

## **ABSTRACT**

Title of Dissertation:       NAVIGATING RACISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A  
  GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF BLACK MALE  
  ADMINISTRATORS

Domonic A. Rollins, Doctor of Philosophy, 2017

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In the United States, racism is alive and well, and the lives of Black men are a complete paradox (Jenkins, 2006). At the same time that the person holding the highest political office in the United States of America is a Black man, Black men are slain in the streets every day. Curiously, in a historic moment more than eight years ago, the United States, a nation founded on prejudice and racial discrimination, elected its first Black man to the presidency. And, in a historic moment less than six months ago, the United States elected the most racist and ethnocentric politician to the presidency in the last half-century. For many people, the election, and subsequent reelection of President Barack Obama signified the end of racism in the United States. Simultaneously, the election of the new president indicates

that racism is thriving in the United States. In this Black men are suspended in “dueling realities of history — steady progress and devastating setbacks” (Merida, 2007, p.4). Resultantly, it is commonplace for Black men, regardless of age, socioeconomic class, or location, to wonder whether their life is at risk because they are Black. Simply stated, in an Obama era there was a widely held belief that the United States was post-racial society (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011); the subsequent 2016 election indicated this is not that case, and the lives of Black men are in danger (Sanneh, 2015).

What’s more is that higher education, an institution founded on inequity, has long harbored institutional racism making it difficult for Black male administrators to achieve equitable outcomes with their White peers. In higher education, there is an extant body of research identifying the barriers that impact the success and progression of underrepresented racial minority students and faculty, including Black people (Baez, 2000; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Christian, 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Stanley, 2006). Yet, very little is known about the experiences of underrepresented racial minority administrators (Chun & Evans, 2012; McCurtis, Jackson, & O’Callaghan, 2008; Stanley, 2006). Specifically, most research on Black males in the academy focuses on students and faculty, with little research on the experiences of Black male administrators (Jackson, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Perna, Gerald, Baum, & Milem, 2006).

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach; this dissertation shares and analyzes findings from interview data to unearth the process by which Black male administrators navigate racism. Through this grounded theory investigation, a model for navigating racism for Black male administrators emerged, which illustrates the iterative and contextual nature of navigating racism. The result is that the way one navigates racism in higher education is

dependent on major contextual and shaping forces in their life. Further, one learns how to navigate racism early in life, well before one enters higher education. Specific decisions about how to navigate racism also involve an internal and external assessment of the racist incident, current context in which one is steeped, and desired or anticipated outcomes of navigating or managing the incident.

Finally, this research, through the creation of a model, moved from the descriptive analysis of what racism is, towards the practical implications of having to navigate racism in higher education. By integrating the identified racist incidents, shaping contexts, and the navigation model together, applications were created for individuals, institutions, and future research. The resulting implications focused primarily on critical self-reflection for individuals, an increase in reflection and audits for institutions, and a new direction for race and racism research to explore the primary learning sites of how to manage racism in one's life.

NAVIGATING RACISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY  
OF BLACK MALE ADMINISTRATORS

By

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## **DEDICATION**

To Bayard, Eric, Freddie, Frederick, James, Martin, Malcolm, Michael, Obama, Tamir, Trayvon, W.E.B., and Willie. I am you. You are me. May this work live on for us to live longer. Thrive. Prosper. And realize more than our potential.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I decided to pursue my Ph.D. because I knew it was a credential I would need to ascend to leadership and be successful in my work as a higher education and student affairs professional. I also knew that I needed to study something important and significant to me. Early in my career, I was coached, mentored, and shaped by Professionals of Color who know that they experience *something different* everyday working in higher education and student affairs. Recognizing the raced experiences that Professionals of Color have, there was a need for me to write so that others can truly understand the landscape and terrain of the racial dynamics in higher education. Like the participants in this study, my start to this work occurred well before my entry into higher education.

Thank you to my mom, Ernestine J. Rollins, one of my first teachers about how to navigate racism. Early she said to me, “You have to work twice as hard as the White man seated next to you”. This first lesson lives with me. Thank you. You support me unconditionally. You ground me. You ensure that I stay true to myself. To my dad, Willie Rollins, you taught me and shared with me what it means to be a Black man in our world. This definition, sometimes hard to understand and consume, inspires me to do this important work. Together, you were my first educators, my first role models, and my first cheerleaders.

My memories of elementary and secondary school are sparse and incomplete; however, there are a few educators whose presence, guidance, and motivation has stayed with me. Thank you Mrs. Ryles, Mrs. Kulick, Ms. Snowden, and Mr. Jutras. I am a proud and successful graduate of the Baltimore City Public School System due in part to your support and teachings. I found my voice, passions, and self as a Black gay first-generation college student at The Ohio State University. There are countless people there who nurtured my spirit as a thinker, scholar, and intellectual. Thank you Cheria Dial, Kay Robinson, Amy Wade, and Brian Orefice. Also, I am grateful to Dr. Liana Sayer, my undergraduate faculty advisor – she grounded me in the sociological world. Together, these individuals coached and developed me as an undergraduate student. There, at Ohio State I gained my sense of self as Black man in a White world. In different ways, each of them held me in my racial identity development process as I questioned, pushed, critiqued, and moved through my racialized world as a student.

I must also acknowledge The Vermont Connection. I learned what it meant to be a scholar-practitioner in the truest sense from my graduate experience at the University of Vermont. There, I acquired newfound clarity about social justice, the *-isms*, and my own racial identity development. Specifically, I have to thank Dorian McCoy, my first Black male professor in higher education, and Kathleen Manning, the consummate supporter, thinker, and feedbacker. Together, they aided me in developing my sense of scholarship; they formed a foundation on which I could build towards my Ph.D.

My practice in Chicago, working at two different institutions, deeply informed my lens and shaped my story to pursue my Ph.D., and to specifically write on the topic of racism. My observations of Black male administrators, and experiences as one showed me the need for this work. In Chicago, I was the only Person of Color on my team, and this was

significant to me. Purposely, I was recruited to diversify the team and to bring competencies around justice and equity. There were times where I felt like that work was difficult. I searched for connection on campus that wasn't always available to me through my team. I knew I needed an outlet to discuss, parse, and speak to the racism that I was experiencing. And if it wasn't racism, it surely was the raced burden of being a Person of Color. That formative experience is what fuels this dissertation; it is a big part of my why

There is no way I could have started, continued, or finished this journey without the support of Robert Kelly, Bridget Turner Kelly, Derrick Gunter, and Rabia Khan. And a very special thank you to Jason Chan. In 2012, Jason said yes to the crazy idea of pursuing our Ph.Ds., and has been an incredible support every step of the journey. Thank you Jason for being my Ph.D. buddy.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### The Black Male Experience in Context

The history, legacy, and experiences of Black males in the United States is a complex, often violent history punctuated with periods of progress (Anderson & Stewart, 2007; Anderson, 1990; Blackmon, 2009; Fultz & Brown, 2008; hooks, 2004; Hutchinson, 1997; Majors & Billson, 1993). Merida (2007) articulated the “dueling realities of [Black men’s] history — steady progress and devastating setbacks” (p.4), and in 2016, the lives of Black men remain a complete paradox (Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Reese, 2004). At the outset of this study, the highest political office in the United States of America was held by a Black man; yet statistics on the quality of life and the lived experiences of Black men in America are bleak (Blackmon, 2009; Eckholm, 2006; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011; Merida, 2007; Ulmer, Harris, & Steffensmeier, 2012).

Incarceration and homicide rates illuminate a stark picture of Black men in the United States and show how they are absent from civic life. A recent analysis by the *New York Times* reported that more than one in every six Black men between the ages of 24 and 54 has disappeared from civic life because of death or incarceration (“Forcing Black Men Out of Society,” 2015). This means that nearly 17% of all Black men are missing. Specifically, from 2010 to 2012, the mortality rate for Black males between the ages of 15 and 17 was 74.3 per 1,000 people (National Urban League, 2015; Kochanek et al., 2011); for the entire population of the United States, the same statistic is 8.15 per 1,000 people. During this time 7.4% of college-aged Black men were not able to attend college because they were deceased. These data are alarming and further supported by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) findings (2015) that Black men are *six times* more likely to die from homicide than

White men. Supplementing the CDC's finding, the homicide rate (per 100,000) for Black men between the ages of 15 and 24 was 75.0 in 2012; for the same age group of White men, it was 3.9 (National Urban League, 2015).

Further, one of the most noteworthy causes of death for Black men is the killing of Black men by police officers. Between 2005 and 2012, it is estimated that White police officers killed a Black man twice a week in the United States (Johnson, Hoyer, & Heath, 2014). From 2010 to 2012, federal data reported 1,217 deadly police shootings; these data show that Black males ages 15 to 19 were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million, while just 1.47 per million White males in the same age range died at the hands of police (Gabrielson, Grochowski Jones, & Sagara, 2014). Homicide rates and police killings explain, in part, why Black men are literally missing from society; however, incarceration rates further illuminate the absence and inequality experienced by Black men in America.

Today, more Black men are incarcerated than ever before (Alexander, 2012). Scholars (Alexander, 2012; Gibbs & Others, 1987; hooks, 2004; Hutchinson, 1997; Merida, 2007; Ulmer et al., 2012) have cited several reasons that contribute to the large number of Black men in prison, including inferior schools, limited job opportunities, and the absence of role models. Yet, the most notable explanation is the "racism within the criminal justice system and sentencing guidelines that have disproportionately affected Black men" (Merida, 2007, p. 239). In 2013, the incarceration rate (prisoners per 100,000) for Black men was 2,819; for White men, it was 466 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013). Putting these data in historical perspective, "more African American [men] are under correctional control today — in prison or jail, on probation or parole — than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began" (Alexander, 2012, p. 180). Currently, when post-secondary education is considered,

there are only twice as many Black men in college as there are incarcerated (Cook, 2012). Specifically, in 2013, Black men accounted for 18.5 million of the United States population, of which only 7.5% were enrolled in college and 4% were incarcerated (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013; National Urban League, 2015). Viewed together, homicide rates, police killings, and incarceration rates show that Black men in the United States exist in a historical, social, and current context that significantly disadvantages them (Alexander, 2012).

This is not surprising. Black men have always had a contentious and uneasy relationship with the United States, particularly with law enforcement and the criminal justice system (Asim, 2001; Brunson, 2006; Burris, 1999). Most recently, this tenuous relationship has been historicized, exposed, and aggravated by the deaths and killings of Laquan McDonald, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner – this list could continue (Chu, 2014; Harris & Tillis, 2015; Sciullo, 2015). The loss of so many Black male lives and the permanence of Black men behind bars has prompted more of the American citizenry to raise questions about race, racism, and anti-Blackness in America (Coates, 2015; Sanneh, 2015). This response has been demonstrated in the Baltimore Uprising, the Black Lives Matter movement, and countless other marches, protests, and demonstrations, including the recent uprisings at UCLA, Towson, Yale, Claremont McKenna, and University of Missouri campuses. Given the current context and climate, one must ask: How is it that Black men in America can simultaneously see the potential for their success represented in the first Black male president of the United States and also fear for their lives on a regular everyday basis? The answer to this question is the paradox of Black males in America: *perceived progress* for Black men represented by the former President of United States,

anchored by *real* danger, fear, and frustration evidenced in the lived experiences of Black men (Coates, 2015; Sanneh, 2015).

### Black Males in Higher Education

The contentious relationship that Black males have had in American society extends into their experiences in higher education. Black males were excluded from higher education until after the Civil War (Anderson, 2012; Ballard, 1973; Gates, 2011; Weinberg, 1977), at which time they began to see some gains in access to higher education and modest levels of degree completion. Historic and consistent patterns of success, however, have been elusive. The 20<sup>th</sup> century marked several high points for Blacks in higher education (Anderson, 1988). By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were 78 Black colleges and universities in the United States, and more than 2,000 Blacks had earned college degrees, of which approximately 390 were from predominately White colleges and universities (Anderson, 1988). Yet, during the same time, less than 1% of Black men earned a college degree, and, by 2000, only 10% of Black men aged 22 to 28 has completed college (McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2011). In other words, there were not significant gains in degree attainment for Black men over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In fact, over the past twenty years, Black male enrollment rates in higher education have plummeted (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). Currently, Black men account for approximately 4.3% of the total enrollment at four-year postsecondary institutions in the United States, and this percentage is nearly the same as it was in 1976 (Harper, 2006; Palmer et al., 2014). During a ten-year period from 1998 to 2008, enrollment for Black men at all institutions increased by 49.1%; however, the percentage change from 2007 to 2008 was only 8.1% (Kim, 2011) – enrollment gains are declining for Black men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further,

in examining enrollment rates for Black men and Black women over a thirty-year period, Black women outpace Black men. From 1976 to 2010, undergraduate enrollment for Black men increased from 4.57% to 5.43%; for Black women, the level increased from 5.44% to 9.36% (Palmer et al., 2014).

This trend is similar in graduate education. In 2010, Black men were 3.61% of attendees in graduate education; during the same time, Black women more than doubled their attendance at 8.71%. Further, in 2010, Black males represented 3.6% of master's degree and 2.6% of doctoral degree recipients (Palmer et al., 2014; Kim, 2011). These data demonstrate two important points. Firstly, Black men are underrepresented at the collegiate level when compared not only to the entire population, but also to their Black female counterparts. Secondly, Black men are significantly underrepresented in graduate education, a necessary degree for achieving employment success at the senior rank in higher education. When institutional types are considered, 41% of Black male undergraduates are enrolled at community colleges; only 33.2% are enrolled at public and private four-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). This distinction is key, as there is significant attrition at community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2010), and the pathway leading towards completing a graduate degree often begins with completing a degree at a four-year institution.

More important than enrollment is degree completion. According to national data, two thirds of Black men who start college do not finish (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014). And, while graduation rates have increased for all students since 1996, Black men experienced the smallest gains in graduation rates, with only a 2.4% increase in the graduation rate of Black men since 1996 (Palmer et al., 2014). Much of the growth in degree attainment for Black men has occurred at the associate's degree level

(Bush & Bush, 2010). From 1998 to 2008, associate degree completion for Black men increased by 66.9% (Kim, 2011). Furthermore, in 2008, Black students accounted for 8.9% of bachelor's degrees conferred, of which Black males earned only 3%. More broadly, in 2009, Black men 25 years old and older were 15.7% of adults who held a bachelor's degree or higher in the United States, only 4% more than in 1989. The same rate in 2009 for men and women of all races 25 years and older was 27.9% (Kim, 2011; Ryu, 2010, 2013). With so few Black male degree holders, few available candidates exist to pursue senior administrative roles higher education.

### Black Male Administrators

Of those Black males who do complete college, some return to the collegiate environment as administrators. Although specific research on Black male administrators is scant, one can learn about their experiences through the general body of research on Blacks in higher education. Turning to climate issues in higher education, many scholars (Austin, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Stanley, 2006) have written about and discussed issues that impact Black students, faculty, or administrators, and researchers have concluded that Black people experience “a physical environment and social culture alien to their own background” within institutions of higher learning (Anderson, 1988, p. 264). Additionally, “there continues to be ostracism by White students and faculty based on racist perceptions” (Anderson, 1988, p. 264). Scholarship has been consistent in describing the challenging environment that exists for Black people in higher education (Christian, 2012; Harper, 2011; Jones Brayboy, 2003; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011), and Jackson (2005) argued that the challenging atmosphere could serve as a barrier to success for Black administrators.



Further, in higher education, there is an extant body of research identifying the barriers that impact the success and progression of underrepresented racial minority students and faculty, including Black people (Baez, 2000; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Christian, 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Stanley, 2006). This work has identified factors such as racism, academic preparation, and campus climate as challenges for underrepresented racial minority students and faculty. And, while the experiences of faculty and students are often studied, very little is known about the experiences of underrepresented racial minority administrators; staff members who have managerial and leadership responsibility at colleges and universities (Chun & Evans, 2012; McCurtis, Jackson, & O'Callaghan, 2008; Stanley, 2006). Specifically, most research on Black males in the academy focuses on students and faculty, with little research on the experiences of Black male administrators (Jackson, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Perna, Gerald, Baum, & Milem, 2006). Black male administrators are a subset of Black administrators and Black people in higher education; understanding their general experiences in the academy is essential to understanding how they navigate racism in higher education. Next, I turn to the specific research about Black administrators and employment in higher education.

Employment opportunities for full-time administrators in higher education have increased significantly during the past two decades (American Council on Education, 2012); however, this growth has not translated into an increase in Black administrators in higher education. Specifically, from 1983 to 2003, full-time administrative positions in higher education increased by 51%; yet, Black administrators filled few of these positions (McCurtis et al., 2009, p. 67). Further, White administrators continue to be overrepresented in full-time administrative work. In 2007, Whites accounted for 80% of full-time

administrative staff in higher education, whereas racial minorities accounted for only 20% of full-time administrative positions (American Council on Education, 2012).

Additionally, the availability of Black candidates to enter full-time administrative positions is limited. Often, senior administrative positions require incumbents to have a master's or doctoral degree, and in 2008 Black graduates accounted for 9.3% of master's degrees and 6.2% of doctoral degrees (Ryu, 2010, 2013). Resultantly, Black administrators are rarely represented in senior positions; less than 10% of senior-level administrators in higher education are Black (Jackson, 2005, 2012). With few Black administrators in senior positions, Black men are rarely able to ascend to the most senior position in higher education: college president. Specifically, in 2011, only 5.3% of college or university presidents were Black men; in 1986, this same statistic was 5.1%. Clearly, not much has changed in the past 25 years (American Council on Education, 2012).

Also, Black administrators tend to leave the field of higher education more frequently than their White counterparts (McCurtis, Jackson, & O'Callaghan, 2009; Stanley, 2006). This attrition largely results from institutional racism that creates challenging conditions for Black administrators in higher education (Better, 2008; Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Law, Phillips, & Turney, 2004; Perna et al., 2006).

While it is clear that Black administrators face challenges in higher education, their experiences vary across institutional types (Jackson, 2001; Judson, 1999; Silver, Dennis, & Spikes, 1989). Some Black administrators have found a home at minority serving institutions (MSIs). In fact, MSIs employ most Black administrators in leadership roles (American Council on Education, 2012; Jackson, 2001, 2003). In 2011, of the 98 MSIs surveyed by the American Council on Education (2012), approximately 28 had Black college presidents. At

MSIs, Black administrators hold positions of power and can impact the institutional environment. However, at predominately White institutions (PWIs), the prospects for Black administrators are bleak. As Jackson (2002) noted, in reviewing and summarizing the literature on African-American administrators at PWIs, little scholarship exists about Black administrators, and there are very few present.

### Problem Statement

The pathway to the senior rank for Black administrators in higher education is difficult to achieve; attrition, a harsh climate, and no support are a few of the challenges for Black administrators. There are also fewer Blacks who complete the educational requirements and gain the experiences in the work force necessary to advance. Moreover, Black administrators experience racism in higher education, particularly as they attempt to advance to the senior rank and take on leadership roles within the academy (Jackson, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006; Perna et al., 2006). Black administrators do not have access to the same opportunities for advancement in higher education as do their White counterparts (Jackson, 2001, 2003, 2006). Kile and Jackson (2009) found that there continues to be an overrepresentation of White men in senior-level positions. Resultantly, Black administrators often find themselves in support roles within institutions of higher learning, or work in departments or academic units that focus on ethnic or minority studies (Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Kile & Jackson, 2009). In most settings, neither role affords Black administrators a clear path to senior administrative positions.

More specifically, Black male administrators are greatly at risk to experience dissatisfaction and frustration at work, as “the marginalization of African American men in the arena of employment remains problematic” (Mong & Roscigno, 2010, p.1). Black male

administrators are both highly skilled and competent, yet nonetheless underrepresented in the senior ranks of higher education administration. Results from a study conducted by Mong and Roscigno (2010) indicated that Black men reported being passed over for promotions in favor of a less qualified person. The researchers also found that Black men were disproportionately sanctioned in their workplaces relative to White peers and were held to higher standards of performance (Mong & Roscigno, 2010). Various studies by Jackson (2003, 2005, 2006) indicated similar findings for Black male workers in a higher education setting. Needless to say, these studies demonstrate a gap between Black male administrators' rate of advancement in higher education to the senior rank and the skills and competencies that they bring to higher education. As Merida (2007) noted, "the nation's most accomplished Black men usually have a story to tell about what they overcame, who influenced them, how they survived" (p. 12).

This dissertation uncovers the stories of accomplished Black males in higher education. Based on historical and current disparities impacting Black males across key sectors (e.g. employment, housing, education, and the justice system), I contend that Black male administrators' stories are shaped by the continued presence of systemic racism. Yet even with systematic racism, there have been Black males who have successfully navigated important systems in society — most especially education (Feagin, 2013; Harper & Wood, 2015).

### Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to understand the process by which Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education through an exploration of the meaning making, processes, and strategies that Black male administrators employ. This study starts

with the assumed presence of racism; this study does not seek to establish, legitimize, or substantiate the existence of racism. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to racism as a sensitizing concept for this research, and the ways in which racism has been studied in American society. Situated as a tenet of critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), this study acknowledges the permanence of racism as a social phenomenon and uncovers how a critical group of administrators in higher education manage this social phenomenon. The literature gives some indication of the barriers and challenges that Black male administrators encounter in higher education (Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Jackson, 2001, 2003, 2006); however, there is little empirical work that specifically examines racism through the lived-experiences of Black male administrators (Chun & Evans, 2012; McCurtis et al., 2008; Stanley, 2006). This research fills this gap. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of the racism that they experience in higher education at predominately White institutions?
2. What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominately White institutions?

By examining the processes by which Black male administrators navigate and make sense of racism in higher education, this grounded theory research explains more generally the nuanced experiences of racism in higher education. To explore these phenomena, I use Black male administrators as the example because of the historical and current context of Black males' experience with racism both broadly in the United States and specifically in higher education. This work extends beyond a descriptive analysis of racism to an

interpretive analysis of racism that deepens higher education scholars' and practitioners' understanding of the nuances of racism, while also building towards a model that is used to navigate racism in a higher education context.

### Overview of Research Methodology

To address my research questions, I use constructivist-grounded theory methodology. Centered on inductive logic, constructivist grounded theory is particularly useful because the methodology is driven by the data generated in a study — in this case the lived experiences of Black male administrators (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically, constructivism focuses on the ways that individuals interpret their social world and make meaning of what is happening to them. Charmaz (2006) argued that “the constructivist approach means learning how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger, and often, hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships” (p. 130). For this reason, comprehending and exploring how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education fits well with constructivist grounded theory because the methodology focuses on understanding a process where meaning is held and created by the participants (Charmaz, 2014).

Through ongoing interaction with the data, constant data analysis and coding, and “the iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 1), grounded theory aids the researcher in understanding how complex processes occur, in this case how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education (Charmaz, 2006). This process is particularly necessary, since a robust literature on the subject does not yet exist to describe the phenomenon of the lived experiences of racism among Black male administrators in higher education. Here, I

offer a brief overview of the methodology for this study. Specific methods, techniques, and analytic plans are described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Using purposeful theoretical sampling, I selected “excellent” participants (Patton, 1990). Excellent participants are individuals who demonstrate or have experience with the phenomenon being studied. Also, excellent participants are ready and willing to share their experience with the phenomenon. Specifically in this study, excellent participants were individuals who self-identify as Black males, report to a president, vice president, or a member of the president’s cabinet (e.g. director, assistant vice president, or a chief of staff) at a four-year higher education institution, work at a predominately White institution, have at least seven years of full-time professional experience working in higher education, and do not have academic rank or status (i.e. that of a tenure-track professor). Using expert nomination (Glesne, 2015) and the snowball technique (Charmaz, 2014), I recruited 12 participants. By speaking with administrators who work in diversity, race, and social justice areas in higher education, I was directed to Black male administrators who were appropriate for my study. I conducted interviews to explore and learn about each participant’s experiences with navigating racism in higher education.

I coded data using the methods outlined in a constructivist grounded theory framework (Charmaz, 2014). Through an iterative process, coding is done using a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014); relationships, connections, and associations are made with data that have already been collected simultaneously as new data are being collected. After initial coding is complete, constructivist grounded theory requires that relationships be identified between and among codes, from which a process or action emerges that is driven by the data. Through the process of coding, recoding, and developing relationships among

codes, a theoretical model or framework can be developed. In this study, through coding and a process of constant comparative analysis, I created a model of how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education.

Finally, as a researcher concerned with social justice — specifically the ending of oppression for all marginalized and minoritized people — constructivist grounded theory methodology is appropriate for raising critical questions and orienting the research project towards the liberation of people. As a methodology, constructivist grounded theory can demonstrate how inequities play out at the interactional and organizational levels across different social identities (Charmaz, 2005). Furthermore, as Charmaz (2005) articulated, “A social justice researcher can use grounded theory to anchor agendas for future action, practice, and policies in the analysis by making explicit connections between the theorized antecedents, current conditions, and consequences of major processes” (p. 512).

## Delimitations

To provide clarity about the boundaries of this study, I want to include one concept I touch on but not actively seek out. In addressing how Black male administrators navigate racism, characteristics or attributes related to racial identity development surfaced. Pioneered by William Cross (1971), the theory of Nigrescence is a five-stage model about the acquisition of a Black identity. The theory of Nigrescence charts a process of discovering and becoming committed to Blackness. Although there could be strong linkages between how one perceives and thinks about their race as a Black person and how they might navigate racism, this study is not about racial identity development. As the researcher, I assume that participants go through racial identity development and resultantly may describe how their racial identity interacts with how they navigate racism in higher education. However, I do not



explicitly interrogate how participants' racial identities develop or change. This work endeavored to understand Black male administrators' experiences with racism in higher education, a complex context in which internal issues or identities are not always defined or evident.

### Significance and Contribution

This research provides new insights into the ways that Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of racism in higher education at predominately White institutions. The results of this study offer an understanding of a population that is under researched and studied (Chun & Evans, 2012; McCurtis et al., 2008; Stanley, 2006). Specifically, colleges and universities benefit from understanding the experiences and types of barriers that Black men encounter as they navigate racism in higher education. Further, by providing linkages to institutional change, results of this dissertation study assist leaders in higher education in crafting and fostering an environment that is more inclusive and equitable for Black male administrators.

Additionally, this research contributes to an understanding of campus racial climate. While much research about campus racial climate centers on the student experience, administrators also shape and experience campus racial climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999; Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015). What is more, this research is significant because it studies the everydayness of racism (Bulmer & Solomos, 2004; Essed, 1991) through which campus racial climate is manifested. As such, this scholarship offers insights into how Black male administrators are impacted by and make contributions to the campus racial climate of their institutions.

Recommendations for improving campus climate for all marginalized populations, including understanding current barriers, are identified.

Finally, this research is informative for others, apart from Black males, seeking higher level or senior positions in higher education administration. Particularly, Black males—and others—in the early part of their career may benefit from the findings of this study, in particular the participants' experiences and strategies for navigating racism. In Chapter 3, I explain my own positionality and how I too was fortified by mentoring or coaching relationships with Black male administrators. These stories will prepare future Black male administrators for successful work in higher education.

#### Definition of Key Terms

Here I provide current definitions of major terms or concepts in this dissertation study. The definitions below are only a starting point to frame important concepts in this study.

Administrators – Individuals who plan, direct, or coordinate research, instructional, student administration and services, and other educational activities at postsecondary institutions, including universities, colleges, and junior and community colleges.

These individuals demonstrate talent in managing key functional areas in organizations. In higher education these individuals usually have advanced degrees, and are at higher levels of leadership (Chun & Evans, 2012).

Racism – System of dominance, power, and privilege rooted in historical oppression based on race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Harrell, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2015; Tatum, 1997). In the United States, this system benefits White people and disadvantages or constrains people of color. In this system, White people maintain structures preserving their power while excluding people of color from power.

Predominately White institutions – Institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010). Predominately White institutions are also known or referred to as *traditionally White institutions* or *historically White institutions*.

Critical incidents – Incidents that are memorable, developmental, and significant events (Flanagan, 1954). Often caused by a negative experience, critical incidents are personally salient and spark developmental change (Furr & Carroll, 2003).

## Conclusion

In summary, chapter one introduced the relevance and need for this study, which generates a grounded theory of how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education. By identifying the meaning made and strategies used by Black male administrators to navigate and manage racism, this research contributes to the understanding of campus racial climate for an understudied population. This study uses constructivist grounded theory to generate data for this study of the lived experiences of Black male administrators with racism in higher education. In chapter two, I examine multiple areas of scholarly literature that inform my thinking about racism in higher education, Black administrators in higher education, and critical incidents. Each are sensitizing concepts, which create the bounds of the literature review and provide context and understanding for this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Grounded theorists (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) often debate the need for and role of a literature review. Some grounded theorists have suggested that researchers should not complete a literature review before collecting data, because knowledge obtained during the review will negatively inform, shape, and influence the researcher and impact the way he or she perceives emergent data (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They have argued that, as researchers, grounded theorists should attempt to detach from any *a priori* knowledge and maintain a level of objectivity and neutrality when entering into the research project. Conversely, theorists like Hutchison (1993) have argued that individuals should conduct literature reviews in grounded theory research, as in any other type of qualitative inquiry, to provide context and aid them in developing a rationale and identifying the gaps in the current scholarship about the research project.

Still other theorists adopt a position that falls between these two perspectives regarding the purposes of the literature review. Smith and Biley (1997), for example, contended that researchers should understand a subject area and its gaps broadly, but should not review literature exhaustively. The authors argued that an exhaustive review of the literature could cause a researcher to hold too tightly to current conceptualizations of the subject of study, when grounded theorists should seek to understand what the data reveals about the subject (Smith & Biley, 1997). Furthermore, grounded theory aims to generate a theory, and doing so requires the flexibility to investigate a subject without needing to test theories or build upon current models (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007)

As noted in Chapter 1, this study follows the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). In constructivist grounded theory, the purpose of the literature

review is to explore, explain, and situate sensitizing concepts that will later help establish theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivists have contended that social actors mutually create the social world through their actions and the meaning that they assign their actions (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Rooted in symbolic interactionism, constructivists believe that actors are constantly creating meaning in the social world; the process is ongoing, without a beginning or end (Blumer, 1986). As a result, a researcher cannot enter into a grounded theory project *tabula rasa*, or as a blank slate; on the contrary, researchers have been, and are, a part of the world they are studying (Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006).

Further, Charmaz (2006) argued that a literature review within the constructivist paradigm “provides [a researcher with] a place to engage the ideas and research in the areas that [her or his] grounded theory addresses” (p. 168). Informed by relevant theory, Charmaz suggested that researchers situate literature to start an argument using sensitizing concepts; a sensitizing concept is a general term, which sparks a researcher’s thinking about a topic (Charmaz, 2014, p. 30). Sensitizing concepts also suggest a direction for a researcher to pursue inquiry and offer a sense of how examples of the phenomenon in question might fit categorically (Blumer, 1986; Bowen, 2006). Through the literature review, “sensitizing concepts provide starting points for building [subsequent] analysis to produce a grounded theory” (Bowen, 2006, p. 7). Therefore, the literature review for this study is not exhaustive; rather, it introduces sensitizing concepts that guide and serve as the starting point for my research. Completing the literature review in this way ensures that the researcher addresses existing research on appropriate concepts without over-conceptualizing them in a way that

informs a theory that should be driven by the data collected. Chapters 6 provides a fuller integration of literature that maps current scholarship onto this study's findings.

Given the stated purposes, this literature review includes three major sections that address important sensitizing concepts and orients them towards the outcome of this dissertation study. The first section provides an explanation and definition of various aspects of racism, including theoretical components, sociological conceptualizations, and the ways that individuals have conceptualized and examined racism in the higher education setting. In this first section, I apply sociological conceptualizations of racism to the higher education context, specifically explain institutional racism, and provide an outline of critical race theory as a standpoint perspective for this study. Understanding institutional racism is helpful when exploring the nuances and complexities of the ways that racism manifests in higher education. Institutional racism also emerged as a significant notion in the pilot study that I conducted to prepare for this dissertation study. The first section also addresses the following critical questions that scholars have raised about studying and researching racism:

- In what location or context is racism best understood?
- Which attributes or characteristics should research studies about racism address?
- How should scholarship discuss results or findings from research studies about racism?

I address each of these questions through this dissertation study, which employs a constructivist grounded theory search design (detailed in Chapter 3).

The second section of this chapter presents a review of the literature on Black administrators in higher education. Specifically, this section explores the history of Black administrators in higher education and the environment that Black administrators experience

within institutions of higher learning. The section concludes with a review of literature that addresses scholarship pertaining to Black men. As a result of the lack of relevant literature on Black administrators, and the call from scholars to go to Black men to study them, the literature specific to Black administrators and Black men, together, highlights the need for the thoughtful study of Black male administrators' experiences with racism.

The final section of this chapter addresses critical incidents borrowed from counselor education literature. Specifically, the section presents a brief definition for critical incidents and an explanation of their value in understanding Black male administrators' experiences with racism. In this work, I am seeking to understand the critical incidents that shape Black males' experiences with racism in higher education. Together, these three sensitizing concepts, conceptualizing racism, Black administrators, and critical incidents provide the starting point for studying how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education.

### Conceptualizing Racism in Higher Education

Sociologists have often explored broad conceptualizations of race and racism in society, because "the problem of race relations challenges the consciences of sociologists in a way that probably no other [social] problem does" (Rex, 1999, p. 335). Sociologists have also contended with each iteration of racism, as the definition and understanding of racism has changed with society over time (Back & Solomos, 2000). W.E.B. Du Bois, a Black American scholar, was one of the first sociologists to assert and predict that "the problem of the twentieth century [was] the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and in the lands of the sea" (Du Bois, 1903, p. xx). Stuart Hall, a Black British scholar, extended Du Bois' assertion by astutely

observing, “[The] capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty-first century” (Hall, 1993, p. 361). Together, Du Bois’ assertion and Hall’s observation have become the ground on which sociologists build the study of race relations (Back & Solomos, 2000).

Three sociologists, Michael Banton (1967), John Rex (1970), and William Julius Wilson (1973), advanced the understanding of race and racism by historicizing the intercultural contact among different racial groups and constructing a theoretical framework for the analysis of race relations and racism. Specifically, Banton (1967) investigated race relations by exploring the changing patterns of interactions between racial and ethnic groups across history. Banton argued that there were six basic orders of race relations: (a) institutionalized contact, (b) acculturation, (c) domination, (d) paternalism, (e) integration, and (f) pluralism.

Rex (1970) built upon Banton’s (1967) work by exploring the structural conditions in which individuals in society could enact the six basic orders of race relations. Examples of structural conditions include: (a) frontier situations of conflict over scarce resources; (b) the existence of unfree, indentured, or slave labor; (c) unusually harsh class exploitation; (d) and differential access to power and prestige (Rex, 1970). Ultimately, Rex suggested that “the study of race relations [involved] situations in which such structured conditions interacted with actors’ definitions in such a way as to produce a racially structured social reality” (Back & Solomos, 2000, p. 7).

Like Rex (1970), Wilson (1973) sought to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of race relations. Wilson focused his work specifically in the United States and South Africa during and after the 1960s. According to Back and Solomos (2000), “the



relationship of the concepts of racism and power and their role in explaining processes of change in the context of race relations” emerged from Wilson’s scholarship (p. 7). Together, Banton, Rex, and Wilson, among others during the 1970s and 1980s, laid the groundwork for conceptualizing race relations and established a precursor to understanding racism in the current context.

A significant critique of early sociological conceptualizations of race and racism was their lack of analysis and their failure to address institutionalized power in discussions of the ways that different racial groups could engage in the social world (Back & Solomos, 2000). During the 1980s and onwards, theoretical arguments developed from neo-Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, and critical perspectives to expand the scholarly understanding of racism (Back & Solomos, 2000). Across various intellectual perspectives, writings from scholars like Alexander (2012), Bonilla-Silva (2010), Collins (1990), Crenshaw (1995), Essed and Goldberg (2002), Feagin (2013), and Omi and Winant (2015) expanded the conceptualization of race and racism to acknowledge the implications in legal, education, housing, and criminal justice systems that proved to be pervasive, endemic, and rooted in the founding of the United States.

While racism has always benefitted one race (or group) over another (Feagin, 2013), its manifestation and meaning has changed consistently, resulting in many socially constructed meanings of race and racism. An exhaustive review of these sociological conceptualizations of racism is beyond the scope of this study. However, examining two of these racial theories—racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 2015) and colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Pinder, 2015)—are helpful, as both are widely used frameworks for interpreting and illuminating racism in the United States. Each of these conceptualizations

contributes to understanding the unique development of institutional racism in higher education.

Racial formation theory. Racial formation theory examines race as a socially constructed identity, where social, economic, and political forces determine the content and significance of racial categories (Omi & Winant, 2015). This framework emphasizes the process and dynamics of becoming and engaging as a racialized human being, marked and determined by larger structural systems. Pioneered by Omi and Winant (2015), racial formation theory builds on a sociological shift away from using biological imperatives to understand of race towards a conceptualization of race as a social construct reified and maintained by major social systems.

Further, racial formation theory examines race as a social construct with structural barriers, ideologies, individual actions, and implications from state institutions. The idea that a Black person in the United States is born into a social world that attaches meaning, identity, and treatment to being Black perfectly illustrates this point. This same Black person will learn about and have their race formed through engagement in the social world. Everyday experiences in school, with family, working, or navigating institutions will inform how this Black person becomes *Black*. Finally, this Black person may engage the state where any one state institution can shape and inform race, particularly “through policies which are explicitly or implicitly racial, state institutions organize and enforce the racial politics of everyday life” (Omi & Winant, 2000, p. 293). This illustration demonstrates how race is formed, without the necessary involvement of the human being. Through racial formation theory, race is *a priori*.

Racial formation theory also demonstrates the ways that race has functioned—historically and currently—in society (e.g., Irish were not White, but are now White; African refugees become Black in the United States). As Museus, Ledesma, and Parker (2015) explained, “[Because] race and racial categories are not natural but are socially constructed phenomena, these categories and their corresponding meanings vary across space and time (p. 39). Given the varying meanings of race, Omi and Winant (2015) also suggested that understanding the history of race is necessary to comprehend the current context of race and racism.

At its core, racial formation theory centers the idea that a direct connection exists between the racializing process that various groups of people (e.g., Latino, African American, Asian American) endure and history, politics, economics, and power (Omi & Winant, 2015). Today, a broader understanding of race exists among the American citizenry; as such, racial formation theory works to inform the expectations that these citizens have of how people of different races will engage, interact, or behave (Omi & Winant, 2015).

Colorblind racism. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) wrote extensively about racialized societies where perceived race matters profoundly for life experiences, opportunities, and interpersonal relationships. Through two major studies—the 1997 Survey of Social Attitudes of College Students and the 1998 Detroit Area Study—Bonilla-Silva (2010) argued that White people rationalized, performed, and engaged in colorblind racism through a racialized society. Colorblind racism involves the (apparent) disregard of race when selecting, engaging, or interacting with individuals. Bonilla-Silva noted that White people know better than to say or behave in explicitly racist ways. Resultantly, racism in today’s society shows up in nuanced and complex ways that suggest, on the surface, that White people are not

considering or thinking about race at all. Bonilla-Silva (2010) provided the following examples of statements that depict colorblind racism: “I don’t see race.” “People just need to work hard in order to succeed.” “Some of my closest friends are Black.” At first glance, these examples seem benign; however, each statement carries a meta-message of how the speaker is thinking about people of color in a racialized way.

Bonilla-Silva (2010) identified four frames: abstract liberalism, naturalism, cultural racism, and minimization that aided in developing a full understanding of colorblind racism. The first frame, abstract liberalism, uses economic (e.g., freedom or choice) and political (e.g., equal opportunity) liberalism to explain racial phenomena. Naturalism refers to the belief among White people that racial realities are naturally occurring (e.g., culture of poverty). Cultural racism employs cultural differences to explain inequalities in society (e.g., “Black people do not care about education”). Minimization, the fourth frame, suggests that while racial discrimination still exists, it is not so significant that it impacts the life chances of different racial groups. This last frame contends that because formal systems of legalized and federally supported racial discrimination (e.g., slavery) no longer exist, racism can do very little to impede opportunities for historically excluded racial groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Bonilla-Silva argued that each frame allowed White people to engage racist beliefs without naming race or seeing a racialized system that benefits White people and disadvantages people of color. Ultimately, colorblind racism provides White people “a safe, color-blind way to state racial views without appearing to be irrational or rabidly racist” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 211).

A second scholar, Sherrow Pinder (2015), theorized extensively about colorblindness and its implications for racism in the United States. Like Bonilla-Silva, Pinder suggested that

the colorblind project is a newer way of thinking about race relations that facilitates White people's failure to recognize the racialized history of the United States or the current implications of that history. Pinder (2015) built upon Bonilla-Silva's premise by questioning the notions of colorblindness and the end of racism. Pinder argued that "colorblindness assumes, indeed, that the only way to combat the exclusion and degradation of blacks and other racial minorities is to promote equal rights that are blind to race" (p. 6). The author also clarified that colorblindness considers neither the institutionalized power that advantages Whites nor equity, which is needed to account for the differential access to resources experienced among people of color (Pinder, 2015). Further, while colorblind racism retreats from an acknowledgment and understanding of the historical and material reality of racial discrimination and social inequities by encouraging individuals to *not see race*, there is a current desire to enhance cultural diversity in workplaces, schools, and universities (Pinder, 2015, p. 40) that requires society to identify with and recognize (racial) difference. Pinder indicated that the paradox of colorblindness is that one cannot choose not to see race and desire (racial) difference at the same time.

Application to higher education. Through racial formation theory, one can see higher education as a context within which race matters and racism exists. As Omi and Winant (2015) emphasized, institutions are raced and give meaning to race; therefore, people enter and engage institutions as raced beings. In the case of higher education, addressing racism becomes necessary because of the conditions created in higher education through racial formation theory. More simply, racial formation theory provides a racialized lens through which one can view the context of the higher education setting (Museus et al., 2015).

It is important to consider how higher education institutions were founded when seeking to understand the relationship between racial formation theory and higher education. Largely, the American college was established to educate White elite men in the United States (Gates, 2011; Rudolph, 2011; Weinberg, 1977). Given this foundation, race has always mattered to higher education. Further, historic Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were founded to educate Black people in the United States (Anderson, 1988). Albeit a simple origin story, the founding of American higher education is, in and of itself, an example of Omi and Winant's (2015) racial formation theory because American universities were first founded to serve White people.

Like racial formation theory, colorblind racism is predicated on, and linked to, a racialized society (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), and is a common mechanism through which individuals perpetuate racism in the higher education setting (Museus et al., 2015). Scholars addressing racism in higher education often highlight examples colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Pinder, 2015). Microaggressions serve as one such common example (Sue, 2010). Moreover, because of the espoused value of meritocracy in higher education, colorblind racism is uniquely positioned to thrive in the environment, as arbitrators of colorblind racism place a significant focus on achievement and accomplishment to camouflage their racist beliefs (Carter Andrews & Tuitt, 2013).

Furthermore, the current research agenda of scholars to address racism in higher education is fueled by an understanding that racial formation theory, among many sociological frameworks, aids in comprehending some of the conditions in which colorblind racism functions in higher education. And, it is the interaction between racial formation theory and colorblind racism which produces a racialized institutional context, and examples

or sites of racism in higher education. While an exhaustive description of all sociological conceptualizations of racism in higher education is beyond the scope of this literature review, the sections below detail two representative examples that directly apply racial formation theory and/or colorblind racism through discussions of affirmative action and campus racial climate.

*Affirmative action.* The use of affirmative action in university admissions decisions was first contested in 1978, in *Regents of the University California v. Bakke*, where the Supreme Court ruled that race-conscious admissions policies were constitutional (Gehring, 1998). Since 1978, there have been several Supreme Court cases (see: *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 2013) in which plaintiffs questioned the constitutionality of affirmative action in higher education, particularly in university admissions decisions. Opponents of affirmative action want admissions representatives to evaluate all applicants using the same standards, with no consideration of race (Gehring, 1998; Pike, Kuh, & Gonyea, 2007). Challengers of the policy also support “ideological narratives that promote colorblindness and post-racialism to dismiss the role of racism in shaping college opportunity and contend that policies like affirmative action are no longer necessary” (Museus et al., 2015, p.56). The research supporting affirmative action directly confronts colorblind racism by asserting the continued significance of race in the United States as a result of its racialized history. For higher education researchers, the defense of affirmative action is rooted in racial formation theory. As Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) explained, college campuses engage in systemic racism, and without a corrective measure like affirmative action, students of color would not be admitted.

*Campus racial climate.* The racial climate of a campus often incorporates aspects of both racial formation theory and colorblind racism. This climate involves the ways that students of color experience the institutional environment of a college or university, and the role that community members' attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations about issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity help to shape that climate (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). A campus's racial climate accounts for the interpersonal interactions and campus policies (colorblind racism), as well as the institutional-level forces like governmental policy and sociohistorical context (racial formation theory), that influence the on-campus experiences of students of color (Museus et al., 2015). As such, conceptualizations of campus racial climate operationalize and respond to both racial formation theory and colorblind racism.

*Application to Black male administrators.* By focusing on how Black male administrators navigate racism, both racial formation theory and colorblind racism directly relate to the core of this dissertation study, which is nested in the context of higher education. Specifically, racial formation theory functions as the foundation for the construction of Black male administrators' racialized selves and is the backdrop that racializes higher education. Black male administrators also commonly experience colorblind racism on college campuses. Further, using affirmative action and campus racial climate demonstrates a connection between Black male administrators and racial formation theory and colorblind racism. Although discussions of campus racial climate typically focus on students (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado et al., 1999), research indicates that the campus environment also has a significant impact on Black male administrators (Jackson, 2003, 2005). Further, while the affirmative action debate historically has centered on admissions decisions for college students (Gehring,



1998; Kuh & Gonyea, 2007), hiring managers employ affirmative action policies when recruiting faculty and staff at institutions of higher education. Because of these linkages, it is likely that connections, rooted in racial formation theory and colorblind racism, between affirmative action and campus racial climate for the participants will surface in this study.

In summary, researchers in higher education typically use sociological conceptualizations of racism to study the effects of racism on students, faculty, and staff. As noted previously, two major areas of research—affirmative action (Gehring, 1998; Kuh & Gonyea, 2007) and campus racial climate (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado et al., 1999)—have developed over time in higher education as an application of sociological understandings of racism. Racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 2015) and colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Pinder, 2015) also inform systemic institutional racism in the higher education setting (Ahmed, 2012; Better, 2008; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005). The next section describes the challenges and evolution of institutional racism in higher education.

### Institutional Racism in Higher Education

According to Rudolph (2011), systemic racism has existed since the inception of institutions of higher learning and has become an established component of the higher education setting. A number of researchers have noted the profound impact that this institutionalized racism has had on Black male administrators in higher education (Jackson & Flowers, 2003; McCurtis, Jackson, & O’Callaghan, 2008).

Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005), for example, situated race in higher education using the concepts of individual prejudice and institutional/organizational racism. Recognizing the popular rhetoric that supports an understanding of racism through individual actions, attitudes, and beliefs, Chesler et al. (2005) instead defined racism as a structural and

institutional phenomenon. By highlighting (a) hiring practices in higher education that benefitted White candidates over candidates of color, (b) the predominance of White administrators in senior leadership positions, and (c) the prevalence of campus buildings named after White people as examples of institutional racism, Chesler et al. (2005), among other scholars, characterized institutional racism in higher education as pervasive, endemic, and rooted in the creation of the American academy (Ahmed, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Better, 2008; Phillips & Turney, 2004).

According to researchers, most people think of racism as an interpersonal phenomenon acted out by individuals with racist attitudes and beliefs (Feagin, 2013; Tatum, 1997). Data has shown that, as a result, people struggle to understand that institutions can also perpetuate racism (Ahmed, 2012) and believe that racism lives within people not organizations or entities. Contrary to this widespread belief, Ahmed countered that institutions of higher learning can actually foster and produce systems of racism. Although these institutions are comprised of individual actors, they are, in their own right, entities that exhibit specific cultures and ways of behaving. Further, because these institutions perpetuate racism, people rarely hold individuals responsible for the racism that an institution harbors, even though individual actors actually make up the institution (Ahmed, 2012). Simply stated, “[The] power of institutional racism is that no one person must act to maintain it. Institutional racism can function without much active individual assistance”; it is in the air (Better, 2008, p. 42). This contradiction makes institutional racism confusing, innocuous, and subtle, because there is no one person to which one can attach the systemic racism. Better (2008) shared a cogent and broad definition of institutional racism:

Institutional racism denotes those patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions so as to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of nonwhite racial/ethnic groups. Institutional racism functions to reinforce white skin privilege in all facets of American life. (p. 11)

Better's definition of institutional racism explicates the ways in which people of color may see or experience racism, broadly. When applied to higher education, Better's definition indicates how, for example, Black male administrators' lack of parity with White administrators is a case of institutional racism. Moreover, Better (2008), like Ahmed (2012), characterized institutional racism in a paradoxical fashion. Specifically, Better asserted that institutional racism, although present, cannot be seen unless one is the recipient of it. And with such a nebulous quality, institutional racism requires an in-depth interpretive study into the experiences of those who have to navigate it (Better, 2008, p. 45); because, the people who are navigating institutional racism are in the best position to describe, explain, and uncover the impacts.

Examining institutional racism for this study is imperative, as findings about institutional racism surfaced through the use of constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory methodology is driven by data (Charmaz, 2014); what participants say become core categories in analysis. In so doing, interpretation of data in grounded theory methodology can bridge social action that occurs at the interpersonal and organizational level; grounded theory can get at institutional racism. As a result, in this study, constructivist grounded theory methodology not only uncovered the process that Black male administrators

navigate racism in higher education, but also, aided in discovering and understanding how institutionalized racism is actualized.

Application of institutional racism to Black male administrators. Finally, because research on Black male administrators has focused primarily on describing their status and attainment in higher education, and not on their encounters with institutional racism, there is insufficient knowledge and understanding of the range of experiences they may experience on the road to the senior rank. Historically, scholars have researched the retention, promotion, and positioning of Black male administrators in higher education, but have not explored their experiences with navigating racism (see: Jackson, 2001, 2003; McCurtis, Jackson, & O'Callaghan, 2008). This important line of inquiry represents a cursory examination of the factors influencing Black males' experiences in higher education by identifying success and progress as a hallmark of the experience of Black male administrators. A different line of inquiry, as outlined in this study, includes an analysis of the experiences with racism that Black male administrators encounter; this is a critical and necessary piece of scholarship about Black males administrators. Understanding the paradox of institutional racism, I assert that manifestations of institutional racism experienced by Black male administrators (e.g., lack of parity with White administrators, senior leadership that is predominantly White) require a more thorough and robust exploration. Greater understanding of this issue can lead to important institutional change and key insights for Black males who aspire to the highest levels of administration.

### Critical Race Theory

In addition to institutional racism in higher education, critical race theory has also been used to deepen the way scholars are able to examine racism in higher education. In this

section, I provide an overview of critical race theory and discuss its tenets as a standpoint or perspective grounding my overarching understanding of racism for this study. Critical race theory (CRT) developed out of a body of legal scholarship in the 1980s that examined the ways in which race and racial power are constructed in the legal system in the United States (Crenshaw, 1995). With roots in critical legal studies, CRT demonstrates the systemic treatment and categorization of Black people under the law (Delgado, 1995). CRT shares with critical legal studies a focus on (a) understanding how White supremacy and the subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America and (b) the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals like the “rule of law” and “equal protection” (Crenshaw, 1995). Unlike critical legal studies, CRT investigates all of society, not only the law.

There are several major tenets of CRT: (1) racism is a permanent and endemic part of American society; (2) interest convergence is necessary to combat racism; (3) experiential knowledge of people of color is appropriate, legitimate, and an integral part to analyzing and understanding racial inequality; and (4) eliminating racial oppression is part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppressions (Crenshaw, 1995). Researchers have used CRT to analyze various contexts, and three education scholars—Gloria Ladson-Billing, Daniel Solorzano, and Tara Yosso—extended CRT’s application specifically to educational contexts (Ladson-Billing, 1995; & Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Various works (see: Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) by each of these scholars outline how racism, an endemic part of all educational contexts, requires deep analysis. Moreover, in a higher education context, a CRT analysis seeks to keep race central while unearthing the counternarratives of people of color who are subjugated to White dominance in higher

education. As a framework, CRT contends with both structures and people; and as a result, it helps to demonstrate how racism is a major part of organizational functions and human behavior in higher education.

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define critical race theory in education, and outline critical race methodology. With race and racism central to all aspects of the research process, CRT challenges separate discourses on race, rejects traditional research paradigms, utilizes transformative solutions to racial subordination, and focuses on the racialized experiences of people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Solorzano and Yosso utilized a systems-oriented definition of racism, indicating “that racism is about institutional power, and people of color in the United States have never possessed this form of power” (p. 24). Further, the authors identified and synthesized five elements that were at the core of the CRT methodology: “(a) the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26-27). These elements display a unique approach to scholarship in higher education, as they focus on how the “social construct of race shapes university structures, practices, and discourses from the perspectives of those injured by and fighting against institutional racism” (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009, p. 663). Solorzano and Yosso’s translation of CRT into a methodological and analytic tool to be used in higher education support this study’s usage of CRT as a foundational framework.

The attributes, tenets, and characteristics of CRT enable researchers to “expose how racism permeates the lived experience of people of color in higher education and to give voice to the experiences of those historically silenced and marginalized” (Museus et al., 2015,

p. 27). In this study, CRT allows the researcher to name and ground racism as the systemic reality and organizing principle that deeply impacts Black male administrators, thereby, substantiating inquiry into how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education.

### Researching Race and Racism in Higher Education

Researchers have suggested that racism is a permanent and enduring function of American social life (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Crenshaw, 1995), and American institutions of higher learning are not immune to the effects of racism. In fact, a number of studies have documented the presence of racism in American higher education (see Ahmed, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Law, Phillips & Turney, 2004). These studies have offered a number of valuable insight into individuals' experiences with racism; however, in recent years, several scholars have begun to question how to study racism in a way that leads to nuanced theoretical and scholarly explanations of the issue (Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi, 2001; Bulmer & Solomos, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2003).

Bulmer and Solomos (2004), for example, questioned whether studies of racism should focus on interactions between racial groups or the impact of discrimination on racial minorities (p. 3). The authors also suggested that the focus of racism has been too theoretical, and that authors have not spent enough time exploring institutions, individual actors, and social change (p. 6). Additionally, studies that specifically examine the experiences of Black male administrators with racism have focused specifically on status, representation, and presence in higher education (see: Jackson 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), and have avoided issues of racialized experiences. Acknowledging there is a challenge to determine what to study about racism, and decidedly investigating how Black male administrators navigate racism

using the lived experiences of Black male administrators in higher education answers this question previously outlined by Bulmer and Solomos (2004).

Other scholars have raised a second question about researching race: In what location is racism best understood (Bulmer & Solomos, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2003)? Because of the tendency to theorize racism, there has been little exploration of the practical spaces within which racial systems exist. A thorough understanding of racism requires a specific context (Bulmer & Solomos, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2003). Bulmer and Solomos (2004) contended, “the meanings of race and racism need to be located within particular fields of discourse and articulated to the social relations found within that context” (p. 8). According to Bulmer and Solomos (2004), inquiry involving race and racism must explore the specific actors, interactions, and locations in order to detect the nuances, complexities, and hidden meanings of race and racism. Gunaratnam (2003) asserted, “Modern ideas about ‘race’ and ethnicity can thus be understood as being produced through complicated social relations, with these ideas taking on distinct meanings within different social contexts” (p. 13). Because there are “a variety of forms of racism and racist expression, it is important that research addresses the impact of racism in real-life situations” (Bulmer & Solomos, 2004, p. 10). Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, which focuses on interactions between social actors and social processes (Charmaz, 2006), to understand how Black male administrators navigate racism in a higher education, this dissertation responds to this second query posed by Bulmer and Solomos (2004) and Gunaratnam (2003).

It is also important to note that through efforts to abstract and theorize about racism, scholars have minimized the impact of racism and the way racism is experienced. From two different intellectual perspectives, sociology and higher education, Bonilla-Silva and



Baiocchi (2001), and Harper (2012) contended that researchers must address racism in research studies in a direct and clear way. Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2001) specifically addressed how sociologists minimize racism by focusing on how results are reported in research studies rather than debunking or reconstructing the foundational components of a research study that examines race. For example, a sociologist may investigate the gap in achievement between Black and White students by focusing on the test scores earned by test takers instead of examining the construction, validity, or bias of the actual test—where racism is embedded. Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2001) used this kind of example to advocate for a fuller understanding of how racism exists in the construction of a study, in the testing instrument, as well as in the way the researchers conceptualizes the results from each group of test takers (Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi, 2001).

Researchers have also found that sociologists employ attitudinal research about racism far too often (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). Because societal expectations about overt acts of racism have changed, most White people know better than to demonstrate an explicitly racist attitude, as they are much more likely to be held accountable and suffer consequences (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). Additionally, research that focuses on attitudes about race fail to truly account for the social disadvantages of being seen as a racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This type of attitudinal research about race and racism is limiting and does not fully represent or accurately depict the nuances of racism and how it presents systemically in society.

Finally, Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2001) argued that sociologists over utilize the culture of poverty explanation to conceptualize racism. The culture of poverty framework offers a theoretical understanding of why poverty still exists despite anti-poverty and social

welfare programs (Lewis, 1969) and locates the poverty problem in an individual without regard for structural inequality. Examples of research that use the culture of poverty framework suggest that people want to live in poverty or are unable to adopt working behaviors to diminish their impoverished life. Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2001) noted that social capital theory and structural inequality are better for understanding racism and have more explanatory power than do discussions that speak to the culture of poverty (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2001) provided an argument for directly addressing racism in research studies by using a structural or institutional frame for the analysis of racism. The literature reviewed for the dissertation study addresses Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi's argument by exploring institutional racism. Further, this study addresses Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi's argument by centering racism through the narratives of Black male administrators who have experienced racism in higher education.

Like Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi, Harper (2012) used a higher education perspective to encourage researchers go deeper in their analysis of racism. Harper found that higher education researchers use reasons other than racism to explain why people of color in the academy endure racialized experiences. The author reviewed 255 articles published in seven peer-reviewed journals to "show how researchers explain, discuss, and theorize about racial differences in student achievement, faculty and staff turnover, and other outcomes that are routinely disaggregated in the study of higher education" (Harper, 2012, p. 11). In doing so, Harper identified common rhetorical and semantic devices higher education researchers used to explain findings without directly naming racism. Harper criticizes researchers by indicating that authors soften or explain away the impact of racism in their studies. Few

scholars are bold enough to accurately describe the true impact of individuals' experiences with racism.

Patton, McEwen, Rendón, and Howard-Hamilton (2008) also advocated for the centering of race and racism in higher education. With a specific focus on student development theories, Patton et al. outlined the key aspects of a study that are lost in an analysis that does not center race in theories used for working with students. The authors clarified that race was entrenched in educational settings and emphasized the need to understand the impact of race on administrators (Patton et al., 2008). The final recommendation by Patton et al. further legitimated the approach of this dissertation study, while identifying a gap in current literature:

Higher education and student affairs professionals must be knowledgeable about and aware of their own racial identities, honestly evaluate themselves in terms of their understanding of race and racism, and recognize how their knowledge, awareness, and racial identity influence their decisions, policies, and interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. (p. 49)

Although steeped in the student experience, this recommendation substantiates the need to explore Black male administrators' experiences with racism; ultimately, this new understanding benefits students, as Black male administrators, and other administrators in higher education can be more racially aware and have a more critical understanding of the racism that permeates higher education as a result of this study. Moreover, the perspectives of both Patton et al. (2008) and Harper (2012) legitimate the need for this study, while simultaneously revealing a void in higher education literature—the lack of an honest, direct, and intentional study about racism in higher education settings. Finally, although research

about Black male administrators in higher education is predicated on the historical legacy of racism and the enduring quality of inequity, few scholars directly name race, describe the racializing processes that occur, or situate Black male administrators in the way this dissertation achieves.

### Summary of Conceptualizing Racism

While fundamental understandings of racism are rooted in sociological perspectives, higher education, as a field of study, has also contributed greatly to conceptualizations of institutional racism. Specifically, higher education scholars have used racial formation theory to understand the racialized social structure on college campuses, and have employed frameworks related to colorblind racism to interrogate, broadly, the treatment of various racial minority groups on college campuses. These sociological concepts aid higher education researchers in understanding everyday issues of race on campuses (e.g., affirmative action, and campus racial climate). Further, critical race theory adds to the arsenal of how scholars can understand racism in the higher education setting. In this study, critical race theory serves as a perspective that legitimizes the permanence of racism in higher education.

Finally, the literature reviewed revealed two recommendations about how to study racism, put forward by scholars, to which this dissertation responds. First, using the lived experiences of participants, this study situates racism in a specific context with particular social actors. In so doing, this inquiry addresses both Bulmer and Solomos' (2004) question about whether racism studies should focus on social interactions and their position that the study of racism has been too theoretical. Second, this study explicitly addresses racism. Several scholars, including Harper (2012) and Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2001) have urged researchers in higher education and sociology to address racism explicitly in studies dealing

with race. Too often, scholars explain away racism and cite broad challenges or barriers as explanations for the disparate experiences and conditions of people of color in higher education. This study addresses each of these issues and contributes to the scholarship by filling the identified gaps in the existing literature.

### Black Administrators in Higher Education

Literature about the experiences of Black administrators in higher education (generally) dates back to the late 1980s. Early articles on the topic contended with the historical legacy of racism, employment disparities, the experiences of Black women, and mobility in higher education (Sagaria, 1988; Silver, 1989; Williams, 1989). In a seminal article, Anderson (1988) discussed the ways that the historical legacy of racism impacted higher education in the present day. Anderson shared the following perspective:

Equality, as sanctioned by the law, is limited in reality only to the abstraction of opportunity. Equal educational opportunity and equal employment opportunity in white academe are simply deceptive platitudes of racist motive designed to comply with the letter but not the spirit of the law (p. 262).

Anderson provided a useful connection between the history of higher education in America and the current conditions under which Black male administrators must work.

Accommodation for and inclusion of Black male administrators at institutions of higher learning evolved through efforts to comply with the law; full inclusion was not intended.

In the 1990s, literature about Black administrators in higher education focused on cultivating diverse staffs, career achievement for Black administrators, and the contributions of Black administrators to the academy (Barr, 1990; Bridges, 1996; Judson, 1999). Also in the 1990s, more Black administrators began working for Predominately White Institutions

(PWIs; Jackson, 2002). As an increasing number of Black students began enrolling at PWIs, White administrators found themselves unable to support the specific needs of Black students, particularly in an environment that was often hostile and racist towards minority populations (Judson, 1999). As a result, institutional leaders recognized the need to have Black administrators available to support Black students (Judson, 1999). In the service of Black students and students of color, school leaders relegated many Black administrators to multicultural or diversity-oriented work and “appointed [them] to develop special recruitment programs, administer Black Studies programs, and serve as special consultants for minority relations” (Jackson & Daniels, 2012, p. 117). Silver, Dennis, and Spikes (1989) found that Black administrators at PWIs shared that their White colleagues believed they were only capable of engaging in diversity work. Jackson (2005), conversely, found that Black administrators in Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), were able to serve in a variety of capacities that included senior leadership roles.

In the 2000s, Jerlando Jackson (2002, 2003, 2005, 2006) advanced the literature on Black administrators in higher education by reporting on Black administrators’ status, successes, and continued challenges at both PWIs and MSIs. With more than 20 published articles and several book chapters, Jackson shed light on issues of racism in higher education, the role that Black administrators play in the academy, and how the campus environment is shaped for and by Black administrators in higher education. Jackson explicitly suggested that racism is the cause of the challenging conditions that Black administrators face in higher education. Further, both Flowers (2003) and Jackson (2005) cited an underrepresentation of Black administrators in institutions of higher learning and noted the need for parity with White counterparts as the justification for continued research.

Additionally, scholars have observed that as campuses continue to diversify through the recruitment of minority students, campus leaders have continued to assign Black administrators to serve Black students, specifically, and racial minority students, broadly, in multicultural centers and diversity offices (Jackson, Flowers, & Daniels, 2003). Given that the “relationship between student experiences [and success,] and contact hours with professionals on campus (faculty and administrators) has been a fundamental concept developed in the literature on college student development,” Black administrators are making contact with Black students to aid in Black student’s persistence (Jackson, 2003, p. 10). While Black administrators can provide a unique level of support for students of color, Jackson and Daniels (2012) have critiqued their continued relegation to these types of positions because diversity-specific work has not led to senior leadership opportunities (Jackson & Daniels, 2012). As a result, increases in the number of Black administrators working in higher education have not led to increases in their representation among senior administrators.

The significance of researching Black administrators in higher education is grounded in the changing demographics of the United States, which impact employment trends. Jackson and Daniels (2012), leading authors on administrative diversity in postsecondary education, explained these changing dynamics this way:

A defining feature of the past two decades in the United States is the increased racial and ethnic diversity. This significant shift in racial and ethnic demographics, in turn, has changed the composition of the U.S. work force. Contemporary discourse on the American workforce is hard pressed to not include a single agenda item focused on these pronounced shifts. As a result of this change in the tone and focus on racial and

ethnic diversity, it has in fact become the chief characteristic of the American workforce. In short, there has been a proliferation of non-Whites entering the labor force. (p. 115)

With more Black administrators in higher education, there is a significant need to understand their experiences in higher education. Black administrators will continue to be a part of the growing administrative workforce; however, if positional trends continue, Black administrators will not be in senior ranking positions within institutions of higher learning. Recognizing that the population of Black administrators will continue to increase overtime, without correlating opportunities for advancement, a need exists for a detailed and robust description of their experiences with racism that will aid future Black administrators as they navigate towards the senior positions.

### Researching Black Males

In addition to the need for more research about Black administrators, generally, this review of the literature also revealed a void in the knowledge base about Black male administrators, specifically. Although research specific to Black male administrators is sparse, several scholars have raised questions about how researchers should explore the experiences of Black males and have noted the need to highlight the voices of Black males in future research endeavors (Brown & Donnor, 2011; Drayton, 2014; hooks, 2004; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011). Howard and Flenbaugh (2011) argued that too much of the existing research has spoken for, interpreted, and analyzed the experiences of Black men without actually including Black men in the research process (p. 114). Brown and Donner (2011) suggested that “a melding of methodological approaches and analytical tools is required to fully articulate why the life opportunities, experiences, and outcomes of African American



males are disparate from other social groups” (p. 26). This means researchers must consider how to leverage methodological approaches so that Black men are engaged in the research process, and their voices are centered.

Brown (2011) argued that existing research about Black men pathologizes them and often recycles the same narratives about them to support the *Black male crisis*. Some of these narratives indicate that Black men lack aptitude, are unable to learn, need to adapt to larger society, and are untamable (Brown, 2011). In addition to the presence in academic publications, the *Black male crisis* perspective is forwarded in the news, popular culture, and policy reports, and provide the universal story that the larger society utilizes to make sense of Black males (Brown, 2011, p. 2043).

According to Brown (2011), scholars must respond to these narratives by providing avenues for Black males to share their experiences and debunk overdone, overused, and inaccurate narratives about the *Black male crisis*. Because “every black male in the United States has been forced at some point in his life to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed,” it is an imperative to go to Black males to learn the truth of their experiences in society (hooks, 2004, p. xii).

Brown (2011) also suggested that researchers explore the complexities and nuances of the lived experiences of Black males. This research offers new and balanced perspectives on the lives of Black males that also speak to the ways Black males are thriving. Brown provides the following explanation:

Thus, a conceptual shift must occur in the research about African American males that accounts for the complex and diverse ways that Black males’ material realities and identities are differently constrained across varied racial, class, sexual, and

regional lines. Such an approach will indeed enable educators to move beyond the same old stories of Black male cultural deficit and difference and provide counternarratives that consider the nuances and complexities of Black male life in schools and society. (Brown, 2011, p. 2073)

Brown (2011) called for researchers to transcend the cultural deficit approach often used to examine the experiences of Black males, and instead study the intricacies of the lives of Black males. Cultural deficit approaches highlight how a group of people may be lacking an experience, knowledge, or capacity when compared to another group of people; these models tend to focus on what the subject of study is missing (Brown, 2011; Harper, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Brown also stressed the need to identify patterns and behaviors that contribute to Black male success.

Furthermore, Howard and Flenbaugh (2011) explained that when Black males author and give voice to their own experience it “is not only liberating for the individual, in the name of self-actualization, self-critique, and self-authorship, but can be radically enlightening in the pursuit of social equity” ( p. 115). This dissertation answer the call for this shift in research about Black males by directly asking Black male administrators about their experiences with racism in higher education. Resultantly, this research should identify the structural and discursive constructs that shape the lives of Black men, specifically Black male administrators working at institutions of higher learning (Brown & Donnor, 2011, p. 29).

#### Summary of Black Administrators in Higher Education and Researching Black Males

Research indicates that Black administrators face a number of challenges in the higher education setting that vary across institutional types (Jackson, 2001; Judson, 1999;

Silver, Dennis, & Spikes, 1989). While some Black administrators have found a home at MSIs, few are represented in the senior ranks at PWIs. Further, Black administrators do not have access to the same opportunities for advancement in higher education, as do their White counterparts at PWIs (Jackson, 2003, 2005). These two characteristics support the chilly environment and racism that Black administrators face in the field of higher education.

Further, the existing literature about Black administrators in higher education draws upon report-oriented data and focuses primarily on employment status and trends (Jackson, 2003, 2005, 2006; Jackson & Daniels, 2012). This body of research also lacks any substantial qualitative inquiry that thoroughly interrogates the lived experiences of the target population. Rather, researchers have historically used quantitative data collected from professional associations (e.g., the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American Council on Education) and other sources to explain changes in representation that have occurred for Black administrators over time (Jackson, 2003, 2005, 2006; Jackson & Daniels, 2012). This void represents a limitation of this scholarship; as this secondhand, quantitative data fails to accurately depict the lived experiences of Black administrators. As a result, the existing literature fails to address a number of key questions, like,

- What is the impact of being one of few Black administrators in higher education?
- What forms of racism impact the experience of Black administrators the most?
- What are the needs of Black administrators in higher education?

Moreover, much of the extant literature on Black administrators (e.g., Harvey, 1999; Jackson, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006) has employed a cultural deficit model as a frame of inquiry. In the case of Black administrators, the literature has suggested that Black administrators lack parity with their White counterparts in the field of higher education (Jackson, 2003, 2006).

While this is true, framing the literature narrowly in this way limits the understanding of Black administrators' experiences in higher education, including their successes, challenges, and how they navigate racism to ascend to the highest administrative ranks.

Finally, the evolving need for more nuanced and complex research about Black males is significant and informs the design and intention of this study. Specifically, it is essential to deconstruct the grand narrative of the *Black male crisis*. Further, several scholars (see: Brown & Donnor, 2011; Drayton, 2014; hooks, 2004; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011) have indicated a need to center the voices of Black males in future research endeavors in order to deepen the understanding of Black males. According to Brown and Donner (2011), and Harper and Wood (2015), providing opportunities for Black males to tell their own stories is a promising practice that can shed light on the ways that Black men are thriving and experiencing success, generally, and in higher education specifically.

### Critical Incidents with Racism

This study assumes that Black male administrators must navigate incidents of racism as they strive to fulfill their roles within institutions of higher learning. Because racism is pervasive (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), Black male administrators are likely to experience many forms of racism. This study interrogates the critical incidents that Black male administrators have experienced with racism. All racism is bad, and often, there are particular experiences that stand out in one's memory because they prompted change, development, reflection, and a change in future responses—these experiences are deemed *critical incidents* (Furr & Carroll, 2003).

Borrowed from counselor education, the term *critical incidents* refers to “significant learning moments, turning points, or moments of realization that were identified by [an

individual] as making a significant contribution to their professional growth” (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006, p. 88). Critical incidents have several characteristics: They are (a) personally salient, (b) can cause developmental change, and (c) can be perceived as positive or negative. The concept of *critical incidents* stems from the critical incident technique pioneered by Flanagan (1954), which involves systematically observing, measuring, and collecting information about the performance of a task. In doing so, one can uncover significant attributes about the performance of the task. Further, a key aspect of the critical incident technique is the saliency or significance of the incident to the person doing or executing the task. The critical incident technique has developed over time, and today, the essence of the method maintains the importance and inclusion of the turning point or significant moment of the incident (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Currently, the technique is useful in qualitative methodology as a way to understand the impact of research participants’ experiences with phenomena (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

Critical incidents are useful in studying racism because of the challenge one has documenting an individual’s everyday experiences with racism and characterizing extreme incidents with racism; neither of which may prompt change, development, reflection, or a change in future responses. Everyday experiences with racism “can include mundane hassles that could be forgotten by the day’s end as well as overt, severe actions that could be recalled months later” (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003, p. 40). These kind of everyday experiences are characterized by their routineness and regularity with another person’s prejudice and discrimination and their pervasiveness in social interactions (Essed, 1991; Feagin, 2013; Feagin & McKinney, 2005; Swim et al., 2003).

Racial microaggressions are one acute example of everyday racism that is well documented in the literature. These microaggressions include everyday slights or subtle insults directed toward a marginalized person or group that maintain exclusion (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, 2010). While documenting everyday racism is helpful for understanding the nuances of racialized encounters, experiences with this phenomenon may not engender development. Conversely, for most individuals, extreme incidents of racism occur too infrequently to document. Examples of extreme racism include hate crimes, racial slurs, and overt job discrimination. Moreover, the changing manifestations of racism suggest that extreme examples of racism occur less frequently in a society where behavioral expectations around race and racism have shifted to be less overt and more covert and subtle (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Feagin, 2013). Because of this shift in manifestations of racism, extreme examples are often seen as an exception that is attributable to the extreme views or beliefs of the perpetrator.

The results of critical incidents engender development or change (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Data from the pilot study I conducted revealed useful examples of critical incidents that were similar to examples revealed through the full research study. One administrator from the pilot study recalled a critical incident during which an invited guest speaker used the N-word over dinner the evening before his speech. A second participant from the pilot study shared a critical incident in which colleagues referred to students of color in a disparaging way. A third participant considered the experience of being passed over for a promotion to be a critical incident with racism. Although these examples vary, the most significant aspect of each experience is the way that the respondent developed or changed as a result of the critical incident. In the present study, the severity or frequency of the racialized

experience is less important than the impact that the racialized experience had on the participant and the degree to which the critical incident led the subject to change, consider, or confront the racialized experience. Likely, it is in the change or developmental process following the critical incident where insights about how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education live.

#### Summary of Critical Incidents with Racism

Critical incidents with racism are helpful in this study because they shed light on the racialized experiences that prompt change, development, reflection, and adjusted responses to future incidents of racism among Black male administrators. And, while these incidents with racism are important they are not the focal point, as the primary research question for this study considers how Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of racism in at predominately White institutions of higher learning.

Further, research indicates that, as a single or collective experience, critical incidents are significant and cause a developmental change or shift in thinking or behavior (Furr & Carroll, 2003). The process of negotiating critical incidents is not limited to the time during or immediately after the experience; it also includes the reflection that occurs after the incident. Resultantly, for Black male administrators, critical incidents are only one part of the navigation process—they are sparks; navigation continues after the critical incident with racism.

#### Summary of the Literature Review

The demographic makeup of the administration at institutions of higher learning has enjoyed a change that led to increases in the enrollment, participation, and presence of all racial minorities; yet, over time, not much has changed for Black male administrators in

higher education (Jackson, 2003; McCurtis et al., 2008; Museus et al., 2015). Still, Black male administrators contend with racism in higher education. What is more, the steadfast characteristic of the academy, the historical legacy of racism, and the enduring quality of inequity has made it difficult to improve the quality of Black male administrators' experiences working in the field of higher education.

Moreover, navigating racism in higher education is challenging, and through this inquiry, I develop a more nuanced understanding of the ways that Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of racism at PWIs. To contextualize this research, I drew upon scholarship and literature about Black administrators, Black men, and the historical legacy of racism in higher education to demonstrate the value of furthering this area of study.

The review also outlined the ways in which scholars have studied racism and highlighted their suggestions for deepening and enhancing the study of racism. This research project extends discourse about race and racism by honestly discussing the ways that Black male administrators experience and address racism in higher education. The call to bring forward individuals' experiences with racism, as detailed in their voices, and to center the context in which racism happens is clear, and are fulfilled by this study. The implications of this new understanding, which are grounded in theory, aids future Black male administrators in understanding the racialized terrain of higher education while advancing the methods with which researchers study race and racism in higher education.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

This dissertation study explored how Black male administrators navigate and manage racism in higher education. A constructivist grounded theory was most suitable for this dissertation given the focus on understanding a process where meaning is held and created by the participants (Charmaz, 2014). The research questions guiding this dissertation study were:

1. How do Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of the racism that they experience in higher education at predominately White institutions?
2. What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominately White institutions?

This chapter explains the epistemological paradigm, constructivist grounded theory methodology, and methods (i.e. intensive interviews, memoing, and constant comparative analysis) I used to situate my dissertation study.

### **Research Design**

This study demonstrated an alignment between my epistemological paradigm, constructivist grounded theory methodology, and corresponding methods (Jones, 2002). This study was informed by a constructivist epistemology (Jones et al., 2013), which identifies knowledge as socially constructed and develops from the meaning that individuals create from their lived experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). These principles made constructivism the appropriate epistemological paradigm to use for this

study as I sought to understand how Black males navigate, manage, and make meaning of their experiences with racism in higher education.

Constructivist epistemological paradigm. As a researcher, I wanted to understand how individuals navigate racism through the interpretation of their experiences with racism. The constructivist paradigm requires the co-construction of knowledge between and amongst several social actors, including researchers and participants (Jones et al., 2013). Additionally, the constructivist epistemological paradigm recognizes “subjectivity and the researcher’s involvement in the construction and interpretation of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 14). Overall, constructivism is concerned with how individuals conceptualize social realities and places an intense focus on the researcher’s and participants’ construction, articulation, and interpretation of reality or social action (Charmaz, 2014). Consequently, in this study, I was situated as a partner in the construction of knowledge; I was an instrument of the research process (Glesne, 2015).

Further, as a researcher, I believe that race and racism matter. I entered this work seeking to understand experiences with racism, and critical race theory has informed my standpoint and perspective on the issue. Like the tenets of critical race theory suggest, I believe that racism is a permanent and endemic part of American society, and eliminating racial oppression is part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppressions (Crenshaw, 1995). As a researcher with this epistemological paradigm, I focus on the “ways in which racism is so embedded in society that it appears normal” (Glesne, 2015, p. 10).

Additionally, my epistemological paradigm is rooted in a critical perspective that accounts for history, context, and politics. I was informed by five premises that Tierney and Rhoads (1993) developed for critical higher education research: (1) Research efforts need to

be tied to analyses that investigate the structures in which the study exists; (2) Knowledge is not neutral, but contested and political; (3) Difference and conflict, rather than similarity and consensus, are organizing concepts; (4) Research is praxis-orientated; and (5) All researchers/authors are intimately tied to their theoretical perspectives and positioned subjects (p. 327). This critical perspective challenged me to consider the ways in which race, power, and privilege inform how I viewed this dissertation study and interrogated myself as a tool for this research.

Ultimately, there is a tension point in my constructivist epistemological paradigm. While I believe that knowledge is co-constructed and meaning is shared between social actors, I also believe that racism exists. Resultantly, the social realities in which one can engage occur in a social world where racism is present. This epistemological tension point is rooted in my own lived-experience. I have constructed meaning through lived-experiences with racism. I address my biases, assumptions, and history, and their possible impact on this study in detail in the researcher's positionality and reflexivity section at the end of this chapter (Jones et al., 2014).

Grounded theory methodology. The methodology for this study was grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Specifically, I selected constructivist grounded theory because of the focus on co-constructing meaning between the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory helps distill complex information and uncover processes, like how Black male administrators navigate their experiences with racism in higher education (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Like many methodologies, grounded theory has evolved over time.

With a goal of developing theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) set out to create a new methodology using an inductive process with data-rich cases to produce theory that was “grounded” in the data. Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory in response to a post-positivist critique about qualitative research. With the intention of combining the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods, Glaser and Strauss created the grounded theory methodology using inductive logic to study death and the process of dying. The researchers originally used grounded theory to demonstrate that one could derive core concepts, categories, and hypotheses from qualitative data, which made grounded theory just as rigorous as quantitative measures. Glaser and Strauss’ *new methodology* departed from the positivistic tradition of the time, while maintaining rigorous procedures (Charmaz, 2006; Star, 2007).

An objectivist lens led the first conceptualizations of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); however, Corbin and Strauss (2014) rejected some of the original positivistic leanings of the approach; arguing that in qualitative research, the researcher must serve as an instrument of study. Essentially, Corbin and Strauss offered a version of grounded theory that was inclusive of the interpretive work and role of the qualitative researcher. Corbin and Strauss (2014) advanced an understanding of grounded theory methodology that accounted for the interconnections between people, conditions, and structures, all of which influenced how social processes occurred.

More recently, Kathy Charmaz (2005, 2006, 2014) significantly shaped the use and implementation of the grounded theory methodology. Charmaz’s work interrogated the role of the researcher as instrument in grounded theory, clarified the inclusion of a researcher’s epistemological perspective, and simplified the way in which data analysis, specifically

coding, takes place in grounded theory. Through Charmaz's (2014) work, grounded theory became a more adaptable methodology.

Constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory was the best methodological approach to this study because understanding how Black male administrators navigate their experiences with racism in higher education involves a process in which both the researcher and participants co-constructed meaning from the phenomenon. Pioneered by Kathy Charmaz (2006, 2014), constructivist grounded theory focuses on developing theory inductively from data, and requires the researcher to examine "how their privileges and preconceptions may shape the analysis" of data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 13). Derived from grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory focuses on all of the ways that the participants and researcher engage the phenomenon in the study. Simply, all individuals co-construct reality and make meaning of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2005); this includes the researcher. Charmaz (2006) emphasized the importance of including both the researcher's and the participants' views, beliefs, and feelings, while deemphasizing complex uses of jargon, diagrams, or systemic approaches when executing a constructivist grounded theory research study. Ultimately, the attributes of constructivist grounded theory bridged my epistemological paradigm, methodology, and theoretical perspective, all of which aligned for this study.

## Methods

Methods provide the roadmap for data collection and data analysis in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). The sections that follow detail the sampling strategy, prospective participant recruitment, sampling criteria, sample size, participant interviews, interview protocol, and data analysis that I employed to examine the ways that

Black male administrators navigate their experiences with racism in higher education. I also discuss the limitations of this research design.

Grounded theorists typically use the constant comparative method of data analysis throughout their entire study; it serves as an anchor and overarching technique (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2006) shared that the constant comparison method “generates successively more abstract concepts and theories through inductive processes of comparing data with data, data with category, category with category, and category with concept. Comparisons then constitute each stage of analytic development” (p. 187). As a researcher, I used the constant comparative method, beginning first with reviewing transcripts, and executing the method simultaneously as I collected and analyzed data throughout the entire study.

Sampling strategy. Researchers must demonstrate intention and thoughtfulness when sampling in a grounded theory study. Morse (2007) identified three important principles for grounded theorists to consider when creating samples for study: (1) Excellent research skills are essential for obtaining good data; (2) It is necessary to locate “excellent” participants to obtain excellent data; and (3) Sampling techniques must be targeted and efficient (p. 230-233). In my dissertation study, purposeful theoretical sampling guided how I selected participants.

Purposeful theoretical sampling combines two types of sampling: purposeful and theoretical. When engaging in purposeful sampling, the researcher finds subjects that have experienced the phenomenon of study, which aids in “determining the scope of the phenomena or concepts” (Morse, 2007, p. 236) and yields “excellent” participants (Patton, 1990). In grounded theory, theoretical sampling allows the researcher to obtain data from participants that aids in the development of a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically,

the researcher “decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop [the] theory as it emerges” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Because grounded theory utilizes a constant comparison method to analyze data and determine relationships among data as it is being collected, theoretical sampling is very useful in attaining more data that is useful for developing a theory.

Sampling criteria. To achieve purposeful theoretical sampling, the researcher must establish sampling criteria that allow for the selection of data-rich cases or “excellent” participants who demonstrate aspects connected to the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015; Patton, 1990). For this study, I defined “excellent” participants as those who met four sampling criterion: (1) they self-identified as a Black male; (2) they reported to the president or vice president, or served as a member of the president’s cabinet at a four-year PWI; (3) they had at least seven years of full-time professional experience working in higher education, and; (4) they did not have tenure. Although, each of these criteria eliminated some viable participants, they were necessary to study the phenomenon in question under specific conditions. By selecting participants without academic rank or status (i.e. non-tenure track), I was able to target some of the most vulnerable employees or workers in higher education (Chun & Evans, 2012). The Black administrators that met these criteria did not have the job security and freedom that comes with being a tenured administrator working in higher education.

Through this study, I sought to explore and understand the ways that Black male administrators navigate their experiences with racism in different higher education settings all over the United States. In my examination of this issue, the only contextual requirement that I had for the phenomenon in question is that subjects work at a four-year, predominately

White institution. I chose this setting because most of the research on Black administrators takes place at four-year institutions. Additionally, opportunities to achieve the highest rank with power, prestige, and influence across institutional types for Black male administrators are more likely to occur at four-year institutions. Also, the “four-year institution” categorization also allowed for a range of institutional types (e.g., public, private, research, comprehensive, liberal arts) that would be unavailable if this study only investigated two-year institutions.

I decided to select participants from all over the country because this larger pool of candidates facilitated my selection of a sufficient number of participants; Black male administrators at the senior rank are not common. With a focus on participants’ work in higher education, it is important to note that I was interested in exploring participants’ experiences with racism throughout their entire career in higher education; I did not restrict my inquiry to their experiences within their current institutional context. I did also take into consideration the fact that racism can manifest with regional characteristics or attributes. For example, I anticipated that there would be some similarities between how individuals demonstrate racism in the South and in the Midwest or Northeast. Having participants from locations across the United States enabled me to identify universal themes in the ways that Black male administrators navigate racism, regardless of location. Resultantly, participants represented a variety of institutions and institution types from all over the United States.

Prospective participant recruitment. To recruit participants who could advance this study, I was thoughtful and intentional about selecting Black male administrators who would have significant experiences with racism in higher education. Particularly, I selected Black male administrators who represented a variety of administrative functions, had critical



incidents with racism as an administrator, understood racism to be a part of working in higher education, and had thought about how to manage racism as an administrator working in higher education. Specifically, I used several strategies to recruit participants for this study, including expert nomination, snowballing, and leveraging my professional network of Black male administrators at the senior rank. The first strategy I used was expert nomination (Glesne, 2015). I identified and spoke with administrators who work in diversity, race, and social justice areas in higher education and requested that they direct me to Black male administrators who meet the sampling criteria. The administrators who served as expert nominators assisted me in locating “excellent” participants (Patton, 1990). The second strategy I used to recruit research participants was the snowball technique (Charmaz, 2014), which allows the researcher to make contact with prospective participants based on the recommendation of an informant or current participant who is well informed about the study. By starting with an “excellent” first participant or informant, I was able to recruit a robust sample for this study. Lastly, I used my professional network, as there are several Black male administrators apart of my professional network that fit the selection criterion for this study.

Through employing expert nominations, snowballing, and leveraging my own professional networks I was familiar with four of the participants who were in the available pool. I chose not to rule out participants that I knew because in a study about a sensitive topic like racism, in a field like higher education administration, it is likely that I, as a successful Black male administrator would know other Black male administrators at the senior rank; there are few of us. Finding this specific participant is difficult, and I anticipated that I might know participants professionally in this study. The extent to which I knew the participants

did not impact the study negatively. Rather, interviewing participants I knew added to the comfort and rapport demonstrated during data collection.

Thirty possible study participants were identified using these three techniques. After surveying the list of 30 potential participants, I selected a diverse sample of 23 possible participants. The 23 possible participants were selected based on administrative role, institutional type, and years of experiences. I was also seeking candidates that I could interview in person. In person interviews would enhance this study enabling me to sit with participants face-to-face to engage in difficult conversations about racism. Interviewing participants on difficult topics requires a researcher to be poised, observant, and keenly aware of changes in affect, tone, or body language demonstrated by their participant; this is only available in-person (Guba, & Lincoln, 2005). Moreover, to ensure a similar quality in the available data, one must interview all participants under the same conditions (i.e. phone, in-person, virtual) (Guba, & Lincoln, 2005). Given this demand for the qualitative researcher, I needed to prioritize selecting participants that not only met the selection criterion, but also were available for an in-person interview.

Next, I emailed potential participants about the study; of the 23 participants initially contacted, only one participant indicated that they were not interested in participating in the study. This initial email (Appendix A) identified the title and purpose of my dissertation study, and included information about involvement and the possible outcomes of the inquiry. This email also served as an invitation to participate in the study. To identify my final sample, I asked the 22 interested participants to complete an online demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) that I used to collect demographic information and basic information (i.e. name, title, institution, years of experience, job responsibilities) that allowed me to assess

whether the participant would (a) be an “excellent” participant for the study and (b) meet the sampling criteria. Of the 22 potential participants, 14 participants completed the online demographic questionnaire. This online demographic questionnaire included IRB information and a consent form that each respondent signed. Given my professional relationship with colleagues in higher education administration, I was able to carry out my sampling strategy and recruit excellent participants. Additionally, as a Black male administrator myself, I brought credibility to this study and was able to build trust with participants. Participants identified with me, recognized that I would be sensitive as a researcher and careful with the data that I collected during the study.

Sample size. Determining the sample size in qualitative research broadly, and grounded theory specifically, is a debated issue. Jones et al. (2013) reminded qualitative researchers that decisions about sample size should be guided by “the methodological approach, coupled with the purpose of a study” (p. 70). Creswell (2013) suggested that researchers must recruit 20 to 30 participants to reach saturation in a grounded theory study. Specific to constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2006) asserted that conducting 20 to 30 interviews with fewer participants who could provide data-rich information could lead to theoretical saturation. Similarly, Morse (2007) noted that “the better the data quality, the fewer interviews will be necessary, and the lower the number of participants recruited into the study” (p. 230). Morse (2015) also advised that “trying to predetermine the sample size is a futile task” (p. 3).

While inconclusive, these guidelines and expert scholarship provide context for understanding the range of sample sizes in recent grounded theory studies in higher education literature (see, for example, Edwards & Jones, 2009 [10 participants]; Jones, 1997

[10 participants]; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005 [13 participants]; Pusch, 2005 [13 participants]; and Stevens, 2004 [11 participants]). Consistent with the higher education literature base, and utilizing Charmaz, Creswell, and Morse's (2006) approach, this study included 12 participants. I identified a sample of 14 participants. One participant was ultimately unreachable for an in-person interview, and a second participant incorrectly completed the Country of Origin field in the demographic questionnaire; his data was not analyzed nor included in the study. Finally, guided by the principle of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2013), I was open to the possibility of adding more participants in later stages of data collection and analysis to advance the emerging theory. However, this was not necessary as emerging categories were clear, similar, and saturated early in data collection.

Participant interviews. The primary means of data collection in this study was intensive interviews with participants (Charmaz, 2014). Intensive interviews allow the researcher to generate data by focusing on "research participants' statements about their experience, how they portray this experience, and what it means to them, as they indicate during the interview" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 58). Additionally, through intensive interviews, the researcher can attempt to understand a participant's interpretation of an experience (Charmaz, 2014). In this study, intensive interviews were necessary because they offered me first-hand accounts of the experiences with racism that each participant had encountered during his career in higher education. Interviews took place in person, and no follow-up interviews were necessary as saturation occurred early in the data analysis process.

Charmaz (2014) recommended using reflective questions in intensive interviews to (a) build rapport with participants, (b) aid participants in making meaning of their

experiences, and (c) allow participants the space to provide a full explanation about the phenomenon in question. Leading with reflective questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews that were designed to last between 60 and 90 minutes (Jones et al., 2013); the shortest interview was 53 minutes and the longest was 78 minutes. Interview questions focused on the following ideas: describing the current position and work history, describing a critical incident or experience with racism in higher education, identifying the process or steps used to navigate the experience with racism, and reflecting on the meaning of the racist experience. All interviews were conducted in-person face-to-face, audio recorded, and transcribed for use in the data analysis process.

Creswell (2013) explored the dynamics of an interview, suggesting “the nature of an interview sets up an unequal power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee” (p. 173). Charmaz (2014) clarified the power dynamic cited by Creswell by indicating that “differences in gender, age, status, and experience may result in interactional power differences” during an interview (p. 73). In constructivist grounded theory, knowledge is co-constructed by the researcher and participant (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Therefore, the researcher must work towards minimizing the power dynamic (Jones et al., 2013). For this study, I worked towards this goal by developing trust and situating myself as a co-researcher. In each interview, I shared briefly about my own experiences with racism in higher education, as a way to build trust, and discuss why I was motivated to conduct this research. Specific examples of what I shared are outlined below, in the Researcher’s Positionality and Reflexivity section. Further, my constructivist epistemological perspective shapes my belief that participant interviews in a research study should occur without a power dynamic, and the participant should feel equally empowered to shape the interview.

Interview procedures and protocol. As mentioned above, before conducting interviews, I sent each participant a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) soliciting information about their place of employment, years of experience, and highest degree earned. I used the information gathered from this questionnaire to determine whether a potential participant met the selection criterion. I also paired the demographic questionnaire with pre-work I completed about each institution, which afforded me a basic understanding about the participants and their context, and enabled me to start each interview in a conversational manner primed with background knowledge. Specifically, the pre-work I completed helped me to learn about demographics, composition, and context of the participant's institution.

Following the structure of constructivist grounded theory interviews outlined by Kathy Charmaz (2014); I divided the interview protocol (Appendix C) into four categories of questions: (a) rapport building, (b) encouraging reflection about racism, (c) prompting thought about interpretation, and (d) concluding the interview. These categories afford the researcher the ability to follow each participant's narrative while constructing meaning with the participant (Charmaz, 2014). For example, in the "encouraging reflection about racism" section of the interview protocol, I asked participants to recall a critical incident with racism. Explained fully in Chapter 2, critical incidents engender growth, development, or change. Asking about critical incidents with racism aided me in developing theory about the process that Black male administrators have used to navigate their experiences with racism in higher education.

Data analysis. Interview transcripts served as the primary data source for this constructivist grounded theory research study. I applied the constant comparative method to the transcribed interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). Further, to identify an emerging theory,

I applied three critical steps of data analysis through coding: (1) initial coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) theoretical coding. Additionally, I used memo writing throughout the data collection and data analysis processes to help me move analysis from codes to theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2014).

*The coding process.* The coding process aids the researcher in thinking about their research in a way that differs from their participants by joining analytic thought, disciplinary training, and empirical data (Charmaz, 2014). In grounded theory, coding links data and the emerging theory. Specifically, through coding, the researcher defines and makes meaning of what is happening in the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). Charmaz identified three coding levels that reveal theory from data: (a) initial coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) theoretical coding. In this study, I used each coding level to aid in generating a grounded theory about how Black male administrators navigate their experiences with racism in higher education.

Initial coding keeps the researcher close to the data and requires a line-by-line analysis that emphasizes core concepts and action words that a participant uses (Charmaz, 2014; Jones et al., 2013). The initial coding was simple and involved the use of gerund phrases (e.g., resisting direction from supervisor; believing in a larger message) to indicate and maintain the action participants disclose in interviews. During initial coding, I coded each sentence of the transcripts with one or more codes. Codes were derived from participants' words. I generated 1098 initial codes. Some examples of initial codes include: being palatable, being true to self, creating allies, learning change, and loving self. Charmaz (2014) explained that axial coding “specifies the properties and dimensions of a category” (p. 147). By putting initial codes together to form categories, axial coding creates groupings of codes on the basis of emerging relationships (Charmaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2013). Using the

initial codes I established, each piece of text was systematically compared and assigned to one code to during the axial coding stage. Also, during axial coding, codes were added or modified as necessary as new meanings or categories emerged; and, I rechecked codes and assigned text to assess coding consistency. Finally, during theoretical coding, a story emerges about the connections between the data and patterns formed from the initial and axial codes (Charmaz, 2014). As Charmaz (2014) noted, the researcher then applies broad terms to demonstrate application action, direction, or movement across the information shared from most participants. Through theoretical coding several substantive ideas emerged including: conceptualizing racism, understanding racism experienced, and past experiences with racism shaping future experiences.

*Constant comparative analysis.* Throughout the entire coding process, I used the constant comparative method. This method creates analytic distinctions, by “making comparisons at each level of analytic work” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 132). Specifically, this method allows the researcher to conduct a sequential comparison of transcripts with transcripts, codes with codes, and observations with observations. Pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method requires the researcher to code and recode data continuously to move towards themes and categories as data is collected. When using this method, the researcher can compare all new data with previous data to find similarities and differences. This process aided me in making “analytic sense of the material, which may challenge taken-for-granted understandings”—one of the major purposes of the grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014, p. 132). Ultimately, the coding process unearthed theoretical concepts, properties, and propositions that helped me to generate a theory about how Black male administrators navigate their experiences with racism in higher education.



*Memo writing.* Memo writing helps researchers to capture analytic thoughts by “elaborating on the coded categories that developed during data analysis” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 169). Conceptual in nature, memos are written by and for the researcher (Jones et al., 2013). In constructivist grounded theory, memos are the building blocks and form the core of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014, p. 191). Charmaz shared, “[Memo-writing] encourages you to stop other research activities, such as gathering data without analyzing them” (p. 170). Specifically, writing memos aid the researcher in seeing the relationships between emerging categories, keywords that participants use, and the connections among concepts that the researcher interprets as significant to the study (Charmaz, 2014).

In this study, I used memos to capture my thoughts about the information that Black male administrators share during interviews. I also coded memos like the interview data and used the constant comparative method to find similarities and differences between memos, interview transcripts, and codes. Further, memo writing provided a medium for me to interrogate race, power, structure, and systems that function as a part of the information that participants shared with me. At the beginning of this study, memos were helpful to reflect on my assumptions, inclinations, and bias as the researcher. As the project continued, memos focused on exploring conceptual ideas, relationships in the data, and key quotes from participants. Finally, I brought raw data into my memos to identify gaps, deepen my analysis, and transform codes into theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2014).

### Trustworthiness

I used several measures to ensure the trustworthiness of this dissertation study. Trustworthiness, paralleled with rigor, ensures that the study is high quality, and encourages confidence in the research findings (Jones et al., 2013). In this study, I used four strategies to

ensure trustworthiness: (a) member checking, (b) reflexive memoing, (c) a peer debriefer, and (d) sampling. Together, these strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the results of this study.

Member checking. Researchers primarily use member checking in qualitative studies to ensure trustworthiness and establish credibility. Specifically, “through prolonged engagement in the field and the use of others to confirm findings,” credibility can be achieved (Jones et al., 2013, p. 36). Time spent conducting interviews achieved engagement in the field, and I used member checks with participants and expert reviewers to confirm findings. Member checking, for example, can involve participants reviewing transcripts for accuracy. Beyond this basic practice, I involved participants in the preliminary exploration of data by providing summaries of initial findings and developing themes. Specifically, I sent profile information featured in Chapter 4 to each participant to ensure that I accurately represented demographic information, and that anonymity would be maintained. Participants were asked to confirm via email that the profile information was accurate and appropriate to keep their participation in the study anonymous. Finally, in grounded theory methodology, member checking is useful in identifying gaps, conflicting data, and areas for further development (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005).

Reflexive memoing. Reflexive memoing aids a researcher in uncovering their own assumptions, biases, and suppositions about their data (Charmaz, 2014). Through writing about the research experience, parsing data, and capturing questions about the process, a researcher can interrogate their own thinking about their study. Further, Jones et al. (2014) suggested that “researchers need to consider how they are going to negotiate the self-other relationship, and then they must divulge it” (p. 46). Charmaz (2014) emphasized the need for

a researcher to be clear about how they are relating to their data and not import assumptions or interpretations. Reflexive memoing responds to the need to be clear about how the researcher is relating to their participants and data outlined by Charmaz (2014) and Jones et al. (2013), and increases the dependability of the research study. In this study, I wrote reflexive memos to challenge my own assumptions, perspectives, and interpretations throughout the research and analysis process of this study.

Peer debriefers. I also used peer debriefers to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings. I selected my peer debriefers from the Dissertation Help Team that I established. This team consisted of peers, colleagues, professors, and practitioners who were familiar with the subject of my dissertation and were able to help with various aspects of the dissertation research and writing process. Each peer debriefer had familiarity with constructivist grounded theory and helped me to recognize the core categories and themes that emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). Peer debriefers also aided me in ensuring the dependability and confirmability of my findings by tracking my coding process as I moved from open codes to theoretical codes.

Because dependability and confirmability relate directly to the research process, each trustworthiness measure requires the researcher to make the inquiry process explicit and tie findings into data and analysis (Jones et al., 2013). My peer debriefers ensured that the coding process, specifically, and the inquiry process, broadly, made sense and provided overall constructive feedback about the research project.

Sampling. Jones et al. (2013) stated that “transferability requires that findings are meaningful to the reader” (p. 37). To ensure transferability, I selected participants who represented diverse perspectives of Black male administrators, while also representing

various institutional types. These sampling decisions ensured the transferability of my findings. Together, each of these strategies helped to guarantee that the research process was consistent, data collection was thorough, and the research findings from this study are valid and useful.

### Limitations of Research Design

Every study has limitations that restrict what it can achieve. I identified three key limitations of this study that relate to the selection of participants and my desire to study a process. By narrowing the selection criteria to Black male administrators at the senior rank with each of the characteristics detailed earlier, I significantly shaped the characteristics or attributes of eligible participants for this study. These characteristics are not representative of most Black male administrators. Very few Black males are at the most senior rank (i.e., report to the president or vice president or serve as a member of the president's cabinet). I designed participant selection in this way to interview Black male administrators that have been successful in navigating their way to the top rank in higher education administration. My assumption, which was confirmed during data collection during this study, is that to attain their position, they successfully navigated experiences with racism. While this study has uncovered a process that *successful* Black male administrators at the senior rank use to navigate racism in higher education, many other administrators (i.e. coordinators, assistant directors) are not a part of this inquiry. There are always trade-offs associated with participant selection. In this dissertation study, I selected and gave more weight to a very specific type of Black male administrator to learn about the process of navigating experiences with racism.

The second limitation of my research design is my attempt to study a process. Processes are dynamic, not static, and constantly change over time. While grounded theory is suitable for studying processes and answering “how” questions (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Creswell, 2013), the design of this study does not get at the process of how Black male administrators navigate racism with complete accuracy because, by nature of the phenomenon, the process is constantly changing. I mitigated this limitation by achieving saturation through theoretical sampling.

Finally, grounded theory asks researchers to have no preconceived notions about the phenomenon of study (Charmaz, 2014). Specifically, “the investigator needs to set aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas or notions, so that the analytics and substantive theory can emerge” (Creswell, 2013, p. 89). However, one must ask if this goal is achievable. I, as a Black male administrator in higher education, find it challenging, to the greatest extent possible, to set aside my ideas and notions about how Black male administrators navigate their experiences with racism. In fact, I am drawn to this area of inquiry because of my own lived experience. Resultantly, this issue is a limitation when the researcher serves as an instrument, which can possibly impact the research design. Recognizing this limitation, I wrote memos regularly during the research process about how I, researcher as instrument, was impacting the research process.

### Researcher’s Positionality and Reflexivity

Why study Black male administrators and their experiences with racism in higher education? For me, the answer to this question is both simple and complex. As the researcher, my narrative, lived experiences, and future aspirations directly relate to my research

questions and study. In essence, this study reflects a belief I hold deeply and connects to my personal vision for higher education in the future.

Several professional experiences have informed my belief that Black male administrators must navigate their professional work differently than their peers. Further, without an informed understanding of racial dynamics, many Black male administrators could not be successful in their roles. Calling upon my experience of being the only Black male resident director on a seven-person team, or being one of several staff members of color in a Dean of Students Office that still seemed dominated by Whiteness, I position myself as a researcher informed and impassioned by this topic through several professional experiences. While the need to study racism in a relevant way crystallized recently because of the killings of Laquan McDonald, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, and sustained by the continued killing of Black men by police officers; my understanding of the impact racism has on one's lived experience was formed during my youth and has evolved during my subsequent life experiences.

I grew up in a low-to-working class Black neighborhood. My newly constructed townhome development was situated across the street from a private women's school on one side and a government-subsidized housing project on the other. The tenants of the housing projects were classic examples of Baltimore's poor. The media often stereotypes these people as non-working and parasitic, and claims that they take from society without return or deposit. For me, growing up in close proximity to people that lacked life's basics conditioned me to understand a hard life that was not my own. Plainly, it provided me with opportunities to interact openly with people from the projects. Sometimes the kids from over there would play with me, and my friends, in our almost gated back yards. Early interactions with kids

from the projects, kids who looked like me but had very different lives, prompted several questions: Why do some people have to struggle, while others do not? Why do those kids have a different life than I do?

Despite not having role models, a plan, or a full understanding of what it would take, my mother was certain that I would attend college. I am her only child, and during my youth, she was convinced that education would be the way I could have a better life than what she or my father could create for me. Without a college education, my mom was certain that I would experience roadblocks in life. My mother predicted that because of racism, I would not be treated fairly by society in school or work. Growing up, my mom would say to me, “You have to work twice as hard as the White man next to you.” As a child, I was uncertain of what this statement meant, and it only brought to light new questions: Why would I have to work twice as hard as a White man would? How does my race matter?

My race did not become important or salient to me until I entered sixth grade. My elementary school was in a predominantly Black neighborhood, but my public, magnet middle school was in a White community. In my elementary school, my peers often were the products of broken homes, drug abuse, and failed marriages. I was not. At the time, my parents were happily married. They created a loving home and raised me in a good environment. At my middle school, I observed that White students were from nuclear families, drove nice cars, and did not eat the school lunch. New critical questions surfaced: What are the differences between Black people and White people? Why did Black kids come from broken homes? Why did White kids have money?

As a teenager, I was mature, precocious, and responsible. My peers noticed oddities and unique characteristics about me before I really understood what these characteristics

meant. Needless to say, I did not fit in well with my peers at the public, magnet high school. Criticism, discomfort, and distress were all drivers for me to leave Baltimore for undergraduate study and attend school in Ohio. I always knew I would attend college; it was my way out.

I attended a predominately White institution in Ohio. In that environment, I often was one of few students of color, and frequently found myself to be the only Black male in my classes and organizations. Although there were a large number of Black students involved in the Black Student Union on campus, few took part in *mainstream* student activities. As a result, while I was a successful undergraduate student, involved on campus, and recognized by peers and administrators; I was tokenized. For both administrators and faculty, I became a poster-child for other Black male students on my campus, as administrators and faculty believed that I demonstrated how integrated, accepting, and progressive our campus was. Admittedly, during this time, I had more questions about my racialized experiences and tokenization than I had answers. Given my talents, interests, and involvement, my mentors and advisors – both of color and White – placed me on a track leading towards higher education administration and coached me through the graduate school application process.

Graduate school in the Northeast was very different from my undergraduate experience in the Midwest. There were fewer people of color on campus and living in the surrounding community. The salience of my race intensified as I noticed I was one of few Black people in most spaces. Additionally, the curriculum of my program focused on social justice and pluralism. Constantly, for two years, I considered what it meant to be a Black man pursuing higher education administration. Careful reflection through my final comprehensive exam aided me in clarifying my racial identity. Specifically, my introspection



helped me to resolve my professional values with an intense focus on race, the experiences of marginalized students, and the socialization of administrators of color.

My first job following graduate school was at a mid-sized, Midwestern, religiously affiliated institution where I served as a resident director. Our team consisted of seven professionals, and I was the only person of color. While I knew from my interview that if I received the position, I would be the only person of color on the team; I did not know what that positioning would mean for me as I tried to enact social justice in my professional world and live out a my racial identity. I reported directly to a woman of color, and our vice president was a Black man. Both of these professionals were supportive of social justice and equity work, yet limited in how they could assist me in navigating a racialized environment among my White peers and throughout the department. This experience revealed a relationship dynamic between the pervasiveness of racism in organizations and the limits of organizational power.

After serving as a resident director, I moved into a new role as an assistant dean of students at a different mid-sized, Midwestern, religiously affiliated institution. While there were a number of Black people in the Division of Students Affairs, few held senior leadership positions. Many people of color with whom I worked questioned why an institution whose mission focused on social justice lacked administrators of color in positions of power. At this institution, I observed the staff of the Division of Student Affairs trying to enact racially just values in its service to students while simultaneously struggling to enact those same values towards professional staff.

Filled with questions about race since my youth, my critical perspective has developed over time. Given this evolution, I know that my research study is informed by the

lived experiences that lead me to higher education, my professional experiences in graduate school, and my subsequent administrative roles. Because of my experiences, I anticipated that interviewing participants and analyzing data would be difficult for me. I expected that stories of the research participants' experiences with racism in their administrative roles in higher education would trigger memories of my own experience with the pain and discomfort that come from trying to live out my true self in professional environments that value Whiteness.

As a co-constructor in this research project, I am aware that critical race theory resonates for me as my epistemological perspective and shapes how I see the world. Further, I believe racism exists and is endemic. Although I was unaware of the exact principles or underpinnings of the model, I have always held or asked questions that subscribe to critical race theory. As a youth, undergraduate student, graduate student, and professional, I have noticed the endemic characteristic of racism; questioned dominant ideologies; and listened to the counter stories of family, friends, and colleagues.

In this dissertation study, I used critical race theory to honor the narratives of my participants and center race as a controlling, mitigating, and complicating construct that influences how Black male administrators experience professional life. Finally, for this study, I present rich narratives from participants about their lived experiences navigating racism in their professional work, as each participant's narrative offers a nugget of wisdom that aids in building and creating more equitable professional spaces in higher education, where Black male administrators can be their whole, authentic selves.

## Pilot Study Findings and Implications

Given the numerous decisions a researcher must make about their study, it can be overwhelming to both design and execute a research protocol. Additionally, determining the structure, methods, and design of a grounded theory study can be difficult. Recognizing this difficulty, I conducted a pilot study during the 2014-2015 academic year to test out my interview protocol and specific methods for collecting data about how Black administrators navigate racism in higher education. In qualitative research, pilot studies, although underutilized, offer researchers a way to test out key aspects of their research design before executing a full study (Sampson, 2004). Creswell (2013) explained that pilot testing offers the researcher the opportunity to refine interview questions and procedures. Most importantly, pilot studies encourage reflexivity for the investigator on the research process, possibly enhancing and making better the final research study (Nunes, Martins, Zhou, Alajamy, & Al-Mamari, 2010).

Design and methods. For my pilot study, I interviewed five Black administrators—three women and two men. This sample was convenient and available through my professional network at my institution. This group of participants included an assistant vice president in student affairs, an associate dean of an academic college, and two directors and one associate director of student academic support programs. I conducted intensive semi-structured interviews to collect data. The interview protocol included five main questions; each of which had several probes designed to gain depth and nuance in the response from each participant. Two examples of questions asked during the interview include: “What comes to mind when you hear the words racism and higher education?” and “In what way(s), have your past experiences with racism in higher education shaped the way you navigate

racism in higher education, today?” Each interview lasted at least 60 minutes. The longest interview was 90 minutes.

Results. Three significant themes emerged from my pilot study. I address these three themes here: (a) navigating racism by moving from unawareness to awareness, (b) conceptualizing institutional racism, and (c) navigating racism as a life journey.

*Navigating racism by moving from unawareness to awareness.* Each participant shared information about his or her own unawareness of racism. This lack of awareness, linked to their knowledge (or lack thereof) of self, surfaced as participants tried to discern whether selected professional experiences were in fact, examples of racism. Through repeated racial or racist experiences, and more experience in their professional roles, participants indicated that they were able to name racism more clearly. Further, each participant charted a journey whereby he or she moved from being unaware of the nuances of racism in higher education to a fuller understanding of the ways racism played out in the postsecondary setting. Often, participants linked their awareness to an understanding of the manifestations of institutional racism in higher education.

*Conceptualizing institutional racism.* When asked about institutional racism, participants provided a very vivid and descriptive response about what institutional racism looked like in their professional workplace. One participant shared,

It's invisible in that it's so hard to name, but when there are...let's just say “policies” in the financial aid office, and decisions that are made, and priority categories that are determined ... because there are ... that negatively impact one group over another, or in favor of another...that's institutional racism.

Their conceptualizations of institutional racism set the stage for their continued responses about how they navigated racism. The participant noted above, interpreted and spoke about the racism they observed and experienced in higher education through a systems lens. And, each participant framed institutional racism in a systemic way, noting how the phenomenon is far-reaching, subversive, and innocuous. Because of the characteristics of institutional racism, participants noted the challenge of being able to make positive changes for students of color and others who were most impacted by institutional racism in their workplaces.

*Navigating racism as a life journey.* When responding to questions about navigating racism in higher education, several participants made a direct connection or link to how they navigate racism in their life, generally. Participants reflected on the racism they faced growing up, in secondary schools, and their home communities. For these participants, a close relationship existed between the way that they navigated racism in higher education and the way they navigated racism in their lives. Further, these participants shared that they learned the process, strategies, and tactics needed to navigate racism in their workplace, specifically, from their experiences navigating racism in life, generally.

Implications for dissertation research design. One of the largest imports of a pilot study is its ability to shape and influence the design of a full research inquiry (Nunes et al., 2010). My experience with the pilot study led me to make several intentional research design choices for this study related to sampling and my interview protocol. Specifically, I sampled only Black male administrators with power in their professional role and selected participants who represent a variety of administrative roles. I also probed deeply into the ways that administrators (a) navigate racism generally in life, and (b) use mentors to navigate racism in higher education.

*Sampling implications.* I decided to select only Black male administrators because I want to have a very specific sample about which I can interpret results and draw conclusions. Additionally, how people navigate race and racism in higher education is a gendered phenomenon (see: Austin, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Jenkins, 2006). For example, how Black men respond to racist comments in a staff meeting in a higher education setting may differ from the way that Black women respond. Methodologically, Morse (2007) advised researchers to create a sample that is very specific, as “qualitative samples should always include processes of purposeful selection according to specific parameters identified in the study, rather than processes of random selection” (p. 234). Finally, reviewing transcripts from the pilot study revealed distinctions between the ways that women and men navigated their experiences. Noting these distinctions, this study sampled only Black male administrators.

In higher education, how administrators navigate, manage, or move about in organizations for their professional work directly relates to the power they have in their organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2011). Yet, power is not always guaranteed by a particular position in an organization. Further, to understand power in an organization, one must look to the responsibilities of the administrator in question. Does this administrator supervise anyone, have control over a budget, or report to a senior-level administrator? Answers to questions like these help to identify and isolate the power that an administrator might hold. Noting these distinctions about power, selected participants in this study reported to the president or vice president or served as a member of the president’s cabinet. These criteria ensured access to Black male administrators who have various forms of power as leaders.

Three of the participants in my pilot study were engaged in race-based professional work. In each case, the individual provided direct service and programming to mostly students of color, and issues of race and racism were central to their work. Because several pilot study participants came very close to issues of race and racism in their everyday professional work, they were able to provide cogent examples of instances in which they observed examples of racism, and how they navigated each example. Supported by several scholars (see: Ahmed, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Law, Phillips, & Turney, 2004), I posit in this study that racism is everywhere in higher education. As a result, the sample in the study represents a variety of professional roles and functions.

*Implications for interview protocol.* One of the most useful benefits of completing a pilot study is learning about how participants respond to the interview protocol (Sampson, 2004). When participants responded to questions about how they navigated racism in higher education, and what influenced this process, they often discussed incidents, perspectives, and ideas that came from their life, broadly. Simply, it was difficult for participants to compartmentalize their understanding of navigating racism to the context of higher education only. Because of this, in this study, I probed about what connections existed for participants between navigating racism in higher education, specifically, and in their life, generally.

Additionally, several participants discussed using mentors to aid in navigating racism and suggested that new professionals in higher education have a mentor. While having and using a mentor to manage professional life in higher education is supported by the literature (see: Jackson, 2003; Jones, 2002; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), I did not anticipate this strategy to come through so clearly in my pilot study. As a result, I explicitly probed about the use of mentors. Both of these implications highlight the way in which I shifted my interview

protocol to aid me in capturing the nuance and complexity of how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education.

### Summary of Methodology

By using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, I was seeking to understand the process that Black male administrators use to navigate and manage racism in higher education. As a researcher, I believe that race and racism matters, and critical race theory has informed my standpoint and perspective on racism. Using a purposeful theoretical sample of participants selected from across the country, I employed intensive interviews to collect data. With a constructivist lens, I used the constant comparative method to analyze the data. Together, participants and I co-constructed meaning of their experiences with racism in higher education. Specifically, by coding data, creating relationships among codes, and developing theoretical categories, I captured the navigation process in and around racism that Black male administrators adopt.

Overall, the methodology for this study is informed by the research process and results of a pilot study with five Black administrators conducted during the 2014-2015 academic year. Results from the pilot study informed research design choices, including sampling and the interview protocol. Ultimately, the result of this dissertation includes the Navigating Racism in Higher Education Model which explains the process, while filling a gap in the literature about responses to racism in higher education settings.



## **Chapter 4: Findings – Participant Profiles**

### **Overview of Findings**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how Black male administrators at the senior rank navigate racism in higher education. Specific research questions included:

1. How do Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of the racism that they experience in higher education at predominantly White institutions?
3. What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominantly White institutions?

Findings for this study are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. First, Chapter 4 introduces each participant through a summary profile, relying completely on each participants' words during the interview process and information on the demographic questionnaire. I use pseudonyms, regional information, and broad descriptors to highlight information about each participant. Additionally, each participant confirmed that the individual profiles to follow maintained their anonymity and privacy.

As I interviewed each participant, I was able to discern how comfortable and practiced they were in discussing race and racism. I provide more details and evidence of participants' comfort and ease in Chapter 5; here in Chapter 4, however, I touch briefly on how each participant discussed race and racism to aid the reader in understanding the dynamics of the interview.

Firstly, I open each participant profile with a significant quote from the participant

which characterizes and sheds light on their experiences with racism in higher education. Also, each participant profile includes institutional data to aid the reader in understanding the context in which each participant is located. I consulted the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015), each institution's mission and value statements, and diversity websites for information to highlight the institutional values and commitments where each participant currently works. Additionally, I report the percentage of students of color at each participants' institution. When available, the percentage of students of color represents domestic diversity, and does not include international students. Reporting this demographic in this way is important as the conceptualization and experience of racism in the United States is unique to the United States. Finally, each participant profile highlights important and formidable ideas about how the participant relates or connects to racism in higher education, and their life, generally.

Christopher

*"I belong here and, if I don't show up and let them know I belong here, when [Black] people come after me, they're going to face the same stuff."*

Christopher is a Senior Student Affairs Administrator at a small public baccalaureate college in the Mid-Atlantic region. Christopher's institution is primarily nonresidential, selective, and has a very high undergraduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 3,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 16.6% were students of color; 83.4% were White. At the same time, 59.6% students were female; 40.4% were male. Learning, engagement, integrity, accessibility, and community are the core values indicated in the mission of this institution; diversity is not mentioned as a core value. Moreover, the university does not have a diversity

statement; however, there is a unit dedicated to diversity programming and services within the Division of Student Affairs. At this institution, there is not a Senior Diversity Officer.

Christopher has 15 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 5 years. In his role, Christopher reports to the President and is responsible for 28 departments and more than 100 staff members.

Christopher sees himself “as a pioneer because even though technically [he’s] not the first person of color to be on the President's executive staff, [he is] the first person of color to hold the title of Vice President and to have held it the longest and also the highest paid person of color.”

Christopher identifies as a heterosexual non-denominational Christian African American man with a middle class socioeconomic status. Christopher agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had not been any racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Christopher gained skills to navigate racism during his youth. He attended a predominantly White elementary and middle school. In college, he majored in engineering where he was one of a few Black students. In both his master’s and doctoral programs, he was the only man of color. Emphasizing this point, Christopher shared: “I've been in the training ground on navigating Whiteness as a big, Black man my entire life. I've continually thought about and learned [how to navigate racism]”. Recognizing that racism will always be a challenging and difficult part of the higher education landscape, Christopher does consider himself to be successful in working in higher education in spite of the racism that he has to navigate. Christopher believes there are other Black people who would not continue to deal

with, or manage the racism he encounters while working in higher education. Christopher reflected that other Black people would say “forget this” and become tired of being congratulated with compliments like, “Oh you’re so great”, when what is actually meant is, “You're so great and we can't believe how great you are because you're Black and you're great”.

Christopher was comfortable talking about race and sharing stories from his personal and professional background about racism. It was clear that he had had similar conversations in the past with older Black male mentors. Specifically, Christopher recalled one conversation in graduate school where he and his Black male peer talked about a White female professor, known for her scholarship about inclusion and race, casting doubt on Christopher’s intention to complete his doctorate in four years; she thought this was unrealistic for Christopher. As the interview progressed, Christopher’s language became bold, intense, and powerful. In the middle the interview, he shared:

I'm going to love you by just talking to you and being visible to you. That's been my strategy. I literally, this is my thing. I walk up to people. If they have a space for me to go in front of them, I'll go right in front of them and put my hand out, say their name. “Good to see you here, how are you?” I see those interactions happen all the time in White folk, but it's reciprocal among them, not with me.

The candor and forthrightness demonstrated in this quote accurately depicts the depth of what Christopher shared during our interview, and how he shared it.

Lee

*"You know you have to be twice as smart. You have to always show up, present. You have to always show up with your stuff together. You will not be given that second chance. That is freaking exhausting."*

Lee is a Senior Student Affairs Administrator at a large public doctoral university with moderate research activity in the Midwest region. Lee's institution is primarily residential and has a high undergraduate enrollment, approximately 13,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 33% were students of color; 67% were White. The female population exceeded the male population on campus with 54% students identifying female; 46% were male. Integrity, scholarship, transformation, responsibility, education, stewardship, and embracing diversity are the core values of the university. At this institution, there is not a diversity statement; however, there is a diversity webpage linked from the institution's homepage. On this page, Multicultural Services and Programs is outlined as a programming unit in the Division of Student Affairs. At this institution, there is not a Senior Diversity Officer.

Lee has 20 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 10 months. In his role, Lee reports to the President, and is responsible for 15 departments and more than 125 staff members. As a Black male senior leader, Lee sees building strong relationships with his White colleagues as imperative and necessary to his success. This is particularly true for Lee, as he is "following a line of two other vice presidents before [him] who were people of color and did not do a good job and were seen as incompetent and not very good with leadership and building relationships".

Lee identifies as a gay Christian African American man with a middle class socioeconomic status. Lee agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher

education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there were racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, Lee learned about racism from his father, who grew up in South Georgia in the 1930's. Lee's father told him growing up that he, as a mixed-race person, would face racism from everyone, including Black people. At an early age, Lee recalls having to navigate racial assumptions that he played sports because he was a tall athletic-looking youth. Lee began to unpack this during the interview, sharing: "It's almost like a point of pride for me when someone asks, 'Oh, did you play a sport? You must have been an athlete'. I was like, 'No, I have an academic scholarship.' Very early on people were surprised by that". Recognizing that racism will always be a challenging and difficult part of the higher education landscape, Lee does consider himself to be successful in working in higher education. Specifically, Lee attributes his success to having to navigate similar racialized incidents since his youth.

Lee tended to be informal, easy and relaxed talking about race and sharing stories from his personal and professional background about racism. It was obvious that he had had similar conversations in the past with his colleagues. Lee noted that in his current position he has found two African American women also from the South with whom he discusses race issues. As the interview progressed, Lee's language became reflective, pensive, and critical. In the middle of the interview, he shared:

This sounds so cliché. It is in some respects but I think part of it is that I have a responsibility to educate and really get people to a better place of understanding. I'm not trying to shame people because you don't know what you don't know. I think a lot

of which is never experienced is someone like me, so the thing is – is that I think is part of my responsibility to help educate people, but then also to advocate for others and then also other people and just not people of color but just people in general.

The desire and good will evoked in this quote acutely characterizes both the orientation and nature of what Lee shared during our interview, and how he shared it.

Benjamin

*"Maybe this is part of being a Black man in the role I have, that I want to make sure that I know the business, I've done the homework and I have an opinion that actually matters."*

Benjamin is a Senior Student Affairs Administrator at a mid-sized public master's university in the Northeast region. Benjamin's institution is primarily residential, selective, and has a very high undergraduate enrollment, approximately 11,000 students. In the spring of 2015, 18% were students of color; 82% were White. Benjamin's campus has a strong female presence representing 61% of the population, with the other 39% male. As a comprehensive public university, this institution does not have a succinct or clear mission statement. However, prominently placed on the *President and Leadership* webpage is a link for a value statement that reaffirms the institution's commitment to diversity. At this institution, there is a Senior Diversity Officer with responsibility for providing resources to the campus that support efforts to create equity and equal opportunity for the community, particularly historically underrepresented students.

Benjamin has 22 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 4 years. Benjamin reports to the President and is responsible for 11 departments and more than 120 staff members. Benjamin sees himself as a trailblazer with a deep sense of responsibility and gratitude for his community. He shared: "I

never worked at a school that had a vice president that was Black, and here I am doing my thing. People will lean on me figuratively or literally and it's cool, it's overwhelming, it's really cool...I have like hundreds of people to thank, that were there for me, that allowed me to keep it moving”.

Benjamin identifies as a heterosexual Protestant African American man with an upper class socioeconomic status. Benjamin agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had not been any racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, Benjamin learned and gained skill to navigate racism from his dad, mentors, and coaches during his youth and early years as a professional. Benjamin recalls the important lesson that how you respond to racism in the presence of White decision makers determines whether you will be invited to future meetings. This lesson shapes how he currently navigates racism, and motivates him to connect with White allies who can confront racism without similar repercussions to what people of color experience. Emphasizing this point, Benjamin shared: “They ask for your opinion, are you sophisticated enough to do it in a way that doesn’t shut you out but moves it forward? I think it’s tough. You need folks fighting racism on the full spectrum. People who are going to be out there and willing to die for it. [And,] folks who are doing it in the subtlest nuance ways.” Recognizing that racism will always be a challenging and difficult part of the higher education landscape, Benjamin does consider himself to be successful in working in higher education. Specifically, successful in connection to being in the right place, at the right time, with the right people in his life to encourage and support him.



Benjamin was easy to speak to about racism. It was clear he was comfortable talking about race and sharing stories from his personal and professional background about racism. It was clear that he had had similar conversations in the past. Particularly, Benjamin relayed a story about his father who was the first Black person on the basketball, football, and track teams at his university in 1954. At one game, Benjamin's father recalled that the Black cleaning staff had never seen a Black athlete on the court. In our interview Benjamin shared: "There were a bunch of Black guys cleaning up, they dropped their mops and came down to the court to get [my father's] autograph because they had never seen a Black guy on that court." As the interview progressed, Benjamin's language became cogent, illustrative, and critical. In the middle of the interview, he shared:

Do White supremacists and self-hating folks of color, do they tick me off? Absolutely. I can deal with that. I can deal with that. I enjoy dealing with that as a matter of fact but you have these White allies sometimes within the power structure that you've entered into a new environment that are untouchable... I don't celebrate White allies, most of the truly White allies. For me, the ones I enjoy working with the most are the silent ones.

The criticality and question raising demonstrated in this quote accurately captures the nuance and style of what Benjamin shared during our interview, and how he shared it.

James

*"I've been around White people so long in my life, I know what they think, I know how they act and I know what to expect. In some ways it makes it a little easier to navigate. There's no surprises, so to speak."*

James is a Senior Human Resources Administrator at a large private doctoral

university with high research activity in the Midwest region. James' institution is highly residential, selective, Catholic, and has a high undergraduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 11,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 9% were students of color; 91% were White. At the same time, 47% students were female; 53% were male. Being in a diverse community, educating the whole person, and linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service is core to this institution's mission; diversity beyond representation in community is not mentioned as a core value. Moreover, the university does not have a diversity statement; however, there is a unit dedicated to diversity programming and services within the Division of Student Affairs. At this institution, there is not a Senior Diversity Officer; however, there is a diversity and inclusion webpage hosted by the Office of the Provost. This page highlights the provost's diversity and inclusion plan, bias incident protocol, and diversity and intercultural events.

James has 16 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for one year. In his role, James reports to the Vice President for Finance and Administrative Services and is responsible for 5 departments and more than 20 staff members. James sees himself as different from his Black colleagues. He shared: "I seem to garner a different level of respect or a different level of collegiality than most... I've seen a number of incidents, and seemingly it hasn't held me back because I've been able to consistently grow in terms of position and responsibility."

James identifies as a heterosexual Christian Black man with a middle class socioeconomic status. James agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there were racial

incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, James learned and gained skills to navigate racism during his youth from his upbringing. James grew up in a small town where he and his family were the only Black family. There, racism was so rampant that his father had to have a White acquaintance purchase the family property, and then sell the property to James's family. When asked about learning to navigate racism, James shared: "I guess I've always had – I don't know, that it's an innate way but just a way of picking up on cues. Whether it be people's body actions or willingness to engage or disengage. It may sound hokey, but a sense for – hey, are you open and welcoming to me and or others. Just being observant in conversations, meetings, one on one dialogue to really know where someone's at."

I found interviewing James to be somewhat easy, as he was somewhat comfortable and certain in talking about race and sharing stories from his personal and professional background about racism. While James recalled a conversation with a former Black male vice president at his institution about being followed by public safety; it was unclear whether James had had specific conversations about navigating racism in the past. Several times during the interview, James needed a question repeated or he did not have an example available. As the interview progressed, James's language became simple, questioning, and straightforward. In the middle the interview, he shared:

I am the only person of color who is there in that particular role. That kind of always leaves you thinking, okay, so there's no road map, I don't know which way to go. No one seems to necessarily be extending their hand to show me which way to go.

Thinking well is this by design so that I might fall flat and then people say, "Well, gee we told you that it couldn't work out. We told you those guys couldn't fill the

position." Or is it just me? It always leaves you wondering...

The question raising and introspection demonstrated in this quote illustrate both the style and depth of what James shared during our interview, and how he shared it.

Nicholas

*"Every day I got to be among these people who don't like who I am, and there's nothing I can change about this... Everyday that just eats – eats away a little bit at you. And I began to realize not that your soul is being eaten away, but in a way, your soul is just dying every single day."*

Nicholas is a Senior Operations and Administrative Officer at a small private baccalaureate college in the Northeast region. Nicholas's institution is highly residential, more selective, and has an exclusively undergraduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 2,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 20% were students of color; 80% were White. At the same time, 47% students were female; 53% were male. Educating broadly and deeply, sustaining resources, reflecting personal and diverse views, and contributing to humanity are examples of this institution's core beliefs. Moreover, the university does not have a diversity statement; however, there is an institutional unit for campus diversity dedicated to diversity programming and services. At this institution, there is a Senior Diversity Officer with oversight for affirmative action, Title IX, and grievance and mediation processes.

Nicholas has 22 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 2 years. In his role, Nicholas reports to the President and is responsible for 5 departments and more than 20 staff members directly, and 100 staff members indirectly. Nicholas sees himself as a trailblazer with immense capacity to perform

well professionally. He has been the first Black man to hold his position in his last four jobs. Nicholas knows that “people make decisions on what I’m doing next or what they’re going to do next because of this experience.”

Nicholas identifies as a heterosexual Christian Black/African American man with a middle class socioeconomic status. Nicholas agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there were racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, Nicholas learned and gained skills to navigate racism during his youth into young adulthood. Nicholas was the first Black student body president at his high school and his college. Also, he was one of the only Black people in his master’s program. With such “only-ness” as a Black person, Nicholas believes: “It’s unfortunate, I think I’ve been some people’s first Black friend of any substance”. Recognizing that racism will always be a challenging and difficult part of the higher education landscape, Nicholas does consider himself to be successful in working in higher education, though believes he could be more successful if he were writing on the topic of race and racism.

Nicholas was candid and direct in talking about race and sharing stories from his personal and professional background about racism. It was clear that he had had similar conversations in the past, which required him to navigate racism. Demonstrating this point, Nicholas recalled two different racialized conversations with White colleagues. In one conversation, a defiant and hostile White colleague offered Nicholas a “Black Band-Aid” to sarcastically be attuned to racial differences. Nicholas had a cut on his forehead, and bandaged it with “regular Band-Aid”. Nicholas’s colleague shared: “see I’m being responsive

to normally flesh-colored or Caucasian-colored bandages, and look, there you go”. In a second conversation, a White senior leader expressed frustration at Nicholas’s decision to internally promote a Black male leader in Nicholas’s organization, as the White senior leader wanted to bring him over to his area to diversify his staff. Nicholas’s colleague lamented: “You already have enough people of color in your area”. As the interview progressed, Nicholas’s language became reflective, acute, and purposeful. Towards the end of the interview, he shared:

Part of it was I began to realize how deeply seeded some of the problems were. Some things, I can change this, I can fix this situation. I begin to realize, this ain't about me, I can't fix this. The other part was I've been, I was being recruited left and right for other opportunities. In the end, I was like, I don't have to take. I don't have to laugh at the joke. I don't have to do it. Because I can be recruited for other things.

The realization explored in this quote characterizes accurately the learning, depth, and contemplation embedded in the entire interview with Nicholas.

Steven

*“Because I've been in many different [racialized] situations, seeing White power exercise itself is not something as theoretical to me. I've been in those rooms. I've been with the X-Files as popular places.”*

Steven is a Senior Diversity and Inclusion Administrator at a small private baccalaureate women’s college in the Northeast region. Steven’s institution is highly residential and selective; total enrollment is approximately 3,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 54% were students of color; 46% were White. There is not a clear mission or vision statement for this institution. There are a variety of offices dedicated to diversity including:

multicultural affairs, religious and spiritual life, and disability service. At this institution there is an institutional office for diversity.

Steven has 7 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 1.5 years. Steven has his juris doctorate, and before working in higher education, he practiced law with a focus on civil litigation and contract law. Steven started his career in higher education as an Associate Vice President. In his current role, Steven reports to the President and is responsible for one department and more than five staff members. As one of three people of color reporting to the president of his institution, Steven sees his role as one “to talk about how do we make this space relevant for all the members of our community. Sometimes our vocabulary isn't the same, our experiences aren't the same. [He has] reconciled that [his] role is to be the sand in the clam that makes the pearl”.

Steven identifies as a heterosexual Black/African American man with a middle class socioeconomic status. Steven agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had been racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, Steven gained skills to navigate racism during his youth. Steven recalls moving from an all-Black inner city neighborhood to a suburban White neighborhood that later experienced White flight. Also Steven was socialized around White students as a youth; he was on a college preparatory track and there were few Black students or students of color in his college preparatory classes. Steven shared that few racialized environments were comfortable for him: “[I have had] a level of discomfort in almost every area that I've been in.

I mean I felt othered, for a variety of reasons. It just flips, I think in a weird sense I felt othered even when I was around all other Black people”. The experience of moving from an inner city all-Black neighborhood to a first-ring Detroit suburb manifest in Steven as being *too White* for other Black youth, and not *White enough* for White youth. Referencing the pop culture television show, Steven poignantly shared: “I was born and raised as Black-ish.”

Interviewing Steven was easy; he was direct and poised talking about race and sharing stories about racism from his personal and professional background. It was clear that he had similar conversations in the past. Steven’s previous experiences as a litigator provided him with ample opportunity to discuss race. As the interview progressed, Steven’s language became comparative, analytical, and critical. In the middle of the interview, he shared:

Because [the] most common thing that I hear from White people when they're trying to be sensitive of the issues is, "Well, I don't want to be seen as racist." I'm like: "That's interesting what he said." He didn't say he didn't want to be [racist], *sic* [but rather] you don't want to be seen [as a racist]. All right? I'm always navigating that. The challenge and question embedded in this quote accurately captures the nature and orientation of what Steven shared during our interview, and how he shared it.

Pat

*“I was always there, always kind of blackening, queering that space... It was always on my mind. I was always wearing these identities, and really always aware of how I could and should politicize.”*

Pat is a Senior Student Affairs Administrator at a small private baccalaureate college in the Northeast region. Pat’s institution is highly residential, selective, and has an exclusively undergraduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 1,500 students. In



the fall of 2015, 24% were students of color; 76% were White. At the same time, 57% students were female; 43% were male. A passion for learning, inquiry, and ethics are all parts of this institution's mission; while diversity is not mentioned in mission, social justice is a core aspect of the vision statement. Further, there is a commitment to diversity statement linked from the institution's *About* webpage. At this institution, there is a Senior Diversity Officer with responsibility for anti-discrimination and harassment, equal opportunity employment, and gender-based and sexual misconduct. Also, there is a unit dedicated to diversity programming and services within the Division of Student Affairs.

Pat has 20 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 3 years. In his role, Pat reports to the President and is responsible for 9 departments and more than 65 staff members. Pat identifies as a gay Black and Native American man of faith, but he does not identify with a set religion. He identifies with a middle class socioeconomic status. Pat agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had been racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Connected to his reserved personality, Pat learned how to navigate racism by being okay with conflict. Specifically, during college and graduate studies, Pat was involved in conflict resolution and mediation training; this equipped him with a general toolkit that he is able to apply to navigating racism in higher education. Talking about his experiences, Pat shared: "I can seem distant and aloof, and so it becomes really hard then to address these circumstances when people don't know that I'm not attacking them, or they don't know I'm also very comfortable with conflict". For some, Pat's style of navigating racism required

explanation for some of his colleagues, as Pat is able to enter conversations about race and racism boldly, directly, and without a need for connection or relationship.

Pat was easy to interview, as he was direct and poised talking about race and sharing stories from his personal and professional background about racism. It was clear that he had similar conversations in the past. Pat shared that his professional career has mostly been at predominantly White institutions, where it has been necessary for him to discuss, confront, and negotiate race and racism. As the interview progressed, Pat's language became cogent, critical, and reflective. In the middle of the interview, he shared:

You have to work eight times as hard to get half as much. Sometimes you're the only person in a room, and so even though people aren't expecting you to speak on their behalf, they are expecting you. How do I come out of a senior staff meeting, how do I come out a Board of Trustees meeting and not have accomplished that really important thing? There is this kind of invisible burden. Whereas other people have invisible privilege, there's a burden and expectation to kind of get some stuff done, and you either embrace that, or you don't.

The contemplation and resolve demonstrated in this quote characterizes what Pat shared during the interview, and the manner in which he discussed his experiences.

Jude

*"I've always worked at really predominantly White environments and small colleges, so the racism is out front. It is right out there in small places where we have preserved power and we've got this little cul-de-sac of privilege that nobody can reach."*

Jude is a Senior Student Affairs Administrator at a small private baccalaureate college in the Northeast region. Jude's institution is highly residential, selective, and has an

exclusively undergraduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 2,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 44% were students of color; 56% were White. At the same time, 51% students were female; 49% were male. Advancing knowledge, undertaking inquiry, and doing scholarly research in a small residential community grounds the mission statement of this institution; diversity in experience throughout the community is also highlighted as a key component in the mission statement. There is a dedicated webpage to diversity that defines diversity, highlights action steps to advance diversity at the institution, displays a statement on diversity from the board of trustees, and showcases diversity programs at the institution. At this institution, there is a Senior Diversity Officer.

Jude has 18 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 2 years. In his role, Jude reports to the Chief Student Affairs Officer and is responsible for 10 departments and more than 75 staff members. Jude sees himself as an administrator who focuses on his students' experience. He has a sense of obligation to creating an inclusive experience for his students of color, and is selective about confronting racism with his colleagues. For Jude, this is a part of survival and not burning out in his work.

Jude identifies as a heterosexual Catholic Black Dominican man with a middle class socioeconomic status. Jude agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had not been any racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Jude learned and gained skills to navigate racism during his youth. During the interview, Jude recalled a story about local cops telling him as a kid that one day he could

grow up to clean and fix their shoes, just like Jude's dad, the owner of the local shoe repair shop in New York City. Jude shared: "These were decent cops who were still racists. My dad would see that and be like: 'they want to be good people. They work here, where they don't live here, but they work here. They want to be good, they just don't know how.'" Jude's father tried to acknowledge the cops' good intentions and recognize the limits of the cops' understanding. Jude continued: "That's not different from where we are now." Jude's reflection, explored further in Chapter 5, from his youth highlighted the low racist expectations of Black people that White people carried in the past, and which still permeate today in higher education. These expectations are a part of the racist terrain that one must navigate.

Jude was candid and direct talking about race and sharing stories about racism from his personal and professional background. Jude indicated that for his entire career he worked and lived in predominantly White institutions and spaces; it was clear that he had similar conversations in the past. As the interview progressed, Jude's language became relatable, critical, and illustrative. In the middle of the interview, he shared:

Every act of overt racism is not the thing that I'm going to jump up and say: "I'm going to say something." Somebody else in this room is going to have to say something about that and I'm going to sit on my hands, and I tell students that all the time, "You're not going to be the person every single time. If you are that person every single time, you're going to burn out. You're going to leave here upset. You're going to leave here tired. You're going to suffer in a number of ways."

The caution, gravity, and pressure articulated in this quote accurately characterize the depth and style of what Jude shared during our interview, and how he shared it.

Reginald

*"Certainly racism has a long standing history in this ecology and there are folks that have dealt with far worse than what I'm dealing with, or that I've dealt with, but I have an obligation...to do what I can to make this place more inclusive, to eliminate that racism...and I feel like being here, showing up day-to-day, is a form of resistance in that regard and helps to bring about that desired change in the academy."*

Reginald is a Senior Student Affairs Administrator at a large private doctoral university with high research activity in the Midwest region. Reginald's institution is primarily residential, selective, Catholic, and has a majority undergraduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 16,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 39% were students of color; 61% were White. At the same time, 64.5% students were female; 35.5% were male. Expanding knowledge, serving humanity, and centering learning, justice, and faith ground this institution's mission statement; diversity is not mentioned as a core value or indicated in the mission statement. Moreover, the university does not have a diversity statement; however, there is a unit dedicated to diversity programming and services within the Division of Student Affairs. At this institution, there is not a Senior Diversity Officer.

Reginald has 12 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for 6 years. In his role, Reginald reports to the Vice President for Student Affairs and is responsible for 8 departments and more than 60 staff members. Reginald sees himself as an optimist and believes his mission as an administrator in higher education is to make the institution more inclusive for people of color. Speaking broadly about this perspective, Reginald shared: "I've got little ones and it's my duty to make sure that they inherit and they experience a world far better than the one that I'm

experiencing.”

Reginald identifies as a heterosexual Christian African American/Black man with a middle class socioeconomic status. Reginald agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had not been any racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, Reginald learned skills to navigate racism from formal training in higher education. He referenced his diversity and inclusion experiences in college, as a student leader and Resident Assistant, and in graduate school as learning sites on how to confront and engage with racist behavior. Relatedly, he shared: “Those skills and experiences I think are all part of my toolkit that I bring and that help me navigate this [higher education] space”. Recognizing that racism will always be a challenging and difficult part of the higher education landscape, Reginald does consider himself to be successful in working in higher education. While there is always room for improvement, Reginald noted, he is able to motivate, encourage, support and develop his staff in spite of the conditions under which he works.

Reginald was incredibly comfortable talking about race and sharing stories about racism from his personal and professional background. Referencing his formal training and robust professional support system, it was clear that he had similar conversations in the past. As the interview progressed, Reginald’s language became cogent, illustrative, and critical. In the middle the interview, he shared:

I pick and choose in terms of when I want to engage, expend that personal, that mental energy and for me that's very much about survival or thought preservation

because I think I would run myself into the ground or crazy if I felt like I had to teach, if you will, or correct my colleagues or students that I interact with, who act in subtly racist ways at times. Yeah, I make choices and I recognize that, that is part of my coping skill, my strategy for maintaining some sense of self care in what can sometimes be a very hostile environment.

The discernment and reflection illustrated in this quote characterizes much of what Reginald shared, and how he discussed his experiences during our interview.

David

*“What I learned early on is not to take it personal. You can't take it personal, of course. Their ignorance, that lack of understanding, lack of information, whatever, I was personalizing it like it's just focused on me.”*

David is a Senior Student Affairs Administrator at a large private doctoral university with moderate research activity in the Midwest region. David's institution is primarily nonresidential, selective, Catholic, and has a majority undergraduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 24,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 35% were students of color; 65% were White. At the same time, 53% students were female; 47% were male. At this institution, the mission statement is a long document, attending to various purposes of the institution. The preservation, enrichment, and transmission of knowledge are central to the mission of this institution. Diversity in students' identities is mentioned in this document. At this institution, there is a Senior Diversity Officer; this officer is responsible for diversity policies, programming, sexual harassment procedures, affirmative action plans, and the president's diversity council.

David has 20 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been

working in his current position for 12 years. In his role, David reports to the Vice President for Student Affairs and is responsible for 3 departments and 25 staff members. David sees himself as patient and consistent in his struggle against racism in higher education. He reflected that early in his career he was often angry and isolated himself from others through how he responded to racist incidents.

David identifies as a heterosexual Baptist Black man with an upper middle class socioeconomic status. David agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had been racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, David learned and gained skills to navigate racism during the first part of his professional career. He was one of a few people of color, and the only Black person on his campus at the senior rank and a part of administration. He recalls having to serve on every search committee, confronting racial incidents in the community where he lived, and being angry about his conditions of employment. To this point he shared: “I found myself very isolated, even amongst folks of color. Like, 'Hey, calm down a little, you're bringing unwanted attention, just let it go.' And I couldn't let it go. But I wasn't making an impact on the folks I wanted to make an impact on, particularly leadership who managed a lot of these systems and processes that impacted many students.” This experience helped David shift how he manages racism to the process he uses currently.

David was somewhat difficult to interview, as he was mildly uncomfortable talking about race and sharing stories from his personal and professional background about racism. It was clear that he had not had similar conversations in the past. David shared: “But some of



these things I haven't talked about and I have to apologize, I'm being super measured.” As the interview progressed, David’s language became tempered, regulated, and reserved. In the middle of the interview, he shared:

I think you're just given enough power. I manage what's around me, I can manage what's in front of me and what I can touch. I think we try to bring voice to things that are outside of our area and sometimes are dismissed, with leadership saying: “It's not that bad” or “It can't be as bad as you're saying it is” or “Not everyone's experiencing it that way.”

The limitations and externalization highlighted in this quote represent David’s orientation during the interview. This quote aptly characterizes the experiences he discussed.

Euclid

*“I'm used to dealing ... I've been treated bad by White people a lot when I was a kid so microaggressions and the subtle stuff doesn't bother me. I've got my armor on.”*

Euclid is a Senior Operations and Administrative Officer at a large private doctoral university with highest research activity in the Mid-Atlantic region. Euclid’s institution is highly residential, selective, and has a majority graduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 18,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 30% were students of color; 70% were White. At the same time, 55% students were female; 45% were male. Reflection, service, and intellectual inquiry are central to the mission of this institution; diversity is not mentioned as a core value. However, at this institution, there is a Senior Diversity Officer and institutional office of diversity; the mission of this office is to promote understanding and appreciation among diverse members of the institution’s community.

Euclid had the most years of full-time experience working in higher education of any

participant in the study, and has been working in his current position for more than 15 years. In his role, Euclid reports to the Provost and Executive Vice President and is responsible for 5 departments and more than 50 staff members.

Euclid identifies as a heterosexual Baptist Black man with a middle class socioeconomic status. Euclid agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had been racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, Euclid learned and gained skills to navigate racism during his youth in the Jim Crow South. During the interview, he recalled a story as the first Black student to integrate a White Catholic school where a White girl decided to sit next to him when no other White student would. Euclid shared: “She came and sat right behind me. I said, ‘Terry, why are you doing this? You don’t have to do this. They’re going to call you a nigger-lover, you’re going to have trouble.’ She said, ‘It’s not right.’ People started filling in by that Monday, they would all fill in because I would go to the same seat every day.” Further, Euclid explained that in higher education there are few, if any racist acts that could match or rival the racism he experienced growing up. Emphasizing this point, he shared: “I’ll take a microaggression over an overt aggression any time. Folks will go around worrying about a microaggression haven’t grown up where I grew up. Where folks were calling you ‘nigger’ and ‘boy’ and telling you, ‘we don’t serve colored folks here.’” Moreover, Euclid’s perspective and context growing up has significantly shaped how he navigates and makes meaning of the racism he experiences in higher education.

Euclid was very comfortable and candid talking about race and sharing stories about

racism from his personal and professional background. Euclid shared: “I grew up in racism and segregation. I call it Mississippi.” This context shaped Euclid and centered racism; it was clear that he had similar conversations in the past. From the beginning of the interview and throughout, Euclid’s language was reflective, illustrative, and moving. In the beginning of the interview, he shared:

No Black election officials anywhere that would come up, no black policemen. It was really bad. I went to segregated Catholic schools from first through eighth, then they closed the Black Catholic schools...The local bishop made us go to the White Catholic schools ... This was my first time dealing with White people on an everyday, social, equal basis.

The authenticity and reality depicted in this quote characterizes the entire interview with Euclid. His stories represented a long history of dealing with racism throughout his life. Simultaneously, nuance and simplicity framed what Euclid discussed during our interview.

Reed

*“You always have to be better than the White man. You don't do anything that's mediocre, whatever you choose, whether you're a street sweeper, you be the best street sweeper, because you always have to be much above the White man.”*

Reed is a Senior Diversity and Inclusion Administrator at a large private doctoral university with highest research activity in the Southeast region. Reed’s institution is highly residential, selective, and has a majority graduate enrollment; total enrollment is approximately 16,000 students. In the fall of 2015, 40% were students of color; 60% were White. At the same time, 49% students were female; 51% were male. The mission of this institution is to provide a liberal education that fosters both intellectual growth and personal

development. Developing resources, increasing wisdom, and promoting human happiness are also central to this institution's mission. While diversity is not mentioned in the mission statement, there is an emphasis on diversity at this institution; *Diversity* is linked to the *About* webpage. Finally, there is an institutional diversity unit whose mission is to foster an inclusive climate where all community members feel valued and respected.

Reed has 20 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and has been working in his current position for more than 10 years. In his role, Reed reports to the President and is responsible for 6 departments and more than 30 staff members. Reed identifies as a heterosexual Christian African American man with an upper class socioeconomic status. Reed agrees that racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and that Black men generally encounter or experience racism while working in higher education. During the time that I interviewed him for this study, there had been racial incidents on his campus that he could identify.

Generally, Reed gained skills to navigate racism on the "streets" as a young adult. Talking about his experiences he shared: "I think the great bulk of what helps me navigate, have some success is because of all my years on the street... The struggles that I've had and the opportunities very young to learn about myself and issues of race on the street are far more important than having a doctorate." Reed's perspective on racism was shaped by his experiences as an activist protesting, participating in sit-ins, and marching in the 1960s and 1970s, which grounds him in handling racism currently in higher education. Recognizing that racism will always be a challenging and difficult part of the higher education landscape, Reed does consider himself to be successful in working in higher education. However, he observes from his travel and consultancies that issues of racism are deeply systemic, which

makes success in navigating or managing racism relative and local to the specific context.

Reed was easy to interview, as he was comfortable talking about race and sharing stories about racism from his personal and professional background. It was clear that he had similar conversations and navigated many incidents in the past. Reed explored this point, sharing: “These [racist] things, almost without thinking, they just fly away in the context of 50 years. [For example,] this particular incident has happened so many times over the years and then life goes on after it...None of this is the first time it happened.” As the interview progressed, Reed’s language became calculated, illustrative, and moving. For example, he shared:

I'm not in-your-face aggressive. I'd like to think that I analyze situations and environments and try to be strategic in my intervention. For example, I know that if I'm in the face of my colleagues and senior leadership in a certain way, those meetings that are critically important that occur between 3 or 4 [people] on [the] side, I will never be invited. There'll be discussions that I'll never know about or be a part of, there'll be decision-making arenas that I'll never be invited to, where I have the opportunity to strategically push my agenda.

The intentionality and precision demonstrated in this quote characterizes much of what Reed shared during our interview. Acute descriptions shaped the style and content of what he discussed.

### Summary of Findings – Participant Profiles

The distinction in each of these Black male administrators’ stories is impossible to fully capture in the short profiles; however, the profiles do offer a brief summary of their experiences with racism in higher education and an understanding of the context in which

they work. Most of the participants had approximately 15 years of experience in higher education with two outliers: one with 6 years and another with 34 years. They all identified as Black males and predominantly Christian; however, other social identities were important. Two participants identified as gay. One participant identified as ethnically Latino, and one participant identified as biracial. In terms of socioeconomic class, the majority of participants identified as middle class with three participants identifying as upper class. The majority of the males learned how to navigate racism very early in their lives usually as a result of growing up with racism around them, being the only Black person in their schools or neighborhoods, and having family members who experienced racism share lessons with them. Many of the participants discussed the topic of racism with ease; however, there were a few participants like James and David who demonstrated more difficulty talking about race.

Chapter 5 explores more deeply a cross case analysis of the participants experience with race and racism. In Chapter 5, I present findings organized by the study's research questions; the major themes are: (Q1) Processing and Navigating Racism, (Q1) Making Meaning of Racism, and (Q2) Developing Strategies for Navigating Racism. Together, these themes form the basis of the emergent Navigating Racism in Higher Education Model which will be presented in Chapter 6.

## **Chapter 5: Findings – Themes**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how Black male administrators at the senior rank navigated racism in the higher education setting. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of the racism that they experience in higher education at predominately White institutions?
2. What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominately White institutions?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the meaning that the participants in this study assigned to racism. It is important to note that the respondents already believed that racism existed in higher education. In each interview, I provided participants with a definition derived from the literature and began each conversation by clarifying and soliciting agreement with each participant about the definition of racism. I also inquired about the forms of racism the participants experienced most often in the higher education setting. During the interviews, I asked the participants whether they were familiar with five forms of racism (1) systematic racism, (2) institutional racism, (3) colorblind racism, (4) interpersonal racism, and (5) microaggressions. This chapter will detail their responses and reactions to the forms of racism that they experienced. This opening context serves to orient the reader to the subsequent findings and sets the context for what the men in this study defined, understood, and conceptualized as racism.

I then turn to the major themes that emerged across the interviews. Using the research questions as a guide, I reveal the major findings that align with (Q1) how the participants

processed, navigated, and made meaning of the racism that they experienced and (Q2) the strategies the participants used to manage racism. I organized these findings using three specific themes linked to each research question: (a) Processing and Navigating Racism [Q1], (b) Making Meaning of Racism [Q1], and (c) Developing Strategies for Navigating Racism [Q2]. One of the major challenges that arose when coding and identifying the themes was that the dimensions or characteristics of racism did not neatly or wholly fit into one theme. There was overlap. As such, I chose quotes from the participants that best exemplified each theme.

Finally, the themes contribute to the development of a grounded theory of Navigating Racism in Higher Education, which I will present in Chapter 6. The model is comprised of two domains: pre-higher education context and higher education context, trajectories for navigating racism in higher education, and responses to critical incidents with racism. This study was built on the extension of Gubrium and Holstien's (1997) argument that grounded theory could respond to the what, how, and why of a phenomenon. The emergent model integrates these three components, which are further explored in Chapter 6 as part of a fuller discussion and analysis of the model. Now, I turn to what I learned about the participants' meaning and conceptualization of racism.

### Defining and Conceptualizing Racism

This study was not about discerning whether racism exists; rather, the inquiry developed based on the assumption that racism exists and is endemic to the United States. I sought participants who shared this particular perspective and understanding of racism. In fact, the demographic questionnaire asked potential respondents in advance about their belief in racism. Specifically, the questionnaire asked five questions about racism (see Figure 1).



Participants had to agree with numbers 1 to 4 to participate in this study. Further, during every interview, I first asked participants whether they agreed with the following definition of racism that I developed for this study:

Racism in the US as a system of dominance, power, and privilege, rooted in historical oppression, that benefits White people and disadvantages or constrains People of Color. In this system, White people maintain structures preserving their power, while excluding people of color from power.

1. Racism is a very real part of working in higher education.
2. Generally, Black men encounter or experience racism Working in higher education.
3. I have had experiences with racism as an administrator in higher education with which I have dealt personally.
4. In the past, I have thought about how to manage racism as an administrator working in higher education
5. Recently, there have be racial incidents on my campus.

Figure 1. Demographic questionnaire. These are participant selection criteria statements. Interviewed participants agreed with each statement.

After each participant agreed with this definition, I asked him to share or expand on his thinking about the definition of racism in his own words. What follows are some of the participants' responses and reactions.

When I asked what racism meant to them, the participants' responses included the following key words: system, oppression, inequity, cost, hurt, legacy, history, and privilege. These words begin to show the complexity, nuance, pervasiveness, and pain of racism. Participants expanded on these words with the following descriptors: "prejudice," "being treated wrong," "irrational fear," fear of the unknown," and "racism ... tough, hard, unfair."

All of the participants offered their own language to the definition that I provided, and several of them provided specific examples and situations to frame their thinking about

racism. Christopher shared, “It's infused everywhere. It doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is literally everywhere. It's at the system level, but there are agents who are using, who are tapping into the power of racism, to execute their own outcomes.” Nicholas commented on how one might execute or perform racism: “Unfortunately it's the overt screaming, the using of the N-word, the active malicious attempt to just take someone down based on their race and ethnicity.” Like Nicholas, Reginald indicated that he also thought about overt acts of racism; however, he gave more consideration to the more elusive examples: “I think about more subtle instances of racism than overt...blatant forms of racism that perhaps our parents or grandparents were subjected to. When I think of racism, I think about denial.”

Several participants added an important dimension to how they defined racism; they talked about its systemic or institutionalized characteristics. Reed shared, “It's an institutionalized and systemic set of advantages and disadvantages that are connected with someone's perceived racial group, [or] ethnic group.” Steven offered a similar perspective: “I'm probably thinking of it as an institutionalized form of oppression. So, I'm looking at both systemic roots and continuing effects. I think when we talk about racism, we don't necessarily frame it in that way.” Steven also noted that people often failed to acknowledge the continuing effects of oppression when discussing racism.

While the history and outcomes of racism are important, several participants introduced context and time as key concepts related to their understanding of racism. Specifically, Reginald differentiated between the racism of today and the racism of yesterday, indicating the following:

I think that there are many that believe that racism is an ill that has been cured and satisfactorily addressed and is a phenomenon of the past. I think of emotional fatigue,

particularly for those who feel that they are confronted with racism regularly and I think about perseverance.

Similarly, Euclid, born and raised in the Jim Crow South, explicitly situated his definition of racism in the past and connected his definition to Whiteness. He shared the following perspective:

Racism is to me white superiority and disrespect. It's exclusiveness, because you have to understand, I grew up in Jackson, Mississippi in the 50s and 60s and 70s. I lived through the civil rights movement. I grew up in racism and segregation.

For Euclid, racism was not a distant thing of the past; rather, it was very much a part of his lived experience. Euclid continued:

I come from a background so bad, and I'm so aware because I was raised by my grandmother, who was raised by her grandmother, who was a freed slave. Slavery to me, was not in the distant past, it was like yesterday.

Euclid found it hard to conceive of racism as anything other than an integral part of the nation's history. For him, racism elicited notions of hate speech, "separate but equal" laws, and lynching.

Like Euclid, who directly cited White people's involvement in the institution of racism, some participants offered nuance in their exploration of racism among White people and People of Color by explaining the characteristics of power. Specifically, Reginald wrestled with the notion that racism could occur among marginalized people without power. He shared, "The element of power may not be as alien in those instances, because those groups may not traditionally have access to power, but it's still maybe not racism...but discrimination, perhaps."

When asked about what racism meant to them, only a few of the participants shared direct examples from higher education. However, James highlighted one example regarding faculty members of color being denied tenure as an illustration of racism. Jude also broadly explained his conceptualization of racism in higher education by stating the following:

What comes up is first all the acts, behaviors, histories that exist at our colleges that have made for...to put it politely...inhospitable environments for our students...in addition to the number of ways in which, right now, faculty and staff of color are carrying the burden of correcting for racism on college campuses that haven't had to face it. You have to face it to fix it.

Jude's explanation implicates history, time, and context as significant dimensions, previously captured by other participants, to his understanding of racism in higher education.

When discussing his personal experience with racism in higher education, Benjamin shared that he did not really understand the impact of the racism he experienced in the higher education setting until he left that context:

The two words that just popped in my head are anger and loneliness. I think for me, the most damaging pieces of racism in my professional life, I don't think I've actually felt the full impact of it until I've left that context. Looking back, whether it was my physical health or how I treated others or myself or how effective I was. Getting into a new environment, I looked back and said, "Wow! The impact of it was more than just maybe an episode..."

Benjamin's personal account of racism in higher education demonstrated the wonderment and confusion that can exist when seeking to understand the complexities of racism and its impact in higher education.

The participants' definitions and conceptualizations of racism demonstrate breadth and depth in their understanding of the concept. In Chapter 1, I defined racism as a system of dominance, power, and privilege rooted in historical oppression based on race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Harrell, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2015; Tatum, 1997). In the United States, this system benefits White people and disadvantages or constrains people of color. The system helps White people maintain structures that preserve their power while excluding people of color from power. When taken together, the participants' responses reflect and extend beyond the definition provided in Chapter 1. Notably, most participants shared definitions that were broad, vivid, illustrative, complex, and that reach beyond the context of higher education. Participants' definition and conceptualizations of racism are a building block to understanding the forms of racism that participants highlighted in this study.

#### Understanding Forms of Racism Experienced

In the previous section, I outlined how participants defined and conceptualized racism; as understanding how participants begin a conversation about race and racism is fundamental to this study. Likewise, a central objective of this study is to understand some of the forms of racism that participants in this study experienced, as these data are germane to understanding how the respondents navigate racism.

In each interview, I listed the five possible forms of racism that they may have experienced: systematic racism, institutional racism, colorblind racism, interpersonal racism, and microaggressions. I did not provide a definition for any of these forms of racism, and the participants did not ask for one. When responding to the interview question, "Which forms of racism do you experience?", most participants indicated that they experienced all forms; although their explanations did include a particular focus on microaggressions, colorblind

racism, and institutional racism. What follows in this section are the responses that illustrate how the participants understood microaggressions, colorblind racism, and institutional racism, specifically. I close this section by highlighting some examples of racism that were particularly difficult for the participants in the study to understand or categorize. These examples aid in illustrating the nuance and complexity of racism.

Microaggressions. An acute form of racism, microaggressions are everyday slights or subtle insults directed toward a marginalized person or group that maintain exclusion (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, 2010). While almost every participant indicated that they had at least some exposure to microaggressions in the work setting; Reginald, James, and Jude shared specific experiences. Reginald revealed, “I would say, personally, microaggressions would be a more common form of racism that I experience or that I have experienced throughout my journey.” For Reginald, enduring microaggressions was commonplace; whereas, James noted observing others who had such experiences. He remarked, “I guess probably more so the microaggressions is what I've noticed across the campus with other individuals. Again, I can't necessarily say that I've experienced it.”

Jude offered a more complex observation, ultimately questioning whether microaggressions would be more accurately labeled as acts of racism:

So much falls into the day-to-day interactions that are either including or excluding people in conversations, decisions, access to power, etc. that happen every day. I think so many times, we think about those as microaggressions, and the fact is they're being mislabeled. When I get excluded from a conversation... When I get excluded from a meeting that I should be at, I don't feel like that's a microaggression.

Like Sue (2010), Jude understood that microaggressions are everyday slights or subtle insults directed toward a marginalized person. However, Jude raised the question of whether his experiences with microaggressions should be labeled as such:

I think that that is systemic racism at play. The fact that whether it's being done intentionally or not, there's no thought to whether a person of color in my position or another position, should actually be at the table.

Together, Reginald, James, and Jude represent the range of experiences with microaggressions across participants in this study. Collectively, their comments demonstrate the pervasiveness and complexity of microaggressions in higher education.

Colorblind racism. Participants also exhibited a robust understanding and experience with colorblind racism. Colorblind racism involves the alleged disregard of race when selecting, engaging, or interacting with individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Three phrases often used to depict colorblind racism are “I don’t see race;” “People just need to work hard in order to succeed;” and “Some of my closest friends are Black.” Each of these statements carries a meta-message of how the speaker is thinking about People of Color in a racialized way. In this study, Benjamin, Euclid, and Lee discussed their experiences with colorblind racism. During the interview, Benjamin expressed frustration with colorblind racism as he described how damaging it was when White people claimed not to see race and acted out of guilt when making decisions. Specifically, he shared the following:

I think the one that usually gets me the most upset is that colorblind or White guilt or that sort of...whatever moniker you want to put on it, [when White people] make decisions from the guilt standpoint or deficit model stand point that [is] just so damaging.

Euclid shared his frustration with colorblind racism. He referred to the term *colorblind* as both a form of racism and as a category or type of a person. Euclid lamented:

Colorblind...That's the one that gets on my nerves the most, because when you walk into a room, everybody can see it...that you're a man of color. To say that you're a "colorblind" means that you're trying to hide behind being a racist. You can be "color don't matter" but you can't be "colorblind."

Both Benjamin and Euclid noted how colorblind racism acts as a shield for White people to camouflage their real beliefs. Lee also observed that colorblind racism camouflaged and was a vehicle for institutional racism. Lee shared the following: "My White colleagues act like they don't see me; that's colorblind racism...though, they have never had to see me. That's the institutional part." Lee's reflection perfectly depicts the relationship between institutional racism and colorblind racism as experienced in higher education.

Institutional racism. The examination of institutional racism is a key component of this study, and three of the respondents specifically discussed their experience with this form of intolerance when discussing the types of racism with which they were most familiar in the higher education setting. Better (2008) defined institutional racism as "those patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions so as to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of nonwhite racial/ethnic groups" (p. 11). While several participants indicated that they were least impacted by institutional racism; Reed, David, and James noted experiencing institutional racism directly.

When discussing his experience with institutional racism, Reed explained, "I'm tuned into the subtle ways in which racism is institutionalized in systems and I'm tuned into the subtle, but powerful ways in which people express and behave in ways that reinforce



inequities and racism.” He continued: “if we are to move things forward, we're going to not only have to try to erase the overt stuff, but try to shift this more subtle institutionalized thing in systems and in individuals and in the kind of decisions that they make”. In his role as a senior diversity and inclusion officer, Reed was more likely to encounter and notice institutional racism, as it was a direct part of his job responsibilities. Reed shared that he was “tuned in to the subtle ways in which racism [was] institutionalized in systems... [he was] tuned in because that's *sic* [his] area of work.” Reed also traveled to other institutions of higher learning to consult on diversity issues. He noted that through these travels, he had collected several secondhand accounts of institutional racism.

When discussing institutional racism, David reflected on the conversations he had heard about hiring decisions and the comments members of search committees often made about the “fit” of a candidate for a position. He saw these remarks as examples of institutional racism:

Yeah, I think even with the institutional racism...I think anytime we use these types of terms, and I share with folks... I think there are systems in place that people don't realize, this historical piece; they've been there for so long. We talk about hiring and issues of fit, and what have you is White people's comfort, I think that's part of [institutional racism]. That we don't do a good job [explaining this] or hasn't necessarily been named the way it should be named.

Finally, James discussed the covert nature of institutional racism, and raised questions about its systemic nature: “Folks are probably doing a good job in hiding that secret system. Sometimes, that's the challenge. You don't know what you don't know if you're not a part of that inner circle that meets someplace else. How would you even know that that exists unless

someone told you?” Together, Reed, David, and James’ discussion depicted the intricacies of how Black male administrators wrestle with institutional racism in higher education.

Most men in the study did not indicate experiences with institutional racism in higher education. Recognizing that each participant agreed with the following statements: (1) Racism is a very real part of working in higher education, and (2) generally, Black men encounter or experience racism working in higher education in the demographic questionnaire, it is interesting that more men in the study did not indicate nor explain traversing institutional racism as part of their experience working in higher education. Possibly, Black male administrators at the senior rank are not attuned to institutional racism, as they are part of senior leadership and perhaps focusing on other organizational issues that are of immediate importance to their division or responsibilities. For example, meeting fundraising priorities or determining the impact of future legislative on a campus community may keep a Black male administrator’s attention. Or, the men in this study simply strain to identify examples of institutional racism, despite possibly experiencing institutional racism. Here, “the struggle to recognize institutional racism can be understood as part of a wider struggle to recognize all forms of power, inequality, and domination are systemic rather than individual” (Ahmed, 2012, p 44). Put differently, if the men in this study are searching and locating examples of racism within individual actors, instances of institutional racism will not be evident. James exacts this point, by saying: “Again, as I stated earlier, I don't necessarily see anything institutional here. So I say that to say is I kind of look at things especially people on an individual level as opposed to a collective level.” Furthermore, each participant in the study occupies a leadership position reporting to a president, provost, and vice president or is a member of the president’s cabinet; these men are institutional actors.

Thereby, institutional racism becomes doubly hard to identify because it functions systemically, and these men are closest to institutional racism's origins as institutional actors.

Other types of racism. Some participants had direct experiences with racism that were difficult to categorize. These experiences left participants wondering about the nature of these more ambiguous forms of racism. This ambiguity is reflected in James's quintessential comments about his experiences,

Well I should say the indirect things have been most challenging for me to figure out. For some odd reason I seem to have been able to walk through life or my life at the university differently than some of my colleagues, my African American colleagues, male or female. ... I don't know if things change once I walk around the corner, or once I make it back to my office... I've noticed the same opportunities not being afforded to [others] or passed over or really I think treated in different ways."

James expended a lot of energy wondering about (a) the racism he experienced, (b) incidents where he might not even be aware that racism was occurring, and (c) incidents where others are treated differently based on race. For Black men, Smith, Hung and Franklin (2011) termed this state of mind *racial battle fatigue*. Racial battle fatigue refers to the stress and anxiety caused by constantly dealing with both overtly racist actions and subtle references to one's race (Smith, 2008; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). This battle fatigue was exemplified by David, Christopher, and James demonstrated in anxiety, worry, and stress about performance, connection, and execution at work. This initial discussion of racism that served as the opening of each interview enabled the participants to take a first step in making personal meaning of racism. Every respondent agreed with the definition of racism that I put forth during the interview. Over the course of the interview, the participants stated which words in

the definition stood out to them most and explained why those particular words were important.

Throughout the interviews, respondents discussed a range of experiences with a variety of forms of racism in higher education, and their experiences reflected the shifts and trends cited in much of the current literature about racism (see: Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Carter Andrews & Tuitt, 2013; Coates, 2015; Harris & Tillis, 2015). Participant responses also indicated that the administrators experienced coded, subtle microaggressions more than other more overt types of racism or hate speech. The data detailed here demonstrates that Black male administrators are experiencing racism in higher education. In the next section, I turn to the major themes derived from the findings of this study. Organized by the study's research questions, the major themes are: Processing and Navigating Racism (Q1), Making Meaning of Racism (Q1), and Strategies for Navigating Racism (Q2).

### Processing and Navigating Racism

Throughout the study, the participants' responses revealed that these Black male administrators largely learned to process and navigate racism before entering the higher education setting. Each respondent noted having early exposure to issues of race and racism and discussed observing, experiencing, and hearing about racism as young boys and young men before going to higher education. They all discussed the important role that family, friends, coaches, mentors, experiences, and acute moments from their past played in teaching them about how to navigate racism as professional adults. One interpretation of this key finding, discussed later in Chapter 6, is that learning about racism before entering careers in higher education impacted and shaped how these Black male administrators navigated racism in the higher education setting. The men in this study also discussed learning how to process

and navigate racism experientially through their work in higher education and emphasized that the role of positional power or authority had a significant impact on how they processed race and racism in their positions.

Lessons from families. For most participants, the need to navigate racism was firmly established in childhood through socialization. Four participants spoke about how their families and early life experiences taught them about race. Three of the four participants referenced specific lessons from their fathers. Lee's father was born and lived in the Jim Crow South. Lee recalled his father teaching him that he would experience racism from everyone: "No one is ever going to be happy, and sometimes, Black folks will be the most racist people you meet; White folks depending on region, north and south may sugarcoat it." Lee's father's advice reflects a paradox for Black men—regardless of how Black men behave or show up, they will experience racism from others, irrespective of their race. Similar wisdom from Reed's father built upon this lesson by explaining the kind of effort and work that Black men needed to demonstrate to navigate racism. Reed recalled his father saying the following:

You always have to be better than the White man. You don't do anything that's mediocre. Whatever you choose...whether you're a street sweeper...you be the best street sweeper, because you always have to be much above the White man.

Regardless of the scope, type, or opportunity of work, it was important to Reed's father that Reed work better or harder than White men as he navigated race and racism.

During his interview, Jude shared a story about police officers that were customers at his father's shoe repair shop. As a child, Jude helped his dad at the shop. One day, a White police officer, which was a regular customer, commented to Jude that if he worked hard

enough, he too could one day grow up to repair his shoes. Jude's father observed the interaction, and after the officer left commented, "They want to be good people, Jude. They just don't know how." For Jude, this was "probably the most vivid lesson around race that [he] learned." Jude expressed the same sentiment when discussing his White colleagues in higher education:

That's not different from where we are. We work with White folks who want to be good people, and they think they're doing the right thing when they give the Black kid that extension... It's the quiet racist voice of low expectations.

In the interview, Jude extended the lesson he learned about the low racist expectations the White police officer had of him, to the low racist expectations that White faculty members have of Black students when they adjust deadlines or assignments unreasonably.

Commenting on deadline extensions that White faculty members offer to Black students, Jude shared: "Don't extend that any more. You're not doing that kid any favors... No. You set the bar where you set the bar for all the rest of [your students]." Jude is acutely aware of low racist expectations as a form of racism as his formative experience as a youth informs what he observes with his White colleague in his higher education.

Unlike Lee, Reed, and Jude, Euclid learned about race and racism from his mother and brother. Euclid's imparted a lesson his mother shared about success being the best revenge: "My momma told me the best revenge is to succeed. Do your work, do your job. The best revenge is to succeed, because I can't change everybody's mind. You can't change people. The only one you can control is yourself." During the interview, Euclid also spoke about some wisdom he gleaned from his younger brother, who did not navigate racism well. He explained, "It's funny; racism destroyed my brother. He's two years younger than me, and

he's so full of both...He's very insecure, and he hates White people. It has hurt his life. He's not very accomplished...not accomplished at all.” From his brother, Euclid learned that you cannot allow racism to consume you, it is a horrible condition of life; however, it is not everything. Euclid continued with the insight he uncovered as a result of his brother,

Human beings have been killing and treating other human beings poorly since time and they're going to continue. Cain killed Abel. You have to have a different perspective and say: “I can't change all of this, the only thing I can do is do the best job I can do, and look out for me and my family.”

This lesson has helped Euclid tremendously. He expects for people to be treacherous; he is not surprised by racist behavior. Rather, he works hard, understands his responsibilities, and succeeds.

These responses indicate that family was very important in teaching the participants about race and racism. These lessons were foundational and predated most of the participants' racialized experiences in higher education.

Lessons from life experiences. Some of the respondents also discussed the lessons they learned about race and racism from significant life experiences that occurred before they began their careers in higher education. Euclid and Reed, the two oldest participants in this study, and James all revealed life experiences that taught them about intolerance. Euclid explained how his experiences with racism while growing up in the Jim Crow South in Mississippi motivated him to succeed:

From my background, growing up in the city. I used to walk ... I used to participate in boycotts. I was a kid, and just seeing and putting up with so much stuff, it motivated me to get educated and get out of Mississippi.

Navigating racism during the Jim Crow Era was a central part of Euclid's life as a youth.

Euclid explained the relationship between these experiences and his decision to wear a suit to work every day:

I grew up where I didn't see Black men in suits until I went to college at Jackson State, and it was our professors. That's one reason I wear a suit every day too... I feel like I owe it to a lot of folks to do the best that I can do. A lot of folks died so I could be set up in this office.

Euclid's cogent memory from growing up where few Black men wore suits significantly shaped his need to show up in a professional way to show his gratitude and to serve as a role model and symbol of success and possibilities for young Black men around him. When discussing how he dealt with racism, Euclid replied: "I'm used to dealing ... I've been treated bad by White people a lot when I was a kid, so microaggression and the subtle stuff doesn't bother me. I've got my armor on."

Euclid's preparation from life before higher education is similar to Reed's, who explained that he "came to [higher education] with lots of experience from the streets, hanging with the [Black] Panthers, etc." Reed showed me a newspaper article that featured him camping out in front of a government building in New York City in protest of a community college tuition increase. Reed referred to his early experiences with the Black Panther Party as formative and instructive for handling racism in the higher education setting. As a result, when he arrived on campus as an administrator, he was prepared to navigate issues of race and racism with relative ease. Together, Euclid and Reed, were raised, socialized, and experienced a time when race, racism, and racialized incidents were qualitatively different than what they were for other participants in this study.



James recalled a significant experience from his mid-twenties that informed how he dealt with racism in the professional setting. He shared a story about a White friend with whom he had worked for two or three years. One day, James's friend needed a ride home because his car broke down. James agreed, and upon arriving at his home, James's friend pulled out the garage door opener so that he could enter his house; it looked shabby and was taped together. He then clicked the button and the garage opener did not work. The friend said, "Damn thing is nigger rigged." James looked at him, and he looked down. James's friend apologized and got out of the car. In that moment, James thought to himself, "Here's a guy that I was college classmates with, worked with him...I think he served as a reference or whatever, and I'm giving the guy a ride home and click, this is how it ends."

James and his White friend continued to work together. James shared that he did not talk about this incident with anyone; he just dealt with it. He said: "It was just this awkward moment that I just put in the closet and just lived with." James is like the other men in the study who learned through their experiences in life that Black men sometimes have no recourse when dealing with racism, particularly when they have no one with whom they can process the impact of the incident.

For Euclid, Reed, and James, life before higher education offered significant experiences that shaped how they navigate racism. While other participants did not share similar lessons, they did highlight other ways that life, particularly socializing forces, aided in teaching them about race and racism. Some of the other ways included being the first Black student body president, negotiating the proper pronunciation of one's African name, and, moving from a mostly Black neighborhood to a White neighborhood as a youth. These responses, as well as those regarding lessons from family members revealed that these Black

male administrators entered higher education with significant life lessons and lived experiences connected to race and racism.

Lessons from working in higher education. Participants also discussed learning how to process and navigate race and racism through their lived experiences in the higher education setting. Each participant reflected upon a story, moment, or experience in higher education that taught him about the significance of race, and how racism worked in a higher education context. David, Pat, Jude and Lee shared particularly salient examples of this subtheme.

A key insight about race and racism that David learned in higher education is that “those who are educated with credentials and degrees are just as racist as folks who are uneducated.” It took David a long time to learn that “racism happens at any social economic level, [and with] any level of education.” Before learning this lesson, David believed, “[Just] because this persons is a provost or president of my institution, they get it,” but he soon realized that “[They] don’t.” David shared his expectation that those who work in higher education would be more attuned to racism than were those who worked in other fields, and expressed frustration about learning that this was not the case.

David also carried with him from childhood the racialized desire to be better than Whites in his professional life. David’s experiences of isolation, being doubted, and being thought of as “less than” within the higher education setting fueled his desire to outdo his White colleagues. David reflected on how he managed his desire to be perceived as “better”:

If I went to the bathroom, I was carrying a piece of paper. I created structures and processes that were never there. I felt that need to take it the next level; I had to be that person just because I didn't think they thought I was that person.

David operated, in part, under the assumption that he was the “first interaction [his colleagues were] having with an individual of color at this level.” As a result, he believed that he had “to be that person.” David believed he had to be a *particular kind* of Black man who demonstrated excellence. Summarily, David shared that having to engage with racism in higher education caused him to be “very guarded with relationships, [and] very realistic in expectations [with White colleagues].” David noted, “There were very few times that I allowed myself to just trust in the situation or relationship because I'd been disappointed so many times.”

Like David, Pat discussed a need to perform well or be better than White people in higher education. Pat carried this lesson over from his childhood and explained how his academic abilities as a student evolved into his professional abilities as an administrator:

“I'm going to write some stuff that's so tight that you can't not give me the A+.” That carries into your adult life. I mean, for many of us, it carried...well, it carried into my adult life. So, I'm high-achieving. I was a vice president when I was in my early-to-mid-thirties. There's a measure of ambition that I know people find threatening or off-putting, and I'm okay with that. I kind of do that on purpose. That is motivated by experiences of discrimination, really.

For Pat, prior experiences with racism influenced him to perform well; his reflection on achieving a vice president position, as a way to navigate race and racism is a key lesson situated in a higher education context.

Both Jude and Lee's way of dealing with racism in higher education connected more to the mechanics or process of navigating racism, and less to a specific racialized experience

or event. Jude, for example, learned that he was not always going to understand or accurately access situations dealing with racism:

I realize the one that I'm most comfortable with is being okay with being wrong about it. Just walking away saying, "Yeah, I'm not going to get it right every single time. Even around race." Folks will say we're the experts at that. I'm not going to get it right around race. I don't feel pressed to get it right around race all the time.

Jude's comments indicated comfort and relief in realizing that he, as a Black man, could also get navigating race and racism wrong. He explained, "[It's] always a work in progress."

Similarly, Lee shared a lesson about realizing that one is not alone is not navigating racism in higher education. Lee noted the following:

Once you figure that ...that you're not alone and that you're not living this world where you're interpreting these things in a really strange way, and that someone can validate your experiences and your [feelings]...then you're like, "Okay, I'm not crazy."

Each man in this study shared examples of ways that on-the-job experiences shed light on how to navigate racism. David, Pat, and Jude also expressed a need to understand how racism has functioned over time. Additionally, Reginald, Nicholas, Benjamin, and Lee discussed learning on-the-job how to process and navigate racism through power dynamics. The following section explores participants' experiences with positional power and its relationship to race and racism in the higher education setting.

*Power, role, and status.* While the site and context in which the respondents learned to process and navigate racism proved impactful, the men in this study also noted that their role or position in the higher education setting influenced the way that they processed and navigated racism at work. Several of the participants touched on the interaction between

power dynamics and their approach to navigating racialized experiences. Reginald noted the following:

The other thing that I would say that I didn't acknowledge earlier on as one of the considerations that I make in terms of when I engage these [race] conversations, for me there's always a quick analysis of the power dynamic in the relationship. Am I talking to somebody who is a superior to me within the organization, am I talking to a peer or a colleague? It's a variable in this complex [race] equation. Particularly in my role and in the conversations that I am part of, [positional authoritative] power is more often than not part of that equation.

Like Reginald, most participants recalled experiences with racism at work where power dynamics were at play. They each stated that, in these instances, the offending party seemed to disregard their senior leadership position in the organization. While they held high-level positions, such as vice president or director, these men still experienced racism; and during encounters with racism, they each had to consider how the power dynamics within the situation would inform their response. Nicholas, Reginald, Benjamin, and Lee offered additional salient examples.

Nicholas recalled an experience as a new vice president attending his first board of trustees meeting. He was presenting to the board his vision for his area when a board member who used a motorized wheelchair arrived late.

He started his motorized wheelchair coming towards the table. When he came to [the] table, there was a fairly large crash. I kept going with the presentation because I didn't want to make a bigger deal about it. Another trustee said [to the late arriving trustee], "You know what, John, we want to introduce you. This is Dr. Nicholas Jones, our

new vice president for student affairs.” This trustee looked at me and going to *sic* [say]: “You and Obama.”

Nicholas stated that he simply continued with his presentation.

Reflecting on this experience, Nicholas recalled that this was the first of several incidents at this institution where he experienced a complete lack of regard for his role as a senior leader in the organization. During this encounter, he quickly assessed the racial and power dynamics in the room and realized that he did not have the power to confront the offending parties. Nicholas shared that he was appalled at both the trustee’s surprise at his presence in the meeting and the individual’s racialized remark. In the moment immediately following the trustee’s remark, he “looked to the president [for support]...there was nothing there.” Feeling deflated and frustrated, Nicholas could tell that this trustee considered his selection as a vice president for student affairs to be part of a larger societal shift in race relations, similar to having the first Black president of the United States.

Reginald also expressed a similar level of shock when a close White male colleague publicly misstated his title at a presentation for which Reginald was a panelist. The presentation focused on the benefits of having a demonstration policy, and Reginald was providing the student affairs perspective. Reginald recalled the following:

I was on the panel with some other faculty members and institutional leadership. All of us [were] terminal degree holders. He introduced each panelist by their formal title and their affiliation to the university. When he got to me, he introduced me as Reginald and mistook my affiliation with the institution and assigned me to the department of student diversity and multicultural affairs...in a very public setting...and there was this audible gasp in the room...not from me, but from others

in the room who know clearly that I do not work in that office. I never have worked in that office during my time here at the university.

Reginald shared that he felt dumbfounded in that moment and confused by the fact that his colleague had automatically associated him with student diversity. When later processing the experience afterwards with a close friend, he initially tried to explain the situation using his relationship with the colleague: “Perhaps it was the fact that we did have a relationship that he thought we were on that level, where he didn't need to address me in a formal way.” After more discussion with his friend, Reginald “came to realization that, that was a microaggression, perhaps not so micro. It was an aggression and [he continued to talk] about it as a form of racism. This example demonstrates how racism often has no regard for an individual’s power or status.

What Benjamin learned from his mentor added a more nuanced understanding to this finding regarding power. Recalling an experience with his mentor where they were engaged in a conversation about navigating racism, Benjamin asked his mentor how he confronted a racial joke that took place at a board of trustees meeting.

[My mentor] is somebody who came up through multicultural affairs, actually. I was like: “What do you mean you just sat ... You didn’t say nothing?” He’s like, “If I said anything, I would never ever be in that room again, and if I ever have any opportunity over my lifetime to change who is in that room, or the conversations in that room, I’ve got to be in that room.” I was like, “What?” He said, “Listen, they don’t pay me no never mind. As a university chancellor, I’m the poorest person up in there.”

Serving as a chancellor of a university system is arguably one of the most senior level positions attainable in higher education. However, Benjamin’s mentor provided a clear

example of how Black male administrators at even the most senior rank are not insulated from racism. This example also illustrates that Black men must occasionally make personal and professional sacrifices in service to a greater work. If a Black male administrator wants to make a change, he must consider the possible outcomes or consequences of confronting a racist incident. Before acting, Benjamin's mentor asked, "Will I be invited to the meeting again if I confront the racism?" To effect change, he needed to be present in the room, and the risk of not being in the room in the long-term outweighed the short-term gain of responding to racialized remarks.

Lee's example involved his observation of his colleagues' treatment of another Black male administrator with a senior rank. As a vice president and member of the president's executive cabinet at his institution, Lee was serving on a search committee for a very high cabinet-level position. The search yielded a Black man, and Lee was astonished by the racialized comments the search committee made. Lee shared:

Even some of the questions or even some of the committee members, how they tried to tear him down a little bit, it was interesting because he was infinitely more qualified than any other person in the pool; but I picked up on that, and you hear little things, as far as people questioning...well...this and that, and other people...other candidates did not [undergo] that same level of scrutiny.

Lee shared that he was shocked that those kinds of attitudes remained at play among such high-ranking professionals in the higher education setting. He had assumed that his White colleagues on the committee were more sophisticated than their behavior indicated as they inappropriately questioned and tore down the credentials of the Black male candidate. Lee



was certain that a White candidate would not have experienced the same level of scrutiny and questioning.

Nicholas provided another example that spoke to the relationship between power or status and the navigation of racialized experiences. Nicholas recalled a meeting where the president's cabinet discussed a student report and request for a vice president for diversity and inclusion. Students who worked on the report asked Nicholas to attend as the vice president for student affairs and present the report to the president on their behalf.

Nicholas was unaware that the report would be an agenda item for that particular cabinet meeting. Running a little late, Nicholas quickly learned this news upon arriving. When asked to speak, Nicholas shared that students had been working diligently on the proposal, and it is something that both the president and cabinet should seriously consider. The president quickly responded that the report could be thrown out, and directed Nicholas to respond to the students' report. Nicholas clarified that the report was directed to the president, and the students were owed a response. The president disagreed, and the meeting continued. At the end of the meeting, Nicholas approached his president because he felt like he needed to say more to him regarding the students' report. Nicholas said: "I really think we're making a mistake by not fully vetting this issue, talking about pros and cons." The president responded: "I don't pay you to disagree with me." To which, Nicholas replied, "You don't pay me enough not to disagree with you."

Nicholas shared that it was not his normal inclination to confront individuals in such a direct way; however, he had been unhappy at the institution for a while at that point. The interaction continued with the president staring intently at Nicholas, slowly saying, "Again however you want to [handle the report,] I see you and our provost as the chief diversity

officers.” Never knowing this perspective from the president, Nicholas responded, “Okay...I hope that's just not because I'm Black.” The president moved in close to Nicholas and said, “Listen...this is not a painting where you and I are co-creating what this is going to look like. It's a puzzle, and it's my puzzle; you're just putting the pieces in place.” Embarrassed and threatened, Nicholas knew in that moment he would need to leave his position; he had hit the point of no return and could no longer endure the kind of racism that characterized much of his tenure in this position.

Taken together, the experiences shared by Reginald, Nicholas, Benjamin, and Lee demonstrate how these men reacted to the power dynamics at play in their interactions with racialized and racist comments from their colleagues and leaders. Interestingly, each of the shared examples involved interactions with either the president or provost of the institution in question. With involvement from the most senior administrator, the question is raised: Where would a Black male administrator find reprieve or alleviation from racism in higher education, if the president or provost, often their supervisor, is the very person perpetuating racism. Put differently, if the president or provost of an institution is unaware, does not understand, or does not care about the racism a Black male administrator is experiencing, how can a Black male administrator thrive?

Summary. Each participant in this study shared specific lessons that they learned about processing and navigating race and racism from their families, their life before entering their postsecondary positions, and their experiences within the higher education setting. These stories shed light on the significant roles played by (a) the context in which one is raised, (b) early socialization, (c) family, and (d) relationships with one's senior leadership (e.g., president, provost) on campus. The respondents also demonstrated that they were able

to learn valuable lessons from the experiences of other Black male administrators. This finding supports data on the importance of employing mentors as a strategy to support Black male administrators and help them navigate racism on campus, which I discuss later in this chapter. Overall, the participants' responses underscored the important role that a Black male's prior context can play on his decisions about how he will process and navigate racism in the higher education setting.

### Making Meaning of Racism

The second key theme explores the ways that Black male administrators make meaning of the racism they experience. Four subthemes emerged from the data that speak to this theme: (1) race is omnipresent, (2) developing resilience, (3) discussing racism, and (4) believing in change. Generally, participants used past experiences with racism to illustrate what racism meant to them, and those past interactions with race helped to shape how the Black male administrators in this study dealt with racism. This theme shed light on the degree to which approaches to meaning-making—the process during which one makes sense of life events, relationships, and the self—develop from a person's early experiences (Baxter Magolda, & King, 2012). This theme, like the one before it speaks to Research Question 1. Both themes directly connect to the lived experiences with racism for the study participants, are fundamental to identifying the process by which Black male administrators navigate racism, and will ultimately aid in the development of a grounded theory that speaks to this process. The men in this study shared a wide range of meaning that they created from their experiences with racism. Highlighted below are data that illustrate the confidence, care, deliberation, and intention with which the Black men in this study move through racism in higher education.

Race is omnipresent. Many scholars have written about the idea that race is ever present; as a social construct, one's race always matters and is implicated in everyday situations (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Omi & Winant, 2015). However, few scholars have suggested what the implications are for race being omnipresent in a higher education context. Several research participants noted learning early on that race was always a factor in their interactions with White people, and that knowledge shaped their approach to handling racism in their present day professional lives. Christopher, for example, stated that "race is always at play." He explained, "No one ever gets the benefit of just being an individual when they're Black in particular." For Christopher, learning that his race, as a Black person, would always be a part of his work in higher education helped him to become attuned to all interactions so that recognized that every encounter could have racial implications.

During the interview, Christopher reflected on an experience where he engaged two of his Black male students as he was walking to the dining hall to have lunch with a White male colleague. Christopher spoke to his students and embraced them the "way in which [he] would normally embrace another brother—pound, hug, and dap." Christopher shared that he knew his White male colleague was watching, and he was prepared to explain or navigate the questions that his colleague may ask. Christopher continued reflecting on this experience by explaining how he thought his colleague would respond:

[My colleague has] lived on this earth long enough...He came from an urban institution. I'm thinking he *gets it* [emphasis added]. I did sense [something], when he came up, because he also knows this student. [And,] I feel confident saying, "This one [White] person probably got it." The one white colleague who I think gets it is

juxtaposed to the five who'd be like, "Why are you embracing? What's that? What's that about?"

Christopher's sensing is about the presence of race, and the questions that are often asked by White people of Black people when they observe cultural practices that are unfamiliar to them, or thought of as inappropriate for the context. In the short moment of greeting his students, Christopher was certain that his race as Black person was present.

Similarly, for Lee, race "[informed] all of [his] work because [he was] thinking about that every day." Lee shared that he had learned from past experience that race was an inherent factor in policies, resource allocation, and the general operation of the entire higher education system. Noting all of the locations where race lives in higher education, Lee traversed his experiences with racism with the understanding that race was always an integral part of the environment.

Christopher and Lee are representative of most men in the study who stated that race had this "in the air" effect – it was always present (Better, 2008). Recognizing this aspect of the men's reality was important to conceptualizing how they negotiated all racialized experiences in higher education. In next section, I explore how past experiences with racism helped the men to develop resilience.

Developing resilience. Several participants noted that negotiating past experiences with racism in higher education helped them to develop resilience and made them stronger. Nicholas shared, "I know that I'm stronger around issues of race. I won't naturally go to, 'Is it me? do they not like me? What happened to them in their childhood?' I don't naturally just go to that [anymore]." Because of past experiences, Nicholas no longer questioned himself, because he did not "need as much to build [him]self anymore." Rather, Nicholas allowed

room for the complexity of race and racism to play out in the moment. Nicholas also shared that his past experiences prepared him to navigate racism “much more so from a place of strength and empowerment [with a] more positive perspective on it.” His resilience was rooted in having endured the very racist experience with the president of his university [mentioned previously]. As he shared, “Because no one could say anything worse to me than, ‘I don’t pay you to disagree with me,’ I’m not fazed by smaller incidents. Few things could be said that would cut to my core.”

Similarly, Reginald shared, “I’ve developed a thicker skin, and I think I’m better now at being able to talk about the issues.” For Reginald, past experiences helped him hone his ability to talk about and process racism, and he now feels prepared to navigate his experiences with racism relatively unscathed. Deepening this idea, he shared:

Having the experiences that I’ve had over the years, I think each one of those experiences that I’ve had, has been a valuable learning opportunity and as messy as those situations have been at times, they are still very valuable. I think I’m able to empathize with others who experienced different forms of discrimination or racism or whatever the ism is.

Reginald also commented the relationship between emotions and resilience and shared that his past experiences with racism informed how he now responded emotionally to encounters. He explained that had “gotten better at being able to manage the emotion in the moment and ultimately the toll that experience takes on [him] personally.” Reginald’s understanding of this connection aligned with Masten’s (1994) notion that positively managing one’s emotions in response to a traumatic or difficult event could contribute to the development of resilience.

Euclid shared a significant insight around the meaning he had made of racism through past experiences. He shared his belief that if his ancestors were able to endure slavery, he should be able to endure the racism he experienced today working in higher education.

I used to keep a big cotton ball in a plastic bag in my desk, and we just moved [offices] and came back...so I've gotten rid of it; but whenever something happened that I didn't like, I would pull out that cotton ball and say, "If my ancestors could pick cotton from [sunup] to sundown for free and get beaten and raped, I can take whatever they throw at me with this suit and tie on in this air conditioning.

Here, Euclid tapped into the strength and fortitude of spirit shown by his ancestors to foster his own resilience. This meaning is so poignant for Euclid that he kept a physical representation—the cotton ball—to remind him of the true strength and resilience that one could demonstrate in the face of extreme adversity. Euclid believed his colleagues in the present could not throw anything at him that would compare to racism that his ancestors endured. This knowledge helped him to understand that while it could be hard for him at times, he could push through.

Finally, for David, past experiences with racism in higher education prompted him to be equipped and ready for dissent. He shared that he would “be ‘prepared for every argument... providing structures and processes that either [superseded] or [found] ways to work around some of the systematic [racism].’” David knew from past experience that he was likely to encounter resistance from his colleagues, so he went into every situation prepared to respond to criticism and questions.

Nicholas, Reginald, and David highlighted the ways that past experiences with racism contributed to the development of strength and resilience, which the men used to navigate

experiences with racism in the present. These men translated their negative experiences into wisdom, which shaped how they negotiated subsequent experiences with racism.

Discussing racism. The third subtheme that speaks to making meaning of racism is the idea of discussing racism in a particular way. Two of the participants noted that discussions about race and racism could be difficult, but they were necessary to eliminate or minimize future experiences with racism. The participants believed that there were particular ways that one could have a productive conversation about racism.

Steven had the most to say about discussing racism in a specific way. He explained that one key component of a successful conversation was providing White people with a safe spaces to have the discussion. Steven shared the following:

When people talk about safe spaces, you know who want[s] a safe space. It's the White people. Talking about race, they want to be made to feel safe.... Now, you have to create a safe space for White people to talk about race, right?

Steven learned from his previous experiences that White people could not handle the direct, clear, and intense language necessary to discuss racism. Recognizing that he could not always ensure that White people would feel safe when discussing racism, Steven shifted the way he approached these conversations with his White colleagues. Instead of speaking specifically of race and racism, he spoke of *implicit bias*, a concept that is related to racism that he found to be more palatable for White people. Steven believed that White people were better able to engage this discussion because it did not paint them as the villain. He shared, “I like to talk about an implicit bias. I think it's important to talk about because I want to remove the thought that you have to be bad in order to act this way.” Steven noted that everyone was socialized in a racist world; for him that was not a debatable perspective. This



understanding helped him to accept the need to discuss racism in a way that White people could receive so that the conversations could be more fruitful.

Lee also touched on the need to discuss racism in a particular way. He shared that he often conducted presentations about diversity on his campus. Knowing that racism could make White people uncomfortable, and recognizing that he was a large Black man, Lee knew he had to be incredibly disarming and nonthreatening when talking about racism.

Let me talk about this in a safe way and let me care for you. Even when I do presentations on campus about inclusion, it's very from a very nonthreatening place. I mean how I use my voice...I tell personal stories; I disclose things about myself. It's very much, "Let me make you feel comfortable so we can start having this conversation."

Like Steven, Lee noted White people's need to feel safe when having conversations about racism. He suggested that over time, this need became more and more evident to him as he understood the need to make himself more relatable by telling personal stories to assuage them and make them comfortable with the discussion.

Both Lee and Steven had experienced the degree to which White people experienced discomfort when discussing race and racism. To facilitate further productive conversations on the issue, both men took great pains to create safe spaces where White people felt comfortable and unthreatened. These efforts stemmed from a foundation belief that people, and organizations, were truly capable of change under the right conditions.

Believing in change. The final subtheme of making meaning of racism is that people and organizations can change. A positive change in White peoples' response to racism is predicated on the conditions under which White people have to engage with racism and

discussions about race. As I discussed in the previous section, White people must feel safe having candid discussions about race before positive change can occur.

Lee recognized that a lot of people had never been exposed to people that were different from themselves, and as a result, they did not fully understand how to engage with people across racial lines. Lee shared the following explanation:

My role as an educator is to make sure that I'm helping people understand something different...maybe a different situation, a different person...and also not to look at everything with just one lens. I think that's a very important piece.

Lee believed that his work and role as an educator could aid in helping people to change by helping them to become more comfortable with difference. He considered it his responsibility.

Like Lee, Pat connected to change in organizations through his work. He shared an expert observation about how people and organizations could evolve and grow:

I mean, I've seen a lot of capacity for organizations and individuals to do really critical reflection and really be willing to check themselves and do work, important work...White people and People of Color, actually. That's been really encouraging. I feel like I'm having deeper, more authentic conversations with more people around these topics and how they relate to the success of the academy.

Pat had witnessed individuals who could think about themselves, reflect on their organization's racialized tendencies, and begin to shift the racial dynamics. Akin to change, Pat feels like he is "having deeper, more authentic conversations with more people around these topics, and how they relate to the success of the academy".

David also expressed the belief that “people can change; processes can change; systems can change.” David had spent 20 years in higher education, and for many of those years, he was “not understanding and not being patient to understand that change takes time; there are multiple moving parts.” David expressed frustration with new professionals who observed injustices, racism, and inequity and wanted each to be fixed immediately. He explained that he had learned from his experiences that true change did not work that way, particularly around such difficult topics. David explored the complexity, yet possibility of change by discussing how to enhance diversity when some colleagues are the barriers.

If I can't change some of these seasoned folks who have been here for along time, we can find a way to institute training for folks who are coming on board. We can include some aspects of diversity within the performance appraisal. So there are certain things that I can [do]... [While some] folks have planted their flags at some of the higher levels, [we must ask:] how do we create structures and processes at other levels that will allow us to finally wear away at some of these longstanding pieces? David's exploration recognizes how deeply embedded some characteristics are to system in higher education, requiring strategy, time, and endurance to evoke change; yet, change is possible.

Summary of making meaning of racism. Together, the four subthemes—(1) race is omnipresent, (2) developing resilience, (3) discussing racism, and (4) believing in change offer a vivid picture of how participants made meaning of the racism they encountered in the higher education setting. The lessons these men gleaned from their experiences reflected a remarkable understanding of themselves in relationship to the racism they experienced, and a notable comprehension of the context within which they worked. By reflecting on and

learning from the past, these men developed a deeper understanding themselves and their work environment that enabled them to navigate that environment more successfully.

Lee expressed this notion best when he recalled questioning his identity early in his career. Now, Lee expressed a confidence in his Black male identity. He shared, “Now, I’m comfortable with who I am and where I am, but it has taken a while. It takes a long time.” Similarly, Reginald shared the following:

Having the experiences that I’ve had over the years, I think each one of those experiences that I’ve had, has been a valuable learning opportunity and as messy as those situations have been at times, they are still very valuable.

Together, these men’s experiences offer profound meaning about racism and present strategies for successfully navigating racialized encounters within the workplace.

### Strategies for Navigating Racism

The second research question of this study asked, “What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominately White institutions?” This section details the strategies used by the Black male administrators in this study to navigate encounters with racism. A review of the data they provided revealed four strategies that the respondents noted as important to negotiating incidents of racism in higher education: (1) employing self-care, (2) understanding the context in which one operates, (3) naming racial dynamics, and (4) utilizing mentors and allies. The participants grounded each of these strategies in an overarching belief in “being true to oneself,” and regularly used language like “knowing yourself,” “live your values,” and “walk in your truth” as a way to communicate the need to understand who you are as you process and navigate racism in the higher education setting.

The findings revealed that the respondents tended to use both internal and external strategies to navigate racism; thus, I have organized the findings of the strategies based on these two broad categories. Internal strategies focus on what Black male administrators can do for themselves to fortify their internal sense of psychological well-being. The two internal strategies include (a) employing self-care and (b) understanding the context in which one operates. External strategies, alternately, focus on the relationships, connections, or assistance necessary independent of the Black male administrator to navigate racism in higher education. The two external strategies include (a) naming racial dynamics and (b) utilizing mentors and allies.

Throughout the interviews, the participants discussed strategies they use to navigate racism explicitly and implicitly. In some cases, the respondents directly noted a strategy they employed to navigate a racialized incident; at other times, the strategy a participant used was embedded in their reflection about a racialized incident. The data already presented evidence the fact that navigating racism is not a linear or sequential process; as such, the strategies employed are neither linear nor sequential.

I begin my explanation of the four strategies with a discussion of the grounding principle of being true to one's self. I follow with a discussion of the internal and external strategies used by Black male administrators to negotiate the racism that they encountered in the higher education setting.

Knowing and being true to oneself. Interview responses revealed that the participants viewed the notion of being true to oneself as a foundational component of managing racism in higher education and this central principal guided the respondents' use of various strategies to negotiate racialized incidents. As most participants discussed the challenges of

navigating racism, they identified key values that were important to them, such as authenticity, self-love, maintaining consistent values, and knowing oneself. They talked about being true to oneself as a foundation that undergirded the other strategies they employed. Benjamin serves as an evocative example and stresses the importance of this principle:

I would say, number one for me is knowing my own shit around racism; whether it's my narrative, my reactions, my most agonizing painpoints...the stuff that rolls off a duck's back that doesn't bother me...whatever. I must know myself.

Like Benjamin, several participants used explicit and clear language to describe the importance of being true to themselves in light of the racism they experience in higher education.

James touched on this principle when he recalled his experience as the only vice president of color who served on the cabinet with his president. He talked about the need to adjust to fit the White, mainstream environment; and admitted that while a mild adjustment was acceptable, he never wanted to feel that he had to change who he was to any great degree:

I've shared this with the president every day. For me, it's not much of an adjustment; but years ago...and I think we were having a conversation about racism in a group setting and... I know every day that I come in to work, I've got to adjust a little bit from who I am at my house when I wake up. I suspect that most people do. For me, it's when I have to adjust a little, I'm okay. [However,] if I have to adjust [too] much, I'm not necessarily okay. It's either not the right environment for me, or I'm not the right person for the environment, however you want to look at it.

James believed that the racialized environment ever present in the higher education setting prohibited him from being at work the same person he was at home. Other men in the study, either explicitly or implicitly, also discussed having to adjust to assimilate to the mainstream White environment at their workplace. For some, the burden was too much, and they made a decision to leave their position. Others used external strategies to cope with the racialized environment in which they worked.

Lee related into the adjustment of self from home to higher education by sharing how hard it was to live one's life honestly. He reflected on responding recently to a request for advice from a Black male undergraduate aspiring to pursue a career in higher education. Lee worked at a predominately White institution in the Midwest, and connected with this student at a Student of Color networking event. In discussing the challenges of the academy, Lee shared with the student, "The hardest thing that you can do in this life is to live your life...like be honest and be true to who you are, especially in higher education." When the student asked Lee about handling racism, Lee replied, "Become comfortable. Be comfortable with where you are... I wasn't equipped to deal with those [race] things. It needs to come at the right time because here's the reality, you need to be able to walk away from that conversation, however you deal with that racism knowing that you made the right decision." Lee's advice and reflection on the challenge of living authentically as a higher education professional demonstrates the foundational issue of being true to oneself in the work environment and shows how it lives out in his thinking.

For Nicholas, there was dimension to being true to oneself that extended to other Black male administrators. He recognized that he could not hire too many Black men in his division because of the scrutiny and racism they would experience. Nicholas shared, "I

remember we had a candidate for the athletic director. I thought, ‘My God! This guy would be outstanding!’ I was like, ‘You know, there's going to be too many Black men. It's going to look like it's too many Black men.’ If I don't think that the person can handle it, [I won't hire him].” Nicholas believed that he had to monitor the number of Black male administrators he hired in his division, because he sensed that a critical mass of Black men would raise questions. As a result, he had become wary of hiring “too many Black men.”

Nicholas also second-guessed how his Black male colleagues would be able to adjust to the racism that was apart of the higher education context. He associated the increase in the number of Black males with increased incidents of racism. Nicholas realized that, despite declarations of colorblindness, White people did see color and would notice the increase in Black males in leadership positions. Interestingly, Nicholas occasionally allowed these concerns to impede him from hiring the most qualified person for available positions. His past experiences with racism evoked in him an anticipation of racist reactions that significantly influenced his judgment and the way he carried out his responsibilities. His response to this anticipated racism is connected and grounded in knowing oneself. Reflecting that he is able to handle the scrutiny of being a Black male administrator among other Black male administrators at a predominantly White institution because he knows himself, Nicholas suggests that other Black male administrators need to “know how to handle that difficult situation. [He] think[s] it's going to be hard for them because of either how they're perceived or it's simply going to be. [Nicholas] doesn't know if they're going to have the tools to handle microaggressions as they occur every day and [he doesn't] want someone to not be successful”. Here, the main tool Nicholas is referencing is knowing oneself.



The interview data revealed that there is a very tangible quality to racism. The respondents discussed racialized situations that tested them and required that they know themselves and what they stood for as they confronted racism.

Christopher discussed an example that he had not given much thought before our interview as he discussed salary discrepancies in his organization. Christopher is the only Vice President of Color on the president's cabinet. He shared that as a long-stranding vice president, he made the second lowest salary among all vice presidents. Christopher explained:

I've seen several VP's come and go, all making more than me. New vice presidents making more, and it's the transparent organization. There are literally spreadsheets that just have names and salaries, because like any enterprise, we need that anyway.

There's gross inequity in that.

Watching Christopher during the interview have this realization was difficult. He could reflect on how he had been complicit in the institutional racism he was experiencing through salary inequity. I asked Christopher whether he would bring this inequity up to his president, and he indicated that he would. He asserted that he knew his worth in the organization and could not let this blatant form of racism continue. Christopher expressed that he would approach his president with the following inquiry:

Here is a list of numbers. Here are my credentials. Here's what I've done for the university. You can see my past evaluation was flawless. My last president gave me the best performance review ever. Why is my salary this? ...I'm thankful to have a job, but when you compare my salary to others, even the gap is too far.

For Christopher, knowing himself connected directly to knowing his worth; and this knowledge led to a refusal to accept a salary inequity at his institution that had strong racial implications.

James explored the foundational concept of being true to oneself in his discussion of ascending to a leadership role. He shared, “Be true to yourself. Don't fall too far outside of the core trying to reach the highest level...[by] doing it in a way that's artificial.” James’ observation about being true to oneself comes from advice shared with him by Black male mentors, and what he observed of other Black men who were “trying too hard.” James observed that as these men ascended to leadership roles, they became increasingly unsure of themselves. “They lost themselves,” he explained. Similarly, Reed talked about the importance of maintaining one’s values while moving up the career ladder. He advised, “In whatever job that you're in...in higher education, or out [of higher education]...[the job] should exemplify your values. You shouldn't let your values shift depending on what job you're in... I would hope that you exude the same values, equity, fairness, [and] honesty, wherever you are.” Christopher also commented that loving oneself could serve as a strategy for navigating racism. “You have to love who you are and love your skin...love the body you're in, because you're not going to always get affirmation from the outside.”

The participants emphasized the importance of living and leading by their values as Black male administrator in higher education. They explained that navigating racism could cause individuals to try to be someone that they were not, and argued that Black male administrators must be their true selves and live by their values.

This foundational principle undergirds and frames the four strategies detailed below: (1) employing self-care, (2) understanding the context in which one operates, (3) naming

racial dynamics, and (4) utilizing mentors and allies. Guided by Research Question 2—What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominately White institutions—and the broad categorizations of internal and external, in the next section, I explore the stories and anecdotes presented by the respondents that speak to each of these strategies.

Employing self-care. Every participant expressed that employing self-care was a necessary strategy for navigating racism in higher education because of the stress, and subsequent fatigue, one experienced when dealing with racism at the personal and institutional level. Reginald advised that Black male administrators needed the following:

[A] customized way in which you're able to deal with that stress, in a healthy, productive manner. For some people, it's running. For some people, it's processing. For others, it might be just cooking or whatever; but find something that allows you to deal with this in a constructive way.

David used himself as an example when discussing the need for self-care:

The self-reflection, all that's great, but also the wellness piece. I think [racism] takes a toll on folks. Again, I have a bottle of Tums that stays on my desk, and I have a backup bottle that I just rotate.

David admitted that the stress and anxiety caused by the racism he encountered at work often led to physical discomfort to which he tended by keeping the bottle of Tums on his desk. He clarified that he would like to find better ways of coping than relying on Tums and stated that he would suggest that others find healthier forms of self-care before resorting to medication.

Nicholas's strategy for coping involved utilizing a therapist. He shared, "There were too many pressures at work [that] were crashing together, and several seemed race-related. I

needed to be able to speak honestly to someone in a structured manner.” Nicholas recognized that it was uncommon for Black men to seek professional mental health counseling, but he saw it as an inevitable tool if he were to succeed in his role.

Finally, Euclid addressed self-care in a clear and direct way: “Take care of your mind, your body, and your soul to be your best.” Euclid admitted that he did not always take great care of himself, and noted that Black men working in higher education do not always have that luxury. Euclid shared, “I’ve gotten older, but there were times I’d be at work hungover, or be at work on two or three hours of rest.” He advised, “You’ve got to get your rest. You’ve got to keep your head clear. You have to focus on that...You have to think long term. You have to understand that you have to build a reputation.”

While not clearly stated, Euclid’s response implies the notion that Black male administrators endure struggle and racism for the duration of their careers. As such, they must take care of themselves holistically to build up their physical and emotional resilience and endurance. Ultimately, for these men, self-care was an imperative and necessary strategy for navigating racism in higher education. Albeit a basic strategy, and one that any high-stress job would require, traversing racism in higher education required the respondents to be very intentional about self-care.

Moreover, although every participant expressed that employing self-care was a necessary strategy for navigating racism in higher education; no participant discussed using self-care techniques as a regular and on-going strategy to navigate racism in higher education. One interpretation of this finding is that these men in the study recognized the usefulness of self-care, without employing it for themselves regularly. This distinction is revealing and necessitates looking at how Black women cope with racism. While studying or comparing

the experiences of Black women and racism was beyond the scope of this study, Bulmer and Solomos (2004) share that “racism need to be situated within specific social and cultural environments. The effect of a particular racist discourse needs to be placed in the conditions surrounding the moment of its enunciation. This means irrevocably crossing the analysis of racism with other social relations surrounding gender (p.8).

In this case, understanding that “Black women tend to use more social support as a form of coping” with racism is important, as it indicates an available strategy related to self-care that Black men in this study are not using (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013, p.55). Similarly, Swim, Hyers, and Cohen (2013) found that “[Black] women were more likely to talk about *sic* [racist] incidents with friends and more likely to behaviorally respond to perpetrators. Talking with friends may reflect women’s greater tendency to seek social support than do men” (p.63). Given the ways that Black women cope with racism through connection with self-care as a strategy, suggest that the construction of self-care is a raced and gendered. Returning to Smith, Hung and Franklin (2011) clarifies this idea: “Akin to Black women, Black men are constantly developing unique racial and gendered race-based techniques for applying highly adaptive and active coping strategies” (p. 66).

Understanding the context in which you are operating. Several participants shared explicitly the need to understand context when navigating racism. For the respondents, this second internal strategy involved developing a clear understanding of the environment within which they worked. Reginald, for example, noted that “[Black male administrators needed] to be intentional about surveying the landscape and understanding the context in which they're operating.” From Reginald’s perspective, surveying the landscape and understanding the context enables Black male administrators to find support, identity where there is tension

in the organization to avoid, and observe how other People of Color are being treated in the organization. David's perspective on this strategy involved acknowledging that Black male administrators were more like to experience hypercriticism from colleagues and supervisors in the higher education setting. As a result, they had to be prepared to respond to any inquiries that might arise. He advised, "I would say never be surprised. Have modest expectations for all engagement. Be prepared to have to answer questions that may not even be within your charged duties of responsibilities." David suggested that while Black male administrators should fulfill their acknowledged professional responsibilities, they should also acquire a broader knowledge of related areas in preparations for questions and concerns that may arise.

Lee stressed the need to execute impeccable work when advancing diversity and inclusion objectives. He explained the following:

The thing is that if you know you want to advance and make sure that you're pushing issues related to inclusion and diversity, than you got to have good people who know what the hell they are doing, and their work is impeccable. The thing is that sometimes, I find myself really making sure and like, "Alright People of Color...Staff of Color, get your shit together. Do not screw up."

Lee shared that in the context of a predominately White institution, diversity and inclusion objectives were highly scrutinized, and the work of People of Color was also highly visible and scrutinized. Because of this dynamic, Lee felt that he and his team had to demonstrate diversity and inclusion work of an extremely high quality to be prepared for the increased scrutiny.

Like Lee, Benjamin noted that as a Black man, White people expect that you will support diversity issues and assume that diversity will be the single issue about which you are knowledgeable and for which you advocate as an administrator. Benjamin shared the following:

You have that strategy that you have to lay the foundation, and you don't always have to do it directly. You don't always have to come into the room and be the diversity champion. You can be someone that really [knows all issues]. I want them to know how I analyze issues, think of issues, and how I represent my own opinion. So, when it gets to those [diversity] subjects, those things happen [naturally].

Because Benjamin recognized the racialized dynamic that existed at the institution of higher learning at which he worked, he understood the need to advocate for and become knowledgeable about a variety of issues to ensure so that his colleagues did not conclude that he was only concerned about diversity issues. This approach demonstrated an understanding of his context.

Pat spoke to the expectations that exist for Black men in predominately White institutions by sharing an anecdote about how he navigated attending a lacrosse game. Pat knew that few Black men attended the lacrosse games at his institution and that White parents and students did not expect Black men to attend the games. However, Pat was ultimately responsible for all students on campus, including the lacrosse team. He shared the following:

Taking up intentional space at a lacrosse game...just being really clear; talking to all the parents; being like, on a scale of ten, a thousand charming; knowing the players by name...because, I mean, I show up, and they're like, "Who is...Oh! Who is

that?"... It's being really thoughtful and intentional about [managing expectations]...

I mean, it can be exhausting. You kind of make sense of it, [and] I hope to be seeding successes later.

Pat understood the expectation of him as a Black man; and these expectations were a part of the context within which he worked. He attended the lacrosse game as a senior administrator at his institution because of his position, and his attendance demonstrated a clear understanding of his context.

Steven explored the relationship between job performance and understanding one's context. Because diversity and inclusion were both a major part of his job, Steven had to be on the ground and out and about on campus to navigate his racialized environment. In fulfilling this role, he developed an understanding of the context in which he was operating. He suggested that getting into the campus community was not only about his role on campus, it was also about learning the environment so that he could be successful as a Black man. Steven shared,

You can't...I can't learn a lot in this office. All right? I could meet with students, yeah. I could meet with them in this office. But I have to get in the residential houses; I have to get in the classrooms; I have to get in the programs; I have to get in the events. That's how you really learn. For my job, and for me...I'm a Black man in a very White space. When I came here, my family didn't join me until six months later. As difficult as that was, I think I needed that.

The comments shared by Reginald, David, Lee, Benjamin, and Steven illustrate the need for Black male administrators to be deliberate and discerning as they navigate racism in higher



education. Developing a clear understanding of the context within which they worked helped them to develop more appropriate strategies for coping with the racialized environment.

Naming racism and racial dynamics. Several participants discussed the importance of naming racism and racial dynamics and highlighted several dimensions to this strategy. Specifically, the respondents stressed the value of (a) acknowledging that racism exists in higher education and (b) identifying how racial dynamics operate without placing too heavy a focus on racism. Euclid explained, “Know that there's racism around, but don't focus on it because you can't change it. The only thing you can change is you; be the best professional you can be.” Euclid posited that one could acknowledge racism without giving it too much focus. He also shared that people “can find racism everywhere they turn in higher education.” As such, it can be a significant distraction if one is not careful. Euclid stressed the importance of seeking balance when exercising this strategy.

Lee provided an example of how one employs the strategy of naming racial dynamics when he recalled an experience where a White staff member shared that he was uncomfortable being around large groups of People of Color. Lee explained how he followed up with the White staff member:

I had a conversation with him and explained to him how I was offended by that comment, and that he really needed [to reflect on what he said]; especially as he is not a Person of Color, and [works] with predominantly African-American students. If there were 18 or 19 year olds hearing him say that as far as being afraid to be around large groups of People [of Color], how would they feel? And we're supposed to be creating this open and this safe environment for our students to develop and grow, but if they hear staff members say things like that, that's not very conducive to growth.

Lee's staff member was unaware of how what he said was racist and unacceptable. While Lee did not confront his staff member during the meeting, he was certain to call him into his office later to address the inappropriate comment.

Finally, Christopher explained how he addressed racism with his student affairs colleagues. Suggesting that they might have thought that they understood racism by virtue of their proximity to Christopher, Christopher unpacked the importance of naming racial dynamics:

Here's one final thing. It's the final one, I promise. You need to be okay naming the dynamics of race. You got to name it. One of the most empowering things that I've done is named it in terms of race with my colleagues, particularly my colleagues in Student Affairs who, because of long term contact with me, may sometimes believe, "Well, I'm not racist at all because I know you, and I know you do lots of diversity and social justice work, and I learn from you, so I know." The truth is, they probably know a lot more than their colleagues. It doesn't mean that still don't have to daily navigate their own unconscious bias.

Christopher challenged the idea that one could understand and remedy racism solely through someone else's experiences; he suggested that everyone still needed to attend to their own implicit bias.

The participants' responses show that naming racial dynamics offered a starting point for the employment of other strategies. Akin to understanding the context in which they were located, acknowledging racial dynamics afforded participants a way to broadly perceive and approach the racism they experience in higher education.

Mentors, support people, and allies. Every participant in this study discussed the important role that mentors and support people played in their efforts to navigate racism in higher education. A clear impression emerged from the participants' responses that Black male administrators generally could not "go it alone." They need help from others to negotiate the racism that they encounter in their workplace. Christopher's observations exemplified this theme:

The thing is you need those folks, but you need someone to normalize what you're going through... You need someone to say, "One, it's not your fault. Two, this is called racism. Welcome. Welcome to the world." You need people who can help you [and] give [you] strategies.

Like the other men in the study, Christopher emphasized that mentors, support people, and allies could serve as normalizers of the racism that Black male administrators encountered.

Nicholas, Reginald, and David also provided concrete examples of the need for and mentors, support people, and allies when navigating racism in higher education. Nicholas noted the lack of Black male administrators who were available to provide guidance to new administrators about navigating racism as a Black male. Nicholas also suggested that mentors were beneficial because they could provide wisdom about avoiding particular challenges in higher education:

If I could say anything, I would say find people who can be your guide at that institution and walk you through the land mines...the opportunities...because there are not a lot of us. I know that is what helped me to navigate; and, nowadays, in any kind of organization you go to, there are not a lot of us.

In noting to the dearth of Black male administrators in higher education, Nicholas may have been implying that one's mentor or support person at one's institution did not necessarily have to be another Black man.

Because of this scarcity of Black males in the academy, and the value he placed upon having a solid support system, Reginald stressed the importance of finding mentors from both within and beyond the institution:

It's really important to identify and cultivate a network of support...that would be internal to the institution and beyond. Along those lines, mentorship...it's going to be incredibly key. Find someone, or individuals, who are able to and willing to mentor you effectively...who understand your experience and your identity.

Reginald noted the importance of including allies as part of the circle of support. He explained the following:

I would say identify allies. I think that's important...Allies at different levels of your organization as well. I think it's really important to have folk that are peers that truly understand your daily walk if you will, but then it's also important to have allies that are at senior levels of the institution.

Christopher explicitly advised that one's circle of support could include both White allies and other People of Color, though he stressed the importance of finding mentors who had a firsthand understanding of the challenges faced by Black men in the academy:

I know in any given moment, there's probably a half dozen people I can text or call—both men and women. I think it's important to have trusted men and women and...as much as you may have trusted White folks who really get it...that's important...you

got to have some people who look like you, who have experienced what you've experienced. That's number one.

Christopher explained that, regardless of their race, mentors should be people that are trustworthy and capable of supporting a Black male administrator in a racialized academic environment. Christopher shared an experience where he had a trusted White colleague who had served as an ally and partner:

I didn't have a staff. I didn't have any of that. [I was] a Black man without position, without power. To start bringing about some of the outcomes, I just partnered with a White man...a White, gay man, who even to this day, we are like partners. Back in those days, I was director of multicultural. He was in an AVP of student affairs...The strategy was, "Hey here's the issue. Let's work together on it, but you be the voice. You be the voice. I'll be right beside you, but you're going to be the voice because of your position and you're a Ph.D. " ...Through him, we created Disability Response Team. Through him, we've created now a Faculty Diversity Award.

Christopher's relationship with this White colleague demonstrated the role an ally can serve in helping Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education. As a Black man working in a racialized environment on campus, Christopher was not given the power and resources he needed to advance important diversity and inclusion objectives. It was only after he partnered with a White colleague that he was able to achieve the desired outcomes.

Christopher admitted that, at the time, he needed his White colleague to be the voice, to speak and champion in spaces in which Christopher, as a Black man, would not have been as well-received.

Finally, like the other respondents, David suggested that Black male administrators should have a network of support to help them navigate racism in higher education. David advised, “Begin to develop allies who understand the struggle. Create a network of support. It's going to be super important.” In David’s view, mentors and supporters should be able to understand the challenges that one faced as a Black male administrator in the academy.

The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that Black male administrators needed mentors, support people, and allies to navigate racism in higher education. Specifically, these allies should serve to (a) support the acknowledgement that racism is a part of the higher education landscape, (b) provide guidance about how to traverse and make sense of the racialized environment in the academy, and (c) partner with Black male administrators to achieve diversity and inclusion objectives. While the role that mentors, support people, and allies play may vary, it is abundantly clear that each is of vital importance to the success of Black male administrators in the higher education setting.

Usefulness of strategies for navigating racism. A necessary extension of understanding what strategies Black male administrators use to navigate racism in higher education is to understand how useful the strategies are that these men employ. During the study, I asked participants to describe their state of being in higher education.

Overwhelmingly, responses to this question varied. Some participants indicated that they are thriving in higher education; while others described that they are maintaining or surviving.

While one’s state of being in higher education is not a direct result of the strategies one uses to navigate racism, there is a connection, as it is likely that one would describe their state of being positively if they found their strategies to navigate racism to be successful.

Turning to the direct responses from participants uncovers how the men in the study characterize their existence in higher education, and thus implicate the utility of their strategies. Opening with Christopher, he shared:

I would say I'm thriving, but with a lot of hard work... I feel like I have had to train with an incredible amount of weight on my shoulders for most of my life because the racism didn't just show up when I got [to higher education]... I can deal with the race stuff. It's frustrating. It may piss me off. I may lament to friends and colleagues, but I also know it takes a toll. While I'm able to thrive, am I going to live as long if I didn't have to deal with this shit? Maybe I won't. I don't know.

Christopher situates his entire state of being under the condition of having to navigate racism, and this is not new to him; racism has always been a part of his life. While Christopher suggests he is thriving, he questions what the ultimate impact or toll of having to navigate racism will take on his life. Here, for Christopher, the question of the usefulness of his strategies is moot; as the weight of racism can have an impact no matter how well one maneuvers through it.

Highlighting his success, productivity, and notoriety, Benjamin also characterizes his state of being as thriving. He shared:

In my universe, right now I think I'm thriving. When I compare to those who I served with on the academic level, I'm probably creeping up on as many publications as our Provost... In my field, I'm more legitimate in terms of what I've given back to the field than any of the cabinet members, my peers. I'm very comfortable being with students and code switching in a moment's notice. I feel like I'm thought well of by my peers in my field and that took the last 12 years to build towards that so I've been

very conscious of building my network and trying to meet new people who I look up to who now ask me for advice which is cool.

In his response, Benjamin does not fully consider his local higher education context in characterizing his state of being in higher education; rather, he takes a total or all-encompassing career perspective. In this way, he is thriving, and notes that small strategies like building a network, code switching, and out performing his White peers are working for him. Unlike Christopher, Benjamin does not implicate the omnipresence of racism as inescapable; instead, he acknowledges how racism manifests, suggests that his strategies are successful to move through it.

The final example highlights James. Slightly unsure as he wrestled with how one might evaluate their state of being in higher education and how others would view him, James indicated that he is maintaining:

Let's cut out surviving because I think I'm beyond surviving... I think I know what people would tell you if they had to respond on my behalf. They would say that I'd be thriving. I don't know...I would say maybe maintaining...If you say, "are you getting better than average raises?" Well yeah, I guess maybe I'm thriving there, but are you really? Are your opinions respected more, or are you valued more within the organization? I would say I would be maintaining. Depends on the dimension, if you're saying, "well gee, is your life better? Can you drive a better car or something?" Well, yeah. On the other hand, can I say that now I have more respect and more credibility with deans and vice presidents then I did before? No, I would not say so. I would say I maintain then. Definitely not surviving or fighting for survival but I would say it's a maintenance.



James processes through several examples to help evaluate his state of being. In so doing, he identifies several ways that racism may manifest: salary inequities, not being valued, and not garnering respect. From James's response, it is evident that some of the strategies he is using to navigate racism works, and it is also evident that dimensions on which to evaluate state of being, and thus strategies, are numerous.

Summary of strategies for navigating racism. The strategies presented in this section highlighted the complexity of the various approaches that Black male administrators employ when responding to racism. These strategies included (1) employing self-care, (2) understanding the context in which one is operating, (3) naming racial dynamics, and (4) utilizing mentors and allies. Each of these approaches were grounded in the principle of being true to oneself and fell into either an internal and external categorization. Internal strategies focused on the tactics that Black male administrators can utilize to fortify their internal sense of psychological well-being. External strategies focused on relationships, connections, or assistance necessary outside of the Black male administrator to navigate racism in higher education.

#### Summary of Findings - Themes

In this chapter, I detailed major findings that supported the grounded theory that I put forth within this study. I opened with a presentation of major three themes guided by this study's research questions: (Q1) Processing and Navigating Racism, (Q1) Making Meaning of Racism, and (Q2) Strategies for Navigating Racism. Each theme highlighted the nuanced ways in which participants connected to and navigated racism. Together, these themes form the basis of the emerging Navigating Racism in Higher Education Model. The model is comprised of several major components, including (a) the assessment of racist experience,

(b) internal and external engagement, (c) response to racist experience, and (d) reflection on racist experience. In the next chapter, I present and explain the model fully, discuss implications, and conclude this study.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how senior rank Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education through an exploration of meaning making processes and strategies that Black male administrators employ. Black male administrators working on college and university campuses are at high risk of attrition, face hostile campus climates, find little support, and identify limited pathways to senior rank position (Jackson, 2001, 2003, 2006; Perna et al., 2006). In order to effectively address these conditions, this research sought to understand what works for Black males who have successfully navigated these challenges. Given the challenging conditions for Black male administrators, and the enduring presence of racism in higher education, this study uncovered how Black male administrators learned successful strategies for navigating the academy.

Generally, Black administrators are not represented in senior positions as less than 10% of senior-level administrators in higher education are Black (Jackson, 2005, 2012). While the literature gives some indication of the barriers and challenges that Black male administrators encounter in higher education (Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Jackson, 2001, 2003, 2006), there is little empirical research that specifically examines racism through the lived-experiences of Black male administrators (Chun & Evans, 2012; McCurtis et al., 2008; Stanley, 2006). This research fills this gap. More importantly, it embodies the notion that “the nation’s most accomplished Black men usually have a story to tell about what they overcame, who influenced them, how they survived” (Merida, 2007, p. 12). This study addressed two primary research questions:

1. How do Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of the racism that they experience in higher education at predominately White institutions?
2. What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominately White institutions?

Supported by Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), this study started with every participant agreeing that racism exists. Put differently this study did not seek to establish, legitimize, or substantiate the existence of racism. Further, this research also extended beyond simply identifying and describing the racism that Black male administrators experience; rather, this research uncovered the process that Black male administrators use to navigate through racism in higher education. To understand this process I used constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory is best suited for understanding processes, particularly those that take place subconsciously (Star, 2007). As Charmaz (2007) argues, a constructivist approach “ means learning how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger, and often, hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships” (p. 130).

I conducted in-person interviews with 12 Black male administrators at the senior rank and analyzed the transcripts using a constant comparison method (Charmaz, 2007). Participants were interviewed in various locations in the United States including Indiana, Ohio, New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Washington, D.C., and North Carolina. In this study, participants self-identified as a Black male, reported to a president, vice president, or were a member of the president’s cabinet (e.g. director, assistant vice president, or chief of staff) at a four-year higher PWI, had at least seven years of full-time professional experience working in higher education, and did not have tenure. By selecting participants without

academic rank or status (i.e. non-tenure track), I was able to target some of the most vulnerable employees or workers in higher education (Chun & Evans, 2012). The Black male administrators that met these criteria did not have the power or influence that comes with being a tenured administrator working in higher education.

The findings of this study reveal that Black male administrators experienced many forms of racism in higher education. Briefly, participants reported experiences with microaggressions, color-blind racism, and institutional racism. As the men in this study shared how they navigated and processed racism in higher education, three major themes emerged (1) Processing and Navigating Racism, (2) Making Meaning of Racism, and (3) Strategies for Navigating Racism. In this chapter I revisit these findings in relationship to, and by way of explaining, the emergent model: Navigating Racism in Higher Education. I explore what the model is, how it works, and illustrate how data from participants apply to the model. Following the discussion of the model I share reflections on the research process. In this section, I reconsider my positionality as a researcher and discuss challenges to implementing the study. I close the chapter by outlining personal implications for Black male administrators, institutional implications, and new directions for future research.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 provide the foundation for the emergent Navigating Racism in Higher Education model presented later in this chapter. Participants provided data about their experiences in, and outside, of higher education. As shared previously, racism doesn't fit neatly or wholly in one space or context. In Chapter 5, I presented much of the findings in the context of higher education; in my approach to presenting the data, I centered the men's higher education experiences, as these experiences

are integral to this study. However, overwhelmingly, the men in this study indicated that much of their learning, processing, and understanding of racism was gleaned before their higher education experiences. Given these findings, I deepen the discussion by focusing on how men in the study learned to navigate racism before higher education, often as a youth, and through the racist experiences of other Black men close to them. Also, I link the discussion of findings to two important concepts: collective memory and life course perspective. Throughout Chapter 6, I map collective memory and life course perspective onto the analysis I provide, as each concept offers robust explanatory power for the data in this study.

Life course perspective analyzes one's life within their structural, social, and cultural contexts. Broadly, as a concept life course refers to "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" (Giele & Elder 1998, p. 22). There are five major domains of the life course: human development and aging as a lifelong process, linked lives, timing in lives, lives in times and places, and human agency in constrained situations (Giele & Elder 1998). Collective memory refers to the knowledge, information, and experiences shared by a social group (Griffin, 2004). Specifically, "members of a particular generation experience powerful, self- and collectivity-defining national and international events at the same formative time in their lives (e.g., the Great Depression and the 1960s generations) making it a 'collective memory'" (Griffin, 2004, p. 545). Ultimately, for these men, formative experiences from early on in life are the grounding point for understanding what racism is and the strategies necessary to traverse it in higher education.

Learning to navigate racism as a youth. The men discussed formative experiences as youth where they encountered and learned about racism. Generally, "as a rule, African

Americans learn effective strategies for fighting and coping with [racial] discrimination from parental instruction and from assessing their own experience, as well as from hearing about the experiences of family members and friends” (Feagin & McKinney, 2005, p.119). More specifically, the fathers and families of the men passed down skills and ways to navigate racism. Recalling the example from James where he was with his uncle, brother, and dad in a store parking lot, and White children made a siren sound; after which they exclaimed: “Calling all Black people.” James recalled that no one said anything. There was no processing or explanation of what occurred. Similarly, James also recalled a time with a close White friend whom he gave a ride home from work; this friend commented that the garage door opener was “Nigger rigged” – James said nothing. Both examples exemplify that one way to navigate racism is to say nothing. These examples also demonstrate the human agency in constrained situations domain of the life course perspective. Furthermore, evoking a decision point that one may have to make in discerning whether to respond to a racist experience, James learned about how to respond to racism early in the life. Feagin and McKinney (2005) suggest that deciding whether or not to respond to racist encounters is a universal experience for African Americans as they learn what racism is early in their lives. Given the many instances of racism that African Americans face, Essed (1991) emphasizes that deciding whether to respond to racism is an everyday experience that is characterized by the specific situation and the agency or power one has to respond.

Unlike James, Euclid and Reed both learned as youth that one must respond to racism. Both men were raised during a time when racism was permissible by law, and both participated in sit-ins, demonstrations, and marches. Together, Euclid and Reed lives are linked and shaped by the timing of the Civil Rights movement in their life. While it is unclear

what motivated either participant to respond to racism in the way they did so early in life, it is clear that both of their socializing context as youth influenced them to confront racism directly. Here, the “region, along with race, gender, age, and other social factors, matters in the construction of collective memories,” thus impacting how Black male administrators learned to navigate racism (Griffin, 2004, p. 556).

Socializing context as a determinant of racism. Returning to Euclid and Reed, both were at least ten years older than the other participants in the study. In reviewing each of their transcripts, I found the quality of the formative experiences they discussed were substantively different than other participants. They came of age in the Jim Crow South, were active with the Black Panthers, and participated in the sit-ins and marches of the Civil Rights movement. These men came of age, experienced, and observed the particular racism of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Specifically, “their generational identity formation appears to be place-specific as well as age-dependent, and the primary social location of civil rights battles and successes was the South” where they were both raised (Griffin, 2004, p. 556).

Retrospectively, we can consider the historical context and the uniqueness of Euclid and Reed’s social location as a youth and how it offered a distinct example of navigating racism. Griffin (2004) illuminates this significance of historical events as shaping one’s understanding of social phenomenon, like racism.

Formative historical events are those recalled as especially meaningful later in life because they are associated with crystallization of both personal identity and knowledge of social realities outside of the self. Thus, one's sense of self is theorized to be stamped by the historically significant events and changes occurring during this critical time in the development of an individual's identity (p. 545).



These two men had a different understanding of their identity and interaction with racism in higher education than the younger participants. For example, Reed shared: “Those are the years that I was? in high school, I spent a lot of time on pickup lines demonstrations... I was working about 15, 18 hours a week to augment my parents' income, but learning so much about myself and activism, complex systems, racism”. Euclid explicitly illustrates this idea noting that, “Folks will go around worrying about a microaggression haven't grown up where I grew up. Where folks were calling you ‘nigger’ and ‘boy’ and telling you, ‘we don't serve colored folks here’”. Embedded in Euclid’s observation is a different threshold and understanding of what is meant by racism and a hostile climate. If someone is worrying about a microaggression how will they handle a much more aggressive racial assault?

Both Reed and Euclid cite early learning about racism from their specific context; thus the way these men make meaning or understand racism is directly shaped by their formative experiences. Returning to Griffin’s (2004) scholarship on collective memory is helpful to deepen the understanding of how one’s social context is so shaping, particularly when considering the Civil Rights movement.

The past seems especially salient, as both memory and as historical significance, to people whose identities and social awareness were crystallized during and because of sweeping historical events. Where events happen also influences memory, perhaps as much as when they occur in a person's life, because place conditions the personal relevance of events, such as the Civil Rights movement, that are intensely spatialized (p. 555).

Ultimately, participants in the study who came of age during a time when racism was more blatant, intense, and grotesque in American society had different expectations, experiences,

and responses to racism than participants who came of age during the 1970s, 1980s, or later. Together, the learning to navigate racism as youth, and socializing context as a determinant of defining racism set the foundation for how the men in this study first engage racism – the starting point of the emergent Navigating Racism in Higher Education model to follow.

### Navigating Racism in Higher Education Model

In this section, I explain the Navigating Racism in Higher Education Model (Figure 2). This model is grounded in the data from this study, and seeks to explain the process by which Black male administrators in higher education navigate racism. The model includes a sub-model (Figure 3), which explains the generative relationship between making meaning of racism and strategies used to confront racism. The sub-model operates independently and within the emergent model, as the sub-model explains specifically the way Black male administrators use strategies and leverage the meaning they have made of racism in higher education to navigate racism in higher education broadly. The emergent model has two major domains: pre-higher education context and higher education context. In the higher education context, the model distinguished between higher education context as a student, and higher education context as a professional; several participants recalled navigating racism wholly in higher education without regard for their role. Further, as evident in the stories from each participant, these men learned about racism before arriving to higher education. The emergent model is structured like a basic graph; on the x-axis childhood to adulthood as a measure of time for the Black male administrator is considered, and on the y-axis the practice, learning, and skill in navigating racism is considered. The x-axis contends with the time in which a Black male administrator was born and the major socializing forces apart of his context in life generally, and higher education specifically. The y-axis contends with the

practice, learning and skill in navigating racism through life before and during higher education. Time is also considered on the y-axis through the change in contexts. Put differently, the y-axis contends with the lessons and teachings that Black male administrators have experienced since birth on how to deal with racism. Together, there is a positive relationship that the model using a basic graph illustrates: the more time a Black male administrator has and is socialized in his specific context, the more practice, learning, and skill he will acquire in navigating racism in higher education. Broadly, history, time, and space are captured by the specific time of birth for a Black male administrator which significantly shapes the learning he acquires to navigate racism.

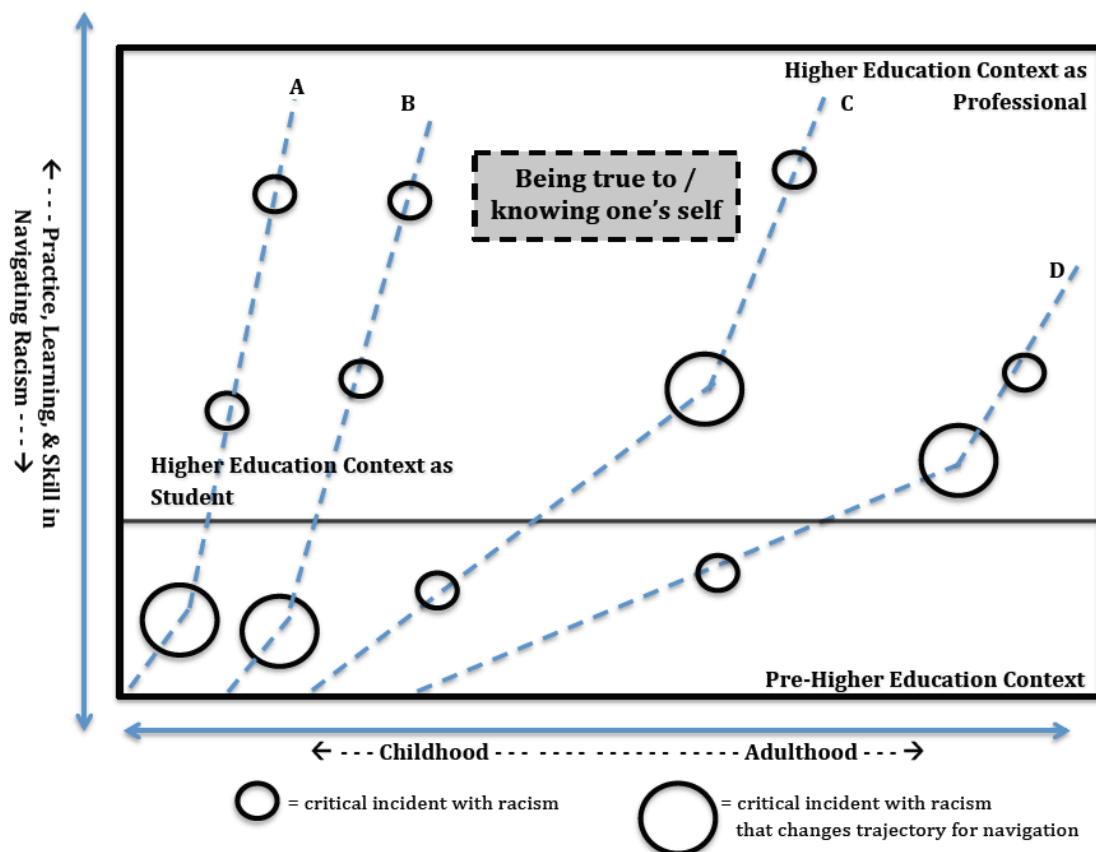


Figure 2. Emergent navigating racism in higher education model. This emergent model outlines the key findings and trajectories Black male administrators endeavor as they traverse racism before and during higher education

Also, the model includes four dotted blue lines labeled A, B, C and D. Each of these lines represent possible trajectories a Black male administrator could take, based on the socializing context, or when he was born and the learning and practice he has in navigating racism in higher education. Lastly, each line has orbs on it to represent the critical incidents with racism that Black male administrators experience. There are small orbs and large orbs to represent the magnitude of the critical incident with racism, and the subsequent possible change in one's trajectory for navigating racism as a result of new learning or insights from the critical incident. You will recall that I asked the men in this study about their most recent experience with racism in higher education, and their most memorable experience with racism in higher education. Responses to each of these questions aided in conceptualizing the specific steps a Black male administrator may take to navigate a critical incident with racism in higher education. What follows in this section is a full explanation of the model. Included in this explanation is a description of the pre-higher education and higher education context as domains, mapping of study participants onto the model, the meaning and strategies generative cycle, and critical incidents with racism specifically in higher education.

Pre-Higher Education Context. The pre-higher education context was very influential to participants in this study and shaped how they developed strategies for navigating racism. The findings clearly demonstrate that Black male administrations have formed their early racial perceptions and ideas that ultimately inform and shape their professional careers. Racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 2015) and the cycle of socialization (Harro, 2000) are two major frameworks that clarify the racial experiences of Black male administrators before higher education.

Racial formation theory examines race as a socially constructed identity, where social, economic, and political forces determine the content and significance of racial categories (Omi & Winant, 2015). “Race and racial categories are not natural but are socially constructed phenomena, these categories and their corresponding meanings vary across space and time” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 39). Racial formation theory emphasizes the process and dynamics of becoming and engaging as a racial being marked and determined by larger structural systems. The participants in this study were born into a structural system in the United States that continues to attach negative meaning, and treatment to being Black (Omi & Winant, 2015). Particularly, “the identity and self-concept of Black males is one that has been developed and grown under a constant burden of negativity and otherness” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 138). Participants experienced and learned about perceptions of their race through their engagement in their social context. Illustrated by the incredible number of Black men incarcerated, jobless, and without a college degree, Black men’s everyday experiences in school, with family, working, or navigating institutions informed how they understood what it meant to be Black before entering higher education. Through racial formation theory, race is *a priori*, and this is particularly true for the study participants before entering higher education.

Also in the pre-higher education context the cycle of socialization begins (Harro, 2000). The cycle of socialization is related to racial formation theory, in that it focuses on major socializing forces that shape one’s understanding of the social world in relationship to one’s racial identity and context (Harro, 2000). The cycle of socialization indicates that people “are born into a specific set of social identities [(i.e. race)] and these social identities predispose us to unequal roles in the dynamic system of oppression” (Harro, 2000, p.45). The

cycle begins before birth, as one is “born into a world where all the mechanics, assumptions, rules, roles, and structures of oppression [regarding race] are already in place and functioning” (Harro, 2000, p. 47). Immediately following birth, one begins to experience socialization through family, institutions like school church, and media, and general exposure to the social world; each shaping “self-concept and self-perception, the norms and rules [one] must follow, the roles [one is] taught to play, [one’s] expectations for the future, and [one’s] dreams” (p. 47). In the cycle, unequal roles are enforced interpersonally and institutionally resulting in more oppression (i.e. racism). Taken together, racial formation theory and the cycle of socialization offer the conceptual backdrop upon which the participants in this study developed an understanding of their race and racism very early in life. These men gained skill and practiced navigating their race and racism before entering the higher education context.

Higher Education Context. In the higher education context, colorblind racism and institutional racism are major forces influencing Black male administrators’ experience of racism. Colorblind racism involves the disregard of race when selecting, engaging, or interacting with individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Ultimately, colorblind racism provides White people “a safe, color-blind way to state racial views without appearing to be irrational or rabidly racist” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 211). Colorblind racism is uniquely positioned to thrive in higher education because of the espoused value of meritocracy in higher education. Arbitrators of colorblind racism place a significant focus on achievement and accomplishment to camouflage their racist beliefs (Carter Andrews & Tuitt, 2013). Institutional racism produces the “patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions so as to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals

who are members of nonwhite racial/ethnic groups” (Better, 2008, p. 11). As noted by Better (2008) “institutional racism can function without much active individual assistance”; it is in the air (p. 42). Reed’s experiences were representative of most study participants, he acutely noted that institutional racism is “subtle, but powerful, and exists within systems and people who say all the right things, [and] consciously believe all the right things”. Given the pervasiveness, institutional racism is functioning and very much a major form of racism that Black male administrators are navigating in higher education.

While the pre-higher education and higher education context are each distinct and important in shaping racial experiences there is important overlap. Located in each are the key findings that participants have learned in processing and navigating racism, the meaning they have made of navigating racism and the strategies Black male administrators use to move through racism in higher education. I turn in the next section to an examination of each theme and a discussion of the theme’s relationship to the model. The themes include: (1) Processing and Navigating Racism, (2) Making Meaning of Racism, and (3) Strategies for Navigating Racism.

*Processing and navigating racism in higher education.* While the introduction of racism occurs outside of the higher education context much of the way that Black male administrators process and navigate racism is understood in the higher education context. Specifically, Black male administrators learn experientially to navigate racism through their work in higher education, and they find that power, role (position), and status matter significantly in their encounters with racism. In the emergent model, these insights are mostly apart of the higher education context. Conversely, insight from fathers, families, and

life experiences that teach Black male administrators about race and racism before higher education is apart of the pre-higher-education context.

*Meaning making of racism.* Participants made meaning of the racism they experience in higher education in four particular ways: (1) race is omnipresent, (2) developing resilience, (3) discussing racism, and (4) believing in change. While steeped in the higher education context, each of these meanings of racism began developing early for participants. Several research participants noted learning early on that race was always a factor in their interactions with White people, and that knowledge shaped their approach to handling racism in their present day professional lives. Further, the participants' past experiences with racism made them stronger, and enabled them to traverse future experiences with racism. The third meaning, discussing racism, evoked the sense that there were particular ways that one could have a productive and effective conversation about racism in professional spaces. And the final meaning made of racism, believing in change, suggests that the participants knew that positive change was possible with their White colleagues and organizations.

In the emergent model, each of these meanings of racism inform how Black male administrators traverse racism, as these general ways in which participants create meaning of racism did not come at a particular time for participants. Rather, these meanings were shared among participants as important and, as I will demonstrate in the next section, are in relationship to the strategies that Black male administrators use to navigate racism.

*Strategies.* The final key finding is represented by strategies that participants employed. Four major strategies for navigating racism were identified and they were all grounded in a principle strategy of being true to oneself and knowing oneself. In the model, *being true to and knowing oneself* is placed in a dark gray box, emphasized with a dashed



black line surrounding the text. This principal strategy is foundational to all other strategies that Black male administrators use to navigate racism making it worthwhile to note on the model. The remaining four strategies are, self-care, understanding context, naming race and racial dynamics, and mentors, support people, and allies. In the emergent model, these four strategies are in relationship with the specific meaning that Black male administrators made of racism in higher education (see Figure 3).

Summary of Domains. Together, the pre-higher education context and higher education context, including time as a student and as a professional, shape and hold the conditions under which Black male administrators are navigating racism. Informed by both collective memory and the life course perspective, Black male administrators are socialized and learn about racism in a specific way in the pre-higher education context. Further, the historical context shaping when a Black male administrators is born matters greatly in the pre-higher education context. Some participants were born during a time when racism was permissible under law, and others during a time when racism was less severe and laws provided some protections. Also, in the pre-higher education context, Black male administrators learn about race and racism from their families. Specifically, families have taught Black male administrators what racism is from their lived experience, and how to respond to racism.

In the higher education context, Black male administrators experience primarily color blind and institutional racism that is already apart of the context before their arrival. Also, Black male administrators are making meaning of racism in the higher education context, and this meaning informs the strategies they use to navigate racism resulting in a generative

process. In the next section, I address possible trajectories one may experience as they navigate racism in higher education.

Trajectories in the Navigating Racism in Higher Education Model. To understand the usefulness of the emergent Navigating Racism in Higher Education model (Figure 2), it is helpful to return to the participants of the study and map their experiences onto the model. In doing so, one can see how the model works to explain and track the progression and possibilities for Black male administrators. In the model, there are four lines labeled A-D. Each line represents a study participant. Line A represents Euclid, line B represents Reed, line C represents Nicholas, and line D represents Reginald. I selected these participants because they represent distinct times of birth and different outcomes. Ordered from eldest to most junior, there is a range represented in these four participants' experiences that are illustrated distinctly through the sample trajectories.

While navigating racism is not a linear process, these sample trajectories aid one in seeing how the study participants developed skill, managed critical incidents and navigated racism before and during higher education. What follows are key quotes, and stories recapped from the findings in Chapter 4 and 5 to illustrate each trajectory and illuminate how the model can be used to understand the navigation process for other Black male administrators.

*Euclid.* In the study, Euclid has the most years of experiences; he was also raised in the Jim Crow South making him one of the oldest study participants. Euclid “grew up in Jackson, Mississippi in the 50s and 60s and 70s. [he] lived through the civil rights movement. [He] grew up in racism and segregation”. Euclid (line A) is the oldest and came of age in the United States when racism was legal, sanctioned, and permissible. In Chapter 4, I open with

the following quote from Euclid: “I’m used to dealing ... I’ve been treated bad by White people a lot when I was a kid so microaggressions and the subtle stuff doesn’t bother me. I’ve got my armor on”. For most of Euclid’s life, he knew about racism and how to traverse it. Also, he experienced critical incidents with racism well before entering higher education, which is represented by the large orb closest to start of line A in the pre-higher education context in model. In Chapter 4 I shared a story about Euclid being the first Black student to integrate a White Catholic school where a White girl decided to sit next to him when no other White student would. This is a perfect example of a pre-higher education critical incident with racism in which Euclid develops skill in navigating racism and changes his trajectory for navigating racism because of the magnitude of the incident. By the time Euclid entered higher education as an administrator, he was quite practiced with racism; the steep slope of his trajectory for line A notes how quickly he acquired skill. Also, as result of his early socializing context where racism was permissible by law, he also experienced critical incidents early in higher education, noted by the second orb on line A. As result, when Euclid speaks about navigating racism in higher education, he claims: “I’m used to dealing ... I’ve been treated bad by white people a lot when I was a kid so microaggression and the subtle stuff doesn’t bother me. I’ve got my armor on”. Euclid experienced enough racism early in life that milder incidents, like microaggressions, affect him less; his toolkit for managing racism developed early with encounters with extreme forms of racism.

*Reed.* Like Euclid, Reed also has a significant number of years of experience in higher education and is one of the oldest participants in the study. He, too, was born and socialized in a context when racism was legal, sanctioned, and permissible. In the model Reed (line B) represents having been socialized and educated about racism early in life, yet

his trajectory is not as steep as line A; Reed grew up mostly in New York City and not the Jim Crow South. In Chapter 4, I shared a revealing quote from Reed which exemplifies his early learning about race and racism: “I think the great bulk of what helps me navigate – have some success – is because of all my years on the street...The struggles that I've had and the opportunities very young to learn about myself and issues of race on the street are far more important than having a doctorate”. Like Euclid, Reed experienced racism early in life. The incidences of racism that he is presented with in higher education are not as difficult to manage as previous life experiences. Moreover, Reed was fighting racism as a youth; he was “hanging with demonstrations, sit-ins, [and] regularly hanging with the panthers”. It is likely that a critical incident occurred early for Reed changing the trajectory of he acquired skill, practice, and learning to navigate racism in higher education. Like Euclid, Reed also developed a toolkit very early for navigating racism.

*Nicholas.* Line C represents Nicholas; he has 22 years of experience working in higher education and is middle-aged. Unlike Euclid and Reed, Nicholas was not born into a socializing context where racism was permissible and legal. However, he was the first Black student body president at his high school and his college. Nicholas was one of the only Black people in his master’s program. Also, he was the first Black man to have the Vice President title at two different predominately White institutions. He shared: “My last three [or] four jobs, I was the first black person, black male to be in that position, I know that people make decisions on what I'm doing next or what they're going to do next because of this experience”. With so many firsts in his career and often the only Black person, Nicholas did experience a socializing context slightly later in life in which he gained practice and skill in navigating race and racism. Nicholas believes: “It's unfortunate, I think I've been some people's first

Black friend of any substance”. In his interview, Nicholas highlighted a major critical incident with racism in higher education represented by the second orb. Nicholas was asked by his president to respond to a student group request to consider hiring a Chief Diversity Officer. Nicholas believed that the president and the cabinet should seriously consider the students’ request. Nicholas and his president disagreed, and during the encounter, Nicholas’ president responded: "I don't pay you to disagree with me." To which, Nicholas replied, "You don't pay me enough not to disagree with you." On Line C, this is represented by a large orb to indicate a critical incident, which shifts how Nicholas traverses racism in higher education. This incident was so significant that it offered Nicholas new insights into navigating racism while in the higher education context. Specifically, he realized that he could not, and more importantly did not have to navigate all forms of racism in higher education; he could opt out – he could leave.

*Reginald.* Finally, representing line D is Reginald; he had 12 years of full-time experience working in higher education, and was likely the youngest study participant. Also, he had the latest socializing context represented by line D as the last line. The slope of the line is less steep for Reginald as he was not born into a socializing context like Euclid and Reed where racism was permissible by law; however, Reginald did still acquire skill in navigating racism before working in higher education. Briefly highlighted in Chapter 5, Reginald recalled negotiating the proper pronunciation of his African name during the interview. This incident occurred with a sociology professor while Reginald was an undergraduate student. Reginald said to the professor: “That’s my name. Don’t mess up my name, and if you need help pronouncing it, I’m happy to help you pronounce it. I do have a nickname, but I’m going to insist that you learn how to call my name, to say my name.” This

critical incident in the pre-higher education context is practice, learning, and skill in navigating racism. Also, Reginald indicates that he has acquired skills to navigate racism while working in higher education, suggesting that his “formal education through graduate school, [and] taking a course on cultural competency” has helped. For Reginald, “part of it is formal training that [he has had] and then a lot of it also is lived experiences”.

Unearthing Trajectories: Meaning informs strategies. To this point, I have explained the broader navigating racism emergent model and the possible trajectories using participant examples with attention to their primary socializing context as a determinant of the slope of their trajectory. Continuing to move from the larger higher education context, where navigating racism is occurring all of the time with Black male administrators alongside other Black male administrators, to the specifics of the navigation process, I explain how meaning made from racism inform strategies to traverse racism generatively to create a navigation process for racism in higher education.

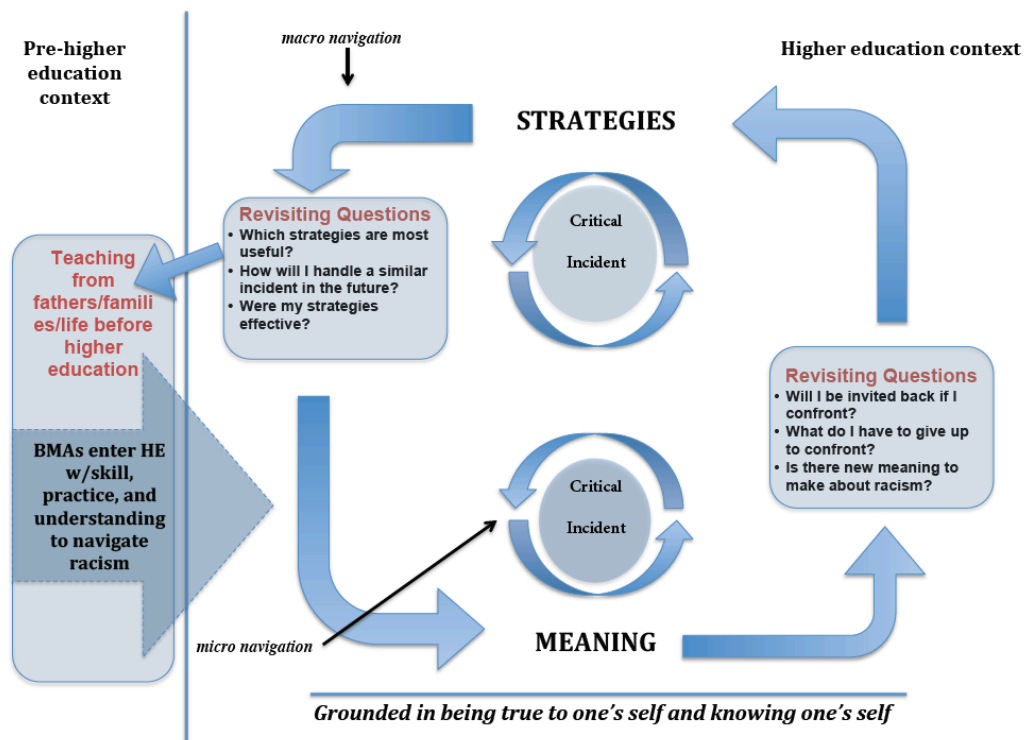


Figure 3. Emergent navigating racism in higher education sub-model. This illustrated the cyclical relation between meaning and strategy.

As previously stated, Black male administrators enter higher education with skill, practice and an understanding of how to navigate racism. Primarily, Black male administrators learn how to navigate and process racism from their fathers, families and life before higher education. Upon entering higher education, illustrated by the arrow in Figure 3, Black male administrators cycle between meaning and strategies to navigate the racism they experience. Here, the meaning Black male administrators have made of racism informs the strategies they use, and the outcomes of the strategies they use develop new meaning of racism in the higher education context. The two arrows formed in a circle cycling from meaning to strategies generatively illustrate this process. In this cycle, there are evaluative questions that Black male administrators ask after utilizing a strategy and creating meaning. These questions labeled *Revisiting Questions* on the sub-model aid a Black male administrator in discerning the effectiveness of a strategy and/or determining the specifics of the meaning he has made. The questions following the strategies in the process may prompt a Black male administrator to also revisit primary teachings about navigating racism and then reenter the generative cycle. This navigation process is similar to praxis, the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realized (Freire, 1970).

Praxis, as conceptualized by Paulo Freire (1970) is a theoretical construct useful to understand the generative relationship between meaning and strategies that Black male administrators enact to navigate racism in higher education. Praxis uses reflection and action to enact a progression of cognitive and physical actions. Implementing praxis requires one to take action from an existing conception or understanding. After, taking action, one considers the impacts of the action by analyzing and reflecting on the results of the action. Following their reflection, one alters and revises their conceptions and planning. Finally, one

implements new plans for future actions related to the conception or understanding in question. Through “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed,” Freire (1970) intended for praxis to be used by oppressed people to acquire a critical awareness of their own condition to struggle for liberation (p. 126). With striking parallels, Freire’s conceptualization of praxis is a helpful way to view the generative relationship between the meanings that Black male administrators make of racism and the strategies they use to traverse it.

A second way to understand the generative relationship between meaning and strategies that Black male administrators enact to navigate racism in higher education is through the human agency in constrained situations domain of the life course perspective. Human agency in constrained situations suggests, “within the constraints of their world, people are planful and make choices among options that construct their life course” (Elder, 1994, p.6). Here, the choices, or strategies, that one makes are informed by how they understand the constraints, or have made meaning of the racism they experience. Particularly, the *Revisiting Questions* following meaning assist Black male administrators in understanding the constraints they face. These questions include: (1) Will I be invited back if I confront? (2) What do I have to give up to confront? And, (3) is there new meaning to make about racism? These questions are explored more fully below in the *Meaning informs strategies in critical incidents with racism* section.

Generally, the cycling between meaning and strategy is a macro process, whereby it informs how Black male administrators navigate the everyday experiences of working in racist environment: higher education. There are several examples from the data that illustrate this point. First, Benjamin shared that the existence of racism in higher education means that



he, as a Black man is unable to always take up diversity or race issues; he cannot over represent race. Benjamin uses the strategy of allies. He shared:

I do that a lot with allies around the cabinet table.... I take my notes on the iPad so I can draw a picture; I can write it out, tilt my screen to the right. The Provost is the closest ally of mine, I can erase the page and she knows enough that, 5 or 10 minutes later, she can call that [diversity] question because she knows if I'm not saying it.

Returning to an example shared by Jude; he realized “we're never going to be all the way there,” suggesting that racism in higher education will “always [be] a work in progress for us”. Informing Jude’s strategy is a clear realization or meaning he has gleamed. He shared: “I realize the one that I'm most comfortable with being okay with being wrong about [racism]”.

A third example comes from David and connects to a general finding from this study regarding the meaning that Black male administrators make of racism in higher education – people and organizations can change. This meaning moves David to use patience as a strategy. He shared: “[Regarding racism,] it's patience. Early my in career it was 'I need to see it now' like immediate satisfaction, I needed to see it right now, I need to see change now. Not understanding and not being patient to understand that change takes time. There are multiple moving parts”.

Furthermore, the meaning informing strategy process rests on one principal strategy (bottom of Figure 3) from the data: being true to and knowing oneself. This is the same principal strategy that grounds how Black male administrators navigate in the Emerging Navigating Racism Model (Figure 2). Although not highlighted on the cycle itself, two key insights operate within this generative process: learning to navigate racism by being in higher education, and power, role, and status mattering in racist experiences in higher education.

Through the research process these two insights emerged as central to how Black male administrator navigate and process racism in higher education. Finally, returning to the trajectories (i.e. Line A) outlined on the emergent model (Figure 2), one notices orbs representing critical incidents. In the next section I explain how the generative relationship between meanings made of racism and strategies used to traverse racism (Figure 3) interact with critical incidents with racism in higher education.

Meaning informs strategies in critical incidents with racism. In this study, I asked participants about key experiences with racism in higher education as a way to gain entry into racism as a phenomenon. The two key interview questions that enabled me to learn about participants' experiences with racism were: What was your most memorable experience with racism in higher education? And, what was your most recent experience with racism in higher education. These experiences were critical incidents for my participants. Critical incidents refer to "significant learning moments, turning points, or moments of realization that were identified by [an individual] as making a significant contribution to their professional growth" (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006, p. 88). Critical incidents have several characteristics: They are (a) personally salient, (b) can cause developmental change, and (c) can be perceived as positive or negative (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006). By utilizing critical incidents, I learned about what Black male administrators do in the face of racist events. This study was wholly about how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education broadly. Yet, there were some specifics that became evident that make navigating critical incidents different. In this section, I use the meaning and strategies generative relationship (Figure 3) in a micro fashion to explain a basic way in which Black male administrators move through critical incidents with racism, represented by the orbs

located on each trajectory in the emergent Navigating Racism in Higher Education model (Figure 2). Drawing from the experiences of the participants and mapping on critical incident technique (Flanangean, 1954), illustrates the complexity and nuance of navigating racism in higher education. Breaking down the men's incidents with racism in three ways, I explore the key ideas and questions that the administrators in this study addressed before, during, and after the racist incident. Also in this section I situate the strategy and meaning the participants leveraged to move through the critical incident.

*Before critical incident with racism.* Having discovered that race is omnipresent, Black male administrators are prepared before ever encountering racism in higher education. Feagin and McKinney (2005) emphasize this point for all Black people sharing that “implicit in the idea of being prepared for anti-black actions is again a degree of acceptance of the sad fact, gleaned from previous experience, that this [racial] discrimination is likely to occur” (p. 125). In the study, David exacts the idea of being prepared broadly in life for racism by sharing: “So what we see outside, you see here as well. Be prepared to face this on a regular basis. You have to have thick skin.” Furthermore, “it is common for African Americans to reflect deeply on the structure of their encounters with whites, in part as a way of crafting some countering and coping strategies;” the men in this study were not different (Feagin & McKinney, 2005, p. 125). In this study, the Black male administrators assess immediately preceding the occurrence of a critical incident with racism. Participants assessed by asking themselves several questions: What is the nature of this racist incident? Is this worth confronting? Will I be okay to let this pass by? Broadly, “most black Americans do not react to acts of discrimination with the same strategy every time. Instead, they often consider the situational context in which the questionable or discriminatory behavior arises, and assess the

possible motivations of the white discriminators” (Feagin & McKinney, 2005, p. 121). As such, Black male administrators also evaluate their options of how to respond to the racism they are experience by assessing the motivation of the White person enacting racism and the nuance of situation in which the racism in occurring. Ultimately, the preparation that Black male administrators have to navigate racism is imperative before the incident. In the study, James shares the idea best, saying: “I think as anything in life it's a good thing to be prepared to have a realization that you may find an obstacle in front of you that is going to be centered in race and how are you going to manage to navigate through it or around it.”

*During critical incident with racism.* Black males ask themselves important questions when there is a critical incident with racism in higher education. Participants in this study asked: (1) Do I have power here? (2) Will I be invited back if I confront? (3) What do I have to give up to confront? And, (4) Which strategies are most useful? Answers to each of these questions reside in the cycle between meaning and strategy. As expressed by Reginald “there's always a quick analysis of the power dynamic in the relationship”. Similarly, Lee shared from his mentors’ perspective a weighing of whether to confront: “If I said anything I would never ever be in that room again”. Reginald and Lee’s comments are representative of what each of the men in the study thought of during a critical incident with racism. Once key questions were examined Black male administrators were able to employ the most effective strategy to respond to the critical incident. Some strategies include direct confrontation, ignoring, or minimizing the critical incident by sidetracking, distracting, or derailing. Steven summarizes the wondering that Black male administrators do in the midst of critical incidents with racism, sharing: “As a black person, you always wonder. You've been in it [(racist situation)] so much, that in the back of your mind you could have a negative reaction [to

what is happening because], you don't know what the motivation is [of that person]. This person can be an ass to everyone, right?”

*After critical incident with racism.* Black male administrators also consider a set of questions immediately following critical incidents with racism in higher education (1) How will I handle a similar incident in the future, (2) Were my strategies effective? And, (3) is there new meaning to make of racism? Each of these questions has an evaluative characteristic to them, aiding a Black male administrator in discerning what the incident meant, immediate next steps, and how the outcome of the critical incident will impact their future. This process is illustrated by Reginald, who following a critical incident shared: “In that moment I just let it go and I knew it was going to be something that I would eventually need to talk to someone about just to get it off my chest or whatnot, but I didn’t feel that it was appropriate in that space to bring it out. I let that go”.

In part, because race is inextricably linked to traversing a racist experience, one is doubly reflective and thoughtful after the incident, noting that how one responds may confirm stereotypes or other racist thoughts of the person with whom the incident occurred. Lee said it best, sharing: “I realize that in my position I can't be the angry black person. You're managing that all the time and I don't know that my white counterparts have to worry about that. I don't think they do”. Similarly, James is reflective after critical incidents as to inform his future approach. James reflected: “I try to take a high level approach in saying is there a way that I could be of help to this situation, or can I make the situation better if not for me, for the next person who will come along and have the experience”. Summarily, Smith, Hung, and Frankly (2011) noted that “Black men are constantly developing unique racial and gendered race-based techniques for applying highly adaptive and active coping strategies [to

racist experiences]” (p.66). This idea is incredibly applicable to the Black male administrators in this study after experiencing a critical incident with racism in higher education.

Summary of Navigating Racism in Higher Education Model. This emergent model, with the meaning and strategy cycle, attempts to capture a very complicated non linear process. Yet, it is depicted in a linear way, and uses a simple graph to capture the primacy of the relationship between socializing context / time and skill development in navigating racism. The hallmark of the model is that it accounts for and explains the pre-higher education context and the importance of these experiences in informing the higher education context. The model also emphasizes the socializing context or time in which Black male administrators were born. In the socializing context of Black male administrators the specific social, political, and cultural context are considered. Here, major events like the integration of school or the Civil Rights movement matter to how Black male administrators learn and understand racism. “Research has shown that historical events are implicated in the formation and maintenance of collective memories if they represent significant long-term changes to people's lives, make people think about the events at the time of their happening, are emotionally charged, and exert collective psychological impact” (Griffin, 2004, p.546).

Further, because it was a significant finding that Black male administrators learn how to navigate before entering higher education, trajectories are necessary to demonstrate the skill that Black male administrators acquire in their pre-higher education context. From a life course perspective, these men discovered racism, and their role as Black men as part of their “normal” human development from birth (Elder, 1998). Furthermore, the generative process indicated by the cycle between meaning made of racism and strategies to traverse racism

(Figure 3) demonstrates the way Black male administrators are moving through racism broadly in higher education, and specific incidents in higher education.

Finally, racism is deeply complex, and everyone experiences it differently. As a result identifying a process through which all Black male administrators subscribe is difficult. This model excels at identifying how the meaning Black male administrators make of racism and the strategies they used to traverse it are related in higher education. And yet, a critical question emerges given the relationship this emergent model depicts between meaning and strategy: Do Black male administrators use the generative process between meaning and strategies to navigate racism before higher education? The answer to this question is unanswerable from the data. While participants discussed early life experiences with racism, they were not explicit in discussing what meaning they made of, or the strategies used to navigate early life experiences with racism. Resultantly, the question, how do Black male administrators navigate racism before higher education, would guide future research.

### Reflections on Research Process

Doing qualitative research requires flexibility and adaptability. The qualitative researcher is the instrument for the study, and must make decisions about how to best serve and execute the study given the on-the-ground dynamics and conditions (Glesne, 2015). Human subjects are not static, rather as you interview participants you must adjust your protocol, and make slight adjustments to your overall research design to collect the best data (Creswell, 2013). In this study, data became quickly saturated, and themes quickly emerged. As a result, it was not necessary to conduct second interviews with participants. Each participant was able to readily speak about a memorable and recent experience with racism in

higher education, and in so doing offered robust data about how they had moved through that experience.

Also, the qualitative researcher cannot enter into a grounded theory project *tabula rasa*, or as a blank slate; on the contrary, researchers have been, and are, a part of the social world they are studying (Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006). As a result, a research project requires a methodological tool that minimizes the researcher's judgments and preconceived notions on the data. To that end, critical incidents were helpful in getting participants to recall racist experiences acutely that were unique to them. Framing the interview protocol using critical incidents helped participants to center on one or two specific experiences, while keeping me open to their responses. Each participant was successful in recalling critical incident; yet, these incidents were only the start to participants' sharing.

Recognizing the dynamic nature of qualitative research, there are choices and decisions a researcher makes to execute and maintain the integrity of their study. Consequently, I offer a reflection on my research process. Specifically, I address challenges in executing the study, considerations for future study, and implications of my positionality.

Challenges in executing the study. A primary challenge in executing this study is explained in Bulmer and Solomos (2004) and Gunaratnam's (2003) scholarship that research about racism should investigate specific actors, interactions, and locations in order to detect the nuances, complexities, and hidden meanings of race and racism. While this study achieved the type of the research that these scholars are suggesting, it was challenging to capture what exactly racism is to each participant in this research process. Every participant agreed that racism was a part of working in higher education; however, there was variation in the type of examples participants shared about personal experiences with racism. For



example, James shared about having to respond to a staff member who was concerned about a Black Lives Matter flag hanging from a student's home. Whereas Nicholas talked about having to confront his president who explicitly thought that Nicholas should handle the student demands for his institution to hire a Chief Diversity Officer, as the Black Vice President for Student Affairs. These examples are very different, and yet they were each very important to the individual experiences of the participants. Starting with the clear idea that racism is perceived differently by different people (Anderson, 2012; Banton, 1967; Rex, 1999), this study did not require a shared understanding of the specific workings of racism across participants. Rather, participants were asked only to agree to a scholarly definition of racism at the beginning of the interview. Subsequently, participants were invited to discuss experiences with racism in higher education; these experiences varied, yet all of them had a profound impact on the participants in the study. Here, how participants personally define racism may have mattered to what examples and stories they shared. When asked to reflect on the definition I provided, Steven shared "I think when we talked about racism, we don't necessarily frame it in that way. Sometimes you could talk to two different people using the same word, and you're talking past one." And Pat's responses build on Steven's, noting: "My brain immediately goes to a kind of structural inequity, but I think how people experience it day-to-day can be really different. It can be these racialized moments that feel like racism, or they feel like a manifestation of racism. I guess I'm stumbling over a response". Steven and Pat's responses reflect the difficulty of precisely defining what racism is and then being able to talk about it. Reflecting on the range of lived experiences that were shared among all participants, it is clear that capturing and distinguishing *what is or is not racism* is an acute research challenge.

A second challenge related to the previous challenge is explicitly naming racism. While participants were able to readily speak about a memorable and recent experience with racism in higher education, several struggled to directly cite racism. Ahmed (2012) suggests that “speaking about racism becomes difficult *because* of how the equality and diversity world coheres; even practitioners who are aware of this difficulty can be silenced by it” (p. 142). Stated differently, equality suggests similar treatment, and speaking about racism suggests that the diversity is not being treated equally; speaking about racism ruptures the perception of equality. In reviewing the transcripts from this study, only four participants say the word racism when speaking about their experience in higher education. James exacts this challenge well: “I’ll tell you another [example] and again I can’t necessarily point to and say aha definitely racism.” James’ uncertainty could be due to his interpretation of what racism is, and also the very challenge of calling something *racism*. Further, Ahmed (2012) suggests that “describing the problem of racism can mean being treated as if you have created the problem, as if the very talk about divisions is what is divisive” (p. 152). To this end, confirming what is directly and explicitly racism to participants is hard.

Returning to Harper’s scholarship illuminates the challenge of naming racism explicitly for researchers. Harper reviewed 255 articles published in seven peer-reviewed journals to “show how researchers explain, discuss, and theorize about racial differences in student achievement, faculty and staff turnover, and other outcomes that are routinely disaggregated in the study of higher education” (Harper, 2012, p. 11). In doing so, he identified common rhetorical and semantic devices higher education researchers used to explain findings without directly naming racism. Harper criticizes researchers by indicating that authors soften or explain away the impact of racism in their studies. Ultimately, the

challenge of naming racism explicitly is shared by both researchers and participants, and future study would benefit from clear probes to evoke the use of the word *racism* from participants to understand what this evokes in them.

Broadening the challenge of explicitly naming racism in the study, there were two men, James and David who were somewhat uncomfortable during the interview experience. On several occasions during the interview, both participants indicated that they were uncertain and unsure about their responses, or asked me, as the interviewer what I thought of the very question that I was asking them. Each of their reactions illustrate the challenge of being able to name racism, as their behavior during the interview demonstrates the immense difficulty in being able to comfortably parse experiences with race and racism. Their stories demonstrate the need for future research to more deeply probe one's experience, comfort, and practice in discussing race and racism before the interview. Put differently, just because one has had a racist experience, does not mean that they are ready, comfortable, and have the words to discuss racism in a meaningful way. David shared poignantly about the challenge of discussing these issues:

There aren't many folk I feel comfortable talking to about these situations and my frustration. When you get frustrated and you're just about done, and you go home and look at your house and your significant other, and if you have a child, like 'I have bills to pay'. That is something that tears at me on a regular basis, that there's a livelihood piece.

Also, David commented explicitly about not discussing some of his experiences with race and racism. He said: "Some of these things I haven't, I've maybe generally talked to some folks about in circles. But some of these things I haven't talked about and I have to apologize,

I'm being super measured.” While I was able to drawn out important experiences from both James and David, the idea cannot be underestimated that one must be ready, poised, and comfortable to speak about race and racism; one must have the words.

Finally, I agree with Brown and Donner’s (2011) suggestion that “a melding of methodological approaches and analytical tools is required to fully articulate why the life opportunities, experiences, and outcomes of African American males are disparate from other social groups” (p. 26). Too often, research on African American males isolates their experiences without accounting for historical forces, and the implications on Black men’s current experiences. “History requires one to think holistically and continuously about inequality in education (Brown & Donner, 2011, p. 27). Digging into what a historical methodical approach would achieve, Brown and Donner (2011) add that,

The concerns and problems facing African American males in education and society are not new, we contend that contemporary responses to the Black male crisis narrative must reference history to avoid inaccurate descriptions and incomplete solutions. Used as a method for comparison, history links the past to the present by allowing for a comprehensive understanding of trends and patterns, including, how and why conditions have changed or remained constant over time (p. 26).

In this study, constructivist grounded theory unearthed many of the issues and ideas connected to Black male administrators’ experiences with racism in higher education. Yet, it is clear based on what the men in this study shared that their conceptualization of racism did not begin in higher education. Recognizing how difficult it was to capture what racism was for participants, and noting the importance of history, a future study might utilize different methodological tools to center history and bridge the lived experiences of Black male

administrators before higher education with their experiences in higher education. Utilizing depictions, life maps, participant journals, historical stimuli, and physical locations within a grounded theory study may be useful tools to address this challenge (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015).

Considerations for future study. I entered this study with the principle assumption that there would be a relationship between years of experience working in higher education and how one navigates racism. While this was true, what seems to be more significant is the men's early socializing context, and this context was shaped by when they were born. Early in the study, I learned that how my participants conceptualized racism was significantly informed by their experiences as a youth. And, as the study continued, a relationship emerged between the age of participants and the kind of racism they had been exposed to and navigated previously. Substantiated by collective memory and life course perspective as shaping concepts, a future study should center age more. In doing so, one could be more certain about what major events or historical moments (i.e. civil rights legislation, first Black president) were significant for participants.

Connected to the age of participants is the length of time that the men in this study have spent in higher education. Most participants never left higher education; they were undergraduate students, graduate students, and then full-time professionals. As a result, it was difficult and sometimes not applicable for participants to separate or distinguish between their time spent as a student in higher education versus working full-time in higher education. Particularly, when asked about their most memorable experience with racism in higher education both Benjamin and Reginald responded with examples from their time as undergraduate students. The very way they understood the question was different from the intentions I set for the question as the researcher. Given the men's continuous participation in

higher education, it is likely that the higher education setting, through its culture, has also socialized and shaped the participants experiences with racism. Ultimately, this is a unique feature of higher education; the span of one's career in higher education includes the time as a student. As a result, the two periods in my study, time as student and time as professional, could be separated when looking at the arc of racism that influenced my participants' experiences. Possibly, this is different in others studies; future research should explore how one's continuous participation in higher education, regardless of role or position, shapes how one thinks of the racism they experience in higher education.

A final consideration for future study is to center and probe more deeply the broader experiences of Black male administrators as a collective in higher education. Each of the men in this study had observations of and contact with other Black male administrators. Several participants mentioned other Black male administrators serving as mentors or supports to them. The idea emerged that there is connectedness among Black male administrators in how they are navigating racism in higher education. "This speaks to the familial give-and-take in mentoring relationships in the Black community, which often go beyond one relationship" (Griffin & Toldson, 2012, p. 104). While this study focused on the experiences of the 12 participants, a future study could primarily investigate specific Black male administrators, and incorporate secondary Black male administrator respondents that are named or cited by initial participants.

Implications of positionality. A researcher's positionality matters significantly when conducting a constructivist grounded theory study as who they are, and how they see the world will inform how they execute the study (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). In Chapter 3, I outlined my positionality and reflected on my own experiences that would connect to this

study. Primarily, serving as a Black male administrator myself enabled me to understand the experiences that participants were sharing. Furthermore, I was able to probe the nuance of participants' experiences because I shared some similar experiences in the past.

The participant recruitment and selection protocol made it possible for me to interview colleagues, and I recognized that as a researcher there would be trade-offs in deciding to interview people I knew. Knowing some of my participants offered familiarity and comfort, and could have possibly limited what participants shared. James, whom I did not know previously, shared that my anonymity aided him in sharing; there was no risk for him, and he felt comfortable. Conversely, Lee, whom I knew of and share a colleague network, was uncertain whether he would speak about racism with me if he did not know me. He shared:

I think it's complicated, racism is hard to talk about because people don't want to say the wrong thing and the thing is that I wonder even for us to have this conversation, I don't know that if I would be this open if I didn't know you, and the thing is that because when you talk about racism it's sensitive topics

Upon reflection, I believe sharing the same social and professional identities of my participants was very necessary for the men in this study to agree to participate. However, I cannot determine whether it is important that one knows or does not know their research participants when studying racism; it seems that needing to be acquainted with the researcher to be able to share openly is relative to the participant (Glesne, 2015).

My identification with the issues that participants described made it challenging to write about their experiences. I had several professional experiences that informed my belief that Black male administrators must navigate their professional work differently than their

peers. As the only Black male resident director on a seven-person team I often felt isolated and tokenized. At one point I was on a staff with several staff members of color in a Dean of Students Office that still seemed dominated by Whiteness. I was able to relate to what participants experienced based on my own lived experiences as a Black male administrator in higher education. As a result, it was difficult, at times, to explain and unearth their stories. As a researcher, this was hard; I knew my participants' stories intuitively, and needed to push myself to write about them in a way that others who do not know their stories intuitively could understand it. Furthermore, in my reflexivity and positionality statement in Chapter 3, I cite my personal experiences with racism in higher education that motivated me to conduct this study. Paradoxically, it is those very experiences that aided and hindered me in interpreting the data shared by participants. As a Black male administrator, I understood their stories from my own lived experiences, and my own lived experiences made dissecting or describing plainly the experiences of study participants difficult.

Finally, every participant had at least four more years of experience in higher education than I do. This difference in years of experience surfaced as a service-oriented dynamic. The men in the study found their participation to be in service of dismantling racism and helping Black male administrators that follow them to traverse racism. Further, participants felt like they were helping and coaching me by participating in the study. When asked at the end of the interview if they had anything additional to share, Christopher, Benjamin, and Euclid each remarked about this work needing to help and benefit other Black male administrators. My positionality as a younger, less seasoned Black male administrator aided participants in conceptualizing this study as one that would be a contribution to Black male administrators in higher education.



## Personal Implications for Black Male Administrators

This dissertation aimed to generate an understanding of how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education. The findings provide Black male administrators important insights into this process. There are several personal implications for Black male administrators to consider enhancing their experience in higher education. In this section, I describe three strategies individuals can use: knowing self, understanding personal meaning of racism, and developing a network of support.

Knowing self. The men in the study emphasized the need to really know themselves when dealing with racism. Feagin and McKinney (2005) emphasize knowing one's self as imperative, suggesting that "one way in which many African Americans cope with racial antipathy and discrimination is by shaping or changing their attitudes about themselves. Increasing self-knowledge is important, which may be accompanied by increased self-confidence" (2005, p. 132). Ultimately, there is a need to understand who you are, your values, and how you handle a variety of situations; this knowing is imperative for traversing racism (Feagin & McKinney, 2005).

In this study, each participant reflected on their personal experiences with racism in higher education, and what these experiences meant for them. Through doing so, participants gained clarity about how racism impacts their professional experience in higher education. Christopher experienced a change in traversing racism in higher education once he "embraced [his] own competence, worthiness and knowing that [he] belonged and knowing that [he is] filling a need" in his organization. The increased confidence that Christopher gained through a deeper knowing of himself and his worth made navigating racism easier. Nicholas, who considers himself successful at navigating racism, connected to a deep

knowing of self to traverse racism: “I don't necessarily like the idea that I'm palatable to some people, but know that it comes with the skin, it comes with the situation. I've chosen. I know that I'm not palatable. To some, I'm okay with it”. Nicholas knows that being perceived as palatable as a Black man by White people in higher education is necessary. Yet, he does not allow this perception to shape how he views himself. This understanding of self for Nicholas informs how he shows up and engages racism. Ultimately, it is necessary that Black male administrators do this kind of self-work.

Understanding personal meaning of racism. An important interpretation of the findings is that the meaning that Black males make of racism informs the strategies that they employ to contend with racism. The implication for Black male administrators is that they must understand their personal meaning of racism in higher education. The men discussed what racism in higher education meant to them in several ways. And, the most profound way was through their answer to the question: What is one belief you have about racism in higher education. James said, “It's probably just the obvious, that, probably [racism] will exist far beyond my lifetime”. Nicholas shared James’ belief, stating: “It ain't going away anytime soon, but I'm hopeful that things are going to get better in ways for us to talk about them and shape environments differently, to keep the conversation advancing.” Finally, Steven shared: “[higher education is] better at pointing it out, really good at talking about corporations. We're really good at talking about national politics. We're not as good about talking about at where we are”. These three examples, among others help illustrate the different meanings one would make, and resultantly, strategies like perseverance and reflection, might surface for a Black male administrator. Further, evident in participant responses is the idea that the more sense, that Black male administrators can make of racism, the more apt they will likely

be to confront it in higher education. Like cultivating self knowing, understanding one's personal meaning of racism requires self-work and reflection.

Developing a network of support. There is inevitability to racism (Crenshaw, 1995). It will be a part of the higher education landscape thus Black male administrators should create a network of support to assist them in navigating incidents of racism. While this is a finding from this study as a strategy, it also seems imperative to the success of Black male administrators. Feagin and McKinney indicate that in broader society, "research shows that most African American especially rely on informal social networks for emotional support; as a result, the racial concerns of one individual are often assessed, and known in detail, by the larger network of friends and relatives" (p. 171). Similarly, Griffin et al. (2011) suggest "it is important for faculty to find a network of scholars with whom they feel comfortable and supported. Institutions should [*sic*] foster such networks by providing safe spaces for faculty to engage with their peers, in the form of affinity or dialogue groups...to share their experiences with other faculty with whom they identify" (p.522). If this is true in larger society for Black people, and true for Black faculty, it is then also likely true in higher education for Black male administrators.

Furthermore, Black male administrators not only need a network of support institutionally, they also need a network of support personally to navigate racism in higher education. Reconsidering the strategies explored earlier, few Black male administrators are regularly or systematically utilizing others as an acute form of support to traverse racism. This dynamic is gendered, as research indicates that Black women utilize various social supports to cope, manage, and navigate racism (Bacchus, 2008; Bacchus & Holley, 2004; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). In a study with 196 Black women, Shorter-Gooden (2004) identified

seven strategies which included: relying on prayer and spirituality, drawing on strength from ancestors, maintaining a positive self-image, relying on social support, altering outward appearance and presentation, avoiding contact with certain situations and people, and directly challenging the situation. Among these seven strategies four, relying spirituality, connecting to ancestors, relying on social support, and challenging the situation, are done in the context of a network of support.

This gendered dynamic is not surprising as men, across races and ethnicities, are socialized to not ask for help, be independent, and solve their problems on their own (Disch, 2000). Countering this norm, Black men would benefit from collective coping as a specific strategy and way of developing a network of support. Collective coping “refers to relying on one’s social support network and group centered activities as a way of coping. Specifically, collective coping includes seeking support from friends, family, and partners” (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood & Hunt, 2013, p.69). Finally, returning to Christopher to emphasize this implication; he shared: “For me again, black men, there's just something unique about the shit we deal with. I can name the people in my life who, all of them are older than me, and particularly the ones older than me are the ones who have been like, "Yeah, you deal with this shit. Yeah, I dealt with it too”. The need for Black male administrators to develop this kind of network cannot be overstated.

### Institutional Implications

Given the unique positioning of Black male administrators at the senior rank, several implications from this study are appropriate for institutions. In this section, I address three institutional implications: developing graduate programs in higher education and student

affairs, creating differentiated professional development, and conducting institutional power audits.

Graduate programs in higher education and student affairs. A number of the men in this study at some point in their career were affiliated with the profession of Student Affairs. At the time of this study, seven were senior student affairs administrators, and one was formerly a senior student affairs administrator in his two previous positions. Given the representation of the field in this study, there are particular implications for graduate preparation programs in the field. Black male administrators must learn, and understand the impact of racism on their careers and professional identities. Yet, the work to unearth this kind of knowing is not a major part of graduate programs in student affairs. As a result of this study, graduate programs in higher education and student affairs should find substantial ways to include learning about race and racism in the context of higher education as part of the curriculum. Using these findings, preparation programs should rethink current diversity-related courses offered within student affairs programs to include explicit treatment of race and racism. Courses designed to teach graduate students about diversity, social justice, or oppression should develop students' systemic thinking that can be anti-racist and produce institutional and cultural changes.

Dissertation research from Sean Pepin (2015) cites a similar implication in developing graduate students' understanding of social justice, broadly. Pepin's dissertation research "revealed that preparation programs were one of the major spaces where participants deepened their understanding of social justice" (2015, p. 163). An interesting finding from Pepin's research is that "participants noted that they deepened their commitment while in graduate school, but many felt as though they were not prepared to tackle issues of injustice

or create institutional change” (p. 164). Racism, a major force of systemic oppression, is often studied and understood in relationship to social justice. Similar to the call Pepin (2015) makes for the developing an understanding of social justice, the study of racism, particularly focused on its impact on higher education and student affairs administration, should be emphasized and more deeply included in graduate preparation programs.

Differentiated professional development. Study findings indicate that Black male administrators at the senior rank are having a different and complex experience working in higher education due to the racism they experience. Borrowed from teacher education, this study advances the need for differentiated professional development that supports Black male administrators in navigating race and racism in higher education (Kose, 2007; Youngs & King, 2002). In teacher education, the purpose of differentiated professional development is to create an environment where teachers have the understanding and confidence to teach effectively, and implement supportive strategies for themselves resulting in positive outcomes. By taking the time to find out what teachers need and how they learn, differentiated professional development becomes an efficient method of expanding and refining a teacher’s practice over time (Kose, 2007; Youngs & King, 2002). The data shared in this study indicate how pervasive race and racism is for Black male administrators. Because of this, there is a need for focused and intentional attention on how to maneuver through racism in higher education for Black male administrators. Particularly, differentiated professional development should probe to understand Black male administrators’ specific experiences with racism in an effort to provide specific and targeted interventions and support opportunities.

James raised a critical thought cementing the need for differentiated professional development. He shared: “It’s a good thing to be prepared to have a realization that you may find an obstacle in front of you that is going to be centered in race and how are you going to manage to navigate through it or around it”. Recognizing that navigating race is something may find as an obstacle, James is suggesting that he needs development or training to move through racialized experiences in higher education. Through differentiated professional development, Black male administrators would become more aware and in control of their learning, development, progress as employees in higher education.

In the current higher education landscape, differentiated professional development opportunities that might make sense for Black male administrators include the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity and the Social Justice Training Institute. A very specific example of differentiated professional development opportunity that would benefit Black male administrators is the American Council on Education’s Spectrum Aspiring Leaders Program. This program designed to advance mid-level leaders from diverse backgrounds into senior leadership ranks of higher education. In a community of administrators who face similar challenges and demands, the program provides “participants with the opportunity to assess their current competencies and receive advice on creating a professional development plan and enhance their leadership skills in critical areas to enhance their career trajectory” (Spectrum Aspiring Leaders Program, 2017). Finally, the responsibility to develop support mechanisms that adequately address the needs of Black men that work in higher education belong to this institution, as the institution, as an organization, creates and emphasizes the racist conditions that Black male administrators experience.

Improve campus climate. As a result of this study, institutions need to address campus racial climate for Black male administrators. While much research about campus racial climate centers on the student experience, administrators also shape and experience campus racial climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999; Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015). Generally, the campus racial climate involves the ways that students of color experience the institutional environment of a college or university, and the role that community members' attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations about issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity help to shape that climate (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). A campus' racial climate accounts for the interpersonal interactions and campus policies, as well as the institutional-level forces like governmental policy and sociohistorical context. Both attributes influence not only the on-campus experiences of students of color (Museus et al., 2015), but also the experienced of Black male administrators.

This research studied the everydayness of racism (Bulmer & Solomos, 2004; Essed, 1991) through which campus racial climate is manifested. As such, this scholarship offers insights into how Black male administrators are impacted by the campus racial climate of their institutions. Specifically, participants indicated that their campuses had there own culture, demographics, and campus leaders, all of which influenced a Black male administrators' ability to thrive. Turning to two participants, Christopher and Nicholas the need to address campus racial climate is evident through their words. Christopher shared about how he was not listened to or taken seriously as administrator on his campus until he completed his PhD and had a longer tenure at his institution. He shared:



That's when people started treating me differently as well. That's when I became the exception. That's when I became the exception. That's when, while people still in these social settings were going to try to pay attention to me, at least professionally, that's when I had a voice to say, "What are we doing about faculty?" The longer I've been at the university, the more my voice has grown.

From a different standpoint, Nicholas recognized how significant race is to the campus environment; he sees the presence of race as inevitable, thus impacting the climate:

For me I want someone think that race is going to go away...[that] I won't always have to have [race] as a part of my mantle. I know that will not be the case. [Race] will always be. I'm fine with that. I feel I got the right armor. I have the right toolkit, so I'm ready to go in there and fight about it, and argue about it and make it happen and change environments and I feel good about that.

While Nicholas feels good about impacting the campus racial climate, that sentiment is not shared among all Black male administrators.

Findings from a study by Griffin et al. (2011) “remind institutional leaders that they must be mindful of and take responsibility for recognizing the multiple dimensions of climate as they aim to improve institutional environments” (p. 521). Finally, specific recommendations for improving campus racial climate for Black male administrators include: assess what the climate is like for Black male administrators, identify enhancements to the climate that benefit Black male administrators and other people of color that are campus community members, and continually evaluate the campus racial climate with administrators in mind.

## Directions for Future Research

Conducting this study and interpreting the data offered a number of insights into future lines of inquiry regarding racism and Black male administrators in higher education. In this section, I address broad observations for theorizing and researching racism, and offer a major suggestion for how to approach future studies. To better theorize racism there is a need to understand the realities of racist experiences in their specific context. Centered in deductive logic, constructivist grounded theory will continue to be a useful way to understand and assess what is the actual fabric of racism.

Bulmer and Solomos (2000) have called for less theorizing of racism, as theorizing about racism has abstracted understanding how people experience racism. The execution of this study attended to Bulmer and Solomos' call by centering the participants' everyday experiences with racism. Racism is a lived phenomenon that requires an on-the-ground understanding of its inner workings as there are "a variety of forms of racism and racist expression; [therefore,] it is important that research addresses the impact of racism in real-life situations" (Bulmer & Solomos, 2004, p. 10). Here, there is a tension that future research should focus on: usefully theorizing to produce change while attending to the realities of racist experiences in the context in which they are happening and are experienced.

Relatedly, before one can fully understand racism, one must fully understand the context in which racism is occurring; specific manifestations of racism are tethered to their context (Elder, 1994; Griffin, 2004; Harro, 2000; Hurtado, 1992). This idea is supported by the collective memory and life course perspective concepts. And, a thread of this research suggests that the context one is socialized into deeply informs how one conceptualizes and understands racism in higher education. Euclid's experiences exemplify this point. Euclid

was raised in the Jim Crow South; his knowing of racism from the time he was born far exceeds any racism he has experienced in higher education. Similarly, Steven was raised in Detroit around the time of the race riots of 1967. He experienced White flight, and his family moved to the suburbs to improve Steven's educational opportunity. Today, most people are raised in homogenous neighborhoods where they do not engage across different races (Hall, Tach & Lee, 2016). And, at the same time, the United States is becoming more racially diverse (Hall, Tach & Lee, 2016). To unearth Euclid's, Steve's or any person living in the United States understanding, and resultantly navigation, of racism requires a substantial investigation of their socializing contexts.

This idea is also important for college students. Furthermore, if student affairs administrators are going to continue to understand the student experience across social identities, there is a need to better understand the contexts from which students come. This pushes the idea that research needs to be done in a way that bridges the experiences that one has before entering higher education. Much research done on students currently only considers their current experiences in higher education, and does not inquire deeply about the pre-higher education context of students. Possibly, in the pre-higher education context students, like Black male administrators, learn to navigate racism, and have made meaning of the racism they have experienced. Developing the understanding of the unique experiences of students before higher education is incredibly important and can fuel a robust research agenda.

Finally, in a 2017 post-election landscape particular attention must be paid to the experiences of Black men broadly, and on college campuses. This study was conceptualized during the Obama era when experiences for Black men were depraved. For example, from

2010 to 2012, Black males ages 15 to 19 were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million (Gabrielson, Grochowski Jones, & Sagara, 2014). And, in 2013, Black men accounted for 18.5 million of the United States population, of which only 7.5% were enrolled in college and 4% were incarcerated (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013; National Urban League, 2015). Yet, there was still possibility and hope for Black men represented by the first Black president of the United States.

Now, the recent election has made it clear there are deeply held racist beliefs in the United States. Specifically, between Wednesday, November 9, the day after the presidential election, and the morning of Monday, November 14, the Southern Poverty Law Center collected 437 reports of hateful intimidation and harassment. Most reports involved anti-immigrant incidents (136), followed by anti-black (89) and anti-LGBT (43). Some reports (8) included multiple categories like anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant. (see: Southern Poverty Law Center - [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org)). While these examples may not represent the entire country; the signs supporting White nationalism are clear. In schoolyards, White kids exclaim, “go back to where you came from,” to kids they perceive as immigrants. Beyond the South, Confederate flags surge in high visibility. And, gatherings of KKK members now occur in broad daylight. Each of these examples indicates a new or returned era of racism and racial politics. Furthermore, in this climate the pre-higher education and higher education context are highly activated. Like the study participants who grew up in the Civil Rights era, Black boys, youth, and men are growing up in a post-election era that is significantly shaping their racialized experiences. Put differently, it used to be Jim Crow South, and now it is Trayvon, Michael, Eric, Tamir, Black Lives Matter, and marches on Washington.

Given the revived racial reality of the United States, this study could be completed a second time in this different context and yield very different results. The national mood under the new president has shifted national conversations about race and the daily experiences of Black people. The selection of ultra-conservative politicians and judges for cabinet and Supreme Court posts hampers and negatively impacts the lived experiences of Black men. Now for some Black men, their pre-higher education context where they learn about racism will be different; this difference will matter in how these men conceptualize and therefore navigate racism. Although his interview occurred before the election, David did broach how the possibility of a new president was already impacting him as a Black male administrator. Speaking about managing incidents on campus, David shared: “It's an emotional journey on a regular basis. When things happen on campus, I have to walk by this 'Trump', and I have to walk by this 'build a wall' and I know it's meant to incite. It's not meant to inform or engage, it's meant to incite”. And, in a predictive fashion, Nicholas shared: “[racism] ain't going away anytime soon, but I'm hopeful that things are going to get better in ways for us to talk about them and shape environments differently to keep the conversation advancing”. My participants already knew, and continue to know how the climate has changed. And, in this new era, while it is uncertain whether the race conversation will be advancing, it is certain that it will be different, and new research could uncover the differences.

## Conclusion

I decided to study racism in higher education because of a personal belief that racism in higher education is not going away. David shared my belief noting: “sitting in that space and realizing it's not going to change in our lifetime. Will it get a little better; will it show up

in different ways? But that was [a] sobering fact, that it, [racism] won't end [in] my lifetime". Recognizing the permanence of racism, this project, at the outset, focused on understanding how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education. Steeped in the idea that "African American men have long experienced workplace inequality and exclusion from valued labor market positions. The nature and causes of these inequalities, and whether discrimination is playing a role, however, remain unclear in the dominant literature" (Mong & Roscigno, 2010, p. 15). This research addressed the orientation of racial inequalities and discrimination, attempting to add to the literature through the specifics of the racialized experience for Black male administrators in higher education. Moreover, through the research process, this study unearthed several other dimensions of Black male administrators' experiences with racism that warrant study to more deeply understand the complexity of the racism phenomenon. Specifically, this research noted how important one's early life experiences are in shaping how you conceptualize and understand racism. And, this research demonstrated that Black male administrators enter higher education with skill and understanding in how to navigate racism. Given the insights from this study, future research must parse how racism and discrimination specifically occurs in light organizational contexts, policies and procedures (Mong & Roscigno, 2010).

Finally, there is an inevitability of the inclusion of Black male administrators in higher education. In the study, Jude said it best: "Higher education cannot move on without us. That's what we're saying right at this very moment, in 2016, higher education cannot move on without leadership of color in higher education in significant positions that have voice." Noting the unavoidability of Black male administrators in higher education, and the permanence of racism of higher education, there is a huge opportunity for the reconciliation

of the two. There must be a continued and concerted effort to understand the experiences of Black male administrators so that they can thrive, and further shape the climate in higher education broadly.

## Appendix A: Solicitation Email to Expert Nominators

February 22, 2016

Hello <First Name>,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Domonic Rollins and I am a PhD Candidate in the Higher Education, Student Affairs Administration and International Education Policy (HESI) Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am excited to be launching my dissertation study entitled: *Navigating Racism in Higher Education: A Grounded Theory Study of Black Male Administrators*. I am looking to recruit senior rank Black males who have a wealth of experience working in higher education and who are ready and willing to share their knowledge of how they navigated racism in the professional career. Based on your professional experiences and network I am seeking your assistance in identifying potential participants.

The purpose of this study is to understand the process by which Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education through an exploration of the meaning making, processes, and strategies that Black male administrators employ. I intend to answer the following research questions: (1) How do Black male administrators process, navigate, and make meaning of the racism they experience in higher education at predominately White institutions? (2) What strategies do Black male administrators use to manage racism in higher education at predominately White institutions?

Participating in this study is completely voluntary however there are specific criteria that I am seeking in potential subjects they must (1) self identify as a Black male; (2) report to the President, Vice President, or serve as a member of the President's cabinet at a four-year higher education institution; (3) work at a predominately White institution; (4) have at least five years of full-time professional experience working in higher education, and; (5) not have academic rank or status (i.e. non-tenure track). I am looking for 12 participants for the study. I thank you in advance for sharing this information with individuals that you believe would be interested in participating. If you for the study and are interested in participating please feel free to contact me at [rollins1@umd.edu](mailto:rollins1@umd.edu) I would be happy to discuss this in greater detail. I have provided a link to the study (link) for your convenience.

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects (IRBNet ID# 836601). If you have questions about the IRB approval, please contact the Institutional Review Board Office at University of Maryland, College Park via email [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu) or by phone 301-405-0678.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact me at [rollins1@umd.edu](mailto:rollins1@umd.edu) or by phone at (443) 443-4915.

Thank you,  
Domonic A. Rollins, [rollins1@umd.edu](mailto:rollins1@umd.edu)  
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Maryland, College Park



## Appendix B: Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Hello! Thank you for your interest in the study of Black male administrators navigating racism in higher education. The selection of the study participants requires several stages of review to ensure that we have participants who meet the study criteria. I thank you in advance for your patience and your willingness to be reviewed for this work. All individuals will be contacted by phone or email to inform them if they meet the selection criteria, and to confirm if they have been selected as one of the study participants. In order to be considered it is necessary for you to complete this demographic questionnaire. By completing this form you are indicating that you are at least 18, and agree to voluntarily provide this information. You may be contacted by phone or email for a follow-up interview if you are eligible.

Domonic A. Rollins  
Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Maryland, College Park  
rollins1@umd.edu

---

### Demographic Information

*Please fill out the information below. Note: information shared will be kept strictly confidential.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ -  
\_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym: (If selected what pseudonym would you like to use?) \_\_\_\_\_

Current Institution:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Title / Position:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone:  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is your preferred form of communication? \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone

If by phone, can I leave a general voice mail to contact me back? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

Highest Degree completed: (indicate where you completed your degree):

\_\_\_\_\_

Years of Full-Time Experience Working in Higher Education: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have been working in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

In your current position to whom do your report? (Please provide full title)

\_\_\_\_\_

---

### Personal Identities

What follow are a series of questions that deal with more personal information and allows me to better understand the identities that you have and some of your initial thoughts about race and racism. If you are uncomfortable with any or all of these questions please do not answer. However, because the nature of this research deals directly with race and racism, personal identities and the way we identify are critical. One of the expectations I have of this research is to preserve those identities that participants hold important within the research. Also participating in this study would require you to talk about these issues and share your experiences. Of course all of the data collected in this study will be held in the strictest confidence.

Ethnicity:

\_\_\_\_\_

Socioeconomic Class:

\_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation:

\_\_\_\_\_

(Dis)Ability Status:

\_\_\_\_\_

Religion/Spirituality:

\_\_\_\_\_

Are there other salient identities you would like to share? \_\_\_\_\_

## Your Experiences with Racism

In terms of your own experience with and observations of racism in higher education, please indicate your agreement with the following statements. If there is a statement not listed that you would like to add, please do so in the comments section below. If you want to say more you are welcome to email (rollins1@umd.edu) a one-page description.

- |   |       |        |          |
|---|-------|--------|----------|
| 1. Racism is a very real part of working in higher education.   | Agree | Unsure | Disagree |
| 2. Generally, Black men encounter or experience racism Working in higher education.                               | Agree | Unsure | Disagree |
| 3. I have had experiences with racism as an administrator in higher education with which I have dealt personally. | Agree | Unsure | Disagree |
| 4. In the past, I have thought about how to manage racism as an administrator working in higher education         | Agree | Unsure | Disagree |
| 5. Recently, there have be racial incidents on my campus.   | Agree | Unsure | Disagree |

Additional Comments:

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### Consent

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read the questionnaire consent form below or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate, please indicate your consent and type your name below:

---

—

## Appendix C: Initial Interview Script

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study! My name is Domonic Rollins and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland College Park. This is a study examining how Black male administrators navigate racism in higher education.

This interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. I will be digitally recording the interview and taking notes. You will receive a copy of the transcript in order to edit or add to points discussed in the interview process.

Before beginning, I want to go over several important aspects about this research and our interview.

- Any information you provide that may identify you, will be removed from the transcript (i.e. city name, university name, your name, etc.)
- This interview will be recorded. Do I have your permission to record this interview?
- If at any point you have questions feel free to ask.
- If at any point you would like to conclude this interview just let me know.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

From here, the interview will be fairly casual and conversational. I do have a few questions for you, but largely I expect that the conversation will evolve naturally and will reflect the direction of your thinking and experiences.

---

*Below, the interview protocol questions are aligned with the main parts of the research questions for the study. For each interview question, a letter (N, M, or S) is indicated to highlight which part of the research question an interview question is attempting to address.*

[N = Navigate; M = Manage; S = Strategies]

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### Rapport Building Questions

*(1) You have been in higher education XX of years, and in your current position or institution for XX of years, tell me about what do you like most about your current job.*

*(2) As you know this study is about racism. Please share with me what is racism to you? How do you think about racism? (N)*

*(3) So, what comes to mind when you hear the words racism and higher education? (N)*

Probes:

- How did you come to that idea?
- Can you elaborate on the connection you just made?

*(4) Can you tell me about a critical incident with racism or a racist experience that you have had while working in higher education. (N, M)*

Probes:

- How did you grow, change, or develop as a result of this incident?
- Based on what you are sharing, what do you think is the hardest part about responding to and processing racism in higher education?
- What specific strategies did you use to get through the process?

---

### Encouraging Reflection about Racism

*(5) Often I hear about challenges associated with processing or making sense of racism, have you had any moments that were particularly difficult for you? (N, M, S)*

Probes:

- Can you describe in some detail about the context of the situation?
- What was the hardest or more difficult thing about the situation?
- How did you process such a difficult moment?
- What did you do after the situation?
- Was there anything particularly helpful in your processing of the situation?
- How did you process the moment after it happened?
- What was helpful to you as you were processing the situation?
- What obstacles did you face as you moved through making meaning from the experience?
- How do you think you handled it?
- How is this similar to or different from how you handle other critical incidents with racism?

*(6) Can you tell me about another experience like the one before, but this time where you handled it differently? [Depending on how they believe they handled the previous incident] (M, S)*

Probes:

- What were you feeling at that moment?
- Were those kind of feelings or emotions fairly typical for you?
- What were you thinking at that moment?
- What was the hardest or more difficult thing about the situation?
- How did you process the moment after it happened?
- What was helpful to you as you were processing the situation?

*(7) [If this surfaces] You highlighted or named institutional racism. I want to get your thoughts on what is it, how does it show up, what might it look like, how might you describe institutional racism to someone who was unfamiliar with it? And to you and how you experience it, or ... by no means anything that's textbook, but that you named it, what does that mean to you? (N)*

Probes:

- Where did your definition of institutional racism come from? When?
  - What organizational practices or behaviors contribute to institutional racism? Can you describe examples of these practices or behaviors? Is there an example that comes to mind?
  - During your time working in higher education, what changes have you observed in institutional racism?
- 

### Prompting Thought about Interpretation

*(8) How do you think your past experiences have shaped the way you navigate racism today?*

(N, M)

Probes

- What do you think was the most important thing you learned from this experience?
- Would you handle it differently now?
- What are some of the positive take-aways from this experience?
- Are there negative consequences of these experience that remain with you?

*(9) Is there any specific meaning you have made out of these experiences with racism that helps you deal with future experiences with racism?* (N)

Probes:

- How did you come to this meaning?
- What most helped you?

*(10) What do these experiences mean for your future work in higher education?* (N)

Probes:

- What will you do next?
  - How have these events shaped your decisions about the future?
  - What made you want to persist through these challenges to continue going?
- 

### Concluding the Interview

*Thank you for sharing your story with me.* (Affirm stories)

*(11) If you had to give strategies to a new Black male administrator working in higher education on navigating racism ... what strategies would you share?* (S)

*(12) In thinking back on this interview, if you had to give this interview a chapter title, what would you title it?*

*(13) As we wrap up, a question that I have is what is one belief that you have about racism in higher education?* (N)

*I learned a great deal today about your story. Would I be able to follow up with you if I have follow up questions or if it looks like a second interview might help with some of the findings?*

#### **Appendix D: Post Interview Transcript Check & Follow Up Questions**

February 22, 2016

Hello <First Name>,

I want to follow up and thank you for your time [say when I interviewed participant]. I am so glad we could connect and you were willing to take part in this study.

I am emailing you for two reasons. First, I am attaching the transcript from your interview. Would you please review the transcript and let me know if there are any areas that you would like to clarify or any additions you would like to make. If you do, feel free to mark it with track changes – or provide comments in an email message – and then you can send it back to me. If there are no edits please indicate that you have reviewed and that you do not have additional edits to add.

Second, I would like to talk with you about a few things from your interview. I think that you had some excellent insights, I would like to ask you a few questions based on some initial analysis I have done with the interviews so far. Please let me know if you are willing to be part of a select group of participants for a follow-up interview; I anticipate that our second interview would last 60-90 minutes.

*[I would also offer some days or periods of time and indicate how much time you would like the person to allow for a second interview]*

Thank you again and I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Domonic Rollins  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Higher Education, Student Affairs, and International Education Policy  
University of Maryland, College Park  
rollins1@umd.edu

## **Appendix E: Sample Second Interview Script**

To begin, thank you for your initial interview. I wanted to talk further with you because your interview was very helpful. I have a few follow-up questions and some questions related to my preliminary data analysis

Briefly, I want to go over some important information that we reviewed when we met last time.

- Any information you provide that may identify you will be removed from the transcript (i.e., city name, university name, your name, etc.)
- This interview will be recorded. Do I have your permission to record this interview?
- If at any point you have questions feel free to ask.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

---

### Sample Questions

1. In our first interview, you talked about some of the critical incidents with racism you have had in your work in higher education. Since we talked, what thoughts and reflection have you had about the experiences you shared with me?
2. In the first interview, you talked about (insert topic), can you tell me more about that?
3. I have heard from other participants about (insert topic and description), have you had any similar experiences? If so, tell me more about [topic]. If not, what thoughts or reflections do you have about why you might not have experienced that?
4. So far, (insert theme/ category) has seemed to come up in many of the interviews. I would be interested to hear what your thoughts are about that, why you think it keeps coming up, and what that might mean about your work in higher education.



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