I've got a hard task, knowing that I've prayed and that I'm trying to do the right thing...that I've been guided in the right direction.

Bob Michaels described spirituality as being fortified. He also added,

It's having a belief in God and knowing that that's where everything is. I start my day out...every day...with meditation and Bible Study and that's what fortifies me for the day. If I don't do it, I see the difference. So I come in to my office probably at 6:30 or 6:45 and the first thing I do is my meditation and my Bible study. I've always been involved in the church. I'm very much involved now. As a matter of fact what I didn't tell you, at one point I thought I wanted to become a minister and being in the Methodist church I did all the things you were supposed to do. But as I looked at our system I saw a system that was a glass box and I knew that if I went to seminary and received the same training from SMU or one of the major theological seminaries and came back to this system that I would be relegated to serve in an all Black church and that was not my understanding of the teaching and I felt it was wrong. So I decided that my ministry would be through

teaching and education. It was easier, and I guess that's why I'd always been in these integrated settings because I hated the idea of being relegated to a place because of your race.

The youngest of the participants, Ron Smith, described spirituality a bit differently than the other participants. His initial description provided a more ecumenical approach, shying away from the traditional Christian deity of God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. Notwithstanding, he did share his own personal belief system as one being rooted in a traditional setting. Smith shared that as a child he was raised in a traditional Baptist church, and was very active following the leading of his parents and grandparents. When asked about his current participation, he admitted that he is much less involved than in the past, but does have a desire to change that somewhat.

Interestingly, of the participants, Smith was the only leader at a private, religious supported institution. Smith also added,

I guess having a relationship with a higher being, recognizing that there is a higher power that controls things and helps keep you centered and controls things that happen and recognizing that authority. I do believe in God, I believe in Jesus, and believe the work I am doing is a calling....People say that..I guess I can say that if I wasn't getting paid, I would still do the job that I am doing..I like higher education and being around students and helping them achieve a milestone that most of us haven't...especially Black males. Spirituality is visible because I work at a religious based institution. We are a church supported institution, and almost everything here is God centered..from the logo, to our mission. We have a full-time Chaplin, we have religious services here. Part of his responsibility is to help us remember that we are a religious institution.

*Question Five: What role, if any, did mentorship play in the development of African American men serving in higher education leadership roles in Arkansas?*

The purpose of this question was to gauge the participants' experiences with mentorship and, specifically, how mentorship shaped them and their current role as an

educational leader in the state of Arkansas. The theme that emerged from this category was: They Didn't Call Themselves a Mentor.

*They Didn't Call Themselves a Mentor*

This theme captures the participants' thoughts on how a mentor or person of significant influence played a part in their career success. Interestingly, the mentor and mentee relationships described by the participants were important in providing the participants the social capital and some industry specific knowledge that proved valuable to the participants. Sam Carter reflected on his entry into higher education being made possible by one of his mentors. This administrator hired Carter as a Trio program grant manager with no higher education experience or supervisory experience. Carter spoke fondly of the interview with the administrator, and reflected on her willingness to find something in his resume that would fulfill the supervisory requirement for the position. Carter added that she was willing to accept time spent as the leader of a small men's church group and Sunday school class to full the requirement. Carter later chuckled and added that the week following his interview he was surprised to discover that the administrator attended the same church, and her husband was a part of the men's group he was responsible for leading. Carter said, "this opportunity led to many other doors being opened to me in higher education." Carter also shared that the second important person was another administrator who, as a dean of students, hired Carter and exposed him to advising, career development advising, and other student services related functions. Carter expressed that these opportunities were key to him achieving the level of success he has experienced thus far in his higher education career.

Henry Hicks shared a plethora of thoughts on how his mentors and the relationship he shared with them influenced his career success. Hicks asserted,

At the college level, I was mentored by a faculty member who was an African American and American History professor at an Arkansas university. This mentor passed away in 2003. Another mentor was the first African American tenure track faculty member at an Arkansas university who came in 1969. I also had another gentleman that became a mentor when he came to the university in 1978 as the first Black Engineering professor. In 1978 a Black professor came to the university Law school...He is still there. Those men have long been my mentors since I made their acquaintance. It would be nothing for me to call and run an opinion by them or for us to sit up on the weekend and talk about things and I just gleaned from the conversation and stuff. So other Black faculty members that didn't mind a younger fellow up under their wing and forming a friendship with them and guiding along the way.... It was like being in High School again. You looked at the teachers and how they were carrying themselves. It was the same way with me looking at these men who were professionals as I was just getting into the profession. To see how they carried themselves...how they presented themselves. Ironically enough all of them had attended historically Black colleges, now that I just think about it. They had a lot of knowledge to share about experiences and I would just sit there just gleaning. We became friends, all friends as a matter of fact. All four of those gentlemen are men of Omega, the same fraternity that I belong to. They were just great! Just to sit there and to talk and to have an opportunity to run an idea by them or just to get into a healthy discussion about politics. It helped to develop my critical thinking skills as a professional as well. And then when I became active in student affairs there were two other people who I adopted as mentors, a man who was the Vice Chancellor for Student affairs at an Arkansas university, and another gentlemen who is the VP of Student Affairs over at another Arkansas university. When I was getting into the student affairs field, those two guys were African American and in key positions. They were great influences and took time out to talk to a young brother to give me some wisdom along the way. I am still in contact with one of them today. The other one died, or I would still probably be in contact with him as well.

Matt May's thoughts were similar. He shared the following about his mentor experience and relationship:

Mentors come in a variety of roles. I could call out names of people, you know, for understanding the university landscape. There was an African American who was here in the History department. He died several years ago, but he was one of those guys, older, that you would sit in his office for an hour and not say anything, but just listened and learned from him. From a professional standpoint, there was another gentleman. He helped me, he read my stuff, he offered suggestions, I think he offered to push me along in my scholarship. He helped to

push me professionally, you know, because I have gone from becoming an assistant professor to a full professor, and he helped me in that process. He was one of those guys...there were a number of people here at the university that were willing to help me.

Bob Michaels shared various encounters with people who had great impact on his development and educational profession. He described some of these as mentoring experiences, and others as exchanges that greatly added to his leadership acumen and his overall development. His “mentoring” experiences occurred during multiple stages in his life and career. These experiences occurred as early as high school, later in college, and early in his professional career. Michaels shared,

I mentioned earlier my counselor who was a counselor, a mentor, and a teacher; my librarian and Government teacher...who was also a Sunday school teacher; One that really stands out was a man who was a Spanish teacher and music teacher...that would be high school. In college there were several influential individuals: our dean of students, my English professor there at my first college, and the psychology professor. The experience I had at my college during my undergraduate studies was pretty amazing. We had lots of exchange professors from Harvard and Yale who were White. I didn't have a Black teacher my junior and senior year of high school, nor did I have a Black teacher during my undergrad studies...and we are talking about at an HBCU. Even in high school and college I never felt that I couldn't do anything and I'm sure that was because of the experiences that I had and the wonderful self concept that was developed. When I went to do my Masters studies, I went there with the same kind of concept, but it was there where I ran into some racism that I had to learn to manipulate because again I thought if you were smart and did your work I thought everything would be fine but I found that that was not necessarily the case. But I did well. When I went to the university for the doctorate, I had very supportive people there. I had a good experience there, but I was driven and I knew I only had “-X” amount of time and “-X” amount of money and I had to get that degree finished to get back to my job here at the university because I'd taken a leave to go do that. I've always had supportive people. Even in my professional life, certain men were very influential and played an important part of my career. My chancellor and my vice chancellor. They were important. They gave me opportunities that I would not have had to be in this position and to support me to do the kinds of things that I've done. I had a lady as my first vice chancellor for Student Affairs and I actually replaced her. She was a wonderful mentor. And all of those folks were White...because my university is a predominately White institution and I have the distinction (be it positive or negative) of being the only

senior level administrator here and it has just been this month that I was able to hire a Black associate vice chancellor and a Black assistant vice chancellor.

Ron Smith was adamant that although he views himself as a mentor, there was no one during his career development that he actually assigned the title of mentor. However, he describes an experience indicative of a ~~mentor~~“s” concern for his career development.

Smith said:

A key event was my boss, my first job in higher ed, my boss allowed me to become involved in professional organizations. From that, it allowed others to, I guess, see something good in me. From that, I was given the opportunity to participate in committees and other leadership opportunities because they knew me and my work. I developed relationships with different colleagues. As a result of all of that, I have had the opportunity to serve as a regional president of our professional organization without being a state president. This let me represent five states, which is very rare - not impossible, but very rare. Because of this I was selected to a national ~~at~~“-large” position. I was not the only Black male in this process, so I guess I can say that I was named, or given this opportunity because I earned it.

#### Observations

During the course of this research project, the researcher interacted with most of the participants on a professional level. Three of the five participants serve their institutions as the chief student affairs officer, or are responsible for a number of the activities related to student affairs. During the researcher’s initial meeting as a member of the state’s chief student affairs officers’ committee, three of the participants were present. These men welcomed the researcher, who was new to the position, as well as gave him some ~~tips~~“tips” on what to expect, and how to ensure the researcher’s time as s chief student affairs officer would be successful. Most importantly, the participants modeled some very notable behaviors. These included timeliness, engagement (when deemed appropriate) during the meetings, impeccable dress, and interaction with some of their peers.

## Summary

The findings of the semi-structured interviews were presented in Chapter Four. Five interviews were conducted with men at various types and sizes of institutions around the state of Arkansas. The major themes that emerged during the research process were outlined in the chapter. These themes included: *Leading by Example*, *Leading, but not from the Front*; *In the Trenches with the Troops*; *Leading was Natural and Early*; *More is Expected*; *Family Influence*; *I Always Knew I Was Black*; *People Are Watching Me*; *It's the Way I Grew Up*; *It Is Why I Do What I Do*; and *They Didn't Call Themselves A Mentor*. Detailed accounts of the participants' thoughts and beliefs toward their experiences as African American males serving as executive-level leaders in the state of Arkansas have been provided in this chapter. Research findings, implications for future practice and research, and conclusions will be presented in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the success factors of African American men in executive leadership in Arkansas' higher education system. Participant responses to 31 questions were examined under the umbrella of five research questions. The intent of the interview protocols was to reveal distinct factors that attributed to the leadership success of African American men currently serving in executive-level leadership positions in the state of Arkansas. A comparison and discussion between the responses of the five participants of the study is highlighted in this chapter. The chapter also includes a brief summary of findings as they relate to elements of the literature review. Also provided is a list of recommendations for institutions of higher education, as well as limitations for the study and, finally, conclusions drawn from the research.

A summation of the findings will be presented in this chapter. The total corpus of interactions consisted of approximately 10 hours of in-depth, semi-structured and transcribed interviews with five participants. Additionally, emergent themes from the interviews and a brief revisit of the proposed conceptual framework employed for the study will be presented in this chapter.

#### Study Overview

This research was an examination of the lived experiences of African American men serving as leaders in an institution of higher learning in the state of Arkansas. The participants were employed at various institution types with diverse missions. Each participant was referred to using a pseudonym, and their institution was described as either a two-or four-year college or university, as well as whether or not it was a

Primarily White Institution (PWI), or Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Cultural proficiency, social capital, and cultural continuity/discontinuity theories provided the conceptual framework for this study and allowed a reflective examination of the experiences of each of the participants. The researcher selected executive-level leaders because of their ability to influence policy and practice to enact change of leadership philosophies within their institutions.

#### Statement of the Problem

Historically, African American men have been underrepresented in school administration. As the student populations of higher education institutions continue to become more racially diverse, and America becomes more diverse, it is necessary for current and future leadership to understand the essentialness of diversifying the faculty, staff, and administrative teams. Smith (2003) suggests that empirically, little is known about what happens to African Americans administrators once they reach executive-level leadership positions. Notwithstanding, having African American men in these positions is vitally important to the pursuit of equity and administrative diversity. Although there is literature on African Americans in general, there is an inadequate amount of literature focused on anything outside of student affairs and multicultural affairs leadership. There also remains a scarcity of focused research on what factors attributed to the success of African American male leaders.

#### Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to examine the success factors of African American male leaders. Specifically, the research was guided by five focused research questions. They included:

1. How do African American male administrators define leadership?
2. What leaders, African American or otherwise, played a role in the administrator's desire to become an educational leader?
3. How do perceptions of African American men serve as a source of motivation for African American currently serving as administrators?
4. What role did spirituality play in the life of African American male administrators?
5. What role, if any, did mentorship play in the development of African American men serving in higher education leadership roles in Arkansas?

#### Essence of Meaning

Moustakas (1994) describes the essence of meaning as a process whereby we reflect upon something and arrive at its essence. This notion transcends our routine examination of “looking at something” and intuitively drawing a conclusion and assigning meaning. Thus, the discovery of essence constitutes another component of meaning. In an attempt to uncover this essence, the researcher spent a substantial amount of time reading the participants' interview transcripts and listening to the digital recordings of the conversation with each participant. The researcher's intent was to ascribe meaning to what the participants perceived, thought, and remembered. According to Moustakas, this is referred to as noema, “that which is experienced, the what of the experience, and the object correlate” (p. 69).

## Findings

Five research questions were presented and addressed during the study. The research questions were designed to consider five areas. These areas were leadership, motivation for education, motivation for service, spirituality, and mentorship.

### *Leadership*

The men defined leadership as the unintentional actions of providing examples of service and sacrifice for the betterment of others. Additionally, the participants emphasized the importance of leadership as a selfless act of providing opportunities and support for the teams, staffs, and students they worked with.

### *Motivation for Becoming a Leader*

The men were motivated by a teacher, professor, family member, or community member to pursue the role of service as an educational leader. Interestingly, none of the men expressed a preconceived desire to become a leader of their current capacity; however, unprecedented success and a natural call to service served as a catalyst to push the men into their current position.

### *Impact of Being African American and Being an Administrator*

None of the participants voiced a strong opinion on how race impacted their motivation for leadership. Although each of the men embraced the uniqueness associated with being an African American, race was not perceived as the driving force behind previous or current career decisions.

### *Spirituality*

All of the participants voiced the importance of spirituality and how it was a major area of importance in their life. Most of the participants shared how their parents'

and relatives' spiritual and religious values influenced their life work and career choices. However, although spirituality was seen as being important, the men expressed different views on their level of current involvement in spiritual/religious activities.

### *Mentorship*

The participants all discussed the value of mentorship. Additionally, all of the men discussed their experiences as a "mentee" in an informal capacity, as the phrase mentor was not commonly used during the time they were emerging leaders. They also discussed how they have assumed a personal responsibility to mentor others in both formal and informal capacities.

### Emergent Themes

The participants of the study provided open, in-depth, and candid descriptions of their lived experiences as African American male leaders in an Arkansas college or university. Specifically, interviews were structured within a context of examining the distinct "success factors" that attributed to these leaders' current level of achievement. Furthermore, the questions were posited under an over-arching umbrella of four phenomena from which 11 themes emerged. The four areas were growth and development, spirituality, leadership, and mentorship. The essence of Research Question One consisted of three themes: (1) *Leading, but not from the Front*; (2) *In the Trenches with the Troops*; and (3) *Leading was Natural and Early*. The essence of Research Question Two consisted of one emergent theme: *Family Influence*. The essence of Research Question Three - how did perceptions of African Americans serve as a source of motivation for African American currently serving as administrators - consisted of three emergent themes: (1) *More is Expected*, (2) *I Always Knew I was Black*, and (3)

*People are Watching Me.* The essence of Research Question Four - what role spirituality played in the life of African American male administrators - consisted of one emerging theme: (1) *It is the Way I Grew Up, and It is Why I Do What I Do.* The fifth research question - what role, if any, did mentorship play in the development of African American men serving in higher education leadership roles in Arkansas - consisted of one emergent theme: (1) *They Didn't Call Themselves a Mentor.*

### Cultural Proficiency

#### *Growth and Development*

According to Lindsey, Cambell, and Jones (2005), “cultural proficiency is defined as honoring the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups” (p. 2). The study participants voiced very similar responses with regard to their growth and development. Specifically, there were similar instances of family composition, family and caregiver expectations, and academic achievement during the formative years of each of the participants’ lives. Although the concept of cultural proficiency was never mentioned during conversations, the essence of the concept is strongly manifested in the lives of the participants. All of the participants expressed how their caregivers, parents, family, and others taught them the importance of valuing others, as well as treating others with the same respect they expected. Three of the five participants discussed and reflected on attending all-Black schools prior to desegregation. Although the majority of this experience occurred during their elementary and junior high school experiences, the participants had vivid memories of these experiences. The feelings associated with this specific experience varied, with some of the participants expressing a strong sense of hurt

and disappointment as they were forced to attend different schools and adjust their academic course work to a different set of expectations. One of the participants expressed very strong emotions when speaking of the relationship with his White teachers. He believed the White teachers did not have the same level of buy-in and support for his success. However, the participants who experienced the transformation of segregated to desegregated schools expressed the greatest commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equal access for all students.

Each of the participants shared how church and religion played a large part in their upbringing. They each shared how active they were in their local church as a child, and how important religion was to their family and the families around them as they were growing up. Some of the participants shared how the members of their church were also key leaders in the community and their all-Black schools prior to desegregation. One participant shared grave concerns about how desegregation impacted the Black community, thus destroying the nucleus of church, school, and family. This triad was viewed by this participant as essential to the success of Blacks in general. Thus, the non-existence of this social structure is aiding in the destruction of the Black family and community.

There was consensus among the participants regarding how their work consisted of promoting increased opportunities for students on their respective campuses. Some of the participants spoke of their specific engagement with students of color, as well as students lacking essential resources to succeed in college. Two of the participants' conversations demonstrated a deeper appreciation and truer essence of cultural proficiency. They discussed how their work caused them to honor, respect, and be

knowledgeable of all races of students. They shared a concern that only being sensitive to students of color would actually serve to weaken their relationships with students and peers and demonstrate what could be considered cultural deficiency.

### *Spirituality*

All but one of the participants expressed an ecumenical philosophy with regard to spirituality. All of the participants acknowledged the existence of God or a higher power. Four of the participants expressed a strong belief that their occupations actually allowed them to fulfill a type of divine appointment by helping others better themselves through access to education and educational services. With regard to cultural proficiency, the participants were sensitive to the religious values of others, yet felt their own religious value system served as the greatest source of motivation for the work they were currently doing.

### *Leadership*

The participants believed that leadership came to them naturally and very early in their careers. They expressed a sense of obligation or ownership of, providing good leadership to the people with whom they worked at their respective colleges and universities. The participants suggested that although they worked with talented students, staff, and faculty, they had a responsibility to do their best to provide a strong leadership example which included showing others the importance and necessity of valuing and promoting diversity, and assuming the responsibility to be an advocate for access and resources for under-represented students, staff, and faculty.

### *Mentorship*

Participants were united in their thoughts on mentorship. Although they had numerous people provide them with mentorship during the early years of their career, the people providing the mentorship never referred to themselves as mentors; rather, these relationships occurred organically and had lasting impact on all of the participants. This informal mentorship came at the hands of teachers, Sunday school teachers, and community members. Their dedication to the participants was apparent even as early as elementary school. When discussing their mentorship experiences, four of the five participants revealed their mentors as being Black male or Black female educators. Notwithstanding, the participants' united view toward their own personal mentorship was that it was available not only to other persons of color, but to anyone seeking to better themselves, socially and professionally.

### Social and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1977) provided one of the earliest definitions of the concept of cultural capital. Bourdieu explained:

In this theory, schools are viewed not necessarily as neutral institutions, but as ones in which the preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of the "dominant class" are most highly valued. Although lower- and working-class children may certainly acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in school, they are less likely to achieve the same "natural familiarity" that middle- and upper-class students have and thus are more likely to fail academically. The exclusionary character of cultural capital is at the heart of the framework. (p. 156)

### *Growth and Development*

All of the participants came from middle class homes with little privilege or advantage over that of their peers. The major components of "high cultural signals" (attitudes, preferences, and goods) (Bourdieu, 1977) were not present in their homes.

Notwithstanding, each of the participants was very well educated at a Primarily White Institution (PWI), with one participant completing his undergraduate work at a Historically Black College (HBC). Each of the participants also shared how obtaining a higher education was not an option, but an absolute expectation. As such, the social/cultural capital they possess is the bi-product of quality education, professional development, and parental encouragement that motivated the participants to never settle for mediocrity.

### *Mentorship*

What may have been lacking in their upbringing was supplemented by the numerous mentors, formal and informal, who positioned these men for success by educating them during their early school years, as well as teaching them the unwritten rules and norms associated with higher education. The participants spoke very distinctly of their teachers and other mentors educating them on acceptable and unacceptable actions, behavior, and attitudes. This support augmented their acquisition of what could be considered an appropriate measure of cultural capital, as cultural capital is necessary to negotiate some of the inherent hurdles associated with obtaining an executive-level leadership.

### Cultural Continuity and Discontinuity

Cultural continuity suggests the degree of similarity across the home and school settings that predicts the student's achievement and motivational outcomes (Hudley & Gottfried, 2008). The theory simultaneously acknowledges the reality of cultural discontinuity across home and school settings, suggesting a difference between the home and school cultures.

The participants had very vivid memories of their home life. The experiences covered a range from early childhood to their young adult years. The participants who attended schools that were segregated early on and were later desegregated experienced the greatest level of cultural discontinuity. These participants expressed how they were raised in homes that were situated in the predominantly Black areas. This allowed for large school systems that were led by African Americans. As such, the expectations at home, church, and school were very similar. However, after desegregation, the participants expressed feelings of the disconnect between school and home expectations as their teachers during the post desegregation period had a different set of expectations; thus, the existence of cultural discontinuity was present at least for certain periods of their lives.

### Findings

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#### *Leadership*

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men expressed a preconceived desire to become a leader of their current capacity; however, unprecedented success and a natural call to service served as a catalyst to push the men into their current positions.

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#### *Mentorship*

The participants all discussed the value of mentorship. Additionally, all of the men discussed their experiences as a "mentee" in an informal capacity, as the phrase mentor was not commonly used during the times about which they spoke. They also discussed how they have assumed a personal responsibility to mentor others in both formal and informal capacities.

Overall, the participants harmoniously provided valuable, rich descriptive data on their personal lived experiences as African American male leaders. Notwithstanding, one area of disparity was that of how their experiences as Black men impacted or influenced

their decision to lead. The participants shared differing thoughts on their own self-perceptions as Black men. Nevertheless, on the subjects of leadership, motivation for leadership, spirituality, and mentorship, the men were closely united in their responses. Each man described how he had been strongly influenced by family, educators, and church leaders with regard to leadership. This influence served as the major source of motivation for the men. Additionally, spirituality played a major role in each of the men's lives as it provided a source of motivation for service. Finally, mentorship, although not described using this terminology, was vitally important to the acquisition of the social and cultural capital necessary for the men to progress to their current professional positions.

## Discussion

### *Leadership*

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that attributed to the success of five African American male executive level leaders. Without equivocation, all of the participants conveyed strong comments and thoughts that purely supported the "servant leader" leadership platform as the philosophy of choice for African American leaders serving as higher education executives in the state of Arkansas. While numerous themes and thoughts emerged from the study, the paramount finding of interest during the research process was the identification of the predominant leadership philosophy. Additionally, the motivation for this particular style of leadership is derived from a series of lived experiences that led to the development of an innate sense of responsibility that fueled the participants' drive to serve and lead. Regarding servant leadership, Greenleaf (2008) offers:

The servant-leader *is* servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He is sharply different from the person who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. The difference [between servant leadership and other leadership styles] manifests itself in the care taken by the servant – first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 15)

When discussing leadership, the participants discussed their own need to “not be out front.” Rather, they insisted on promoting the success of the men and women on their teams. This approach is consistent with the literature on servant leadership as the participants were committed to making the needs of other people the focus of their attention. Jones (2002) also suggested an intersection between spirituality and leadership. This notion is congruent with the thoughts expressed by the participants. All participants expressed a commitment to spirituality and religion, at least during the early, formidable years of their life. It can be assumed that this early experience provided a long-lasting underpinning for the development of their leadership style. McClellan (2006) suggests that spirituality and religion serve as a source of creative and transformative energy for African Americans. This energy keeps them grounded and striving for success, social justice, and destined greatness. Notwithstanding, this is only an assumption as one of the participants openly shared his current minimal participation in religious activities outside of his job. Regardless of the participants’ level of religious activities (current) and understanding of spirituality, the participants share a common commitment toward utilizing their current position as a platform from which they carried out their “ministry.” This approach is consistent with literature that discusses the coalescing of the work lives and spiritual and religious lives of African American male leaders. Charleston (2000)

suggested a similar common bond among Black male leaders. She suggested two components, the Black community and Black church, were essential in building character and shaping the lives of Black leaders.

### *Success Factors*

The participants spoke of a number of factors that aided in their leadership success. Interestingly, none of the participants spoke of these factors as having been predetermined and necessary as a part of their career exploration or growth. None of the participants discussed aspiring to become an executive level leader. Additionally, none of the participants made conscious choices aimed at becoming a leader. The participants described how they were individually shaped through various home settings, educational experiences, and religious and spiritual involvement. Consistent with McClellan's (2006) research, a myriad of life experiences were responsible for the formation of the leader's character and eventual success. Specifically, McClellan described how successful Black men cited the importance of their familial relationships and encounters of racism in their struggle to become successful leaders.

### Implications for Future Practice

The results of this study support three comprehensive implications for practice for institutions committed to the professional development of future academic leaders. It is important to note these recommendations are applicable to all leaders and not just leaders of color. Increased exposure to diversity of thought and experience may increase the opportunity to influence future generations of students and institutional leadership. Since the study included a significant qualitative approach, it is inappropriate to draw

generalizations applicable to all. However, the following recommendations warrant consideration.

Training and professional development for leaders must include components of cultural intelligence to develop well-rounded leaders cognizant of the cultural differences of those around them. As colleges and universities seek to meet the needs of their communities, states, and regions, an awareness of and sensitivity to issues inherent to transacting business in a global economy is imperative for successful leadership. Additionally, aspiring leaders should be given mentorship opportunities with competent and successful leaders who encourage relationships across cross racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries. The intent of this approach is to provide personal, formal, and informal opportunities for future leaders to be developed by those who may have experienced different personal, educational, and professional influences, thus providing the opportunities to acquire a variety of cultural capital.

Finally, colleges and universities must support the development of formal support networks for executive level leaders. These networks should consist of leaders from various academic and service disciplines. The intent of this approach is to continue to contribute to the acquisition of the necessary social and cultural capital needed for the leaders to have the potential of climbing the ranks of either the academic or student affairs segments of higher education. Particular attention should be given to transferring the knowledge, wisdom, and experience from current leaders to future leaders in an attempt to further advance the cause of diversity and equity in our education leadership ranks.

## Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to examine the success factors of African American men serving as executive level leaders in Arkansas' higher education system. Due to the nature of qualitative research, generalizations cannot be drawn from this study. However, the researcher believes the study will make a contribution to the body of literature addressing the "success factors" of African American male leaders. Upon conclusion of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations for future research:

1. Expand the research to the regional and national level to determine if African American men serving in executive leadership positions had shared life experiences.
2. Identify academic leaders who are serving outside of student affairs and multicultural affairs to participate in the study. The literature suggests that research has been primarily focused on student affairs, multicultural affairs, and other positions not directly tasked with teaching and learning.
3. Expand the research to other non-majority ethnic groups. As America continues to diversify, gaining an understanding of what specific factors led to the success of the leaders is imperative to connecting future leaders to the appropriate education, professional development, and mentorship necessary to prepare them for future leadership success.
4. The concept of family was a strong contributor to the discussion during the interview process. The research experience could be greatly supported and enhanced by

gaining the perspective of some of the family members and care providers of the participants.

5. Study and contrast the lived experiences of female leaders of color to determine if they shared similar factors that attributed to their success.

6. During the research, some answers were noticeably different based on generational differences. Future research should explore ~~pre~~” and ~~post~~” civil rights sentiments.

7. The research demonstrated a strong connection between spirituality and religion and service. Observing and understanding the leaders’ current level of religious participation may prove extremely valuable in determining one of the motivating factors for their service.

8. During the research there was mention of the changes of the ~~understanding~~” of spirituality. An in-depth study devoted to the study of future leaders’ understanding of spirituality and its influence would be valuable.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the success factors of African American male leaders serving as executive leaders in Arkansas institutions of higher education. Specifically, the researcher was interested in what experiences led to the successful ascent of the leaders into a key executive level leadership position at their respective institutions. The participants of this study were five African American male leaders at two and four-year institutions in the state of Arkansas. The participants were interviewed, with the results being transcribed into over 10 hours of data that profiled their unique life experiences. The findings revealed the participants’ understanding of

their own growth and development, understanding of leadership, spirituality and religion, and mentorship. The theoretical framework called for the examination of cultural proficiency, social and cultural capital, and cultural continuity/discontinuity as a tri-fold lens through which the lived experiences of the participants were examined. Although many of the early life experiences of the participants may have not been intentionally designed to assist the leader during his leadership journey, they proved effective in allowing the leader to gain the necessary social capital, maintain a sense of cultural continuity, and be culturally proficient despite being a member of a group considered to be historically underserved and underrepresented at the executive level of leadership in higher education.

It is believed the findings speak clearly to the importance of a number of items, including the importance of family, fairness and motivation in the classroom, and the importance of mentorship. Without question, these items had the greatest impact on the success of the participants. This information may have significance to other higher education leaders and researchers as it can assist in the development of further research and more proactive measures to cultivate more leaders of color.

In closing, as our nation and student bodies continue to diversify, the presence of leaders of color will be vitally important to the success of students who will someday fill the leadership ranks. The opportunity for this level of leadership begins at home and at the earliest levels of education. To ensure this success is possible, all leaders must commit to the investment of resources to educate all on the value of stable homes and schools that will produce men and women with a potential for leadership. Although the focus of this research has been on African American men, the underlying intent is to find

a way to help bring everyone to an understanding of what is necessary to level the playing field and provide equal opportunities for success for anyone desiring to serve in the capacity of an educational leader.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent for Demographic Survey

**Identification of Researcher:** This research is being conducted by Todd Kitchen. I am an Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri -Columbia. My contact information is tkitchen@nwacc.edu or (660) 909-7547. My advisor is Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She may be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu.

**Purpose of the Study:** The primary purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the success factors common to Black men who have risen to the top-tiers of leadership in the higher education arena in the state of Arkansas. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information for Blacks and other minority men aspiring to become leaders in higher education. The information will also assist colleges and universities in the development of appropriate support structures to recruit and retain more minorities as well as develop better policy to aid in diversifying their campuses.

**Request for Participation:** I am inviting you to participate in this study dealing with an examination of the success factors of African American Higher Education Leaders serving in executive positions in the state of Arkansas. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also choose not to complete the survey at any time. If you don't wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply indicate you do not wish to respond. You may withdraw your consent to have your responses included in the study. If you wish to do so, please inform the researcher upon completion of the survey.

**Exclusions:** You must be an African American male serving in an executive leadership position in the Arkansas Higher Education system.

**Description of Research:** The quantitative phase of this research involves gathering demographic data about the participant's career, educations, positions held, mentorship, and length of employment. The research will last approximately 15 minutes.

**Privacy:** All of the information collected will be kept confidential. Pseudonym codes will be used to protect participant's identity. Individual response data and findings will not be linked to individual participants. Transcripts will be kept in a locked file and password protected computer. Digital recordings will be destroyed at the end of this study.

**Explanation:** The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

**Explanation of Benefits:** Study participants will benefit by providing valuable information that will potentially assist institutions of higher learning create structures and programs to aid in their campus' diversity efforts.

**Questions:** If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Missouri, Campus Institutional Review Board, 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, Missouri, 65211 (573) 882-9585.

By completing the survey you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research.

Appendix B  
Demographic Survey

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please outline your education, beginning with your bachelor's degree

<u>Degree</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>University</u>	<u>Date Complete</u>
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3. Please outline your career path as an educator, beginning with your first position and proceeding through your current position.

<u>Position</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Start date</u>	<u>End date</u>
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3. What is your current position title? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How many years have you served in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many years have you served in the position of dean or higher? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years have you worked in higher education? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you been mentored by an educational leader, or other person? Yes or No

8. Are you willing to participate in an interview session? If so, please provide your contact information in the space below.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Email</u>	<u>Phone number</u>	<u>Best time to contact you</u>
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## Appendix C

### Informed Consent for Semi-Structure Interview

**Identification of Researchers:** This research is being conducted Todd Kitchen. I am an Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri -Columbia. My contact information is tkitchen@nwacc.edu or (660) 909-7547. My advisor is Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She may be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu.

**Purpose of the Study:** The primary purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the success factors common to Black men who have risen to the top-tiers of leadership in the higher education arena in the state of Arkansas. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information for Blacks and other minority men aspiring to become leaders in higher education. The information will also assist colleges and universities in the development of appropriate support structures to recruit and retain more minorities as well as develop better policy to aid in diversifying their campuses.

**Request for Participation:** I am inviting you to participate in this study dealing with an examination of the success factors of African American Higher Education Leaders serving in executive positions in the state of Arkansas. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop the interview at any time. If you don't wish to answer any of the questions asked by the interviewer, you may simply indicate you do not wish to respond. You may withdraw your consent to have your interview responses included in the study at the end of the interview. If you wish to do so, please inform the interviewer at any time during the interview.

**Exclusions:** You must be an African American male serving in an executive leadership position in the Arkansas Higher Education system.

**Description of Research:** The qualitative phase of this research involves personal interviews regarding participants' perceptions and life experiences as they negotiated various career and personal obstacles en route to their current leadership positions. Interviews will be conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants, and will last approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. The participants will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

**Privacy:** All of the information collected will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant's identity. Individual response data and findings will not be linked to individual participants. Transcripts will be kept in a locked file and password protected computer. Digital recordings will be destroyed at the end of this study.

**Explanation:** The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

**Explanation of Benefits:** Study participants will benefit by providing valuable information that will potentially assist institutions of higher learning create structures and programs to aid in their campus' diversity efforts.

**Identification of Researcher:** This research is being conducted by Todd Kitchen. I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri - Columbia. My contact information is [tkitchen@nwacc.edu](mailto:tkitchen@nwacc.edu), or (660) 909-7547. My advisor is Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She may be reached at [hutchinson@ucmo.edu](mailto:hutchinson@ucmo.edu).

**Questions:** If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Missouri, Campus Institutional Review Board, 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, Missouri, 65211 (573) 882-9585. If you agree to participate, please sign two copies of this form prior to beginning the interview. The researcher will retain one copy and provide one copy to you for your records.

I have read this letter and agree to participate in an interview.

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me. In this discussion, I am interested in gaining and understanding of your lived experiences. I will ask you to share some personal stories to help me vicariously experience and understand your unique journey.

#### **Growth and Development**

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Describe your family.
3. What was your role within the family unit?
4. Who had the most influence on you growing up and why?
5. What role did religion play in your early growth and development?
5. What were caregiver's philosophies about employment and working?
6. When did you first come to know that you were Black? (probe - "Tell me about the experience.")
7. Tell me about what types of schools you attended
8. Tell me about your teachers.
9. Who had the most influence on your education? How did she/he/they influence you?
10. At what point in your educational career did you begin to think about your future?
11. What were you taught to aspire to (and by whom)?

#### **Spirituality**

12. In your own words, please define spirituality.
13. How does spirituality influence the work that you do?
14. Is spirituality visible in your workplace? Please describe

#### **Leadership**

15. What is your definition of leadership?
16. How would you describe your leadership style?
17. When did you first demonstrate leadership?
18. How has your identity as Black man had an effect on your leadership?
19. What unique knowledge do you bring to the table as an African American educational leader?

#### **Mentorship**

20. Who would you consider to have been mentors?
21. What was their influence in your career development?
22. Do you view yourself as a mentor to others? In what way?

#### **Professional Experience**

23. How and why did you choose your current profession?
24. What were the specific things that motivated you to become an educational leader?
25. Tell me about key events that stick out in your mind in the positions you have held.
26. Where do you see your career going? What is the next step?

27. What is most meaningful for you in your job? What gives you a sense of purpose?
28. How do you revitalize/recharge yourself?

**Other**

29. What information would you like to share with other African American men aspiring to executive leadership positions?
30. Is there anything that we discussed that you would like to reflect on further?
31. Is there anything else you would like to share?

## VITA

Todd L. Kitchen was born January 3, 1969 in Moberly, Missouri to Tom and Linda Kitchen. The second of three boys, he graduated from Moberly Senior High School in 1987 and began his higher education quest at Moberly Junior College (now Moberly Area Community College). He deviated from the traditional education path and enlisted in the United States Army in 1989. He later returned to college while serving in the military and earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Resources Management from Friends University (1998). He then earned a Master of Arts in Sociology from Central Missouri State University (now the University of Central Missouri) in 2002. As a member of the University of Missouri-Columbia statewide cohort program, Todd completed a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis in 2012.

After leaving the military, Todd was employed by Wentworth Military Academy and College as an admissions recruiter and adjunct instructor. While at Wentworth he served as the director of admissions, social science faculty, dean of business and administration, and associate vice president for academics. After 10 years of success in Missouri, he and his family relocated to Northwest Arkansas where he was employed as the director of admissions at Northwest Arkansas Community College. He later served as the dean of learner administrative services and serves currently as the vice president for learner support services (student affairs). His research interests include leadership, and non-cognitive factors impacting educational success.

Todd and his wife Andrea have three children, Brianna, T.J., and Adriana. They reside in Fayetteville, Arkansas.