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Perspectives of Black Male Administrators on Gaining Administrative Roles at Community and Technical Colleges

MarcusAntonio Gunn
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

MarcusAntonio Gunn

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Review Committee
Dr. Danette Brown, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Kathy Zientek, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

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MS, Walden University, 2013

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education

Higher Education Adult Learning

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Abstract

The problem that was addressed in this study is that there is a low number of Black male administrators at community and technical colleges (CTCs) throughout the United States, despite widespread organizational practices of adopting diversity and equity policies, implementing mentoring programs, and providing professional development. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Black male administrators' perceptions of hiring barriers and their recommendations to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. Guided by critical race theory in education, data were collected through semistructured interviews with eight Black male administrators who are serving or have served in executive roles at CTCs for at least 3 years. Data were manually and software-assisted analyzed through open and axial coding with the following eight themes emerging: Black male administrators (1) experience systemic barriers to hiring practices, (2) encounter advancement barriers rooted in systemic stereotypes, (3) face pipeline and preparation gaps, (4) distinguish limitations in building social capital and professional networks, (5) feel pressured to validate competence through overperformance, (6) call for improved institutional hiring practices and accountability, (7) advocate for reform in leadership preparation and pipeline programs, and (8) recommend the establishment of a culture of belonging and inclusion. These findings might inform positive social change by compelling CTCs' leaders to confront systemic bias, invest in equity driven leadership development, and intentionally expand access to administrative roles for Black men. The results would allow for a transformation of policy commitments into tangible, measurable progress toward more inclusive leadership across CTCs.

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Dedication

To the Gunns, Wares (Morgans), Brooks, Hendrix's, and all the Ancestors whose names I do not know, thank you for life. I should not have been the first in my family to experience the promise of post-secondary education. This honor belonged to my grandmother, Sallie Hendrix Ware, my mother, Delores Annette Ware Gunn Kendrick (my first teachers), and my cousin Shanita Chandler, the most intelligent women I know. To my grandfather Ernest Ware and my father Eric Lee Kendrick, you've guided me in spirit, I will always love you. To my siblings Michael, Tioka and Mekeal. To the next generation my niblings (nieces and nephews) whose lives inspire my career and advocacy for accessible, free, and public education, I love you; this is for you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The American education system has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, reflecting the country's changing demographics. Historically, 4-year universities were exclusively for White students, beginning with Harvard in 1636 and continuing until the 1960s (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Community colleges have emerged as champions for baccalaureate-level pathways for diverse populations to address this systemic inequality. For first-generation, low-income, and marginalized students (including Native American, Black, and Hispanic communities), community and technical colleges (CTCs) offer affordable degrees, essential support services, and a crucial route to fulfilling their educational and workforce aspirations. As U.S. demographics are shifting from a predominantly White majority to a majority of persons of color, there is also a shift in the racial demographics of students in the American education system.

In recent years, the demographics of higher education have shifted, reflecting broader societal trends. Between 2010 and 2021, minority student college enrollment increased while the enrollment rate for White students declined (NCES, 2023). Asian students had the highest enrollment at 64%, White students at 41%, and Black and Hispanic students at 36%. To move toward change, many higher education institutions have begun to adopt priorities that include hiring a more diverse faculty, staff, and administrator demographic (Webster & Brown, 2019). However, the presence of Black men fulfilling administrator positions that feature governance and managerial duties, such as chancellor, president, vice president, dean, and director in higher education,

specifically CTCs, remains low (NCES, 2023). Only 9% of public 2 year college administrators in 2021 were Black males.

Diversifying the leadership of higher education institutions is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. The low number of Black male administrators in higher education is of concern for the higher education industry, which seeks to diversify campus staff, faculty, and administrators (Sparkman, 2021). Sparkman argued that a lack of Black male administrators dissuades Black male students from aspiring to graduate programs and applying for administrator positions at colleges and universities. Webster and Brown (2019) argued that a campus lacking diversified leadership leaves all students underprepared to live and compete in a global society. To actualize their vision of a campus with diverse faculty, staff, and administrators, higher education hiring managers, hiring boards, Board of Trustees members, and other stakeholders must review their practices of hiring diverse populations. To improve the pathways for Black men, Black men who serve or have served in administrator roles at the CTCs should be interviewed to learn their pathway toward administrator roles and asked to offer perspectives on improving the hiring process for other Black males.

To better understand the barriers and opportunities facing Black men in higher education leadership, it is essential to center their voices and experiences. Black men's experiences remain largely unexplored in research (Henry, 2021). Scholarship on Black men often falls short, framing their experiences through a deficit lens, fixated on perceived shortcomings, and neglecting their rich cultural heritage and diverse contributions (Webster & Brown, 2019). From first-hand accounts, Black men offered

their perspectives on navigating the challenges and triumphs of reaching executive leadership positions in higher education. This basic qualitative study explored the insights of Black male CTCs administrators, past and present, to inform the development of a more inclusive leadership pipeline for aspiring Black male leaders.

The first chapter introduces the research context, including the background, problem statement, and purpose. This foundation informs the development of research questions and a conceptual framework, guiding the exploration of Black male administrators' perspectives on hiring barriers and their suggestions for improving career pathways for others. This chapter will also include definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the study's significance.

Background

The higher education industry has struggled with increasing its representation of leaders of color. Black administrators are disproportionately underrepresented compared to their White counterparts across all campus types (Sparkman, 2021). The underrepresentation of leaders of color poses an issue for the CTCs. People of color seeking a postsecondary education view these institutions as accessible options. Specifically, there is a low number of Black men who have ascended to leadership positions within CTCs across America. The low number of Black males in administration at CTCs poses an issue of representation and equity. Many institutions have sought to become more diverse and inclusive of leaders of color. Webster and Brown (2019) maintained that systemic barriers are the root cause of the lack of advancement for Black Americans in leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWI) within

higher education. To understand why Black administrators have not advanced in higher education leadership like their White counterparts, scholars must examine the history of higher education and its leadership roles.

The underrepresentation of Black administrators in higher education is a direct consequence of centuries of discrimination and institutional barriers. Ash et al. (2020) postulated that American colonies never intended to educate people of color. Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022) provided that American colleges were fueled and funded by slavery, the slave trade, and the illegal acquiring of Native American land to build these colleges. Thelin (2019) found no record of college authorities or alumni seeking to educate Blacks or White women through general courses or special affiliated institutions. Denied the fundamental right to learn before the Civil War, Black Americans were then denied admittance at many colleges and universities even after emancipation.

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were created to educate Black and other students of color due to the segregated American education system. Webster (2019) highlighted that the number of Black administrators at PWIs could be counted on one hand, as their presence at the institution was rare. Today, minority institutions like HBCUs or Hispanic-serving institutions maintain the highest employment of Black administrators, faculty, and staff (Bitar et al., 2022). While progress has been made, the underrepresentation of Black administrators at PWI remains a significant challenge that requires ongoing attention and systemic change.

The ruling in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954*)*, authorized the integration of Black Americans into heavily populated White educational

institutions. The ruling also set out to rewrite the wrongs of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1869) decision, which solidified the "Separate but Equal" doctrine. This ruling occurred due to the inadequate conditions and resources designated to educational institutions for students of color. The Brown ruling not only allowed students of color movement into PWI but also provided opportunities for the employment of administrators, faculty, and staff of color. While the Brown ruling was federal, it would have grave implications for how many Southern states operated.

There have been several occurrences within American culture and higher education to push for more staff, faculty, and executive administration of color in higher education. One of the most visible acts to aid in the equitable employment of people of color was Executive Order 11246(1965), also known as "Affirmative Action." Higher education institutions were mandated to employ nondiscriminatory practices and provide employment opportunities to people of color. Colleges and universities across America have established positions and offices centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion to help create equitable policies for students, faculty, staff, and administrators of color. Between 2010 and 2020, minority student enrollment increased at American higher education institutions (Hussar et al., 2020). Many colleges and universities adopted policies and practices that specifically sought to increase the representation of staff, faculty, and staff of color (Webster & Brown, 2019). The murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in the year 2020 caused a renewed interest in equity and representation in higher education (Whitford, 2021).. Moreover, with the sunsetting of Affirmative Action for college admissions, there are concerns that this Supreme Court ruling could affect

employment (Sidley, 2023). As the nation awaits future rulings, this study was conducted to add to the discussion on ways to improve hiring pathways.

In 2020, 9% of higher education administrators were Black and male, (NCES, 2023). This number has stayed constant since 2018, only increasing by one percent after 2017. Black men's experiences navigating the challenges and triumphs of reaching executive leadership positions remain largely unexplored in research. While there are Black men in administrative positions, Sparkman (2021) called for more significant action to improve the representation of Black men in leadership positions. Henry (2021) suggested that the lack of Black male voices that hold experiential knowledge within the subgroup contributing to research and literature may be due to the lack of inviting in. To improve the pathway for Black men, Black men who serve or have served in administrator roles at CTCs could prove valuable in aiding the increase of other men from this population. Through a basic qualitative study, this study was designed to improve the hiring pipeline for other Black men seeking ascension into administrator roles with CTCs.

Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed through this study is that there is a low number of Black male administrators at CTCs throughout the United States, despite widespread organizational practices of adopting diversity and equity policies, implementing mentoring programs, and providing professional development. Turner and Grauerholz (2017) reported that Black or African American men and women combined made up only 13% of the higher education administrators' population in 2015. Further, they revealed

that only 34% of that 13% of Black or African American higher education administrators were Black men. In their study, Turner and Grauerholz classified administrators as chancellors, presidents, vice presidents, and deans. Espinosa et al. (2019) reported that Whites held most of the administrative president and provost positions while Black or African Americans stood at 8% in 2016. From 2017 to 2020, the percentage of Black male administrators at public 2 year institutions increased by 1% to 9% (NCES, 2023).

Table 1

Number of White and Black Male Administrators at Degree-Granting Post-Secondary Institutions by Role, Race/Ethnicity, and Sex From 2017 to 2020

Year	Total administrators	White	Black	Difference of Black v. total admins
2020	112,001	84,249	10,046	9%
2019	114,150	86,551	9,986	9%
2018	113,505	86,797	9,816	9%
2017	113,571	87,899	9,637	8%

Note. Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Human Resources component (NCES, 2023).

The pathway for Black men who aspire to administrator roles at higher education institutions is fraught with challenges (Jeter & Melendez, 2022; Sparkman, 2021). Webster and Brown (2019) furthered this notion by pointing to Black men's challenges at PWI. For Blacks and Whites at the same professional level, Jeter and Melendez (2022) highlighted a discrepancy in employment. Sparkman (2021) called for more race-conscious research examining the barriers and successes of African American leaders' career journeys in higher education. Researchers found that despite many higher

education institutions adopting diversity and equity statements specific to hiring faculty and staff of color (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022; Webster & Brown, 2019), the education and training of Black males (Jeter & Melendez, 2022; Turner & Grauerholz, 2017), the creation of mentoring programs (Turner & Grauerholz, 2017), and professional development surrounding hiring strategies and practices (Sparkman, 2021), the problem continues to exist.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Black male administrators' perceptions of hiring barriers and their recommendations to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. The study focused on Black men who have served or are currently serving in administrative and supervisory roles for at least 3 years within the same CTCs.

Research Questions

This basic qualitative study was guided by research questions designed to address the underrepresentation of Black male administrators at CTCs by identifying strategies for improving Black male hiring practices and fostering a more inclusive leadership pipeline.

RQ 1: What are Black male administrators' perceptions of the hiring barriers to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?

RQ 2: What are Black male administrator recommendations for improving the professional pathway to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?

Conceptual Framework

A well-developed conceptual framework is essential for conducting rigorous and meaningful research. Burkholder et al. (2019) suggested that a conceptual framework can better align a study's problem, purpose, and research question. Kivunja (2018) explained that the conceptual framework is the sum of the researcher's thoughts and the operation of organizing ideas and concepts. The conceptual framework aids in setting up how the information will flow throughout the research, the blueprint (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Burkholder et al. (2019) stated that the conceptual design helps to justify the study and suggests that researchers hone this framework with argumentation, explanation, and generation to create a comprehensive model.

Critical race theory in education (CRT-E) is the conceptual framework that grounded this study. Critical race theory (CRT), predecessor to CRT-E, is a social science theoretical framework that first originated to examine the interrelatedness of race and law (Webster & Brown, 2019). Various scholars have used CRT to assess multiple levels of social structures (Ash et al., 2020). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) adapted CRT to specifically examine and analyze higher education (Ash et al., 2020; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Hiraldo, 2010). The CRT-E framework comprises five tenets: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and the critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010). CRT-E provided the conceptual framework used in this study to describe the possible challenges Black men face in gaining administrator positions and their suggestions to refine the pathway for other Black men seeking administrative positions in CTCs.

In the context of increasing diversity in higher education, CRT-E offers a valuable lens for examining the experiences and challenges faced by Black men seeking administrator positions. As faculty, students, and staff of color are entering into more "predominately White" spaces (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018), there is a need to explore conversations centering on race and gender (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) used CRT-E to understand the inequality of education in the United States and analyze the impact of White supremacy culture and racism on and throughout education. Four tenets of CRT-E are most relevant to this study: (a) Whiteness as property, (b) critique of liberalism, (c) the permanence of racism, and (d) counternarratives.

These tenets provide the framework to explore Black men's perceived challenges in seeking administrative positions at CTCs. Parker and Villalpando (2007) provided that CRT can be used as an analytical lens to research the managerial and administrative policies and issues related to race. Scholars have also used CRT to lend a voice to marginalized identities by analyzing Whiteness through the theory's framework (Hiraldo, 2019). Webster and Brown (2019) advised that CRT contests the concepts of meritocracy and equal opportunity to challenge the concepts of color blindness and neutrality.

Scholars have frequently observed that the culture and systems underpinning the higher education industry perpetuate Whiteness and White supremacy. Throughout higher education, access to the capital of education has historically been reserved for White individuals (Briscoe & Jones Baldwin, 2022). Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022) highlighted how systematically inequitable hiring practices exist in higher education to

benefit White practitioners, who have access to privileges and advantages built into the hiring structure and process. The researchers also highlighted how researchers use CRT to shift and challenge the dominant narratives and paradigms often upheld within systems, allowing for investigating higher education's structure and impact on people of color. Using CRT-E allows for positioning the historical facts of people of color being held to a double standard to access rights and opportunities in higher education.

Nature of the Study

The systematic approach and research design that aided in addressing the research question of this study was a basic qualitative study. The main qualifier of a qualitative research approach is to make meaning of the world between those who interact within it (Creswell et al., 2007; Froggatt, 2001; Merriam, 2002). Burkholder et al. (2019) highlighted that a basic qualitative design is most appropriate for connecting experiences with beliefs on process and usefulness. Black men who are administrators in this study had served or were currently serving in administrative and supervisory roles for more than 3 years within the same CTCs.

In-depth semistructured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) were employed to explore the perceptions of Black male administrators at CTCs. Using purposeful sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2019), I interviewed seven Black men who were administrators from CTCs and one past administrator to aid in answering the research questions. As a qualitative research design is flexible (Creswell et al., 2007), the semistructured interview allowed me to enhance data collection by probing for clarification and understanding (Burkholder et al., 2019). This approach provided rich,

detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of Black male administrators at CTCs.

Babbie (2017), Dierckx de Casterlé et al. (2012), and Froggatt (2001) asserted that the qualitative research method is an iterative process. The participants' interview transcripts were analyzed using content analysis employing a priori coding, deductive coding, and open descriptive coding-inductive coding. A priori coding (Saldana, 2021) was based on the conceptual framework CRT-E (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Transcripts were analyzed for codes, categories, and themes (Saldana, 2021). The information was used to inform leadership and stakeholders regarding the retention of Black men who are administrators at CTCs.

Lastly, using interviews in this basic qualitative research approach and design allowed for textual analysis of the perspectives of Black men, who, as a demographic and throughout time immemorial, have been seen as encroaching in and on White spaces. This study allowed these stories to highlight ways higher education institutions can reach the vision of equity for all. Only through the qualitative approach can stories and lived experiences such as these through interviewing bring depth and meaning to an ever-changing society seeking positive social change (see Burkholder et al., 2019; Saldana, 2021). As the voices of Black male professionals in higher education are often missing in higher education discourse, this study sought to add to scholarship.

Definitions

The definitions section is an essential component of a research paper. It plays a vital role in clarifying terms that may be unfamiliar to readers, establishing a foundation

for the study, avoiding misunderstandings, and enhancing the overall clarity and coherence of the paper. By offering clear and concise definitions, all readers of this research will have a shared understanding of the key concepts and terminology used throughout this work.

"Black" male: The term "African American" is used interchangeably with Black throughout this research to refer to American-born males who identify with their African heritage, though some may prefer the term "Black American" to encompass their broader racial identity; the researcher has chosen the latter (Henry, 2021).

Historically White institutions (HWI): An American college or university founded on the premise of White segregation, often having long-standing traditions and practices that reflect their historical focus on White students, faculty, and administrators. HWI is often interchanged with PWI (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022).

Predominantly White institution (PWI): An American college or university that consists of a primarily White (Caucasian) student population; more than 50% (Briscoe & Jones Baldwin, 2022).

Assumptions

This study rested on several key assumptions. Assumptions of a research study serve as a crucial component that outlines the underlying beliefs and premises that the research might take for granted (Simon & Goes, 2018). Firstly, it was assumed that equity and diversity hiring practices in higher education, particularly at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) or historically White institutions (HWIs), had contributed positively to the student experience and shaped campus culture. Secondly, the study

acknowledged the presence of racial and gender challenges faced by Black men in academia. While the specific challenges faced by Black women might differ from those faced by Black men, both groups experienced greater challenges than their White counterparts, regardless of gender identity. Thirdly, it was anticipated that there would be willing participation from Black male executive administrators in higher education, including chancellors, presidents, vice presidents (student and academic), assistant/associate vice presidents, deans, and directors who held governance and managerial authority. Fourthly, the study assumed that all potential participants could be identified through professional associations, organizations and listservs, social media platforms, and referrals from other higher education professionals. Finally, participants were expected to be transparent and honest in sharing their career experiences and providing insights and strategies for other Black men to navigate their professional journeys.

Scope and Delimitations

Two research questions aided in the development of the scope of this study. The research questions are crafted to explore the lived experiences of Black men related to obtaining employment in CTCs and suggestions they may have to improve the career pathway for aspiring Black men. The design of this study is strategic and exclusive to Black male administrators. This study was not intended to address men from other racial groups besides Black men, nor women of every racial group from other higher education institutions. The researcher delimited the study to Black men from CTCs who held

administrator positions for over 3 years. The sample size for this study was limited to 10 - 12 participants.

Limitations

By acknowledging and addressing limitations, researchers strengthen the credibility and validity of their findings and provide a more comprehensive and informative contribution to the field (Simon & Goes, 2018). Limitations identify the potential weaknesses or shortcomings of the research study. Challenges and barriers that might have needed to be addressed while conducting this study were: (a) My role as a state board staff member may have given participants pause because I represent interests both statewide and nationally. To mitigate concerns, I employed practices to protect both participants and the CTCs in which they were employed with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. I disqualified associates I normally conduct business with and communicated the reason for disqualification. I also clearly delineated my role as a researcher, separate from my work role and the role in which they may know me. Additionally, I did not hold any supervisory role over any participants, nor had I ever served in a supervisory capacity over the potential participants in the recruitment pool.

As a Black man in an administrative role within higher education working in equity, diversity, inclusiveness, and barrier mitigation, I employed strategies to combat my biases and the potential act of comparing and entangling my personal and professional experiences to those of the participants. Qualitative researchers use bracketing and reflective journaling to minimize preconceived notions regarding their experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon (Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman,

2012). Thus, I used bracketing and reflective journaling to document and note personal thoughts and processes to ensure integrity and transparency as I engage with data and participants. Finally, another challenge may have been that the administrator's role is time-consuming and demanding; therefore, I could have encountered schedule conflicts and changes, resulting in a longer data collection period. To combat this issue, I remained flexible in communication and availability while recruiting potential participants.

Significance

Black men are underrepresented in administrative roles at higher education institutions. However, many institutions have rewritten their visions, missions, and values to include equity and diversity to promote inclusive work and campus environments. Most often, these institutions seek people of color to fill hiring voids. However, few higher education communities understand how the campus culture and environments they promote are averse to their values (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020). At many higher education institutions, some actively work against establishing an equity-centered campus and an inclusively diverse pool of administrative personnel. By highlighting the limited access to administrative positions for Black men serving at higher education institutions, this study sought to inform positive social change as it provided a voice for Black men whose experiences are rarely included in research to increase the presence of Black male administrators in CTCs across the United States.

This study investigated the professional pathway of Black males becoming higher education administrators and asked for their perspectives on improving that pathway for other Black men. The perspectives of these Black men in administrative roles can help to

prepare other Black men who wish to pursue the same roles. This study also sought to inform higher education administrators, students, faculty, and staff of the potential challenges Black men face when pursuing administrator roles. In the context of positive social change, higher education stakeholders may use the findings from this study to strategically align their efforts to retain, promote, and appoint Black men in administrator positions on their college campuses. By exploring Black men's perceived challenges and barriers in gaining administrative positions at CTCs, scholars can offer suggestions to improve the pipeline for other Black men seeking administrator roles. With this knowledge, CTCs could move forward to be truly diverse instead of adopting the common ideology of diversity that has little implications for positive social change.

Transforming American higher education to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population requires a fundamental shift in leadership at the administrative level. While diversifying faculty and staff is important, the administrative body wields the power to drive systemic change. By actively recruiting and promoting diverse individuals to leadership positions, colleges and universities can create a critical mass of voices that challenge existing norms, dismantle inequitable policies, and implement practical solutions that benefit all students. The need for diverse leadership resonates deeply with the historical exclusion of Black male administrators in PWIs, offering a compelling case for deliberate and sustained efforts to redress this long-standing imbalance.

Summary

This chapter discussed the study's background, definitions, and nature of the study. The study's assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations were revealed, and the significance was highlighted. Chapter 2 will present the literature search strategy and the conceptual framework for this study. The chapter will also review the pertinent literature addressing the historical perspective on race in the United States of America, the origin of Black administrators, and the recruitment and retention of Black male administrators in higher education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Public 2 year CTCs in the United States face a persistent challenge: the underrepresentation of Black men in leadership positions. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Black male administrators' perceptions of hiring barriers and their recommendations to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. . The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the percentage of Black male administrators in public 2 year institutions has remained at 9% since 2017. This lack of progress mirrors a national trend. Espinosa et al. (2019) found limited growth in racial and ethnic diversity among leadership, faculty, and staff at colleges and universities despite a diversifying student body.

Similarly, Pritchard et al. (2020) documented a dominance of White administrators during the 2019-2020 academic year, with people of color relegated to lower-level positions regardless of experience or education. While the education sector sees an upward trend in minority student and faculty representation (Webster & Brown, 2019), a gap remains at the top. This study sought to address this gap by exploring Black male administrators' experiences, career paths, challenges, strengths, and leadership development opportunities in CTCs.

This chapter is divided into several sections: (a) a discussion of the strategies, search terms and keywords, and databases used to locate relevant literature; (b) the conceptual framework, which includes a discussion of CRT-E and the way it informs this study; (c) relevance of the conceptual framework to the study; (d) the experiences of Black males in America; (e) the historical perspective on race in the United States of

America concerning space and education; (f) the origin of Black Administrator (i.e., enablers and barriers and the challenges Black male administrators face); and (g) a chapter summary and conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to gather insights on the topic. The search encompassed various resources within Walden University's library, including peer-reviewed articles from databases like SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. Additionally, Google Scholar was used to find relevant publications beyond these databases. The search strategy involved a combination of keywords and phrases such as *Black men*, *African American men*, *leadership*, *administration*, *Black male administrators in higher education*, *racial leadership in higher education*, *higher education*, *public 2 year colleges*, *junior colleges*, *community and technical colleges*, *institutions of higher learning*, and *Black Americans in higher education positions*. The search primarily focused on recent literature to ensure the most up-to-date information. However, the search was broadened to include relevant reference materials published before 2019 to address any potential gaps in current research.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized CRT-E as its conceptual framework (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT-E allows for analyzing race-based power dynamics within educational settings like higher education (Ash et al., 2020; Cowley, 2022; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). CRT-E was specifically applied to explore the experiences of Black males in executive administrator roles at CTCs. This framework helps to reframe the

issue of low Black male representation in leadership positions by acknowledging the historical and systemic factors contributing to this disparity (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Importantly, CRT-E allows scholars to critically examine how dominant narratives in higher education, often centered on White male perspectives, obscure the unique challenges faced by Black men.

The field of CRT-E draws upon two key predecessors: critical legal studies (CLS) and CRT itself. CLS emerged in the 1970s as a legal movement challenging the traditional view of legal reasoning as objective and independent of social forces (Brown & Jackson, 2021; Busey et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2022). Busey et al. (2023) highlighted how CLS exposed the biases with seemingly neutral legal actors and judgments, revealing the embedded influences of personal, cultural, and political perspectives. However, CLS faced critiques from scholars of color for not adequately addressing the specific dynamics of race-based inequality (Ladson-Billings, 2022). There existed a deep dissatisfaction with the traditional civil rights discourse. This gap of race-based inequity in legal studies (Tichavakunda, 2024) and the slow progression toward racial equality (Busey et al., 2023) spurred many to depart from CLS and cofound CRT in the 1980s, led by figures like Derek Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 2019). CRT aims to specifically examine how race and racism operate within legal systems and broader society, contributing to system inequities (Crenshaw, 2019). In essence, CRT-E represents the next steps in a critical legal tradition, synthesizing CLS's exposure of legal biases with CRT's focus on race to illuminate the complete dynamics of race-based oppression in higher education.

CRT has emerged as a powerful tool for recognizing, analyzing, and challenging racism in our society (Cowley, 2022). Its core mission is to illuminate how race influences various aspects of life, arguing that it is deeply embedded in America's economic, political, social, and even psychological structures (Busey et al., 2023). Scholars like Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022) and Ash et al. (2020) argued that higher education institutions were built to perpetuate this marginalization by ignoring the very concept of racial hierarchies. Hierarchies have made discussing racism difficult, as many falsely believe it is no longer an issue (DiAngelo, 2020; Frey, 2020). Desegregated data, however, exposes the persistent reality of racial disparities, challenging the narrative of a post-racial society.

Defining and discussing racism can be challenging due to its multifaceted nature and evolving context. Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022) argued that racism is not simply individual prejudice or discrimination but rather a complex system of practices and behaviors that perpetuate racial inequality. These mechanisms, often unconscious, act to maintain the racial hierarchy through everyday actions and inactions. Bonilla-Silva emphasized the distinction between overt and subtle forms of racism. While blatant expressions may be less visible today, unconscious biases and discriminatory practices persist. Recognizing both overt and subtle forms is crucial for effectively combating racism. Ladson-Billings (1998) highlighted the ongoing need to research and dismantle these systemic inequities, particularly in education. The researcher argued that as long as racial disparities exist, data will continue to expose them, regardless of attempts to dismiss them as "myths."

Though legal studies were CRT's foundation, it soon expanded into other disciplines, such as education. CRT-E emerged in the late 1990s as an analytical tool to address and understand school inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Inspired by legal studies and its use of CRT to expose injustices, CRT-E advocated for critically examining race in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate emphasized the need for diverse perspectives, particularly those of scholars and communities of color, to be integrated into educational research. They argued that the traditional "color-blind" approach often overlooked the impact of race and systemic racism on educational outcomes. Drawing on Crenshaw's (2019) critique of color-blindness, they highlighted how this neutrality masked the reality of racial disparities and failed to acknowledge the historical and systemic factors contributing to them. For Ladson-Billings and Tate, CRT-E served as a call to action to examine research practices and incorporate the voices of those most affected by educational inequities.

Relevance of Conceptual Framework to the Study

CRT-E is framed by several basic tenets (Avci, 2020; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Hiraldo, 2019) often applied by CRT scholars: the use of counter-storytelling or counternarratives, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and the critique of liberalism. While scholars naturally focus on specific aspects within this framework, this study draws upon four tenets of CRT-E, which are particularly relevant to this study. These tenets provide the framework to explore Black men's perceived challenges in obtaining executive administrative positions at CTCs.

Tenet 1: Whiteness as Property

The "Whiteness as property" tenet of CRT-E examines how Whiteness has historically functioned as a form of ownership and privilege, shaping social structures and access to power (Cowley, 2022). Whiteness itself has been seen as valuable, granting benefits and advantages denied to people of color. This tenet helps us understand the persistent gap between higher education's stated commitment to diversity and the low representation of Black and Brown leaders (Okhremtchuk et al., 2021). It suggests that, despite claims of inclusion, Whiteness continues to function as a form of "property," safeguarding privilege and power. These privileges manifest in various ways, including the inheritance of advantages and subtle mechanisms that disadvantage people of color in hiring, retention, and promotion.

This perspective posits that historically dominant groups, often driven by economic and labor market interests, have created and maintained racial categories primarily based on physical differences (Sow, 2022). Racial categories have been used to justify and perpetuate systemic inequalities, such as slavery and colonialism (Wilkerson, 2020). As a result, individuals who are perceived as White often hold disproportionate power and influence within academic institutions, reinforcing existing hierarchies and maintaining the dominance of certain groups (Okhremtchuk et al., 2021). The concept of "Whiteness as property" suggests that the historical benefits and privileges associated with Whiteness continue to shape societal structures, even in subtle and unconscious ways.

Tenet 2: Critique of Liberalism

CRT acknowledges the limitations of "colorblindness" in achieving racial equality, a concept heavily influenced by the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) decision. Crenshaw (2019) argued that colorblindness, rather than dismantling racial inequities, serves as a tool to maintain the status quo. This tenet of CRT-E, the critique of liberalism, challenges the notion that meritocracy and ignoring race (colorblindness) can automatically ensure racial equality. Crenshaw claimed that colorblindness masks systemic advantages enjoyed by some groups while simultaneously preventing meaningful reforms for disadvantaged communities. Instead of ignoring race, CRT advocates for color consciousness, acknowledging the historical and social context that shapes racial dynamics. This approach allows for targeted interventions to address and dismantle existing racial disparities.

In the context of this study, examining managerial policies and procedures through the lens of CRT's critique of liberalism can be insightful. By studying the experiences of successful Black male leaders who navigated these structures, we can gain valuable insights into the supports and barriers they encountered on their journeys. Understanding their experiences can help identify elements that contribute to career success for Black administrators in higher education, ultimately informing strategies to address potential systemic barriers and promote greater equity.

Tenet 3: Permanence of Racism

This tenet of CRT-E, the permanence of racism, highlights how racism is not an outlier or historical blemish but rather a deeply embedded feature of American society

(Smith, 2020). Smith revealed that systemic racism has persisted even after legal and social reforms, manifesting in the daily experiences of people of color across social, political, and educational spheres. Ladson-Billings (2022) echoed this view, arguing that racism remains a pervasive reality, influencing everything from business practices to relationship formation. The normalized and often undetected nature of racism presents a significant challenge. As evident in the recent Supreme Court decision on affirmative action, *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (2023), attempts to address or discuss systemic racism through frameworks like CRT-E can be met with suspicion and hostility.

However, ignoring or denying the existence of institutional racism only allows it to fester. CRT-E serves as a critical lens to examine the systemic barriers faced by Black men in their pursuit of executive administrator roles in CTCs. Through counter-storytelling and critical analysis, this study asked: Are racial barriers the root cause of the low representation of Black male administrators? Can CRT-E help identify actionable solutions to improve their pathway to success in CTCs leadership? If not, what other factors are at play? Regardless of the specific findings, amplifying the voices of Black men in this discourse is crucial, as their perspectives remain largely absent in mainstream higher education conversations.

Tenet 4: Counter-Storytelling

Counter-storytelling, a central tenet of CRT-E, plays a crucial role in educational research (Ladson-Billings, 2023). Ladson-Billings emphasized the importance of amplifying marginalized voices and experiences to challenge dominant narratives that

often obscure racial inequalities. Counter-storytelling challenges the dominant narratives and norms ingrained within a mainstream culture by highlighting the experiences and perspectives often marginalized or silenced. The emphasis on storytelling stems from recognizing that narratives, unlike seemingly objective data, offer context and nuance to complex social issues.

Ladson-Billings (2022) emphasized the power of stories in education and cultural preservation. While historically marginalized in Western social science research, centering narratives, particularly those of students of color (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018), have gained significant traction over the past decades. This study builds on this work by amplifying the voices of Black men who hold or have held executive administrative positions at CTCs. Their counter-narratives challenge dominant, often inaccurate characterizations that portray them as deficient, unmotivated, or prone to violence. By centering their authentic experiences, this study aimed to contribute to a more nuanced and representative understanding of Black male leadership in higher education.

Criticisms of CRT/CRT-E

Since its inception in 1995, CRT-E has undergone continuous evolution and debate. Scholars like Ladson-Billings (2022) have explored the future direction of CRT-E. One key debate concerns the legitimacy of counter-storytelling, a central tenet of CRT-E. Kennedy (1989) questioned its value, arguing that skin color alone does not determine one's perspective as having more value than another. Cabrera (2018) critiqued CRT-E for lacking a robust theoretical foundation and proposed "hegemonic Whiteness"

as an alternative. Arguing that racism and capitalism are intertwined, Cowley's (2022) work advocates for incorporating Black Marxism into CRT-E. Avci (2020) further suggested that CRT-E needs to fully recognize class and capitalism as independent forces, not simply subcategories of racial injustice.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Experiences of Black Males in American Society

Research often fails to capture the full picture of Black men and boys' lives (Webster & Brown, 2019). These perspectives tend to focus on shortcomings, neglecting the significant influence of societal factors. An individual's success or struggles are deeply intertwined with the privileges and challenges present in their environment (Roman-Greg, 2021). The following section will explore the Black male experience through education systems and criminality in the United States to better understand the challenges Black males face concerning social mobility and advancement to leadership positions.

Education

The educational matriculation of Black men and boys in K-12 is discussed most often in terms of achievement gaps (Hung et al., 2020; Milner, 2012; Morris et al., 2020), completion and transition (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2021; Jackson, 2003; McIntyre, 2023; Temple et al., 2022). For Black males in K-12, there exists an achievement gap between them and their peers of any race and gender (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2021; Temple et al., 2022) and a lesser graduation and transition rate to postsecondary education (Hung et al., 2020). Failure to move through the K-12 education system

successfully creates additional challenges in the future, specifically in gaining employment or transitioning into a postsecondary education.

Morris et al. (2020) pointed to racism and poverty as the primary sources that present disadvantages for Black students. The researchers advised that exposure to these societal ills at an early age contributes to lasting academic effects. The researchers believed that to improve the achievement gap, faculty and administrators in K-12 must continually undergo professional development and preservice training to understand the culture of Black American children.

Researchers have shown that issues for Black children in K-12 have nothing to do with achievement but a gap in opportunities due to the socioeconomic status of most White families (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2021; Hung et al., 2020). Milner (2012) proposed a framework focusing on opportunity gaps, arguing that policymakers' emphasis on achievement gaps overlooks the systemic issues that create educational disparities. Milner contended that framing achievement around White students as the norm disadvantages students of color. Milner contended that this normalization permeates instruction and assessment and ultimately reinforces itself in the student. By shifting the focus to opportunity gaps, Milner believed that educators could move beyond individual deficits and examine the underlying inequities within racist and sexist systems and educational contexts.

Institutions of higher learning must often assess how to address the opportunity gaps within their institutions while simultaneously finding ways to mitigate preexisting gaps that transition with students from K-12 (McIntyre, 2023). Researchers have found

that African American students have historically started their postsecondary journeys at community colleges or other 2 year institutions, often attending institutions of less prominence or departing college before completion (Johnson, 2013). Temple et al. (2022) revealed that of the Black males who transition to postsecondary education, only 54% of those students obtain a degree, specifically at PWI. Researchers again point to opportunity gaps and assess that these gaps are often related to health, housing, food insecurity, and socioeconomic status, which causes barriers to student's academic success, particularly Black males, who have the highest stop-out rate than any race or gender (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2021; McIntyre, 2023). Addressing these systemic challenges requires a comprehensive approach that tackles immediate and long-term barriers, aiming to create equitable opportunities for all students to succeed in higher education.

Several researchers argued that the lack of Black male administrators negatively impacts the success and completion of Black male students at postsecondary institutions and called for a greater presence of these professionals in administrative and faculty positions, specifically at PWI (Henry, 2021; Jeter & Melendez, 2022). Along with the lack of representation of Black leaders, Jeter and Melendez (2022) shared other reasons why Black male students might not pursue careers in education. The researchers believed that Black male students often have negative perceptions of teaching and that schools are oppressive institutions. The researchers stated that Black male educators are vital in shaping a better society. However, there are significant gaps between the need and the number of Black men entering the teaching profession. Increasing the number of Black

male administrators and faculty is crucial for creating supportive and inclusive learning environments that could inspire and empower Black male students to succeed academically and pursue careers in education.

Criminality

Black men in the United States disproportionately face the specter of perceived criminality, a societal stereotype that often overshadows individual realities (Avery et al., 2021; James et al., 2023; Pickett et al., 2022). This pervasive bias subjects' Black individuals to heightened scrutiny and suspicion even in the absence of concrete evidence (Avery et al., 2021). The deeply ingrained association between Blackness and crime distorts public perception and has far-reaching consequences for Black individuals (James et al., 2023). These repercussions influence multiple facets of Black American life, hindering opportunities in education and employment, impacting interactions with law enforcement, and ultimately curtailing the life paths available to Black men in America.

People are quicker to identify individuals with stereotypical Black facial features as "Black" (James et al., 2023). The researchers believed that rapid categorization could lead to increased association of these individuals with harmful criminal stereotypes. These stereotypes are widespread in society and influence how Black men are perceived and judged (Finkeldey & Demuth, 2021). This combination of factors contributes to higher rates of mistaken identification of Black individuals as perpetrators of crimes.

Racial profiling, a form of discriminatory policing, disproportionately targets Black Americans, leading to a higher number of unarmed Bleck individuals being killed

in encounters with law enforcement (Avery et al., 2021; Finkeldey & Demuth, 2021). A study examining the risk of death from police use-of-force in the United States by age, race, and gender found that it was the sixth leading cause of death among young Black men (Marsh & Walker, 2022). Furthermore, the media portrayal of Black males after such incidents often reinforces negative stereotypes, deflecting blame from law enforcement and perpetuating a cycle of bias (Hines et al., 2021). The systemic issue of racial profiling exacerbates existing racial disparities, resulting in disproportionate harm and death for Black Americans, particularly Black men, while simultaneously perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Black Americans' interactions with law enforcement remain a top issue in America as Black men remain the most incarcerated individuals in America (J. M. Williams et al., 2019; K. L. Williams et al., 2019). C. Smith (2009) introduced the school-to-prison pipeline theory, which explains how school policies and criminal justice practices combined push Black male students out of school and into prison at a much higher rate than males from other race identities. Current research suggests that the interment of Black students can be determined between grades K-3 (J. C. Barnes & Motz, 2018; Grace & Nelson, 2019). Even if Black men avoid incarceration, the threat of involvement with the criminal justice system can disrupt educational and career paths. Incarceration significantly affects the employment opportunities and advancement of Black males (Lindsay, 2022). The disproportionate incarceration of Black men, particularly rooted in educational disparities, significantly hinders the pipeline for Black male higher education administrators.

The majority of incarcerated individuals in the United States are housed in local jails, often for minor offenses or pretrial detention (Western et al., 2021). Jail populations are disproportionately composed of people experiencing homelessness, substance abuse, or poverty, frequently perceived as societal outliers rather than serious threats. Despite typically shorter stays compared to prison, the detrimental effects of jail incarceration are profound, especially for Black and Latino men (Western et al., 2021). This experience often catalyzes a cycle of recidivism, as Black men face heightened risks of re-arrest and conviction (Ropes Berry et al., 2020). This pattern underscores the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on Black communities.

Approximately 600,000 individuals are released from correctional facilities annually (Carson, 2018). Secure employment is essential for formerly incarcerated people to reintegrate into society, reduce recidivism, and contribute to the community. However, finding stable, well-paying jobs remains a significant challenge. Research consistently demonstrates that employers often discriminate against individuals with criminal records, particularly Black applicants, who are stereotyped as inherently criminal (Hines et al., 2021; Pager, 2003; Western & Sirois, 2019). This systemic barrier to employment perpetuates the cycle of incarceration, hindering opportunities for rehabilitation and creating a persistent disadvantage for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Western and Sirois (2019) found that racial inequality and the stigma associated with incarceration disproportionately isolate Black Americans from employment opportunities. Their research showed that formerly incarcerated Black men face the most significant barriers to securing jobs compared to any other demographic group. Even

when employed, formally incarcerated Black men often hold low-skilled, low-wage positions with the lowest average monthly compensation. Employed Black men experienced disproportionately high job loss rates within six months. The underrepresentation of Black men in higher education is a systemic issue that contributes to the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals in reentering society and securing stable employment. A criminal record can disrupt the very pipeline that could lead to leadership positions in any employment sector.

College degrees are considered prerequisites for high-level positions, but this advantage is diminished for individuals with criminal histories. While higher education traditionally serves as a pathway to upward mobility, the presence of a criminal record can significantly hinder this progress, particularly for young Black men disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system (Evans et al., 2019). The underrepresentation of Black men in higher education exacerbates this issue by limiting the pool of potential candidates. Research indicates that while a college degree can mitigate some of the stigma associated with a criminal record (Evans et al., 2019), concerns about suitability persist (Stewart & Uggen, 2020). Furthermore, the increasing requirement for advanced degrees for higher-education leadership roles compounds these challenges (Pulley, 2022). This complex interplay of factors creates a formidable barrier for Black men with criminal records, limiting their opportunities for educational and professional advancement.

Black Men in Leadership

Deeply ingrained stereotypes in American culture contribute to prejudice and systemic racism, which have severely disadvantaged Black men. Black men often navigate a system that sets them at a disadvantage yet paradoxically expects them to excel in undervalued and sometimes demeaning roles (Hines et al., 2021). Black Americans in the United States are rarely entrusted with major influence, responsibility, or authority positions. The research highlights racism, both blatant and subtle, as a central cause of these challenges for Black men and the larger society (Ash et al., 2020). These challenges often thwart Black men's ability to be seen as equals or as capable of performing job tasks designated to them.

History of Race, Space, and Higher Education

History of Race and Space

At its founding, the United States government defined who could own land, resources, and even people, inevitably reducing enslaved Black people to mere objects (Ward et al., 2023). In understanding the successes and challenges of Black male administrators in higher education, one must understand and accept that race classifications played a significant role in determining access to property and space in the United States. Furthermore, Black Americans have strived for a sense of belonging throughout history. Bledsoe and Wright (2019) noted that chattel slavery reduced and attributed Black people to being aspatial. The researchers relayed that in the understanding of space, Black people were deemed un-geographic. This legacy of denied space and belonging continues to impact Black administrators in higher education today.

Since America was discovered, space has been a socially constructed and valuable asset (Embrick et al., 2022). Embrick et al. (2022) asserted that control over its use and who has access to space has always been a political issue. The researchers identified how space thrives on the historical codification of Whiteness as a form of property. The historical definition of space itself has created a foundation for restricting access to various activities and locations for Black Americans and other Americans of Color. This restriction is achieved through institutional policies, ingrained social systems, and legal frameworks.

Whiteness and White Space

The United States is fundamentally structured by systemic White supremacy, which perpetuates disadvantage for Black and other marginalized communities (Embrick & Moore, 2020; Joseph-Salisbury, 2019). Joseph-Salisbury (2019) characterizes this as a system of "institutional Whiteness" that underpins socioeconomic disparities faced by Black Americans. Embrick and Moore (2020) further elaborated on how this system is deeply embedded within American institutions, serving to produce and reproduce White supremacist culture. By constructing and maintaining "White spaces," a racial hierarchy is enforced, granting White people unchallenged authority and power (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019). The enduring influence of White supremacy within institutional power structures continues to marginalize Black and other people of color.

Space is more than a physical location; it is a social construct imbued with meaning (Brunsma et al., 2020). "White spaces" emerge when Whiteness is normalized, and the experiences of people of color are marginalized. These spaces are embedded

within organizational structures that perpetuate racial biases, often unintentionally disadvantaging people of color (Brunsma et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023; Withers, 2017). Resources within these organizations are disproportionately allocated to maintain and expand White spaces, limiting opportunities for people of color (Liu et al., 2023). The disproportionate allocation creates a systemic disadvantage that hinders the progress of marginalized groups.

White spaces are reinforced through both formal structures and interpersonal interactions. White norms often dominate in diverse settings (Diamond & Lewis, 2022). While people of color may occupy these spaces, they often experience a complex interplay of privilege and discrimination (Liu et al., 2023). Challenges to White dominance are met with resistance, as White individuals benefit from the status quo (Diamond & Lewis, 2022). Historically, spaces have been racially coded to exclude and exploit people of color (Liu et al., 2023). This dual dynamic of inclusion and exclusion highlights the entrenched nature of racial inequality within social organizations.

The long history of racial hierarchy in the United States has resulted in social institutions that often perpetuate advantages for White people (Evatt-Young & Bryson, 2021; Moore, 2020). Moore (2020) underscored the education industry as a social construct, arguing that schools inherently function as socialization institutions, significantly shaping students' social behaviors and worldviews. Diamond and Lewis (2022) positioned that the education systems in the United States should be considered a White space because their structures and practices reinforce White supremacy. They continue that the education system was constructed in a manner that supported and

reinforced racial hierarchies, and these acts equate the system to being a White space. Diamond and Lewis argued that White people possess a united form of capital within the education system. This capital stems from their social standing, the resources embedded within White communities, and their historical control over educational institutions. This unequal access to resources disadvantages people of color and perpetuates White dominance in education.

The education system plays a significant role in socializing individuals and transmitting dominant ideologies, potentially shaping them to conform to societal expectations and rationalizing and reproducing structures of inequalities (Evatt-Young & Bryson, 2021; Moore, 2020). The historical exclusion of people of color from educational institutions is central to the development of White space. This exclusion provided for the establishment of uncontested norms built on White supremacy that are the foundation of contemporary PWI.

History of Race and Education

Race has been both a political and social construct that significantly influenced the educational opportunities available to Black Americans (D. Rose, 2022). Thelin (2019) stressed that it was never the intent for colleges to serve and educate any other race than Whites (Christian, male). The function of higher education from conception and beyond reconstruction was to preserve the settler colony through the subjugation of enslaved Africans and women (Thelin, 2019; Ward et al., 2023). Rose (2022) described how anti-literacy laws forbade Blacks from seeking education opportunities. The researcher emphasized how Blacks who sought educational opportunities were punished

in the form of whippings, imprisonment, and fines. Due to this violent history, several researchers suggested that the investment into the education of Blacks did not come about due to kindheartedness but to the economic survival of the United States (Allen et al., 2020; Rose, 2022). The historical and systemic denial of education for Black Americans, rooted in White supremacy, created enduring disparities that continued to shape educational opportunities for Black citizens.

While the Civil War did not directly create a widespread educational system for Black Americans, it set the stage for major changes that did (Rose, 2022)—the Reconstruction period brought about the first opportunity for Black Americans to receive literacy and education training through government support (Suryanarayan & White, 2021). During this period, the citizenship of Black Americans was defined, and with it, rights were extended. While the first Black college, Cheney University of Pennsylvania, was established in 1837, support for public higher education from the federal government would not come about until the passing of the Morrill Acts.

Community Colleges

CTCs are a uniquely American model of postsecondary education. Grubbs (2020) praised CTCs as the single most educational investment promoting the equalization of power in the United States. Community colleges are the most cost-efficient and attainable entry gate into postsecondary education programming and credentialing. Gordon and Schultz (2020) shared that as the American population grew, so did the need for new industry skills, which were shifting from predominately agricultural skills. During the

early 1800s, only a small portion of American citizens (White, male) had access to private education.

The Morrill Act of 1862 marked a pivotal moment in federal investment in higher education (Fanshel, 2024; Hawkins, 2021). This legislation established land-grant colleges in each state to offer agricultural and mechanical arts training, expanding educational access (Fanshel, 2024). However, the act's foundation was built upon the dispossession of Indigenous lands, as the federal government granted land expropriated from Native American tribes to states for the creation of these institutions (Hawkins, 2021). Between 1850 and 1890, the U.S. seized over 1.5 billion acres of Indigenous land, the proceeds of which funded public colleges (Fanshel, 2024). While ostensibly race-neutral, the Morrill Act was implemented in ways that systematically excluded Black Americans from its benefits, as states enacted policies that denied Black students access to these institutions.

The first CTCs started as advanced courses after completing the high school credential because educators and parents wanted courses articulated with the current state colleges and universities (Gordon & Schultz, 2020). The first community or junior college that granted an associate degree was the University of Chicago in 1899. The researchers pointed out that other states, such as Minnesota, California, Iowa, Texas, Missouri, and Illinois, sought to establish their junior colleges from the late 1800s.

Gordon and Schultz (2020) highlighted that local public school funds funded many community or junior colleges. However, it was not until the Smith-Hughs Act of 1917 that the federal government invested in these colleges to implement vocational

education. The Truman Commission of 1946 expanded educational opportunities and officially deemed junior colleges community colleges to establish educational opportunities supporting local community needs. Community colleges remain a gateway to higher education, offering traditional academic programs for transfer to 4 year institutions and career and technical training, continuing education opportunities, and valuable community service initiatives (Strohl & Ris, 2023). As a result, community colleges have evolved from locally funded vocational schools into multifaceted institutions serving diverse student populations and community needs.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Freed Black Americans primarily accessed education through private institutions (Rose, 2022). While HBCUs emerged in 1837, federal support for these institutions began with the Morrill Act of 1890 (Rose, 2022; Thomas, 2021). However, HBCUs received significantly less funding and investment compared to PWI. Unlike PWI, HBCUs did not benefit from endowment provisions in the Morrill Act (Allen et al., 2020). Moreover, despite federal mandates for matching funds, states often prioritized funding PWI over HBCUs (Allen et al., 2020). The 1890 Morrill Act foreshadowed the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) by requiring states with segregated higher education systems to provide adequate funding for HBCUs (Rose, 2022). While ostensibly aimed at expanding educational access for Black students, the Act perpetuated racial inequality through the creation of separate, underfunded institutions for Black Americans (Martin & Brooks, 2020; Thomas, 2021).

HBCUs emerged as pivotal institutions in the reconstruction era, crucial in rebuilding the nation following the Civil War. Their establishment was a direct response to the systemic exclusion of Black students from PWIs and the urgent need for educational spaces dedicated to cultivating Black leaders (Allen et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2023). Despite facing significant resource disparities (Allen et al., 2020), HBCUs provided invaluable access to higher education for countless Black Americans, serving as beacons of hope and opportunity in a society marked by racial inequality (Smith et al., 2023). HBCUs have endured as vital pillars of Black intellectual and cultural life, providing a legacy of resilience, academic excellence, and social progress in the face of persistent systemic challenges.

Hawkins (2021) stated that the existential threat to HBCUs was the decision of Brown v BOE. Hawkins stressed that integration did not only specify that separate schools were unequal, but integration also maintained that Black schools were irremediably inferior, causing many Black schools to close and students, faculty, staff, and administrators to seek education in predominately White schools. Brown v BOE was brought up to rechallenge the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v Furgerson* (1896) (Brooks, 2021). Just as *Plessy v Furgerson* (1896) held implications beyond railroad transportation regarding segregated spaces, Brown v Board of Education extended beyond educational institutions (Powell, 2021). The ruling on Brown v BOE, by extension, set the tone to desegregate all public spaces. While the ruling did not overturn *Plessy v Furgerson* (1896), it served as a strong objection from the Supreme Court on the separate but equal doctrine (Brooks, 2021). However, despite its intentions, Brown v

BOE disproportionately impacted HBCUs (Hawkins, 2021). The exodus of Black students, faculty, and resources from previously White institutions threatened the very existence of these vital institutions (Brooks, 2021). The unintended consequence highlights the complexities of dismantling segregation, where progress in one area can have unforeseen negative effects on another.

Black Administrators in Higher Education

The current scholarship on advancement in higher education administration paints an incomplete picture by neglecting the unique experiences of Black men. Research in these areas tends to focus on the dominance of White men in leadership positions (Purcell, 2020) or the challenges faced by Black women navigating these same spaces (Chance, 2022; Johnson & Fournillier, 2023; Pinto et al., 2024). Studies that explore the experiences of people of color in higher education administration often paint with a broad brush (Purcell, 2020; Roman-Greg, 2021), overlooking the specific hurdles and opportunities that Black male administrators encounter (Webster, 2019; Young, 2023). By positioning the experiences of Black male administrators in higher education, scholars gain a richer understanding of the pipeline to administrative positions and the complex dynamics of race and leadership in higher education.

Origins of the Black Administrator

Dr. Patrick Francis Healy is a fascinating and complex figure in the history of American higher education, as he is documented as the first African American male administrator to reach a leadership position at a prestigious university (Holliday, 2018). He shattered racial barriers despite the limitations of his time. He was also the first Black

man to receive a Ph.D. in philosophy, earning his degree from the prestigious Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium.

Healy's background adds another layer of intrigue. Born the son of an Irish planter and an enslaved woman, he legally remained enslaved himself until the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865 (Griffin, 2020). This experience undoubtedly shaped his worldview and perseverance. Despite these challenges, Healy achieved remarkable success, eventually becoming president of Georgetown University from 1874 to 1882 (Griffin, 2020). His legacy extends beyond his administrative accomplishments, raising important questions about racial identity in 19th-century America. While Healy himself may not have identified as Black, his story compels us to consider the complexities of racial categorization and the achievements of African Americans who navigated a world defined by segregation.

Before the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), which outlawed segregation in public schools, Black students, professors, and administrators found their education opportunities largely confined to HBCUs (Holliday, 2018; McGee et al., 2022). The confinement was not simply a matter of preference but a harsh reality of racial segregation in higher education. PWI effectively excluded Black students and faculty, leaving HBCUs as the only viable path for Black intellectual pursuits and leadership development (McGee et al., 2022). This concentration of black talent in HBCUs was vital in nurturing Black scholarship and leadership during a time of profound racial inequality.

Since the 1970s, a wave of diversification has begun to reshape the landscape of PWI students, staff, faculty, and administrators. However, progress remains uneven. A rise in their agency did not accompany the rise in Black student enrollment; Black faculty and staff were not viewed as leaders (Holliday, 2018). Holiday reported that while there has been a notable increase in people of color overall, Black men continue to be significantly underrepresented, particularly in senior leadership positions. Holliday believed that Black male representation in higher education draws similarities to how Blacks were treated in society pre-Civil rights.

Young (2023) specifically highlighted the disparity in community colleges, where the promotion and advancement of Black male administrators consistently lags behind the initial hiring diversity efforts. Affirmative action and diversity programs have undeniably fostered inclusivity and equality among faculty and staff at higher education institutions (Mitchell, 2018). However, a persistent hurdle remains in creating pathways for Black men to ascend to senior administrative roles at PWI (Young, 2023). This lack of representation raises questions about true equity in higher education and deprives institutions of the valuable perspectives and experiences Black male leaders bring (Webster, 2019). Despite progress in diversifying faculty and staff, the underrepresentation of Black men in higher education leadership positions underscores the ongoing struggle for equitable advancement and the need for more intentional strategies to address this disparity.

Challenges and Barrier

The attainment of senior administrative positions in higher education for Black individuals is significantly impeded by systemic racism and the institution's structural limitations (Pulley, 2022; Silva, 2023). Beyond the hiring process, Black executives continue to encounter a range of racist behaviors (Silva, 2023). As a microcosm of broader societal issues, higher education reflects and reinforces racial biases (Webster, 2019). The institution's history and culture often create barriers for Black individuals aspiring to leadership roles, compounded by the fear of retaliation for addressing racial inequities. These intersecting factors contribute to a hostile environment that limits the advancement of Black professionals in higher education.

Black administrators encounter significant obstacles in pursuing higher-level leadership positions within higher education (Okhremtchuk et al., 2021; Webster, 2019). Webster (2019) highlighted the pervasive anxiety experienced by Black administrators as they strive to fit into predominantly White institutional cultures while simultaneously proving their competence. Webster reported that the pressure is exacerbated by a perception among senior leadership that Black administrators lack the requisite skills for advancement. Such stereotypes not only impede career progression but also erode the confidence of Black administrators, leading them to question the legitimacy of their positions and whether they were hired primarily to fulfill diversity quotas rather than based on merit.

Despite the challenges faced by all Black administrators, the presence of Black men in leadership positions enriches higher education. Leaders can create an environment

where Black males with talent thrive by dismantling systemic racism and building inclusive leadership structures. Institutions can foster a nurturing space by acknowledging anxieties and actively tackling unconscious bias. Understanding the experiences of successful Black male administrators can illuminate transferable skills and strategies for future leaders, paving the way for a more equitable future in higher education and a more streamlined pipeline toward higher education leadership.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter's literature review reveals a complex interplay of systemic racism and inequality shaping the lives of Black men. From K-12 through higher education, Black males encounter significant disparities, including achievement gaps and limited opportunities. Moreover, stereotypes and racial bias contribute to challenges in employment and advancement. This study explored Black male administrators' perceptions of hiring barriers and their recommendations to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. By examining the broader context of Black male experiences in American society, this research sought to illuminate the factors influencing their career trajectories. Chapter Three will present an overview of the research method for this study, which includes the research design and rationale, the researcher's role, methodology, recruitment procedures, participation, data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This basic qualitative study aimed to explore Black male administrators' perceptions of hiring barriers and their recommendations to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. In this chapter, I describe the study's research method, including the research design, rationale, the researcher's role, methodology, recruitment procedures, participation, data collection, and data analysis plan. This chapter concludes with issues of trustworthiness and ethical guidelines.

Research Design and Rationale

The study focused on Black men who have served or are currently serving in administrative and supervisory roles at CTCs to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs for Black men. As such, the following research questions helped to understand the unique challenges faced by Black men in attaining administrative positions within CTCs and to identify potential solutions to increase their representation in leadership roles:

RQ 1: What are Black male administrators' perceptions of the barriers to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?

RQ 2: What are Black male administrators' suggestions for improving the professional pathway to employment?

Researchers construct their research designs to answer the research questions effectively. Burkholder et al. (2019) asserted that a basic qualitative research approach is best suited to exploring the relationship between participants' experiences and their perceptions of a process's effectiveness. The study used the basic qualitative approach to

investigate the hiring pipeline for Black men seeking executive administrator positions within CTCs. Also known as an interpretive or descriptive approach, Merriam and Grenier (2019) recommended using this approach to discover and understand the experiences of the people involved. This study sought to understand the experiences of Black male executive administrators at CTCs to aid in streamlining processes that could assist in the success of Black men seeking entry into the field.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher plays a central role. The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry (Burkholder et al., 2019). As the primary instrument, the researcher can foster an intimate connection with the research setting and participants. Karagiozis (2018) underscored the importance of researcher attributes such as trust-building, respect, empathy, and ethical consciousness in conducting ethical and rigorous research. I recognize that the role of a qualitative researcher is complex, demanding a delicate balance of personal and professional qualities to produce credible findings.

The complex nature of qualitative research requires a nuanced understanding of the researcher's role and the potential impact of their positionality. Recognizing the intricate nature of the researcher's role, I committed to a rigorous process of self-reflection. Jamieson et al. (2023) emphasized that critical reflection on positionality, biases, and ethical considerations is integral in research. By scrutinizing my beliefs, experiences, and potential prejudices, I balanced personal and objective perspectives within this study. Moreover, reflexivity is an important validity measure, enabling readers

to critically assess the research through understanding my positionality. This practice was integral to the research process. Traditionally, qualitative researchers have faced a binary choice: participant or observer. However, the complexities of research, particularly when involving personal identity, challenge this simple dichotomy. Burkholder et al. (2019) proposed a nuanced approach with the categories of participant-observer and observer-participant. As a Black male executive in higher education, my shared experiences with potential participants significantly influenced my research positionality. Given that my research focused on improving the pipeline for Black male administrators, the observer-participant role was most appropriate. This position allowed me to maintain a research perspective while acknowledging the potential impact of my identity on participant interactions.

Given my position as a state board staff member for a CTCs state-wide system, there was potential for participants to perceive a conflict of interest, as my role represents both statewide and national interests. To address this, I implemented rigorous measures to safeguard the confidentiality of both participants and their respective CTCs. Pseudonyms were used consistently to protect identities. Furthermore, I avoided involving any associates with whom I had a professional relationship, providing clear explanations for these exclusions. I meticulously distinguished between my research role and my state board staff responsibilities to maintain research integrity, clarifying any potential ambiguities. Lastly, I had no supervisory authority over participants and had never had such a role.

Methodology

Qualitative research enriches the world by providing a deeper, more nuanced understanding of human experiences, behavior, and motivations. Ravitch and Carl (2019) noted that qualitative data collection should be deliberate, thorough, and methodical yet flexible enough to adapt to emergent findings. They suggested that these characteristics meet the goal of qualitative research: seeking and facilitating criticality. This section will provide an overview of the methodology best fitting this basic qualitative study. This overview includes a description of the participant selection process, data collection instrument, interview protocol, and the recruitment, participants, and data collection process chosen to carry out this study.

Participant Selection

This study focused on males who identify as Black or African Americans who have held or currently hold dean or director-level positions or higher at nationally accredited CTCs in the United States for at least 3 years. Participants must have served in top leadership roles at these institutions for over 3 years at a single institution. Age was not a selection criterion as it did not accurately reflect the diversity of individuals in top leadership positions.

I leveraged professional online networks in higher education to identify potential participants, including the Black Student Affairs Professional Group, Black Men in Higher Education, and HBCU Alumni United. Social media platforms (X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook) were used to disseminate the digital recruitment flyer (see Appendix A), including contact information and study eligibility criteria.

Participants who met the criteria were sent informed consent forms via email. The informed consent forms provided detailed information about the purpose of the study, procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of being in the study, and the study compensation information. Those who agreed to participate responded via email with the statement, "I consent." Surmiak (2020) contended that using financial payments in research participation is motivated by increasing recruitment and ensuring participants are compensated for their time, expertise, and effort, maximizing potential benefits, and minimizing risk. To acknowledge participants' time, knowledge, and contributions, those who completed the entire interview and study process received a $15 electronic visa gift card.

For this study, I chose purposive sampling. Ravitch and Carl (2019) suggested that purposive or purposeful sampling is the most common strategy used in qualitative research. This method allowed me to choose the participants best suited to answer the research questions in context-rich detail. The participant criteria for the purposive sampling approach included participants who self-identified as (a) Black or African American males, (b) currently serving or have served, (c) for over 3 years at a single institution that is deemed nationally accredited within the United States. I also employed snowball sampling (Babbie, 2017), as the number of participants seemed low. Snowball sampling occurs when chosen participants assist in recruiting new participants based on who they know and who may meet the criteria.

The saturation of interview answers is a key indicator that the researcher is reaching the end of the data collection process. Moser and Korstjens (2018) explained

that qualitative researchers should sample until data saturation. Once a researcher starts to obtain redundancy in data retrieval, the researcher may have reached saturation. Creswell et al. (2007) provided that most qualitative researchers estimate the number of participants required for a qualitative study based on the type. For example, narrative research would involve interviews with two participants interwoven with artifacts. A case study would select between two and four individuals to determine the meaning of an issue. Phenomenological studies have fewer than 10 participants. Moser and Korstjens (2018) and Creswell et al. (2007) did not provide a specific number for a basic qualitative design. Moser and Korstjens (2018) cautioned that qualitative research does not necessarily require smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies. I sought 10-12 participants for this study to aid in data saturation.

Instrumentation

Semistructured interviews were conducted with Black male administrators to gather rich and detailed data. Qualitative research interviews are valuable for exploring participants' subjective experiences and perspectives on a phenomenon (McGrath et al., 2019). This study sought to delve into the perceptions of Black male administrators regarding hiring barriers and potential improvements in the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. The instrument used for data collection was a customized structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). The protocol included logistical details, an explanation of the interview process, an introductory script, interview questions, and a closing statement. An interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework, introduced by Castillo-Montoya (2016), was used to align questions with research objectives, develop

an inquiry-focused conversation, and gather feedback. The IPR framework is a four-step process designed to systematically develop and refine interview protocols. These steps include (a) aligning interview questions with research objectives, (b) creating an inquiry-based conversation structure, (c) seeking feedback on the interview protocol, and (d) conducting a pilot interview to test its effectiveness.

The development of interview questions was informed by existing literature, particularly the work of Webster (2019) on African American administrators' advancement at PWIs. The conceptual framework, rooted in Whiteness as property, critique of liberalism, permanence of racism, and storytelling, guided the creation of questions. Questions were reviewed and adapted based on feedback from external colleagues of color in high-ranking leadership positions at CTCs to enhance validity. Interview questions were then categorized according to the tenets of the conceptual framework and the study's literature review topics, including experiences of Black males in American society and the history of race, space, and higher education.

Questions were designed to address the research questions (RQs) and elicit in-depth participant responses. A total of 12 open-ended interview questions were developed, with six addressing *RQ*1 and six addressing *RQ*2. These questions were designed to allow for a comprehensive analysis of participants' perspectives and to provide insights into improving the hiring pipeline for Black male administrators at CTCs. The questions were reviewed carefully to align the primary research questions, the conceptual framework, and the research interest.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment

Participant recruitment involved establishing connections with individuals possessing relevant experiences and securing their voluntary agreement to share those experiences (Bonisteel et al., 2021). Bonisteel et al. (2021) added that, contrary to the misconception that recruitment plans are static documents developed solely at the project's outset, the recruitment process is dynamic, often requiring adjustments as the study unfolds. To recruit participants for this study, I used professional online organizations in higher education, such as the Black Student Affairs Professional Group, Black Men in Higher Education, and HBCU Alumni United through Facebook. I also engaged and recruited from my social media pages on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook platforms by creating a digital recruitment flyer. The digital recruitment flyer (Appendix A) had my email address and relevant information to help participants determine if they met the inclusion criteria and wanted to join the study. Participants received the informed consent document via email.

Data Collection

Given the focus on subjective experiences and the need for in-depth exploration, semistructured interviews were the most appropriate data collection method. Participants were expected to participate in a single 90-minute interview conducted via Zoom. This platform offers advantages such as reduced travel, visual interaction, and capturing audio and video data. Following Burkholder et al. (2019), the interview protocol guided the conversation. Semistructured interviews are consistent with qualitative studies by

Creswell et al. (2007) and Pulley (2022) exploring the experiences of Black American leaders in higher education.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed by Zoom and stored on an external hard drive locked in a drawer at my home office. I conducted manual editing based on audio recordings for further accuracy. McMullin (2023) emphasized that the researcher's role in transcription is to deepen understanding of the interview data. McMullins contended that transcribers must exercise significant judgment throughout the transcription process, deciding which utterances and vocalizations to include or exclude and whether to correct grammatical errors, inconsistencies, and redundancies.

After the interview, participants were provided with a debriefing opportunity to reaffirm my commitment to their confidentiality, readdress the study's purpose, clarify any misunderstandings, and address any concerns the participants may have had. Participants received information on how compensation was to be provided. Participants were informed of the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy, which is member checking or participant validation (Motulsky, 2021). Participants were given one week to complete their review and return the transcript with edited mentions through review comments using MS Word. Allowing participants access to the transcripts permits them to review, correct, and edit, which adds to the accuracy of the transcript and ensures data validity and credibility (Motulsky, 2021). By following these procedures, I aimed to ensure the confidentiality, accuracy, and validity of the interview data collected for this research and that research participants exited the study feeling informed and respected.

Data Analysis Plan

While qualitative analysis can be a formidable task (Burkholder et al., 2019), it offers a structured path from raw data to compelling insights that directly address research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Tomaszewski et al. (2020) provided a simple process of analyzing the data from the interview; they suggested first reading the transcription from the interview, highlighting the participant's experience, turning those meanings and experiences into themes, and reviewing the central themes. As this study sought the perspectives of Black male administrators, the best way to analyze the data was to focus on what the participants said as they described their experiences.

Using the software, ATLAS.ti 25 to assist with data analysis, I followed Saldana's (2021) qualitative data analysis and coding guidelines. A combined deductive and inductive coding approach was employed to analyze the interview transcripts. First- and second-cycle coding was conducted to identify and refine codes. This process involves breaking down the transcripts into smaller units of meaning and assigning relevant codes. A content analysis approach was used to examine the coded data. This action involved identifying and interpreting the data's patterns, themes, and relationships. Deductive coding was grounded in the conceptual framework and applied to the transcripts. The task involved identifying predetermined codes based on the tenets used in the study. Simultaneously, open descriptive coding was conducted to allow for emergent themes to arise from the data. This inductive approach involved identifying new codes not anticipated in the conceptual framework.

Fife and Gossner (2024) advised researchers not to shy away from negative or contradictory cases. The researchers expounded that such cases add variety, breadth, and depth to research findings. Coleman (2022) agreed, adding that contradictory data were a common feature of interviews; therefore, researchers are encouraged to capture, analyze, and discuss their presence with their research. Contradictory or deviant cases were to be highlighted in this study, analyzed, and incorporated into the findings, outlining the similarities and differences between the contradictory and typical cases.

Through iterative analysis, codes were refined, grouped into categories, and synthesized into overarching themes (Saldana, 2021). This process involved moving back and forth between data and analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Combining deductive and inductive coding enabled an extensive exploration of participants' experiences within the context of the conceptual framework. The Atlas.ti25 software assisted in making the data analysis process seamless by providing the means to organize data in one place and granting access to multiple tools for coding and analysis. Following this method of data analysis allowed for a rich and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Black male administrators in CTCs.

Trustworthiness

The criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were met to ensure the trustworthiness of quality research (Burkholder et al., 2019; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Trustworthiness in qualitative research hinges on a robust research design, credible researchers, believable findings, and applicable methods. It is the

cornerstone for maintaining qualitative research's academic standing (Rose & Johnson, 2020). By adhering to the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, this research aimed to establish trustworthiness and contribute meaningfully to qualitative inquiry.

Credibility

Credibility, or the believability of research findings based on presented data, is paramount. To bolster credibility, member checking and peer debriefing were employed. Member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with participants to validate interpretations, a process supported by Burkholder et al. (2019). This iterative approach ensured that participant perspectives were accurately represented. Peer debriefing involved a qualified colleague providing an external perspective to challenge assumptions, refine conclusions, and mitigate researcher bias, enhancing the study's trustworthiness.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts and is critical to qualitative research. Researchers must provide sufficient contextual information to allow readers to assess the potential applicability of the results to different settings. Researchers can enhance transferability by offering detailed, rich descriptions of the research setting, participants, and emergent themes. I applied this approach, which is often called *thick description*, to meticulously extract and present participant quotes, narratives, and perspectives to support the transferability of the research (Rose & Johnson, 2020). While researchers cannot guarantee the applicability of

findings to all contexts, providing comprehensive contextual information empowers readers to make informed judgments about potential transferability.

Dependability

Meticulous documentation of data collection and analysis procedures were implemented to enhance the dependability of this study. An audit trail was created to provide a detailed record of research processes, including data collection methods, coding schemes, and decision making rationale contained within a journal of reflective notes. This transparent approach will enable others to scrutinize and replicate the study (Ahmed, 2024). By ensuring a detailed record of research methods, I aimed to promote the study's replicability, which will contribute to advancing knowledge in higher education.

Confirmability

Confirmability, the degree to which research findings can be corroborated by other researchers examining the same data, is a cornerstone of qualitative inquiry. Rose and Johnson (2020) emphasized the critical role of researcher reflexivity in enhancing study validity by acknowledging how personal biases and perspectives influence the research process. Explicitly outlining my gender, ethnicity, and personal experiences at the outset, I endeavored to disclose potential biases transparently. Reflecting through journaling, member checking, and peer debriefing contributed to the study's confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). By acknowledging and addressing my biases and perspectives, I aimed to enhance the confirmability of this study, ensuring that other researchers can corroborate the findings.

This research employed several strategies to enhance trustworthiness and confirmability. Peer debriefing was used to validate interpretations and mitigate personal biases. Participants were offered to provide feedback by sharing anonymous data in a draft report, ensuring accuracy and relevance. Additionally, incorporating direct quotes and participant narratives helped to strengthen the study's credibility. A concluding reflective analysis explored how the research process has shaped my understanding of the topic and worldview. This reflexive approach contributed to confirmability, allowing for a more nuanced and trustworthy understanding of the research.

Ethical Procedures

Past instances of unethical research practices highlighted the need for strong codes and policies to protect research participants and ensure data integrity. To this end, institutional review boards (IRBs) were established to uphold and enforce three fundamental ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Burkholder et al., 2019). These principles are translated into concrete practices, such as honoring participants' autonomy, minimizing harm, and ensuring equitable treatment. The following section delineates my commitment to upholding these ethical standards throughout the dissertation research process, encompassing participant interaction and data management.

Treatment of Human Participants

Before commencing research, I obtained approval from the IRB #12-05-24-033347. Qualitative research involves intimate interactions with human participants, underscoring the need for ethical sensitivity and respect (Mirza et al., 2023). This study's

participants received informed consent detailing the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Building on past experiences, I prioritized minimizing physical, psychological, and social harm by carefully crafting interview questions and selecting appropriate interview settings. Rigorous measures were implemented to safeguard participant privacy and confidentiality. By adhering to these ethical principles, I created a respectful and supportive environment for participants, fostering trust and ensuring the integrity of the research.

Participant Recruitment and Screening

Participants were recruited through transparent and ethical means, such as posting digital recruitment flyers on relevant platforms or contacting targeted groups. Informed consent was obtained from all potential participants before their involvement in the study (Mirza et al., 2023). Those who agreed to participate responded via email with the statement, "I consent." This process provided detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and participants' rights. Screening procedures were conducted to verify participant eligibility based on the study's inclusion criteria and to ensure their safety. All interactions with participants adhered to the highest ethical standards, respecting their rights, dignity, and confidentiality. Participants were treated with respect and courtesy throughout the study, and their privacy will always be protected using pseudonyms.

Ethical Considerations and Participant Protection

Several ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. Participants could decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without

penalty. I offered phone conversations or email correspondence opportunities to accommodate potential concerns or questions. If participants expressed hesitation during the study, I reiterated their right to withdraw and addressed any concerns to the best of my ability. To maintain objectivity and protect participant confidentiality, I excluded individuals with whom I had a professional or business relationship from the study. There were no participants with whom I had a professional or business relationship considered for this study. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate data collection. A $15 electronic Visa gift card was provided upon study completion to compensate participants for their time and effort. Mirza et al. (2023) contended that incentives are intended to acknowledge participants' contributions without compromising the study's integrity.

Treatment of Data

To ensure participant confidentiality, I employed a multipronged approach. Following Ngozwana (2018), all transcribed and translated data utilized pseudonyms to anonymize participants. Additionally, I built a rapport with participants, emphasizing their right to withdraw from the study at any point. This act involved clear communication throughout the research process. Beyond these measures, I was committed to adhering to the ethical guidelines that Walden University's IRB and my advisory committee established. These guidelines encompassed data security, participant protection, and responsible research conduct. To further safeguard participant privacy, all interview data and related information are stored on a password-protected laptop and will be securely deleted after 5 years, following IRB-approved protocols. Finally, I

acknowledge that data collection did not commence until IRB approval was granted. I diligently completed all necessary steps, including seeking IRB approval from Walden University, before initiating interviews and data collection.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodological framework for this qualitative study. It outlined the research design, rationale, and the researcher's role, while addressing methodological considerations, trustworthiness, and ethical implications. The chapter delved into the recruitment strategy, data collection instruments, and analysis plan. Strategies for establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were detailed to ensure rigor. Ethical procedures were outlined to protect participant rights and maintain research integrity. The subsequent chapter will present the study findings, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and emergent themes.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Black male administrators' perceptions of hiring barriers and their recommendations to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. This study focused on Black men who have served or are currently serving in executive administrative positions that feature governance and managerial duties, such as chancellor, president, vice president, dean, or director, at nationally accredited higher education institutions, specifically CTCs.

Two research questions guided the inquiry into the perceptions of Black men who have ascended to executive administrative positions in CTCs. The research questions addressed the underrepresentation of Black male administrators at CTCs by identifying strategies for improving Black male hiring practices and fostering a more inclusive leadership pipeline. The two research questions are:

RQ 1: What are Black male administrators' perceptions of the hiring barriers to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?

RQ 2: What are Black male administrators' recommendations for improving the professional pathway to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?

This chapter presents the study's results, encompassing the research setting, participant demographics, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and measures to ensure trustworthiness. The chapter begins with a description of the study's setting and the demographic characteristics of the participants. Subsequently, the procedures employed for data collection and analysis are detailed. The chapter then outlines the emergent themes, categories, and key findings derived from the data analysis.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and a transition to Chapter 5, which discusses the results.

Setting

I employed purposive sampling for this basic qualitative study to conduct semi-structured interviews with eight Black men in administrative positions at CTCs. Participant recruitment was facilitated by distributing digital recruitment flyers posted on professional online communities focused on higher education, including the Black Student Affairs Professionals Group, Black Men in Higher Education, and HBCU Alumni United, accessed via Facebook. Additionally, flyers were shared on my social media platforms, including X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook. The flyer provided an overview of the study, contact information, and a link to a criteria-matching questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to screen for eligibility, allowing only those who met the study criteria to complete it fully. Eligible respondents were then emailed the Informed Consent Form. Of the 16 individuals who completed the questionnaire, 13 consented to participate. Nine responded to follow-up emails to schedule interviews; however, one participant later canceled without rescheduling. Ultimately, eight participants were interviewed for the research.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms after confirming their interview dates and times. The pseudonyms were intentionally chosen to reflect culturally resonant names commonly found within the Black American community and were selected from names familiar to me through my own personal networks and experiences. This approach aligns with the narrative tradition in qualitative research, which emphasizes the importance of

honoring the identities and contexts of participants (Ely et al., 1998). Moreover, as Pretorius and Patel (2024) argued, the thoughtful selection of pseudonyms, particularly those reflecting participants' cultural backgrounds, can serve as a form of epistemic justice, reinforcing authenticity and voice while upholding confidentiality. Using a culturally meaningful pseudonym preserves narrative clarity, respects each participant's individuality, and enhances the quality of the findings' relational aspects.

The participants resided in various locations across the United States. To ensure privacy and promote open dialogue, each participant selected their preferred setting for the interview. Given the geographical dispersion of the participants, interviews were conducted via Zoom, a secure virtual video conferencing platform. To maintain confidentiality, I used a password-protected laptop and conducted all interviews from my private home office. No individuals other than the participants and I were present during the interview sessions.

Organizational and Personal Conditions

To establish rapport and gather rich contextual background, the interview protocol began with an introductory question inviting participants to share their personal and professional journeys, including their backgrounds, current and former executive leadership roles within CTCs, and the duration of their service in those positions. Additional insights into the organizational and personal conditions that shaped participants' experiences emerged during the interviews. For instance, Keierre and De'Angelo entered higher education after pursuing careers in other industries. Keierre served in the military, while De'Angelo spent 16 years in corporate retail management

and later operated his own business for a decade. Before transitioning into higher education administration, both had developed leadership programs tailored to their respective industries. In contrast, Sharrod and Mycah initially pursued careers in the healthcare field. They took positions in higher education to finance their master's programs. They intended to take advantage of tuition waiver benefits offered by their institutions; however, both employers later discontinued these programs. As a result, Sharrod and Mycah chose to remain in higher education as a long-term career path.

Demographics

Participants were intentionally selected based on specific criteria and knowledge relevant to the research question, a method known as purposive sampling. The criteria for this study required participants to (a) identify as Black or African American males, (b) currently serve or have previously served in executive leadership roles, and (c) have held such roles for a minimum of 3 years at a single nationally accredited institution within the United States. All participants met these inclusion criteria, possessed relevant professional experiences directly aligned with the research topic, and contributed rich, detailed insights from their lived experiences to inform strategies for improving the hiring pipeline for other Black men in higher education leadership. The interview protocol included an introductory question to foster rapport and gather contextual information. Participants were asked to describe their backgrounds, roles in executive leadership within CTCs, and the duration of their service in current and past leadership positions.

Table 2

Participant Background Information

Participant	Years in an executive leadership role	Role	Institution type	Highest level of education
Casey	4	Provost	Community	Doctorate
De'Angelo	6	Ex. Director	Community	Master's
Keierre	3	Ex. Director	Technical	Master's
Leon	6	Dean	Community	Master's
Mycah	5	Vice President	Community	Master's
Sharrod	15	Associate VP	Community	Master's
Vontrell	3	Dean	Technical	Doctorate
Ware	10	Associate Dean	Community	Master's

Note. To preserve the participants' identity, maintain confidentiality when developing the transcriptions, and distinguish between participants' quotations within the study, pseudonyms were used instead of participant names.

Data Collection

Data collection began after IRB approval and continued until data saturation was achieved. All participants were asked the same questions, following the interview protocol, to ensure consistency and alignment with the research focus. Probing questions were used to clarify responses or encourage participants to elaborate on their thoughts. Participant recruitment started on December 6, 2024, and the last interview was conducted on February 5, 2025. However, a final interview was scheduled for March 11, 2025, and was canceled by the participant on the day of the interview. Although it was challenging to secure committed participants, saturation was ultimately reached with eight individuals.

Day of Interview

I conducted all interviews from my home office and recorded field notes electronically. I modified the interview protocol to streamline the process by adding a notes column beside each question. A separate protocol notes page was prepared for each participant, serving as a guide to ensure questions were asked correctly and as a space to document ideas, interpretations, participant reactions, opinions, and any probing questions that emerged during the conversation. While the intended duration for each interview was 90 minutes, the actual time varied depending on the depth of each participant's experience, ranging from 40 to 105 minutes.

Table 3

Participant Length of Interview and Number of Transcript Pages

Participant	Length of Interview (mins)	# of transcribed pages
Casey	75	19
De'Angelo	89	17
Keierre	57	15
Leon	88	20
Mycah	96	20
Sharrod	104	20
Vontrell	39	10
Ware	66	20

Preparation for Analysis

Using Zoom's transcription features significantly reduced the time required to manually transcribe each interview. After completing each session, I informed participants they would receive their transcripts for member checking within 72 hours. I reviewed each recording multiple times to edit and refine the transcripts. This process

involved removing redundancies and redacting identifiers, such as names, locations, job titles, and references to specific agencies or organizations, that could reveal the participant's identity.

Cleaning the transcripts allowed me to engage more deeply with the data by repeatedly listening to the recordings and taking additional field notes based on emerging insights. Once edited, the transcripts were emailed to participants within 72 hours for review and validation. However, the transcripts of two participants were delayed due to the holidays between December 21, 2024, and January 6, 2025. No data collection or analysis occurred during this break.

Out of the eight participants, four responded to the member checking request. Two provided edits for clarification and inclusion, while the other two confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts without changes. Follow-up emails were sent to the remaining four participants after 7 days had passed with no response. An additional email was sent after 7 days to inform participants that they still had time to submit their responses. Still, no one replied. Participants' files were stored per the data collection process outlined in Chapter 3. The member-checking process concluded for those cases once I began the second coding pass through.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began after the completion of the eighth interview and the conclusion of the member-checking process. I approached the analysis by examining each research question individually. First, I analyzed participants' perspectives on barriers to employment. Then, I reviewed their recommendations for improving the

professional pathway for other Black men. A total of 12 interview questions were asked during the data collection process. These questions were evenly divided, with six questions for each of the two research questions. This structure allowed me to focus on one research question at a time, making the analysis process more manageable and organized.

The same analytical approach used for the first research question, which explored barriers to employment, was also applied to the second research question, which focused on recommendations to improve the hiring pipeline for Black men. The responses from the eight participants, each serving at different CTCs across the United States and offering diverse perspectives on barriers and recommendations related to executive administrative employment, allowed me to triangulate the data, thereby deepening my understanding of the research topic (see Carter et al., 2014). This consistency in approach ensured coherence in thematic development and facilitated comparison across both research questions. By using the same coding framework, I was also able to identify areas of alignment and divergence in participant perspectives, further enhancing the rigor and credibility of the findings.

Emergent Codes, Categories, and Themes

While theory and existing literature provided the foundational basis for this study, the core of the analysis centered on the lived experiences and responses of the eight participants. Tomaszewski et al. (2020) outlined a straightforward approach to interview data analysis, which involves carefully reading the transcript, identifying key participant experiences, translating those experiences into thematic codes, and then reviewing the

emergent themes for central patterns and meanings. Through their answers to the open-ended interview questions, I identified rich, emerging themes that offered meaningful insights into their perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to employment in executive administrative roles. The data collected during the initial interviews revealed significant and recurring themes, which helped to deepen my understanding of the participants' unique experiences and viewpoints. Prior research did not impose these emergent themes; instead, they arose organically from the narratives shared during the interviews.

The study's conceptual framework, CRT-E, derived from a review of the relevant literature, served as a guiding lens throughout the research process. It provided a structure for comparison, allowing me to examine how the findings from this study aligned with, diverged from, or extended existing theories and concepts. By linking the emergent themes with established ideas in the literature, I was able to highlight new insights and contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities Black men face in pursuing executive administrative positions in CTCs.

The analysis process followed three key steps (see Table 4). First, I identified initial codes by extracting significant words and phrases from each participant's response. Second, I grouped similar codes together to form broader categories. Third, I reviewed each category and developed overarching themes to capture the core ideas reflected in the data. To aid in this manual process, I added a column to the transcript to code initial

codes and to include notations and comments. I then printed each interview transcript to begin coding.

Table 4

Codes, Categories, and Themes

				Code	Categories	Themes
RQ 1.	Institutional racism	Racial microaggression		Tokenism	Institutional racism and bias	Systemic Barriers in Hiring Practices
	Bias in hiring	Racial stigma		Whiteness	Inequitable hiring practices	
	Selection bias	Trivial eliminations		Lack of equal opportunities	Inequitable promotional practices	
	Discriminatory practices	Underrepresentation		Preferred qualification	Lack of representation	
	Administrative barriers	Racism		Stereotypes	Lack of role models	
	Threat perception	Perceived disadvantage		Cultural judgement	Stereotypes	Adv Barriers Rooted in Systemic Stereotypes
	Intentional exclusion	Comparison		Workplace discomfort	Misconceptions about Blk male leadership	
	Misidentification	Authenticity		Isolation	Microaggressions	
	Masculinity	Invisibility		Code-switching	Authenticity pressure	
	Misconception	Identity challenges		Misunderstanding	Workplace exclusion	
	Curriculum gaps	Pathway limitation		Career navigation	Educational gaps	Limited Pipeline and Prep Gaps to Adv
	Career path knowledge	Misalignment		Lack of rep	Leadership prep gaps	
	Misleading support	Training gaps		Lack of theoretical knowledge	Limited pathways	
					Lack of sponsorship	

(table continues)

	Educational background	Entry-level	Loss of advisor	Lack of mentorship	
	Connection challenges	Community expectations	Networking challenges	Barrier to Building social capital	Limits to Building Social Cap and Pro Networks
	Relationship dynamics	Support deficiency	Unsupportive environment	Lack supportive networks	
	Political navigation	Strategic hesitation	Favoritism	Exclusion from strategic opportunities	
	Perfectionism	Unrealistic	Scrutiny	Excessive performance pressure	Pressure to Validate Competence though Over-performance
	Qualification mismatch	Questioning experience	Professional competence	Credential and capability questioning	
RQ 2.	Fair evaluation	Candidate advocacy	Diverse interview committee	Transparent and equitable hiring practices	Improve Institutional Hiring Practices and Account
	Salary disclosure	Audits	Accountability	Systemic change	
	Equity improvements	DEI implementation	Thorough search	Accountability	
	Intentional processes	Meaning representation	Candidate assessment	Policy evaluation	
	Institutional change	Transparent processes	Challenge status quo	Process evaluation	
	Career guidance	Student prep	Administrative readiness	Training and skills building	Reform Leadership Prep and Pipeline Programs
	Practicum integration	Curriculum alignment	Financial literacy	Formal leadership pathways	

(table continues)

Succession planning	Curriculum reform	Budget management course	Graduate program reform	
Leadership internship	Fundraising techniques	Professional development	Prep for CTCs sector	
Micro-credentialing	Externship	Peer support and mentorship	Institutional financial literacy	
Cultural awareness and integration	Sense of belonging	Diversity training	Inclusive supportive environments	Establish a Culture of Belonging and Inclusion
Networking opportunities	Community engagement	Engage minority voices	Cultural competence and representation	
Storytelling	Administrative accountability	Exposure	Social and professional capital	
Affinity groups	Inclusive leadership	Combat racism	Storytelling, visibility, and voice	

Manual Coding Process

Open and axial coding were applied during the manual coding process to identify and organize patterns within the data. Open coding involves breaking down data into discrete parts to identify initial codes and concepts. In contrast, axial coding focuses on connecting those concepts to form broader categories and relationships (Saldana, 2021). Several emerging ideas were revealed and subsequently organized into themes.

I highlighted common and repetitive words or phrases in the transcripts. I began identifying each participant's perspective based on the relevant interview question. Information that participants indicated as important was marked and coded accordingly. I

conducted the open coding process twice to ensure thoroughness and accuracy. After establishing the initial codes, I searched for patterns and relationships.

Using axial coding, I grouped similar codes together to develop broader categories. As themes emerged, I engaged in reflexive practices by reviewing participants' comments and bracketing my thoughts, assumptions, and preconceptions regarding the barriers to executive administration faced by Black men. I also consulted with my dissertation chair to discuss these reflections. Based on that guidance, I continued journaling and took periodic breaks from data analysis to maintain objectivity and avoid bias.

The emerging themes that surfaced from the perspectives of Black male administrators during the manual coding process regarding hiring barriers to obtaining employment included the following: (a) bias and discriminatory hiring practices, (b) stereotypes and gendered racism in the workplace, (c) systemic racism and institutional bias, (d) networking and social capital barriers, and (e) perception of competency. The themes that emerged from the manual coding of participant recommendations for improving the hiring pipeline were as follows: (a) unbiased and transparent hiring procedures, (b) systemic change and accountability, (c) preparedness and readiness through training, (d) mentorship and sponsorship, and (e) inclusive and supportive environments.

Automated Coding Process Using ATLAS.ti 25

In addition to manual coding, the ATLAS.ti 25 software was used to automate the qualitative data coding process. ATLAS.ti 25 is a qualitative data analysis software used

to organize, code, and interpret large volumes of data sources. It helps researchers identify patterns, develop themes, and draw insights by systematically managing and analyzing qualitative information. Using an inductive manual coding process and ATLAS.ti 25 enhanced the rigor of theme development and helped ensure objectivity in the findings. The software facilitated the visualization of code co-occurrences, identifying thematic patterns, and examining links across participant narratives. ATLAS.ti 25 also allowed for more efficient handling of large data segments and enabled the systematic retrieval of supporting quotes. Integrating this software with the manual process strengthened triangulation, promoted analytical consistency, and provided a robust framework for interpreting the data in alignment with the study's methodological foundation.

Each participant's response was uploaded into ATLAS.ti 25 to support the management, analysis, and reporting of data. The software helped identify links and connections across various aspects of the participants' responses. Several key patterns emerged as I moved through repeated cycles of transitioning from codes to categories and then to final themes. The use of ATLAS.ti 25 confirmed the themes identified during the manual coding process. There were slight variations, but overall, the process validated the findings more.

The Atla.ti25 software identified the following barriers to employment for Black men pursuing administrator roles: (a) institutionalized racism and bias, (b) inequitable hiring and promotional practices, (c) stereotypes and misconceptions, (d) educational and leadership gaps, (e) lack of supportive networks, (f) competency perceptions, and (g)

expectation gaps. Recommendations generated by the software included: (a) equitable hiring practices, (b) building training/skills opportunities, (c) cultural competency and inclusion, (d) building social and professional capital, and (e) systems change and accountability.

Summary of Key Themes

A total of eight distinct themes emerged from the data analysis, reflecting both the perceived barriers Black male administrators face in the hiring process and their recommendations for improving access and advancement. Five key themes emerged to reflect the barriers, and three key themes to reflect recommendations for improvement (see Table 3). All eight themes aligned with participants' perspectives on the hiring pipeline for Black male administrators. Each participant, though unique in their own experiences, shared responses that consistently supported the emerging themes for each research question.

The overall themes identified for the first research question concerning barriers were: (a) systemic barriers to hiring practices, (b) advancement barriers rooted in systemic stereotypes, (c) limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement, (d) limitations to building social capital and professional networks, and (e) pressure to validate competences through overperformance. The overall themes related to the second research question, offering recommendations, were: (a) improving institutional hiring practices and accountability, (b) reforming leadership preparation and pipeline programs, and (c) establishing a culture of belonging and inclusion. Each theme will be presented

and explained in the results section, starting with the first research question and then the second.

Clarifying Related Themes

While there was some thematic overlap among the findings in this study, each identified theme stands on its own with distinct characteristics and implications. For instance, there may be a perceived connection between the themes perceptions of competence and limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement. It could be argued that limited access to professional preparation and leadership development opportunities may contribute to assumptions about a candidate's competency. However, in the context of this study, limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement were characterized by unequal access to mentorship, leadership training, and structured career development. Brown (2025) supported this framing by demonstrating how systemic inequities in professional pipelines often reflect broader patterns of racial exclusion, disproportionately hindering the advancement of marginalized candidates. These limitations include the absence of targeted development programs, inconsistent institutional support, and reliance on informal networks that often exclude Black male professionals from early leadership identification and preparation.

Conversely, perceptions of competency emerged as a more prominent theme after the hiring stage. Despite possessing strong credentials, qualifications, and relevant experience, Black men frequently encountered skepticism regarding their abilities and legitimacy in their roles. These perceptions, often shaped by racial and gender biases, contributed to ongoing challenges in establishing credibility and advancing

professionally. Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations supports this distinction, noting that racial prejudice is often embedded in workplace evaluation systems, allowing perceptions of competence to be filtered through subjective, racially coded expectations. Thus, while related, these two themes operate at different stages of the hiring and employment process: Limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement shape access to leadership opportunities, while perceptions of competency influence treatment and advancement once in administrative roles.

Discrepant Cases

While most of the participants articulated clear experiences of racial bias, exclusion, and systemic hiring barriers in CTCs, Casey's interview emerged as a notable, discrepant case. Unlike others, he did not identify direct discrimination in his own hiring journey. In contrast, he described a career trajectory shaped largely by mentorship, internal networks, and what appeared to be institutional acceptance. However, a deeper analysis reveals that this seemingly untroubled path may be better understood through the lens of assimilation and self-silencing. Casey's approach, through measured navigation, restraint, and strategic politeness, mirrored a familiar survival tactic in White-dominated professional environments: avoiding disruption to maintain perceived safety.

Casey's willingness to admit that he has not had a Black male mentor, and his acknowledgment that he has had to "check [himself]" when evaluating other Black male candidates, speaks to an internalized suspicion of others who share his identity. His quiet distancing from other Black men, coupled with his account of benefiting from being perceived as "ready" when opportunities emerged, illustrates a broader pattern shaped by

societal norms and conditioning. In systems where Blackness is often viewed through a deficit lens, assimilation becomes a pathway to success. Yet, it also perpetuates the invisibility of racialized barriers. Casey's case does not refute the presence of hiring inequities by minimizing friction, avoiding confrontation, and unconsciously reproducing the very fears and judgments imposed on them by White institutional structures.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I examined the concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research through the lends of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four parallel criteria, as applied in qualitative research, provide a robust framework for evaluating the rigor and integrity of a study (Enworo, 2023). In this section I elaborate on the specific strategies implemented throughout the research process to uphold these standards and ensure that the findings are credible, contextually grounded, and reflective of participants' lived experiences.

Credibility requires that data analysis outcomes are descriptive and accurately reflect the participants' responses. To ensure credibility, I used audio recordings of participant interviews and member checking to verify that participants' responses were correctly captured in the transcripts (see Burkholder et al., 2019). Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts, provide feedback, clarify statements, and expand upon their answers if needed. Participants confirmed that the information presented was honest and accurate. Recording and verifying the interviews also helped minimize my biases, ensuring I did not misinterpret participant responses. In addition, recording allowed me to review the data multiple times throughout the analysis process.

Credibility was further strengthened by achieving data saturation, which occurred when no new information emerged, and no new themes were identified. I also enhanced credibility by openly acknowledging my role as an executive administrator within a state CTCs system for each participant.

To ensure transferability, I provided detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and findings, along with sufficient quotes to allow readers to understand the context of the study. According to Rose and Johnson (2020), providing "thick descriptions" that involve carefully extracting and presenting participant narratives, quotes, and perspectives supports the transferability of findings. Interview audio was transcribed using Zoom's automated service, and I manually edited the transcripts to ensure further accuracy. I also gave careful attention to participant selection, using a purposeful sample of eight individuals who identified as Black or African American and who currently hold, or have previously held, dean- or director-level positions (or higher) at nationally accredited community or technical colleges in the United States for at least 3 years.

I employed dependability strategies to ensure that findings were consistent and could be replicated. I verified participants' responses and themes from the interviews to ensure accuracy. An audit trail was maintained to document the research process, including data collection methods and coding schemes. Ahmed (2024) advised that audit trails enable other researchers to replicate a study, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in higher education.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I continuously reflected on my positionality and assumptions to ensure that biases did not influence the results, thereby addressing the confirmability of the findings. I participated in debriefing sessions with my dissertation chair and an external academic community, employing reflexivity to critically examine my thoughts, assumptions, and emerging interpretations. This process helped me recognize and address any biases I may have held as a Black man and researcher. I maintained accountability throughout the study by consistently coding data, enhancing intra-coder reliability. Data were coded both manually and with the assistance of ATLAS.ti 25 software. Codes were organized into categories, from which eight major themes emerged: (a) systemic barriers to hiring practices, (b) advancement barriers rooted in systemic stereotypes, (c) limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement, (d) limitations to building social capital and professional networks, (e) pressure to validate competences through overperformance, (f) improve institutional hiring practices and accountability, (g) reform leadership preparation and pipeline programs, and (h) establish a culture of belonging and inclusion. Using two methods for coding the data increased intracoder reliability and strengthened the overall trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Results

The findings of this study center on the perceptions and experiences of seven Black men who are currently serving and one who has served as executive administrators at a CTCs in the United States. The participants' responses to the interview questions provided the emerging themes. Each theme is presented and explained, beginning with

Research Question 1 and ending with Research Question 2. Two research questions guided this study.

Research Question 1

What are Black male administrators' perceptions of the hiring barriers to obtaining employment in a community/technical colleges? In response to Research Question 1, participants identified several persistent challenges. They reported that the primary barriers include: (a) systemic barriers to hiring practices, (b) advancement barriers rooted in systemic stereotypes, (c) limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement, (d) professional networking and social capital, and (e) pressure to validate competences through overperformance.

Systemic Barriers to Hiring Practices

The first theme to emerge from data analysis was systemic barriers to hiring practices, which participants encountered through their educational and professional experiences. These include references to institutional racism, inequitable hiring and promotion practices, and a lack of representation of Black men in senior leadership roles. Participants shared accounts illustrating how these barriers influenced their career progression and shaped the expectations placed upon them in administrative settings. For example, some recounted early education experiences characterized by limited support or lowered expectations. In contrast, others reflected on instances where their qualifications were overlooked during hiring or advancement processes. Additionally, participants reported experiencing microaggressions and narratives that subtly questioned their

competence and legitimacy within predominantly White institutional environments. Vontrell stated:

> Kindergarten through graduate school taught me how to navigate an institution that viewed me one way, but I didn't fit certain stereotypes. It taught me how to code-switch in a world that sees me one way, although I present myself differently. And that sometimes made me feel like I wasn't supported to be there.

Keierre reflected on an early educational messaging, stating, "a recurring theme I encountered during K-12 was that you're probably going to be dead or in jail by the time you're 21; I heard that a lot from high school counselors and teachers. Those sorts of things." These reflections illustrate how participants encountered systemic bias as early as K-12 education, which, according to their accounts, shaped their approach to navigating future academic and professional environments.

In higher education, these biases manifest in both subtle and overt ways, which Casey described as a persistent and systemic obstacle within educational administration. Casey stated:

> Sometimes, White people and even other demographics expect less of us. Or feel like we show up with some type of deficit. They feel as if they need to give Black leaders a stepping stool or some training wheels. As opposed to us just arriving on the scene and being seen as unprepared.

The data revealed that hiring practices were often opaque, with participants noting that internal networks and unadvertised appointments frequently limited access for Black candidates. For example, Sharrod recounted a leadership transition in which qualified

Black employees were overlooked: “The new White president has excluded qualified Black candidates. Instead of advertising, she has been appointing individuals directly, bypassing qualified Black employees already on campus.”

Participants shared how search committees often lean on unwritten rules and subjective impressions, privileging cultural fit over qualifications. De’Angelo provided a vivid account of bias during hiring committee deliberations:

> We want to spend so much time looking at the verbiage, I versus we…then nitpick at little things. I said to put me as a Black person as co-chair on a hiring committee and to see all of the racism. Every single dog whistle. I had to tell my president, I said, I don’t need that. That’s bad energy for me.

Leon described the outcome of a hiring process in which he served on the hiring committee. Leon explained, “A highly qualified Black candidate with a strong track record in student retention was passed over in favor of a White candidate who had more committee experiences.” This example illustrates how participants perceived that, even when Black male candidates met or exceeded qualifications, they were sometimes passed over in favor of individuals with greater institutional visibility or who aligned more closely with dominant leadership norms. Mycah recounted:

> I served on 12 search committees in an 18-month period. And out of 12 search committees, not a single one of them. Not a single one of them resulted in the hiring of a Black male candidate. And we [the committee] would eliminate people for some of the silliest things. We were only putting together a search committee

> just to say that we were putting on a search committee. They'd already made up their minds before we started.

Similarly, Keierre's hiring decisions as a dean were questioned when appointing several qualified Black and Latino candidates. Despite running a formal and equitable hiring process, Keierre was told that they could not just hire people because they are Black or Latino. Participants noted that some colleagues implied certain hires were based on diversity rather than merit, which they perceived as reflecting a double standard. These observations highlighted the scrutiny Black administrators faced in their leadership roles, as well as the informal conversations that often influenced perceptions of candidate legitimacy.

Nearly all participants described being one of the few or only Black male administrators at their institution. Their accounts suggest that limited representation within leadership structures contributes to feelings of isolation and underscores ongoing structural challenges. This lack of presence contributes to feelings of isolation and visibility that are both burdensome and performative. Vontrell shared, "We do double the work. Not only do we support our students, staff, and faculty, we have to also support ourselves." Participants also noted that the absence of Black male mentors within the system limited their ability to navigate institutional culture and politics effectively. Leon and Casey discussed the pressures of being the only Black administrators in the room. Leon recalled being on a Zoom call representing the district when they realized they were the only Black male administrator present, and one of only two serving the entire college district. For aspiring administrators, the lack of visible role models makes it more

difficult to imagine themselves in those positions. Sharrod revealed, “Most Black men I know in the director level or higher positions are in Student Affairs. I’ve rarely encountered Black men in senior Academic or Financial roles. That reality itself can feel like a barrier.” Participants also stated that even when multiple Black male administrators are present, it is hard to get Black men to engage with one another. Sharrod shared:

> When I arrived, there was one Black administrator. But he wasn’t particularly engaged with Black males. In his own words, his approach was to “tap dance” to make White folks comfortable, then retreat to his office to focus on his research. So as to not cause trouble.

Advancement Barriers Rooted in Systemic Stereotypes

The revelation from Black male administrators in CTCs revealed a unique and challenging position for Black male administrators within higher education. Participants shared how barriers to their professional advancement have often been shaped by deep-rooted systemic stereotypes, such as misconceptions about Black male leadership that result in microaggressions and workplace exclusion. As Vontrell explained, “It taught me how to code-switch through a world that sees me one way, although I show up differently.” Participants offered that they find safety in code-switching at the expense of being authentically themselves. Their experiences reflect an ongoing tension between how they are perceived and who they are, with their identity and performance frequently scrutinized under biased institutional norms. Sharrod illustrated this tension when he shared, “I’m the big Black guy with a beard…who oversees student conduct. So naturally, I’m the one they call. The majority of my experience has been in those

situations." These lived experiences underscored a pattern in which Black male administrators are often simultaneously hypervisible and invisible. Their cultural backgrounds, communication styles, and leadership approaches are frequently viewed through a lens of suspicion or exoticism.

Several participants described encountering reductive stereotypes that, in their view, influenced how they were perceived and evaluated as Black male administrators. These include assumptions that they were aggressive, lacking emotional depth, or more charismatic than competent. Casey explained:

> I think this stereotype of, you know, maybe not having it completely together. This stereotype of you might be charismatic, but how much depth is beyond charisma, you know? This notion that you're going to require a lot of scaffolding support. Or that you're not going to be able to code-switch or speak the king's English when it's necessary.

Leon similarly reflected on how Black male administrators are often boxed into personality-based expectations that fail to acknowledge their full range of professional skills:

> Culturally speaking…we typically or maybe stereotypically are the "wooers". We are cool. We're extroverted. We are the life of the party. And often we lean on those personalities. We also have to show we have administrative skills, strategic plannings skills, and we know how to work data. There is this assumption that we don't. We have to show or backup that we have these skills that I think people don't think we have, and it's because we are Black male.

Leon later expanded on the consequences of not fitting these expected roles, describing how Black men who do not match these personality-driven stereotypes may still be overlooked:

> On the flip side of even being wooers, we are often phased out. What happens when you're not the wooer? You're the Black man that's not the lore. It becomes, he had all the skills, knew everything, knowledge, skills, experiences, could write a whole dissertation. But then the reframe is that he didn't woo me like the other Black people wooed me. Yeah, I couldn't understand his personality.

Despite their credentials, experiences, and demonstrated competence, participants reported being confined to narrow roles and responsibilities due to persistent perceptions about their leadership styles and abilities. De'Angelo reflected on these constraints, describing a stereotype he believes is placed on Black male administrators:

> I think the stereotype for Black men in general is that you keep your mouth shut and you do your job… That's the expectation. I think the biggest stereotype is that we're the workhorse. We're going to just do it. We're going to keep our heads down. We're not going to say anything.

These narratives highlighted the tendency of institutions to associate Black male leadership with labor-oriented roles rather than strategic or academic leadership. Sharrod shared a perspective on where Black male administrators are most often placed within the institution:

> Student Affairs/Service tends to be the primary route for Black male leadership… I've rarely encountered Black men in senior Academic Affairs roles or as chief

> academic officers. I've met a few presidents and chancellors, but almost all of them came up through Student Affairs. That reality itself can feel like a barrier. In fact, I've only met one Black male VP of Academic Affairs, and even he worked at a small institution where Academic Affairs and Student Affairs were combined.

Mycah also noted this pattern, stating that he had never met a Black male chief academic officer and how he serves in these dual roles of Academic and Student Affairs capacities at his institution. Together, these reflections suggest that Black male administrators are frequently tracked into specific types of roles, with limited access to senior-level academic leadership. This perceived pattern, grounded in participant experiences, reflects a structural barrier to advancement.

Participants described a range of daily experiences within their CTCs that they perceived as reflective of ongoing racial bias and professional marginalization. These include being overlooked in meetings, questioned about their qualifications, and being viewed as less experienced. Keierre and Ware shared how assumptions about their legitimacy in leadership roles were frequently framed through the lens of diversity hiring. Ware shared:

> People see us as true DEI hires. Or why are you in this role? You shouldn't be in this role. Because I did not interview for either of my leadership roles. One colleague said, there has to be more to my story.

Keierre described sharing similar scrutiny:

> People are always asking me how I got this job, what makes me qualified. They didn't ask the White woman who had it before me. They just assumed she was

> qualified. There is this expectation that I would need to be top notch. Though they don't know I have my MBA in human resources, and my experience comes from doing human resources in the military.

Casey shared the interpersonal dynamics he experiences as a Black male among a team of provosts, all of whom are older White women whose professional paths differ significantly from his own. He recounted feeling dismissed and talked over in team meetings. Eventually, he had to address the group directly to be heard. He attributed this pattern of treatment to both his race and gender, suggesting that his presence in that space was viewed as an outlier.

Participants described the need to regularly alter their language, appearance, and demeanor to align with the dominant cultural expectations of PWI. These adjustments were not merely strategic choices, but in many cases, essential adaptations for navigating spaces where their natural expressions of identity were often misinterpreted or devalued. Mycah reflected on the pressure to conform in his workplace, describing how cultural differences were not always understood or accepted:

> Over the course of my career… not being able to show up as my authentic self… is a challenge. Something that I'm very aware of now at my current place… people don't understand there are cultural differences. They're slowly forcing me into becoming this administrator who…stays in his office.

The tension between professional survival and personal authenticity, as described by Mycah, underscores the emotional labor and identity negotiation required to maintain credibility and advance in higher education leadership. Casey also discussed the ways he

modifies his presentation depending on the context, particularly when interacting with military personnel:

> I had my ears pierced. We offer courses at the base down the road from my campus. I'm often in meetings with the commander of the base and lieutenant colonels, and colonels. Whenever I go, I take my earrings out…if that's going to be a distraction for them, I don't need it…and I can put them right back in tomorrow or right after I'm leaving off base.

Sharrod emphasized the importance of navigating these spaces with strategic awareness, stating, "We have to learn the rules of engagement. Too often, we bring a knife to a gunfight because we lead with emotions instead of logic and strategy." Together, these reflections reveal how participants continuously assess and adapt their identities to meet unspoken expectations in professional spaces. The choices they described, ranging from self-presentation to emotional restraint, reflect a broader pattern of strategic negotiation in pursuit of leadership legitimacy.

Participants who identified as both Black and gay, including Vontrell, De'Angelo, and Leon, also spoke candidly about the added complexities of navigating their identities in professional settings. For them, cognitive dissonance often arose from not fitting prevailing stereotypes of Black masculinity. De'Angelo recalled:

> I think the challenges of being vulnerable as a Black person, especially a person who identifies as not just Black, but also as a gay man. My White counterparts were able to maybe use that against me in a way that was not, as I remember it, respectful.

In contrast, Vontrell described how aspects of his intersecting identities complicated how others perceived him as a Black man in professional spaces:

> I don't fit what I think other people have thoughts of what a Black man is. Being gay has given me an opportunity to have conversations. I code-switch through a world that sees me one way, but I also show up differently. When I say show up, I'm gay and I'm in a female-dominated industry. There is some comfort I think people feel around me.

Following this reflection, Vontrell noted that not aligning with certain stereotypes sometimes made others more comfortable, while also highlighting the complexity of being viewed as an exception within his professional environment.

Limited Pipeline and Preparation Gaps to Advancement

The pipeline and preparation gap theme highlights the systemic barriers that hinder the advancement of Black male administrators in CTCs. Participants consistently reported gaps in educational and leadership preparation, noting that graduate programs and professional development initiatives often lack the cultural responsiveness necessary to address their unique experiences. Many described entering administrative roles by chance rather than through structured pathways, citing limited early exposure to leadership tracks and a lack of targeted guidance. Additionally, the absence of mentorship and sponsorship tailored to their intersectional identities leaves many Black men without support networks critical for career advancement. These compounded gaps in preparation, awareness, and advocacy contribute to delayed progression and reduced representation in higher-level leadership roles.

Participants revealed that they discovered the pathways into higher education once they attended postsecondary education institutions. Even in programs specific to leadership or administration, participants highlighted that graduate programs and leadership development initiatives often lack cultural responsiveness and practical preparation, particularly in the CTCs sector. Leon reflected on the disconnect between his coursework and the reality of working in a CTCs environment:

> I went to graduate school for a masters focusing on leadership in higher education. The classes were okay, but in the world of higher education, and specifically CTCs, it was evident that people truly do not know CTCs, they don't know where we work. I remember studying Bolman and Deal (2017) and thinking, this is not relative to CTCs.

Mycah echoed similar concerns about practical training, particularly in the financial management of a CTCs:

> When I finished my program in public administration, I felt confident. Then I took a higher education finance class, I can tell you how higher education is financed. But even after taking that class, I couldn't tell you anything about managing those finances.

Keierre emphasized that leadership development often fails to focus on fundamental skills Black male administrators need:

> What I have not seen from administrators who have gotten their doctorate is a deeper dive into leadership characteristics and attributes. As an HR manager,

> what I have seen is a lack of basic leadership essentials that many managers in administration don't seem to be getting.

These reflections suggest that graduate programs and leadership training initiatives do not adequately prepare Black men for the specific demands of CTCs leadership. Participants highlighted gaps in both sector-specific content and culturally responsive mentorship, noting that most programs employ a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to reflect their lived realities and professional needs.

With gaps in preparation, participants shared that they stumbled into administrative roles rather than intentionally pursuing them. Unlike their White peers, who participants believed received encouragement and guidance, several participants stated that they were unaware of potential leadership tracks until much later in their educational journey or careers. De'Angelo shared that he doesn't believe Black male administrators are adequately developed or given a clear idea of their next role. He shared that among the over 30 CTCs, he is the only person in his state with the role he has. He stated:

> I don't know anybody else who does what I do in our state CTC system. It makes it very hard; it makes it very difficult for me as a Black man to try to figure out where do I go next.

Leon stated that it was not until his undergraduate studies that he realized roles like his existed. He offered:

> You don't even know there's this thing called higher education until you get into undergrad. I went to college, got involved and found out there's this thing called student affairs higher education. I was like, what? Is this a real job?

Ware did not discover administrative pathways until his graduate program. He said, "Honestly, I would say, there's no true pathway in high school to tell folks that you could work in higher education. There's no true pathway to working in higher education until you get to the master's level."

Once in leadership roles, participants stated that the lack of mentorship, sponsorship, and guidance is prevalent for Black male administrators. Many participants felt adrift and lacked access to mentors who understood the intersectional challenges of being both Black and male in academia. Sponsorship is highly rare. Participants stated that the lack of representation and development significantly hinders progression and diminishes the chances of being considered for high-impact roles. Sharrod discussed the difficulty of securing ongoing support from Black male mentors. Sharrod stated, "Beyond one mentor, I've struggled to find consistent Black male mentorship. Believe me, I've asked, but many have been reluctant. They may offer informal advice, but long-term mentorship, that's been extremely rare." Vontrell added a more personal perspective, reflecting on the internal challenges he faced in building such relationships:

> It would probably be hard for me to really have a mentoring role with another Black man. But that's something I am working on. I really didn't have any kind of mentor. What I have had are individuals in my life who have steered me in ways, and they have typically been women.

Unlike others who lacked a formal mentoring structure, Mycah shared how he pieced together a network of peers to fulfill that need:

> I can't say that I have a formal relationship with a mentor or sponsor. What I do have is, I have built/piecemealed this network together. I have a group of friends who themselves are administrators. We converse, check in, and keep up with each other among ourselves just to make sure that we are supporting each other as best we can.

Keierre, Ware, and Leon all shared that they have had Black male mentors. Leon revealed that his mentors came through national affiliations that focus is on Black male academics. Keierre also shared that he received sponsorship from a president and vice president, and he felt they taught him about the culture of higher education. All other participants hinted that sponsorship is usually reserved for their White peers.

Limitations to Building Social Capital and Professional Networks

Participants described significant challenges in accessing informal and formal networks that are often critical for professional advancement in higher education. While networking is a common pathway for career mobility, several participants emphasized that building meaningful professional connections, particularly those that translate into sponsorship, visibility, or advancement, is not equally accessible to Black male administrators. In this context, limited access to social capital, relationships, trust, and informal systems of support that help facilitate opportunities emerged as a key barrier.

Participants shared how they were frequently excluded from informal networks, off-the-record conversations, and strategic social gatherings where important decisions or

connections were often made. Some noted that, although they were present in formal decision-making settings, they were frequently assigned peripheral responsibilities with little influence over institutional direction. Vontrell explained that the challenge lies not in the willingness of Black men to build networks, but in their limited access to the spaces where those networks can form:

> The only thing that prevents Black males from having that social capital is being able to be in spaces that would give them the opportunity to build such networks. Being elevated into positions that would allow them access to such spaces. Yet there is always this goal to reach more Black men.

The absence of structured affinity spaces or support systems for Black male administrators further deepened participants' sense of isolation. Without access to the informal mentoring, trust-building, and sponsorship that social capital provides, participants described being underrepresented in upper-level leadership and disconnected from the internal power structures that shape hiring and advancement decisions.

Participants discussed the difficulties of developing professional networks within CTCs, particularly those that lead to meaningful support and sponsorship. Mycah revealed that he is still building his network in community college spaces, describing the process as challenging and ongoing. Similarly, Casey noted that developing relationships with Black and Hispanic females seemed to come more easily than building relationships with any other group, suggesting that interpersonal and cultural dynamics shape how relationships are formed. Keierre emphasized that while relationships with other Black men are important, relying solely on these connections can be limiting, especially given

their underrepresentation across institutions. He connected this reality to the broader challenge of building social capital in settings where Black male administrators are few and far between:

> You're not going to have that many Black men in one college. Black men are spread out and thinly. Having networks and social capital is huge and not just with other Black men, but with all types of people who will support you.

Participants shared that the lack of supportive network systems or professional spaces specifically designed for Black male administrators in CTCs creates limited opportunities for seeking peer support, collaboration, and collective strategizing. Many noted that structured affinity spaces for Black male administrators were either nonexistent or insufficient. Leon attributes his access to national professional memberships to be key to his mobility. He offered:

> I think that because I was involved with the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), I learned a certain skill set being connected with other Black male professionals. Without this access, I think it's harder, I notice that my other Black male colleagues have a time finding their footing in leadership.

Mycah believed the onus should be on the institution to introduce and create opportunities:

> Something I find very interesting that is not happening in this role or others I have been in, people just aren't introducing me to the people. Nobody takes the time. Nobody's making that effort to take me as the only Black man around to these

> people. Also, it makes me realize that this space isn't mine. I don't dominate this space.

Participants expressed that the absence of structured support networks often left them feeling isolated and disconnected from the informal knowledge and sponsorship opportunities that others seemed to access more easily, making advancement into higher-level leadership roles more difficult.

While the absence of supportive professional networks contributes to isolation and slower career development, participants also described a related but distinct barrier of being excluded from strategic opportunities. Even when Black administrators gained access to leadership spaces, they were frequently sidelined from high-impact projects, influential committees, and decision-making processes. Casey stated:

> The other piece is being brought into discussions about things, oftentimes after the foundation of the house has been built. For example, I might be brought in. I've noticed this has happened many times in my career, not to put up the structure or sheetrock, but to determine what color we will paint the walls. There's been planning and there's been blueprints developed before I am able to talk about the windows I might think need to be in the house.

This reflection illustrates how participants perceived their involvement in decision-making as symbolic rather than substantive. Being invited late into conversations, after critical plans were already developed, limited their ability to influence institutional direction and reinforced feelings of exclusion from power structures.

Pressure to Validate Competences Through Overperformance

This theme reflects the barriers faced by Black male administrators as they serve in leadership roles within their CTCs. Participants shared how they are often held to higher standards than their peers, facing excessive performance pressures that require them to consistently overperform just to be seen as competent. This constant need to validate their presence leads to heightened burnout, magnified scrutiny of missteps, and a tendency to minimize accomplishments. In addition to performance pressures, participants also described being frequently questioned about their qualifications and capabilities. Despite holding advanced degrees and extensive professional experience, their legitimacy was often met with skepticism, forcing them to repeatedly defend their right to leadership opportunities.

Sharrod observed this dynamic when he stated, “There’s already this assumption that we won’t put in the work. We won’t be as scholarly. We don’t have the resources.” Leon further illustrated the emotional toil of these expectations, expressing frustration with being expected to excel beyond what the role reasonably demands and the departure of past Black men from his institution. Leon opined:

> The role, there’s so much, and you expect people to be these magical unicorns. So please know that I am not a magical unicorn. Let’s not badmouth these Black men who were doing great work. They got tired or just decided to move on…and folks don’t want to have those hard conversations.

This magical unicorn metaphor captured what Leon and other participants perceived as an unrealistic burden to exceed expectations while receiving little support or recognition for their efforts.

Ware supported this perspective, adding:

> Once we get into these spaces, we know we have to be on our p's and q's because folks are looking at us to fail. I have to make sure I have all my I's dotted and t's crossed because any little slip-up and they're going to point the finger and think I'm incompetent. We know that we have eyes on us, not just our peers, but the institution itself. And I think that's the hardest thing to grapple with, to accept, no matter what someone's always going to want you to fail and looking for any excuse to say, yep, this is why he should not be in that position.

Even when their education and professional backgrounds demonstrate their readiness for leadership roles, participants described persistent experiences of questioning. Keierre shared that despite having an MBA and extensive human resource experience from the military, he often faced skepticism from colleagues. He shared how people, especially White people, asked him how he got his job and what makes him qualified. He stated, "The previous White woman that was in this position before me, they didn't ask her nothing, they just assumed she was qualified." Keierre experiences reflect a broader pattern in which Black male administrators are held to a higher standard of proof compared to their White peers. Mycah reveals that scrutiny does not just occur within the institution and among peers. He provided:

> I've had to deal with parents who were upset because the policy doesn't allow me to let them get their way. I've been reprimanded because people have complained too much about me. People said that my class was excessively too hard, or he just got us doing stuff that we don't need to do. I experienced as a result of that, you know, some blackballing. Even the system president, who was a White man, removed me from a couple of committees or removed me from being considered for a couple of awards and recognitions because I was p*****g off the wrong people with my work. You know, ain't nobody got nothing to say when what I was doing was putting the Black people in check. But when it was causing frustration and consternation for the White folks. You know, then I'm getting calls from the system office.

Participants revealed a complex and layered set of barriers that shaped their experiences seeking and securing administrative roles in CTCs. These barriers, while distinct, often intersect in ways that compound exclusion. Systemic inequities, such as opaque hiring practices, biased evaluations, and limited representation, were identified as structural obstacles that persist from early education through executive hiring processes. Advancement barriers rooted in systemic stereotypes, including stereotypes about Black masculinity and professionalism, created additional pressures for participants to constantly perform, conform, and prove their competence. Gaps in preparation pathways and inadequate mentorship further contributed to the difficulty of entering and navigating leadership pipelines.

Meanwhile, limited access to social capital and professional networks restricted opportunities for advancement and influence. Participants' reflections illuminated not only the persistent nature of these barriers but also the emotional, strategic, and cultural labor required to navigate them. Collectively, these insights highlight deeply ingrained institutional conditions that restrict access to leadership roles for Black men in the CTCs system, underscoring the urgent need for more equitable and intentional hiring, mentorship, and leadership development practices.

Research Question 2

What are Black male administrators' recommendations for improving the professional pathway to obtaining employment in a community/technical college? In response to Research Question 2, participants offered several key areas for improvement. They recommended (a) improving institutional hiring practices and accountability, (b) reforming leadership preparation and pipeline programs, and (c) establishing a culture of belonging and inclusion. These areas were identified as critical to enhancing access and advancement for Black male administrators within CTCs.

Improve Institutional Hiring Practices and Accountability

Participants identified key changes needed to address structural inequities in hiring practices. Their recommendations focused on transparent and equitable hiring practices, systemic change, and accountability, as well as improvements in policy, process, and evaluation. Participants emphasized the need for greater transparency and fairness in hiring, including standardized interview processes, open salary ranges, and diverse hiring committees, to ensure equitable access. They also called for systemic

accountability measures such as external audits and equity dashboards to move institutions beyond symbolic commitments to diversity and toward tangible outcomes. Participants advocated refining job descriptions, evaluation criteria, and hiring processes to remove unnecessary barriers and ensure that all candidates are assessed through culturally competent and transparent standards.

Participants emphasized the importance of reforming hiring practices as a foundational step toward improving equity in the professional pipeline. They recommended that hiring processes be restructured to promote greater transparency, fairness, and inclusivity across CTC institutions. This includes clearly defined selection criteria, standardized interview protocols, and genuine commitments to equity, rather than merely symbolic gestures. Mycah, for instance, advocated for more intentional and outcomes-driven search processes, reflecting on his experience serving on multiple committees: “We were only putting together a search committee just to say that we were putting together a search committee. We never really had discussions about what we really needed.”

Participants also recommend holding hiring committees accountable for equitable practices by using evaluation rubrics, maintaining open salary ranges, and providing training in cultural competence. De’Angelo emphasized the need to eliminate inconsistent evaluation practices that disproportionately harm Black candidates: “They nitpick at the little things. If you’re going to do this process, you do it right from the beginning.” Together, these insights strongly recommend that institutions move beyond

performative diversity efforts and embed fairness, consistency, and cultural awareness into all stages of the hiring process.

Participants also emphasized the importance of diversity within hiring committees in fostering trust. Mycah reflected on the discouragement he felt encountering nondiverse panels. He shared his experiences with White women leaders had not been ideal. He stated, “If I walk in and the whole committee is a bunch of White women, given my experience with White women in leadership, I’m already turned off.” Leon added that advocating for equity during hiring can lead to backlash. He stated, “You can immediately be criminalized for challenging a process that is obviously biased.” Casey provided an intervention used at his institution where search advocates are trained to identify and interrupt bias during hiring processes, which helped improve fairness. He discussed how a search advocate called out the lack of diversity within a pool of candidates and redirected the hiring process.

Participants emphasized that enhancing pathways for Black male administrators necessitates more than procedural reforms; they explained that transformational change requires systemic change through institutional accountability. Many voiced frustrations with superficial DEI initiatives that failed to produce measurable outcomes. Sharrod emphasized the ineffectiveness of symbolic gestures: “When George Floyd was murdered and DEI initiatives exploded, institutions were throwing money at the problem. However, if institutions don’t have real integrity in doing the work, they’ll either eliminate DEI positions or make them ineffective.” Participants argued that meaningful change must be tied to tangible actions, rather than temporary or performative responses.

Several participants recommended regular external equity audits and data-driven evaluations to assess hiring and promotional practices. Casey reinforced this call, suggesting that audits be involved as we live in a diverse society and must move beyond simply talking about equity and raising awareness. Ware emphasized the crucial importance of addressing harm and upholding consistent accountability standards. He said, “I am all about holding people accountable. How do we hold our White counterparts accountable when they do harm, and they don’t want to have the conversation.” To remedy this, participants emphasized the need for leadership to embed accountability measures into structural practices, such as publishing equity dashboards and linking executive evaluations to progress on DEI. Without these systems, as Sharrod noted, there is little incentive to sustain genuine efforts. He added, “Supporting affinity groups is good, but if leadership doesn’t back it with real system changes and accountability, it’s just a photo opportunity.”

Participants identified the need for significant improvements to institutional policies, hiring processes, and candidate evaluation practices to create more equitable opportunities for Black male administrators. They described how unclear job descriptions, inflated qualifications, and culturally biased evaluation criteria disproportionately disadvantage Black male candidates. De’Angelo reinforced the need for fairer evaluation criteria by highlighting the disproportionate scrutiny Black candidates face. He talked about how the hiring committee nitpicks at the little things. His recommendation is to focus on transferable skills instead.

Mycah emphasized the lack of alignment between job postings and actual institutional needs, noting that in his experience, hiring committees never really discussed what they needed. Similarly, Vontrell reflected on how unrealistic preferred qualifications discourage capable candidates, explaining:

> There have been jobs I have not applied for because the language on the job description sounded like I could do the job. Still, then there would be a section that says preferred qualifications. Even though I know I could do the job, I wouldn't apply for it.

Participants recommended that institutions create clearer, more inclusive job announcements and define qualifications in a way that does not unnecessarily filter out diverse applicants. Salary transparency was also identified as a critical improvement. As Mycah pointed out, institutions need to be more transparent and upfront about what they are willing to pay, providing people with more information to make more informed decisions.

Beyond posting improvements, participants advocated incorporating skills demonstrations into hiring processes to evaluate candidates holistically. Mycah shared, "What I like that I'm seeing more of is skills demonstrations as part of the interview process. It helps evaluators better understand the level of skill a candidate can bring to work." Vontrell advised, "They [hiring committees] need to see how we actually think through problems, how we manage people, how we make decisions under pressure, and not just what's on paper." These approaches were seen as a practical way to shift focus from narrow credentialing to demonstrated competence and potential.

Reform Leadership Preparation and Pipeline Programs

Participants emphasized that reforming leadership preparation and pipeline programs with intention are critical to advancing Black male administrators within CTCs. Their recommendations focused on expanding mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, developing culturally competent training programs, establishing formal leadership pathways, and addressing gaps in current leadership education structures.

Participants described mentorship as transformative when offered by individuals who share an understanding of the unique challenges Black men face in leadership. At the same time, sponsorship, defined as active career advocacy, was seen as essential for opening doors to advancement. Sharrod shared his experience of limited early mentorship, stating, “Beyond one mentor, I’ve struggled to find consistent Black male mentorship. While many Black men have contacted me for guidance, I haven’t had the same success securing Black mentors for myself.” This account reflects the broader reality that, while informal support exists, consistent and intentional mentorship, especially from individuals who understand the lived experiences of Black men in leadership, is often lacking.

Participants emphasized that sponsorship is crucial for career advancement. Sharrod emphasized, “We do ourselves a disservice by not actively seeking out and investing in the next generation of Black male professionals. This means sponsoring them for professional development opportunities, covering conference costs, and bringing them along as apprentices.” Participants noted that mentorship should extend beyond skill development to navigating institutional culture. Keierre stressed the need for guidance,

stating, “There are landmines out there you can step on. Nobody really points to where they’re at. Especially for Black male administrators, being able to help identify that stuff is key right up front.”

Participants consistently highlighted the gap between theoretical leadership training and the practical skills required to succeed as a Black male administrator within the CTC system. They emphasized the need for culturally responsive, real-world leadership training. Leon explained:

> We need more investment in leadership development programs, specifically for administrators of color. Not just formal titles but real training in budgeting, conflict management, and strategic planning. You can go to a class, but these classes have nothing on the CTC world.

Participants also emphasized that leadership training must equip Black male administrators to manage organizational dynamics and cultural challenges. Sharrod said, “We do a good job of sending people to conferences, seminars, and think-tanks. But we don’t invest enough in helping people truly understand themselves, how to recognize bias, self-reflect, and confront difficult truths.” Similarly, Casey emphasized leadership affirmation rooted in identity, stating, “There needs to be something affirming in professional training programs... something about somebody saying, ‘you’re a Black male and you belong here.’ It helped me step into spaces with my head held high.”

Participants strongly advocated for the intentional development of structured leadership pathways, including internships, fellowships, and administrative residencies, to support the advancement of Black male administrators. Many described how the

absence of visible, accessible pipelines often left aspiring leaders without opportunities to gain needed experience. Leon reflected on one successful model, stating: “The college actually had a formalized leadership program for up-and-coming leaders. I think more campuses should do that, specifically for administrators of color.” Sharrod also proposed more targeted initiatives, offering, “There should be a dedicated program, maybe even a micro-credential or an intensive summer leadership initiative something like a three-month immersive program focused on Black male leadership in higher education.” Vontrell echoed the call to incorporate microcredentialing into leadership development programs to enhance interest and managerial skill sets for administrators.

Participants noted that structured leadership programs build skills and help emerging administrators gain institutional visibility and confidence. Ware highlighted the importance of addressing professionalism and cultural navigation, stating, “Any leadership program designed for Black males would need to touch on professionalism but also how to navigate these White spaces. We need that a lot.”

Participants stressed the need for reform within leadership development curricula. They described how current training often reflects Eurocentric leadership models that fail to prepare administrators of color for the realities of leading diverse institutions. Respondents proposed revising curricula to integrate Black leadership philosophies, antiracist frameworks, and culturally relevant content. Sharrod emphasized this need for deeper cultural understanding in leadership preparation: “We don’t invest enough in helping people truly understand themselves. How to recognize bias, self-reflect, and confront difficult truths.”

Participants also emphasized the importance of early exposure to leadership opportunities and professional skill development. Many reported entering administrations by chance rather than through structured development efforts. They recommended embedding leadership development into graduate programs and offering bootcamps or summer institutes specifically for administrators of color.

Financial and professional literacy have also emerged as critical competencies that Black male administrators need to achieve success. Participants stressed that aspiring leaders must be equipped with financial management skills early in their careers. Mycah highlighted this gap: “People should be serious about what skills a person needs. Budgeting and strategic planning aren’t optional skills if you want to move up.” Sharrod further emphasized the importance of financial acumen for leadership advancement, particularly in areas such as fundraising and resource management. He explained:

> To be successful, networking and relationship-building are crucial. You need to connect with your CFO, your foundation office, institutional advancement, planning, and research teams. Aside from faculty roles and academic responsibilities, understanding how money flows through an institution, how it’s allocated, spent, and how financial data is leveraged, makes a difference. Knowing how to secure funding and merge financial strategy with data presentation is key.

Participants recommended that leadership programs provide intentional training in budgeting, strategic finance, grant writing, fundraising, and institutional advancement. These financial and operational skills were critical for preparing Black male

administrators to compete effectively for upper-level executive roles within the CTC system.

Establish a Culture of Belonging and Inclusion

Participants emphasized that advancing Black male administrators within CTCs requires more than professional preparation. It also demands intentionally cultivating inclusive, supportive, and affirming workplace environments. Their recommendations focused on five key areas: building inclusive and supportive environments, strengthening cultural competence and leadership representation, implementing continuous bias training to address microaggressions, establishing peer and community support systems, and elevating storytelling, visibility, and voice.

Participants emphasized that institutional culture plays a pivotal role in either facilitating or hindering leadership pathways, and that creating environments where Black male administrators feel valued, seen, and heard is crucial to their success and retention. Participants emphasized that cultivating inclusive, supportive workplace cultures is essential to the success and retention of Black male administrators in CTCs. They described how professional skill and preparation alone are insufficient without an environment that affirms their identity, values their leadership, and fosters a sense of true belonging. Several participants noted feeling undervalued or tokenized within their institutions.

Casey highlighted the importance of intentionally designing inclusive spaces, explaining how higher education practitioners must “design things for students based on what we liked 20 years ago, but we don’t ask the students today. We have to design

networking and support spaces intentionally with the people we're trying to serve in mind." Participants called for more structured initiatives that foster inclusion, such as affinity groups, inclusive onboarding processes, regular listening sessions, and leadership recognition initiatives that honor diverse leadership styles. Sharrod advocated not only creating affinity spaces but also actively investing in them. He believed that institutions should listen to these groups, take their concerns seriously, and act on their recommendations. Investment in affinity groups, leadership programs, and strategic representation is essential if institutions truly want to support Black male leadership.

Institutions were also urged to go beyond symbolic gestures by embedding structural practices that promote authentic representation. Sharrod believes that the visibility of Black male leaders is critical to changing institutional culture. Sharrod emphasized, "We often overlook the power of visibility, having Black men in leadership roles sends a message."

Participants emphasized that while structural reforms and inclusive environments are crucial, peer support systems are equally essential for sustaining the success and well-being of Black male administrators. Many participants described isolation as a persistent barrier, particularly in PWIs, where they often found themselves as the only or one of a few Black male leaders. Creating affinity spaces and structured support groups was identified as a vital solution to counteract feelings of isolation and marginalization. Participants emphasized that these spaces are not just social; they serve as critical venues for exchanging advice, processing shared experiences, and collectively navigating institutional challenges. Leon spoke to the isolating nature of leadership roles in

predominantly White spaces, stating, “In my student services meeting, you’re counting all the boxes on Zoom, and it’s just me and you. It’s very isolating.” Participants called for institutions to formally support the development of peer networks such as Black male administrator groups, mentorship circles, or regional consortia that allow for professional collaboration and emotional support.

Participants consistently accentuated the importance of culturally competent leadership and the visibility of Black male representation at all levels of institutional leadership. They stressed that the presence or absence of Black male leaders signals to current and future administrators whether they belong and whether their identities will be valued within institutional structures. Participants highlighted that institutions must move beyond hiring for diversity in numbers alone; they must cultivate leadership philosophies that affirm and support the lived experiences of Black male administrators. Vontrell expanded on this need for deep cultural awareness, explaining, “Institutions must think about what they are actually doing when they bring in people who are different. How are you ensuring they feel welcome and that their experiences are part of the culture you are creating.” Vontrell urged colleges to recruit Black men and meaningfully sustain their participation and influence through intentional, systemic change.

Participants emphasized that culturally competent leadership necessitates empathy, active listening, and a genuine commitment to dismantling exclusionary traditions. Vontrell further noted, “We really need to think about how to change how traditions have prevented certain people from participating in the conversation and be real about that.” Participants called for leadership training that builds cultural competence

across all ranks, helping current leaders understand how bias, cultural assumptions, and traditional power structures can marginalize Black male administrators. De'Angelo highlighted the importance of recognizing and pushing back against bias in leadership, stating, "If you are going to be an inclusive leader, you have to have the integrity and the ability to push back when you see something coming up."

Participants described daily experiences of microaggressions and subtle forms of discrimination that significantly impacted their sense of belonging and professional advancement within CTCs. They emphasized the need for institutions to move beyond performative DEI statements and invest in actionable, ongoing bias training and transparent systems for addressing incidents of racial bias. Leon reflected on his experience with racial profiling on campus, sharing:

> When I walk around campus with my hood on, particularly on a Friday... I've been stopped by my own security guards and officers. 'Oh, Leon, that's you. Our fault.' But also, do you talk to all the Black students with hoodies this way?

His experience highlights how Black men, regardless of position, are often viewed with suspicion even in familiar spaces, reinforcing feelings of exclusion.

Vontrell discussed the subtle emotional toll of microaggressions in professional environments. Vontrell shared, "In K-12, I was okay with holding back and not saying anything. I just wanted to be. I didn't want to stand out. Now, I recognize that I have a voice and see things from a different lens." He noted that many Black men internalize these experiences until later stages in their careers, often at great psychological cost.

Mycah shared that microaggressions also came from internal and external interactions, frequently impacting career mobility. He recalled:

> I definitely experienced all kinds of microaggressions in this role... and quite honestly, when I was axed out during a college merger, I do believe that those things prevented me from being able to secure another job in the community college system.

Participants called for more than traditional diversity training. De'Angelo recommended intentional designs for DEI programs that make people uncomfortable enough to recognize systemic racism. He offered, "I think making people uncomfortable within the program's design is really important for them to understand systemic racism." Casey urged institutions to conduct regular audits tied to real action plans stating, "There's a lot of training related to biases and stereotypes, but after awareness, you must look at your campus and say, now what? How are we dismantling the barriers we've identified?" Participants noted that addressing microaggressions and racial bias through continuous training, clear policies, and visible accountability is essential to fostering a workplace culture where Black male administrators can thrive without fear of exclusion or harm.

Participants emphasized that storytelling is a powerful tool for building visibility, affirming identity, and reshaping institutional narratives around Black male leadership. Sharing personal journeys was critical to countering invisibility, building community, and inspiring future leaders. Storytelling was framed as both a cultural and strategic act, an opportunity to humanize leadership experiences, challenge stereotypes, and model

resilience. Sharrod stressed the broader importance of representation and visibility, noting:

> We often overlook the power of visibility. Having Black men in leadership roles sends a message. It also helps engage other Black male leaders in the community, whether they are pastors, nonprofit leaders, or business professionals, and encourages them to get involved with their local CTCs.

Participants recommended that institutions incorporate storytelling intentionally by featuring Black male administrators in newsletters, speaker series, professional development workshops, mentorship programs, and campus leadership events. Sharrod also encouraged institutions to invest in opportunities for Black male leaders to share their experiences strategically, "Beyond just allowing these groups to exist, institutions should invest in them financially providing resources for professional development opportunities, leadership training, and national engagement."

Participants also emphasized that storytelling should not be treated as isolated events or symbolic gestures, but as an ongoing institutional commitment. As Vontrell explained, institutions often misunderstand or flatten the complex experiences of Black men, reinforcing the need for authentic narratives. He exclaimed, "People don't talk to Black men. They just think they understand what the Black man is. There's a monolithic belief of what a Black man is." Sharing authentic stories challenges these monolithic assumptions and broadens understanding across campus communities.

Additionally, by amplifying Black male leadership journeys, institutions can help shift internal cultures to fully recognize and value diverse pathways to success.

Participants emphasized that visibility through storytelling fosters cultural affirmation, strengthens a sense of belonging, and models leadership for emerging Black male professionals. Institutions that elevate and celebrate these narratives send a powerful message: Black male administrators belong and that their voices and experiences are central to the future of higher education leadership.

Participants provided a range of actionable recommendations to strengthen the professional pathway for Black male administrators within CTCs. These suggestions focus on reforming institutional structures, enhancing hiring practices, and expanding access to culturally responsive leadership development. Participants emphasized that systemic change must go beyond surface-level DEI efforts to include transparent hiring processes, institutional accountability mechanisms, and inclusive evaluation practices. They also highlighted the importance of mentorship, sponsorship, and early exposure to leadership opportunities, underscoring that effective professional development must reflect the lived realities of Black men in higher education. Ultimately, participants punctuated that a culture of inclusion and belonging, supported by peer networks, visible leadership, and affirming environments, is crucial for sustained progress. Collectively, these recommendations reflect a call for transformative change that addresses both structural and cultural barriers, affirming Black male administrators as critical to the future of equitable leadership in the CTC system.

Summary

For Research Question 1, Black male administrators in CTCs perceived a complex web of hiring barriers that limit their access to leadership roles. Participants

identified systemic barriers to hiring practices, such as institutional racism, inequitable hiring practices, lack of representation, and biased leadership transitions, as significant obstacles. Their experiences revealed that systemic racism begins early and follows them into their professional careers, resulting in microaggressions, exclusion from decision-making spaces, and being overlooked despite qualifications. Advancement barriers rooted in systemic stereotypes further complicate their progression, as they face stereotypes, heightened scrutiny, and constant pressures to code-switch or suppress authentic expressions of identity to fit predominantly White institutional norms. Their leadership skills are often questioned, and their presence is frequently marginalized to symbolic rather than substantive roles.

Additional barriers were rooted in limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement, where participants reported a lack of culturally responsive leadership development, minimal mentorship, and the absence of structured pathways into administrative roles. Without adequate support systems, many stumbled into leadership by chance rather than intentional cultivation. Limitations to building social capital and professional networks further hindered mobility. Black male administrators were often excluded from influential networks and opportunities critical for advancement. Even when allowed into leadership spaces, their influence was usually minimized. Lastly, heightened performance expectations and constant scrutiny of competency forced Black male administrators to work harder just to be seen as equally capable, leading to professional exhaustion and burnout. Together, these barriers illuminate the systemic,

cultural, and structural forces that significantly narrow leadership opportunities for Black men in CTCs.

In answering Research Question 2, Black male administrators recommended improving their professional pathway into CTCs by strengthening institutional structures, professional development, and campus culture. They emphasized the urgent need for transparent and equitable hiring practices, including standardized interviews, diverse hiring committees, clearer job descriptions, salary transparency, and external equity audits. Participants also pressed that meaningful systemic change necessitates leadership accountability tied to progress in DEI, moving beyond symbolic initiatives. To ensure that Black male candidates are assessed fairly, they advocated for incorporating skills demonstrations and refining evaluation standards to ensure cultural competence. Furthermore, the need for expanded mentorship and sponsorship opportunities was clear, with participants highlighting the importance of culturally responsive leadership development programs, formal pathways such as internships and fellowships, and leadership curricula that address technical and cultural navigation skills.

In addition to professional preparation, participants emphasized that cultivating inclusive and affirming workplace environments is crucial for advancing and retaining Black male administrators. They called for intentional efforts to foster belonging through affinity groups, peer support networks, inclusive onboarding processes, and visible leadership representation. Participants recommended continuous, actionable bias training and transparent systems for addressing microaggressions and racial bias. Storytelling was identified as a strategic tool to elevate Black male visibility, counter stereotypes, and

build community within CTCs. By embedding authentic Black leadership narratives into institutional practices and recognizing diverse leadership pathways, colleges can convey a powerful message that Black male administrators are not only welcome but also essential to the future of higher education leadership.

Chapter 4 highlighted the setting, data collection, and analysis processes. It also contains the results of the data analysis, addressing both research questions with supported findings. The chapter ended with evidence of trustworthiness describing the implementation of strategies regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter 5 will conclude the dissertation with a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter begins by reiterating the purpose and nature of the study, as well as its significance to the field of research. A summation of the key findings will follow. The chapter then provides an interpretation of the findings within the context of the conceptual framework and existing literature, as detailed in Chapter 2. The chapter also discusses the limitations to trustworthiness that arose from the study's execution. This chapter will feature recommendations for future research. Lastly, the chapter will describe the potential impact of positive social change within the CTC sector of higher education.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Black male administrators' perceptions of hiring barriers and their recommendations to improve the professional pathway to employment at CTCs. The study addressed the longstanding issue of the underrepresentation of Black men in executive administrative roles within CTCs. This gap persists despite institutional commitments to diversity and inclusion. No definitive empirical study currently exists in the literature that directly addresses this underrepresentation of Black male administrators in CTCs. Through semistructured interviews with eight Black male leaders who currently hold or previously held executive roles, this research uncovered nuanced insights into the systemic, cultural, and institutional challenges faced by these administrators. The findings offer guidance for dismantling inequitable hiring systems and creating more inclusive leadership pipelines.

This study employed a basic qualitative research design to explore the perceptions of Black male administrators regarding hiring barriers and their recommendations for

improving the leadership pathway within CTCs. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to understanding the lived realities of individuals who navigate complex social and institutional structures (Creswell et al., 2007; Merriam, 2002). By using in-depth, semistructured interviews and purposive sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the study captured rich, detailed narratives that reveal both the barriers encountered and strategies for change. Grounded in the CRT-E framework, transcripts were analyzed using both priori and open coding methods. This iterative process of content analysis allowed for the identification of themes that reflect not only the systemic inequities embedded in hiring practices but also the resilience and insights of Black men in leadership. The findings offer insight into institutional practices and leadership development strategies that may inform efforts to promote equity and inclusion within the CTC system.

This study revealed that Black male administrators in CTCs face persistent and interconnected barriers in the hiring process. Five major themes emerged regarding these challenges: (a) systemic barriers to hiring practices, including institutional racism and inequitable hiring practices; (b) cultural and interpersonal difficulties, including stereotypes, code-switching, and identity-based scrutiny; (c) limited pipeline and preparation gaps to advancement stem from a lack of mentorship and culturally responsive leadership development; limited access to professional networks and social capital restricts career mobility; and (e) heightened performance expectations and questioning of competency, which contribute to burnout and professional marginalization.

To address these barriers, participants recommended improvements in three key areas: (a) institutional hiring practices and accountability, advocating for transparency, equity, and accountability; (b) professional development and leadership preparation, including mentorship, culturally competent training, and formalized advancement pathways; and (c) campus culture and belonging, emphasizing inclusive environments, representation, bias training, community support, and the elevation of Black male narratives in leadership spaces. These recommendations aim to foster equitable access and sustained advancement for Black male administrators across the CTC system.

Interpretation of Findings

Guided by two research questions, participants described persistent obstacles including systemic racism, cultural bias, limited access to mentorship, and exclusion from influential networks. These challenges were compounded by expectations to overperform and conform to White cultural norms to be seen as competent. Despite these barriers, participants offered actionable solutions, including equitable hiring practices, culturally responsive leadership development, and enhanced institutional accountability. Interpreted through the lens of CRT-E, the findings elucidate how structural inequities shape the experiences of Black male administrators in ways that reflect core tenets of CRT-E. These include the enduring presence of racial bias in higher education, the importance of counternarratives in challenging dominant perspectives, and the ways institutional norms and practices can reinforce unequal access to leadership opportunities.

Barriers to Hiring and Advancement

RQ 1: What are Black male administrators' perceptions of the hiring barriers to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?

Systemic Barriers to Hiring Practices

The presence of institutionalized racism, inequitable hiring practices, and a lack of role models continues to significantly hinder the advancement of Black male administrators within CTCs. These findings affirm longstanding research that documents how systemic racism operates within higher education institutions (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2022), particularly through policies and practices that maintain exclusionary norms. Participants described how institutional bias is often embedded in seemingly neutral terms like "professionalism," "fit," and "procedural fairness," which, on close inspection, reinforce White cultural norms in hiring and promotion practices. Recent scholarship confirms that professionalism is frequently a racial construct, rooted in White cultural norms that penalize non-White expressions of identity, appearance, and communication. This aligns with the CRT-E tenet of the permanence of racism, which holds that racism is deeply woven into the structures of American society, including its education systems, and continues to shape outcomes despite reforms. Vontrell vividly captured this reality: "Kindergarten through graduate school taught me how to maneuver through an institution that saw me one way, but I didn't fit certain stereotypes." His account not only highlights the enduring nature of racial bias across the educational continuum but also points to the cumulative burden Black men carry when attempting to access or advance within leadership roles.

These findings also extend CRT-E's concept of Whiteness as a property (Cowley, 2022), whereby Whiteness confers unspoken privileges that serve as a gatekeeping mechanism in hiring and promotion processes. Participants consistently described exclusion from hiring pools due to unwritten rules or subjective preferences that favored those within established White professional networks. Mycah, for instance, expressed deep frustration with the performative nature of search committees, noting that decisions were often made before the interview process, rendering inclusion efforts meaningless. His reflection underscores the illusion of liberal meritocracy, a notion heavily critiqued within CRT scholarship, which argues that seemingly objective criteria often mask subjective and racialized judgments.

This perception of predetermined outcomes not only delegitimizes the hiring process but also disincentivizes qualified candidates from pursuing advancement. The first-person narratives in this study expose how structural barriers are not just hypothetical but deeply experienced, reaffirming the urgent need for anti-racist reforms in CTCs leadership pipelines. Lebow-Skelley et al. (2023) emphasize that anti-racist organizational change in higher education must involve more than the creation of diversity goals; it requires interrogating how institutional norms and practices reinforce racial hierarchies, particularly in hiring and promotion processes. Such reforms must extend beyond representation and encompass critical evaluations of hiring practices, power dynamics, and accountability structures that currently perpetuate exclusionary norms. This includes reexamining what constitutes "fit," challenging race-neutral language in job descriptions, and embedding equity-minded practices that disrupt

traditional gatekeeping mechanisms (Lebow-Skelley et al., 2023). Addressing these systemic issues is essential for building inclusive and equitable leadership pipelines.

Advancement Barriers Rooted in Systemic Stereotypes

The theme advancement barriers rooted in systemic stereotypes highlights the deep-rooted and often unacknowledged racialized dynamics that shape the daily experiences of Black male administrators in CTCs. Participants described encountering reductive stereotypes that cast them as aggressive, unqualified, or unprofessional. These racialized assumptions often manifest as microaggressions, subtle, routine indignities that signal exclusion and reinforce negative stereotypes. Newman et al. (2025), in a recent systematic review, found that racial microaggressions in the workplace have a cumulative and overt impact, including professional isolation, limited advancement, and increased emotional burden for employees of color. These findings echo the participants' accounts and underscore how seemingly minor but persistent slights contribute to workplace cultures that marginalize Black male professionals**.** These racialized assumptions are often translated into microaggressions and exclusion from professional opportunities, reinforcing hostile work environments.

Research on gendered racism highlights how the intersection of race and gender uniquely disadvantages Black men in professional environments (Ash et al., 2020), a pattern echoed in participants' accounts of needing to constantly regulate their communication, behavior, and appearance to conform to dominate workplace norms. Participants reported a constant need to monitor their behavior, communication style, and appearance to conform to dominant White cultural expectations, a phenomenon

commonly known as code-switching. This experience aligns with findings from Loiseau and Mahalik (2025), who found that gendered racism predicts increased psychological distress among Black men in the workplace, especially when they feel pressure to conform to masculine and racist norms. These identity-management strategies reflect CRT-E's emphasis on counter-storytelling, as participants' narratives challenge dominant norms that continue to marginalize Black voices in higher education. As Casey poignantly noted, *"*This stereotype of you might be charismatic, but how much depth is beyond charisma...this notion that you're not going to be able to speak the king's English when it's necessary." Casey's quote illustrates the persistent doubts cast upon Black male intelligence, professionalism, and belonging.

These findings confirm that White normative behavior continues to function as an unspoken standard in determining leadership legitimacy within higher education. Participants shared that they were not only required to excel professionally but also expected to conform to behavioral norms that often clashed with their cultural identities. In this way, professional success was frequently contingent upon one's ability to suppress authentic self-expression and embody tropes deemed palatable to White colleagues. This expectation echoes DiAngelo's (2020) critique of racialized professionalism, in which people of color must exceed expectations to receive equal treatment, while White counterparts are presumed competent by default.

Participants' accounts also reveal the emotional labor involved in navigating these environments, as they balance the pressure to represent, the fear of being perceived as a threat, and the desire to preserve their personal integrity. This constant negotiation

between visibility and invisibility exacts a significant psychological toll, reinforcing a sense of isolation and exhaustion. The findings thus extend the literature by demonstrating how systemic and interpersonal forms of racism intertwine to create work environments that are not merely challenging but fundamentally inequitable for Black male leaders in CTCs. To foster truly inclusive institutions, higher education must reckon with and dismantle these racialized expectations that compromise both the performance and well-being of Black administrators.

Limited Pipeline and Preparation Gaps to Advancement

Participants reported a consistent lack of structured pathways into leadership roles within CTCs, highlighting a significant misalignment between their professional realities and the preparation they received through graduate programs. Many described these programs as culturally unresponsive, theoretical in focus, and disconnected from the specific demands of the CTC environment. Rather than providing a clear roadmap for advancement, leadership preparation often overlooks the intersectional challenges faced by Black men in PWI. This aligns with Milner's (2012) critique, which suggests that opportunity gaps, rather than achievement gaps, more accurately explain disparities in educational and career outcomes for marginalized groups. As Leon shared, "You don't even know there's this thing called higher education until you get into undergrad," underscoring how early exposure to postsecondary leadership as a viable career option was largely absent. These accounts support CRT-E's critique of the liberal meritocracy, which assumes that success is equally attainable through individual effort and overlooks

how systemic inequities limit access to information, mentorship, and opportunities for historically excluded populations.

This theme challenges the commonly held belief that academic and professional leadership follows a planned, structured career trajectory (Barnes et al., 2022; Lukes et al., 2023). Instead, participants revealed that many entered administrative roles by chance or necessity, without the formal preparation or institutional guidance their White counterparts often receive. These informal entry points usually rely more on personal resilience than systemic support, indicating a broader issue in leadership development pathways. Research supports a contrasting model.

Barnes et al., (2022) found that faculty careers are scaffolded by competency-based milestones and formal progression pathways while Lukes et al. (2023) documented how cohort-based doctoral programs can intentionally shape academic leadership preparation through structured development overtime. These findings highlight the misalignment between structured institutional approaches and the more fragmented, ad-hoc routes described by the participants in this study. Sparkman (2021) observed that Black male leaders frequently encounter pipelines designed around White male norms, which lack intentional scaffolding for the unique experiences and transitions faced by Black men. Participants' narratives expose that programs often generalize leadership development, without considering race, and gender specific barriers, which can leave Black men navigating advancement with limited structural guidance.

The findings extend current knowledge by illustrating how Black male administrators must navigate and often construct their own pathways amidst widespread

institutional neglect. Without targeted investment in culturally relevant mentorship, early career exposure, and leadership cultivation programs, these gaps will continue to reinforce the underrepresentation of Black men in executive roles. As the participants' narratives reveal, addressing these preparation disparities is a matter of professional development and an equity imperative.

Limitations to Building Social Capital and Professional Networks

Barriers to professional networks and insider knowledge significantly hinder the career mobility of Black men within CTCs. While formal qualifications and credentials are essential, participants revealed that access to leadership opportunities is often contingent on informal connections and conversations that regularly happen behind closed doors, introductions made over lunch, or invitations to exclusive strategy meetings. These networks are habitually closed to Black administrators, particularly in PWIs, where existing leadership structures replicate themselves through familiarity and comfort rather than equity or inclusion. The literature describes these institutional spaces as "White spaces" (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019; Liu et al., 2023). These spaces are characterized by norms, expectations, and relational patterns that center Whiteness and marginalize those who do not conform.

Participants noted frequent exclusion from influential committees, leadership pipelines, and off-the-record dialogues where key decisions and opportunities are discussed. These acts continually send the message that leaders with marginalized identities are not welcome in the role of executive leadership. This exclusion mirrors CRT-E's critique of institutionalized Whiteness, which operates not only through policies

but also through relational practices that quietly maintain racial hierarchies. Vontrell captured this dynamic succinctly when he shared, “The only thing that prevents Black males from having that social capital is being able to be in spaces that would allow them to build such networks.”

These findings highlight the persistence of structural inequities masquerading as neutral institutional norms. Despite equal or superior credentials, Black male administrators often remain outside the circles of trust that drive promotion and recognition in CTC environments. This reality challenges the myth of meritocracy and reinforces CRT-E’s critique of liberalism, which suggests that race-neutral practices alone are insufficient to achieve equitable outcomes. In practice, the absence of structured affinity spaces, mentorship programs, and inclusive networking opportunities means that Black men often must build support systems independently, if at all.

Without deliberate institutional investment in creating culturally affirming networks and inclusive leadership development, these patterns of exclusion are likely to continue. Leadership must do more than make empty calls for diversity and belonging. The findings suggest that proximity to power and performance continue to be key determinants of leadership advancement in higher education. Addressing these disparities requires a systemic and cultural shift from informal, exclusionary pathways toward intentional structures that equitably cultivate social capital for historically underrepresented leaders.

Pressure to Validate Competences Through Overperformance

Participants described a relentless need to overperform and anxiously manage perceptions of their competence to be seen as legitimate leaders within CTCs. Despite holding advanced degrees, extensive professional experience, and strong track records of success, many participants shared that their qualifications were often met with skepticism or outright dismissal. This constant scrutiny reflects what DiAngelo (2020) termed *racialized professionalism*, wherein the traits, behaviors, and accomplishments of Black professionals are devalued unless they align with White normative standards. Participants made clear the heightened surveillance and unforgiving expectations placed upon Black men in leadership. Participants expressed that even minor errors or deviations from dominant expectations were amplified, often resulting in disciplinary action, exclusion from recognition, or removal from high-visibility roles. It was clear that their White peers would not face or have the same disciplinary outcomes for comparable or even worse actions.

Ash et al.'s (2020) findings support the notion that Black professionals are often held to higher standards while being granted fewer opportunities for grace and second chances. The results of this study reinforce the importance of critically examining how institutional cultures normalize overperformance and create environments in which Black excellence is a prerequisite for basic legitimacy. This dynamic directly supports CRT-E's tenets of Whiteness as property, which frames institutional legitimacy, leadership potential, and trustworthiness as attributes disproportionately afforded to White individuals.

Furthermore, these findings demonstrate how colorblind evaluation standards perpetuate inequity by obscuring the systemic biases that inform perceptions of leadership readiness. By failing to acknowledge how race shapes performance expectations, institutions inadvertently sustain unequal standards of assessment and advancement. Addressing these inequities requires more than acknowledging bias; it courageously demands a reconfiguration of how competence, professionalism, and leadership are defined, measured, and rewarded across higher education as an industry.

Recommendations for Improving the Leadership Pathway

RQ 2: What are Black male administrators' recommendations for improving the professional pathway to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?

Improve Institutional Hiring Practices and Accountability

Participants consistently emphasized the urgent need for transparent, equitable, and accountable hiring practices within CTCs to disrupt the exclusionary norms that have historically disadvantaged Black male administrators. Their recommendations included standardizing interview protocols, establishing racially and professionally diverse search committees, publishing open salary ranges, and implementing equity dashboards to track and evaluate institutional progress. These reforms are not merely procedural; they are intended to dismantle the subjective and often racially biased systems that govern hiring decisions. Participants described how current processes often privilege Whiteness under the guise of professionalism or "fit," allowing racial bias to remain unchallenged. These findings resonate with CRT-E's demand for systemic accountability and reflect the work of Okhremtchuk et al. (2021) who advocated for structural hiring reforms grounded in

anti-racist practice. Institutional rituals can appear inclusive while concealing predetermined outcomes. And such performative acts erode trust and perpetuate the very inequities that DEI initiatives claim to address.

The call for codified hiring standards and enforcement mechanisms reflects a critical awareness that diversity efforts without accountability risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive. Participants pushed for concrete strategies such as incorporating search advocates trained in bias mitigation, requiring transparency in candidate evaluation criteria, and tying leadership evaluations to equity outcomes. These recommendations signal a shift from well-meaning but passive inclusion efforts to measurable and enforceable antiracist hiring practices**.**

The emphasis on equity dashboards and external audits challenges institutions to confront the outcomes of their practices, not just their intentions. This aligns with CRT-E's critique of liberalism, which highlights how race-neutral approaches can uphold racial hierarchies when institutions fail to examine power and privilege. Without tangible accountability structures, DEI efforts remain vulnerable to co-optation or defunding, especially in times of political or financial pressure. As such, participants' insights call for a cultural and structural reimagining of how leadership is identified, cultivated, retained, and rooted in racial equity, not convenience or compliance.

Professional Development and Leadership Preparation

Participants called for the development and expansion of culturally responsive leadership programs, formal mentorship, and active sponsorship opportunities as critical strategies for addressing the underrepresentation of Black male administrators in CTCs.

These calls align with growing research identifying systemic investment in Black leadership development as essential for achieving institutional equity (Henry, 2021; Jeter & Melendez, 2022). Participants highlighted the need for leadership training that goes beyond generic content to address the racialized realities that Black men face in White-dominant institutions. They emphasized that culturally grounded programs should include affirming messages of belonging, guidance on navigating racialized professional environments, and exposure to real-world institutional challenges specific to the CTC context.

Mentorship was especially noted as transformative when it came from those who shared similar lived experiences. However, such relationships were rare. Participants spoke to underscoring the scarcity of sustained, identity-affirming mentorship for Black men in higher education leadership. This can be tied directly to the underrepresentation of Black men in leadership positions within CTCs. This lack of consistent mentorship and sponsorship not only reveals institutional neglect but also challenges the myth that Black men in education lack ambition, initiative, or preparation. Participants clarified that their leadership potential was not limited by capacity, but by the absence of structural support and access to meaningful development pathways.

Participants' experiences highlighted the need for formalized support systems, including peer networks, leadership residencies, and targeted professional development specifically designed to reflect the lived experiences of Black male administrators. These findings affirm CRT-E's tenet of counter-storytelling by centering Black men's voices in reframing leadership development as an issue of equity, not individual deficit. Moreover,

they emphasize that institutions cannot expect equitable representation in leadership without intentionally cultivating and supporting Black talent through systemic, sustained, and culturally relevant investment.

Establish a Culture of Belonging and Inclusion

Creating inclusive and identity-affirming environments emerged as central to participants' vision for equitable and sustainable leadership development within CTCs. Participants emphasized that workplace culture plays a critical role in advancing or stalling the success of Black male administrators beyond professional preparation and structural reforms. Institutions must actively cultivate environments where Black men feel valued, seen, and supported through intentional strategies to sustain those environments, including affinity spaces, peer mentorship networks, culturally responsive supervision, and consistent representation at decision-making tables. These forms of community and affirmation are not tangential; they are essential. Sharrod reinforced this point, stating, "We often overlook the power of visibility, having Black men in leadership roles sends a message," highlighting how representation influences external perceptions and the internal sense of possibility for aspiring leaders.

These findings affirm CRT-E's tenet of counter-storytelling, as participants lived experiences push back against dominant narratives that frame Black men as disengaged, unfit, or unmotivated. Instead, their stories highlight the emotional labor, identity negotiation, and cultural isolation they often endure in PWI. As participants noted, visibility must be paired with structural investment in belonging, not tokenism.

As Bledsoe and Wright (2019) argued, the historical denial of geographic and institutional space to Black Americans continues to manifest in the present through aspatial or exclusionary practices that restrict full participation in higher education leadership. This legacy of exclusion reinforces the need for institutions to move beyond performative gestures of inclusion and embed equity into the culture. Authentic belonging requires institutions to shift from asking Black administrators to adapt to dominant norms to transforming those norms to reflect the diverse identities and leadership styles that strengthen institutional effectiveness. As Webster and Brown (2019) relayed, if institutions seek to retain top talent, foster innovation, and build inclusive educational environments that reflect their communities, transformation is not just a moral imperative; it must be a strategic one.

Limitations

This study was limited by several factors that may affect the breadth and generalizability of its findings. First, the small sample size, consisting of eight participants, most of whom were affiliated with community colleges, limits the extent to which the results can be generalized to all Black male administrators across the broader spectrum of higher education institutions, including technical colleges, universities, and other postsecondary contexts. Using purposive sampling and the self-selected nature of participant involvement may have introduced selection bias, as it captures the voices of those more willing or available to speak about their experiences, potentially excluding those with differing or more nuanced perspectives. Additionally, participants represented a limited geographic range, which may not fully reflect the regional and institutional

variability in hiring practices, campus climate, or leadership structures. As a result, the findings may not capture the full complexity of how race, place, and institutional type intersect to shape the leadership experiences of Black men.

Further, while member checking was incorporated to enhance the credibility of the data, only half of the participants engaged in this process. The limited feedback may have constrained the opportunity to clarify ambiguous statements, verify the accuracy of interpretations, or incorporate additional context that could have enriched the analysis. Future research would benefit from a broader and more geographically diverse sample, including various institution types, and more comprehensive engagement in the member checking process. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the systemic and cultural barriers that face Black male administrators. It contributes to a growing body of equity-centered scholarship in higher education leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers should explore the leadership journeys of a larger and more geographically diverse group of Black male administrators across CTCs to enhance the transferability of findings. Including the perspectives of hiring committee members, institutional decision-makers, and human resources personnel could provide a fuller picture of how institutional norms and practices contribute to or disrupt racialized hiring outcomes. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine how Black male administrators progress over time, what supports or hinders their advancement, and how systemic interventions impact their long-term career mobility. Such studies could identify

key moments in career advancement where targeted support is most effective and inform policy changes that reduce attrition among Black male leaders.

Additionally, future studies should investigate the role of gendered racism in shaping the experiences of Black men in leadership, with particular attention to differences between straight and gay Black male administrators. This includes examining how varying expressions of Black masculinity are perceived and navigated within leadership contexts, as well as whether certain performances of identity are rewarded, penalized, or marginalized. Researchers should also explore how internal dynamics among Black men, across various aspects such as sexual orientation, leadership style, and institutional role, affect peer mentorship, sponsorship, and solidarity. These inquiries would build on this study's findings by addressing gaps in understanding how identity intersects with access to leadership, professional support, and institutional belonging.

Implications for Practice and Social Change

The findings of this study have significant implications for practice and meaningful social change at multiple levels: individual, organizational, and societal. At the organizational level, particularly within CTCs, the results call for developing and implementing equity-focused hiring protocols, culturally responsive leadership training, and formalized mentorship and sponsorship programs designed specifically for Black male administrators. Institutions must recognize that you can't be anti-racist and anti-Black, equity work that sidelines the experiences of Black men is incomplete and ineffective. Centering Black leadership is critical to achieving positive social change across the campus environment. These institutions, whose core mission is to serve

historically marginalized and underserved communities, must go beyond symbolic gestures and commit to measurable accountability structures that disrupt exclusionary hiring practices and affirm the leadership capacity of Black men. Establishing identity-affirming environments, creating strategic pipelines, and embedding equity into institutional culture are not optional reforms. They are imperatives for aligning practice with mission.

At both the individual and institutional levels, this study highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing the barriers faced by Black men in pursuing leadership roles. By incorporating the perspectives of current Black male administrators, this research provides a blueprint to support others seeking similar career paths. The participants' insights offer practical recommendations to administrators, faculty, and staff on supporting, retaining, and promoting Black men into leadership positions. In doing so, colleges uphold their social contract to educate and empower all members of society, fulfilling the promise of an educated citizen who contributes meaningfully to a just and democratic society. Suppose CTCs truly seek to reflect the diversity of the communities it serves. In that case, they must invest in leadership pathways that are inclusive, accessible, and equity driven.

At the societal and policy levels, the implications are equally urgent. This study contributes to ongoing efforts to dismantle institutional racism in higher education and advance systemic transformation. Through the lens of CRT-E, the findings make clear that neutrality and colorblind policies are insufficient to address historical and ongoing disparities. You can't be anti-racist and anti-Black, to retreat from the needs of Black

professionals is to reinforce the very systems of exclusion DEI seeks to dismantle. Such a retreat would not only harm Black professionals but also diminish institutions' ability to equitably serve a diverse student population. The political environment surrounding higher education in the United States, especially under the Trump administration, remains hostile to equity efforts. The ongoing dismantling of DEI initiatives, attacks on CRT, and bans on race-conscious hiring practices threaten to reverse decades of progress. In this climate, higher education leaders must hold fast to the principles of equity, antiracism, and inclusive excellence. Retreating from these commitments would harm marginalized professionals and weaken institutions' ability to serve an increasingly diverse student body.

CTCs stand at a pivotal crossroads. As engines of social mobility, they have a unique responsibility to model what an inclusive and anti-racist institution can be. Failing to address the systemic exclusion of Black male administrators risks perpetuating the very inequities these colleges are tasked with overcoming. True diversity requires structural change, courageous leadership, and an unwavering commitment to justice. If embraced, the insights from this research can catalyze transformative practices that move beyond representation and toward enduring social change.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the limited but growing literature on Black male leadership in CTCs. This study highlights the complex and persistent challenges faced by Black male administrators in accessing and thriving in executive leadership roles at CTCs. Despite public commitments to equity and diversity, institutional hiring systems

often remain entrenched in practices that uphold Whiteness as the normative standard and marginalize Black male leaders through exclusion, surveillance, and stereotype-driven evaluation. Participants in this study shared powerful testimonies of being overlooked, undermined, and overburdened even as they continue to bring innovation to their campuses. These experiences reflect not isolated incidents, but a broader systemic pattern of racialized inequity embedded in institutional cultures and structures.

As national discourse increasingly calls into question the legitimacy of DEI efforts, higher education stands at a crossroads. The current climate has weakened and dismantled DEI infrastructure in many institutions, creating a chilling effect on efforts to build representative leadership. This moment demands not retreat, but renewed resolve. CTCs, whose mission is to uplift historically marginalized communities, must reaffirm their foundational promise by protecting and advancing equity at all levels of leadership. If institutions fail to act decisively, they risk not only reproducing the historical and real inequities they aim to correct but also eroding the trust in their capacity to serve a truly diverse and democratic society. This study offers both a warning and a path forward: by listening to and acting on the lived expertise of Black male administrators, CTCs can lead transformative change that strengthens their institutions, honors their communities, and upholds the ideal of an educated and just citizenry. This study presents a cautionary insight and strategic opportunity to the higher education industry, specifically the CTC sector of higher education.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Participants Needed for a Study on Black Male Leaders Serving at Community and Technical Colleges

The perspectives of Black male leaders serving at community or technical colleges are needed for a research study seeking to improve the professional pathway for Black male educators seeking executive leadership positions within community and technical colleges.

Are you eligible?

- Black or African American
- Male
- Currently serving or have served within the last 15 years in a executive leadership position at a community or technical college
- Served at least three years at a single institution in an executive leadership position

Study Requirements

- Accept Informed Consent
- Take part in a confidential 90min video interview
- Review interview transcript
- Post interview to share feedback and researcher's interpretation

- Participants who meet the criteria will be randomly selected to participate in the study. Selected participants will be notified via email and will receive an informed consent document.
- Participants will be compensated with a $15 electronic gift card at the end of the interview.

If you are interested, please fill out the Criterion Matching Questionnaire by using the QR Code or navigate to the following link:

https://forms.office.com/r/YNn8Hy5m8Z

Researcher & Contact Information

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: **Method of Interview:** **Date of Interview:**
Interviewee: **Position of Interviewee:**

The conceptual framework of this study is Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) critical race theory in education.

Whiteness as Property (WP)

The "Whiteness as property" tenet of CRT-E examines how Whiteness has historically functioned as a form of ownership and privilege, shaping social structures and access to power (Cowley, 2022).

Critique of Liberalism (CL)

The critique of liberalism challenges the notion that meritocracy and ignoring race (colorblindness) can automatically ensure racial equality.

Permanence of Racism (PR)

This tenet of CRT, the permanence of racism, highlights how racism is not an outlier or historical blemish but rather a deeply embedded feature of American society (A. N. Smith, 2020).

Counter Storytelling (CS)

Counter-storytelling challenges the dominant narratives and norms ingrained within a mainstream culture by highlighting the experiences and perspectives often marginalized or silenced.

This theory helps explain my phenomena by highlighting how race has played a part in the small number of Black male educators in executive leadership roles at community and technical colleges. It is important to me to consider how systemic racism, and historical biases may contribute to the barriers experienced by Black male administrators.

Opening Script:

Alaafia! Peace to you! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am MarcusAntonio Gunn, and I am the researcher for this study. This study is designed to address the underrepresentation of Black male administrators at Community and Technical Colleges by identifying strategies for improving Black male hiring practices and fostering a more inclusive leadership pipeline. Your time and expertise are invaluable to this study. Again, thank you for participating.

This semi-structured interview is scheduled to last for 90 minutes. While there are structured questions, I may probe further with follow-up questions. Please know you can skip any question. Please share what you feel comfortable with sharing. This interview will be recorded.

Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions:

Rapport Questions

1. Briefly tell me a little about yourself.
2. Briefly tell me about your role in executive leadership at your community or technical college. How long have you been in your current role? How long have you served in executive leadership roles throughout your career?

Research Questions

***RQ 1**: What are Black male administrators' perceptions of the barriers to obtaining employment in a community/technical college?*

	Protocol	**Rationale Lit Review (LR); Conceptual Frame (CF)**	**Probes/ Follow Up**
1.	How did your educational experiences, from K-12 to graduate school, prepare you for a leadership role in higher education? Were there any specific challenges or advantages you faced as a Black male student?	(LR) (CF-CS)	You mentioned _____; can you tell me more about that? Why do you think that is? Is there any additional information you want to share that
2.	Have you had mentors or sponsors who have helped you navigate the challenges of being a Black male administrator? If so, what role did they play in your career development?	(LR) (CF-CS)	

3.	How do you think networking and social capital play a role in securing administrative positions in community and technical colleges? Are there systemic barriers that make it more difficult for Black men to build these connections?	(LR) (CF-WP)	you have not provided?
4.	Can you share examples of microaggressions or subtle forms of discrimination you have experienced in your career?	(LR) (CF-CL/PR)	
5.	Have you encountered any stereotypes or expectations about Black male administrators that you believe have hindered your career advancement?	(LR) (CF- PR)	
6.	Can you describe any instances where you felt hiring practices were discriminatory or biased against Black male candidates?	(CF-WP)	

RQ2*: What are Black male administrator suggestions for improving the professional pathway to employment?*

	Protocol	**Rationale Lit Review (LR); Conceptual Frame (CF)**	**Probes/ Follow Up**
1.	What qualities do you believe are essential for inclusive leaders in higher education? How can institutions foster the development of these qualities among Black male administrators?	(LR) (CF-CL)	Please share the benefits, advantages, and disadvantages. Can you please share an example?

2.	What changes would you like to see in educational programs to better prepare Black male students for higher-education leadership roles?	(LR)	Can you explain what you mean?
3.	What changes do you believe are necessary in hiring practices to ensure that Black male administrators have equal opportunities?	(CF-CL)	
4.	What steps can be taken to address stereotypes and expectations that may hinder the advancement of Black male administrators?	(CF-PR)	
5.	How can institutions foster a more inclusive and equitable environment for networking and building social capital among Black male administrators?	(CF-WP)	
6.	What are your thoughts on diversity training programs? How can these programs be more effective in addressing systemic racism and promoting equity?	(LR)	

Post- Interview Script:

We have reached the end of our scheduled interview.

Thank you for your time, for sharing your story, and for assisting me with this study to improve the professional pathway for other Black men seeking employment within community and technical colleges. It is my hope that your suggestions will inform the development of policies and practices aimed at addressing systemic racism and promoting equity in higher education.

I want to briefly talk about the next steps.

My analysis of the data collected during this research process includes a “member checking” process. Member checking is when participants are offered the opportunity to review a draft of the transcript based on data collected during their interview, and they can suggest any changes to the transcript to ensure their responses were correctly captured. Participants are asked to review the transcript and respond within seven (7) days. If I have not received your response within seven (7) days, I will contact you by email and phone. Please anticipate receiving the transcript of our interview within three (3) days.

Lastly, I have a $15 electronic visa gift card for you. How would you prefer to receive the electronic gift card, by text or email? I will send the gift card within one hour after our interview.

Any other questions about the next steps?

Again, thank you for your time.