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Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Exploring the Lived Experiences of African-
American City/County Managers and the Impact of Mentoring on the Profession

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Public Policy and Administration

West Chester University West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

By

Johnny Mays

December 2022

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the strongest, most compassionate, loving person I have ever met. This journey would not be possible if you did not selflessly interject yourself into my life. You were not responsible for me, but you took on the responsibility.

God gave me life and set me on a path with no instructions other than to have faith. Mother, you gave me love and structure and told me everything happens according to God's will. I listened to you because I knew you would never steer me wrong. Life has ups and many downs, but I have been fortunate because of your knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Without your commitment to my growth and well-being, I might be mired by one of the roadblocks that have been detrimental to some who look like me. I navigated and adapted because of God's grace and your motherly love

To my grandmother Marzell Mays. Thank you for wrapping me tightly in your arms and treating me like your child. Thank you for raising me, teaching me, and loving me. Words cannot express the gratitude and admiration that I have for you. I love you to my core and will forever be indebted to you.

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I want to thank my colleagues, family, kids, and friends who supported and believed in me through this process. Your kind words and faith in me are what made this journey possible. It propelled me to the finish line.

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participated in this research project. This study would have never gotten completed without your experiences and willingness to partake. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

ABSTRACT

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Exploring the Lived Experiences of African-American City/County Managers and the Impact of Mentoring on the Profession

Literature regarding African-American City/County manager's experiences in local governments is limited, and any available resources primarily focus on the profession. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to explore the experiences of African-American city/county managers from their viewpoints. Grounded in Critical Race Theory, this investigative research attempted to shed light on the lived experiences of Black City/County managers pursuing their professional goals to lead a municipal organization. The study also aimed to understand the impact mentoring has on the profession.

Data were gathered via survey questions and audio-recorded interviews with each participant to comprehend this phenomenon better and address the research questions. Four themes developed from the researched data:

Self-awareness and knowing the organization, Being the First Black City Manager,
Advancement in the Profession, The Importance of Relationship building and mentoring,
Lacking African-American Leadership

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Local government is the civil administration of towns, cities, counties, and districts across America. The underrepresentation of people of color results in a lack of innovative ideas to solve complex issues. To understand why diversity in municipal governments is essential, we must reflect on some of the harsh realities that impact the lives of Black and Brown people across this country. People of color often face inequalities, stereotypes, and racial profiling that target their identity by those sworn to protect and serve and elected officials who make the laws. Communities with large black and brown populations are plagued by housing, educational, health, and environmental policies.

Diversity in the workforce helps local governments combat preconceived notions about community policing, policy implementation, and equitable service delivery. Leadership is essential for public administration experts overseeing our fire departments, trash services, recreational programs, law enforcement, and many other services. Taxpayers deserve leaders dedicated to fixing systemic problems affecting their way of life regardless of their race, financial or educational status. Municipal governments are multifaceted operations that require practitioners with the proper experience and knowledge to resolve community problems.

City Managers and Administrators play a dynamic role in executing municipal programs to expand and improve public service delivery and build bridges through networking and collaborative initiatives (Denhardt, 2016).

"Public administrators need a range of disciplinary competencies to provide effective management consultancies and exchanges among countries and cultures. This challenge can be met by interdisciplinary professional training, education, and collaborative,

multidisciplinary research for practicing public managers, MPA graduates, and public administration researchers" (Public Administration Evolving, p. 76).

The government's role is to ensure that the interplay of individual self-interests operates freely regardless of race or economic status. Public Administrators play a significant intermediary role between government and society, so they should be reflective of the people they serve. Incidents across the country have raised concerns in predominately black communities due in part to the lack of cultural representation in key government positions. Governance is about the government pursuing collective interests under severe external and internal constraints to stay ahead of societal changes (Kettl, p. 116). City and County Managers transmit messaging and resources from the state to civil society and deliver demands from civil society actors back to the state (Bertelli, p. 15). Organizations across the country should work tirelessly to be diverse, but diversity must run through the bloodline of municipal governments because of their many dealings with people from all walks of life.

Statement of the Problem

For many people, mainly Black, the United States is a contradiction. Its founding values embrace the beliefs of freedom and equality, but it is a country constructed on the systematic marginalization and suppression of communities of color. Furthermore, these legal structures are not some relic of the Jim Crow past but remain embedded in American federal, state, and local policymaking (Solomon, Maxwell, Castro, 2019).

The cultural landscape of the United States has shifted significantly in the past several decades, compelling public administrators to improve their overall effectiveness in managing social issues (Norman & Gooden, 2014). As protests stunned the country after the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, the voice of black leadership at the city's helm

was few and far between. The lack of African American administrators detrimentally impacts our society when nonsensical calamities affect minorities' way of life in this country. The knowledge and wisdom to implement programs and services to mitigate policing mishaps and community tragedies before they proliferate into something much more significant requires the viewpoint of those enduring the pain. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was performed to address the lack of African-Americans at the top of municipal governments by gaining insider knowledge about their experiences and the value of mentoring relationships. Mentoring is vital in ensuring public administrators receive professional development, guidance, and encouragement crucial to career growth and attaining management positions. Mentor relationships are dire to the success of aspiring and tenure managers because they provide support and professional advice to ameliorate organizational complexities allowing the mentee to attain management positions (ICMA, 2022).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this phenomenological examination was to study the lived experiences of African-American administrators within municipal organizations while gaining an understanding of their experiences from their perceptions. The secondary purpose of the research was to study the impact and value of mentoring relationships throughout their careers. When we make assumptions about the conduct of individuals and institutions, we can make predictions about their behavior in various situations. These circumstances may even embrace counterfactuals – what-if scenarios that did not occur in practice – allowing us to recognize why particular behaviors were not taken (Bertelli, p. 19). This study was conducted to understand the field from Black administrators' perspective to promote positive change and growth for African-American leadership to increase diversity at the upper levels of municipal governments.

Theoretical Framework

This research promoted the significance of the African-American perspective of the lack of diversity in the highest levels of city government. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was applied as the theoretical framework to facilitate the investigation into this phenomenon. CRT examines social inequality from a sociological, political, and economic perspective by attempting to deal with the structural reasons why inequality exists in society. The core concept of Critical Race Theory is that white supremacy remains ingrained in our government agencies, educational institutions, and laws that are fundamental to shaping American society (Wagner, 2017). There are five core beliefs, or tenets, of Critical Race Theory, which consist of the following features (Wagner, 2017).

1. Critical Race Theory emerges from the belief that racism is ordinary and not a deviation from the norm.
2. Critical Race Theory is concerned with the idea of a convergence of interest.
3. Critical Race Theory is concerned with the social construction of race.
4. Critical Race Theory focused on the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling.
5. Critical Race Theory is concerned with the notion that whites are the actual beneficiaries of civil rights legislation.

Critical Race Theory promotes and declares that meritocracy and color blindness go hand in hand with each other. Critical Race Theory is a philosophy that consists of being critical of the prevailing view of society by examining the beliefs that might favor people because of their race, gender, or economic status (Wagner, 2017). Municipalities seek to claim "impartiality" by declaring they want to hire more people of color but claiming there are not enough qualified minority applicants. The public organization concurrently acknowledges the disparity problem

while excusing itself of any specific obligation to treat it. The extent to which an agency is willing to acknowledge, examine, and address structural inequities along these dimensions falls within the nervous area of government. A cultural audit must be used to analyze the nervous area of government within a particular agency by exploring its baseline orientation regarding race and social equity. Public sector organizations provide services to a melting pot of people, so inclusion and diversity should be vital at the top (Gooden, 2015).

Critical Race Theory aims to give African-Americans currently occupying or pursuing city management positions insight into leveling the playing field. Municipal governments would be more respected if white people acknowledged the lack of black managers in the profession and found solutions to bridge the gap (Wagner, 2017). CRT aligns with the objective of this research by allowing African-American professionals to speak about their experiences being black and pursuing city management opportunities.

Critical Race Theory in city management questions the lack of diversity in municipal governments and seeks ways to increase diversity at the highest levels of the organization. The theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory will be elaborated on in Chapter Two, Literature Review.

Significance of the Study

This topic is a vital area to investigate as the outcomes may inform future practice, policy, and research regarding African Americans' experiences at the helm of municipal organizations. The findings may be advantageous to policymakers, human resource departments, and city/county managers who, in practice, could utilize the data to recruit, adequately support, and advance the careers of African-American professionals. The findings from the research

could influence personnel policy and help establish mentorship programs to accommodate unique career-related goals of minorities in the field.

Definition of Terms

To provide clarity and transparency, the definition of specific terms, as it relates to this study, has been provided:

- **Local governments** - usually include two tiers: counties, which are recognized as boroughs in Alaska or parishes in Louisiana, and municipalities or cities/towns. In many states, counties are divided into townships. As defined by State constitutions, municipalities can be structured in many ways and are called townships, villages, boroughs, cities, or towns (The White House, 2021).
- **African American/Black**—refers to a people and identity of African ancestry or background linked to the African displacement.
- **Mentoring** - mentoring relationship is a relationship built to gain personal and professional development for a mentor and mentee.
- **Municipal governments**—cities, towns, boroughs, villages, and townships—are generally structured around a population center and correspond to the geographical designations used by the United States Census Bureau for reporting housing and population statistics (The White House, 2021).
- **Executive-Level**- refers to the executive managers who lead the organization and have the most authority when making community decisions.
- **Mentoring program** - where a seasoned, high-performing employee coach and advise other employees to help develop those who need improvement or understand a potential career goal.

Organization of the Study

This study on the lived experiences of African-American City/County Managers was organized into five chapters. Chapter One, the Introduction, consists of the topic's background, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the importance of the inquiry, presents the theoretical framework, and acknowledges the research questions that will guide the investigation. Chapter Two comprehensively assesses the literature and discusses the study's theoretical framework. Chapter Three layout the methodology used to gather the research, including the sampling, data collection approaches, and data analysis techniques. Chapter Four outlines the study's findings; Chapter Five discusses the study's results, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study aimed to investigate why there is a lack of African-Americans leading municipal organizations and the impact this phenomenon has on communities of color. This research examines how conducive mentoring is in municipal governments and its benefits to the participants. It was anticipated for the reader to obtain an in-depth understanding of experiences specific to African-American City Managers, as perceived through their interpretations of the profession, while recommending solutions to help change the face of government organizations.

The research questions utilized to support this study were:

1. What are some of the lived experiences of African-American city managers?
2. How do African-American city managers describe their mentoring relationship with others managers?
3. What impact does a mentoring relationship have on the city/county management profession?

Literature Review

There is limited literature that directly conceptualizes the lived experiences of African-American City/County Managers and mentoring relationships, and reviewing the available literature offered insight into topics relevant to this research purpose. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the current scholarships in the following areas—Leadership Disparities, Professional Associations, Public Trust, Hiring Challenges, Municipal Leadership, and Why Mentoring Matters. The Literature review ends with a recount of the study's theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory.

Leadership Disparities

Black Americans have played a fundamental role in advancing America's business, political and cultural landscape into the realities of today. However, the representation of black leadership at the helm of municipal organizations is deficient, and a road map for improving this phenomenon is missing. Shirley Chisholm, John Lewis, Maya Angelou, and Michel Jordan all had someone break the glass ceiling to be successful. The Black leaders, who have made history in their respective industries, stood on the shoulders of pioneers who came before them (Connley, 2021). Leadership self-efficacy is a decision to lead others and offer discernment in decision-making and performance (Chemers et al., 2000).

Understanding the racial disparity in municipalities is critical to visualize the way toward more significant racial equity in local government leadership (ICMA, 2021). The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the profession's diversity journey continue to advocate for change, but African-American leadership in city government remains low. Research finds that African-American males and females crack the glass ceiling in their careers by following in the footsteps of others. The scarcity of African-Americans in City Management creates a vacuum for young professionals needing counseling and mentoring relationships to achieve their career goals and is a detriment to society (Connley, 2021).

The disparity in the number of African-American City/County Managers can impact municipal institutions and the career advancement of men and women in the field. An article published by the ICMA (1975) recognizes that in minority communities, municipal management is one of the least understood careers. It must be acknowledged as an essential and influential profession that can bring about effective change. If municipalities want to remain viable organizations providing equable public services in policing, fire services, and recreational

programs, minority representation in top staffing positions is necessary. Most organizations have made little effort to implement policies to eliminate racial barriers, excluding Black and Brown representation in leadership roles. Many African-Americans seeking management vacancies in government organizations have the credentials of their white counterparts but rarely land those high-level positions. Critical Race Theory states that American society is constitutionally framed to prioritize white people, which inherently alters the progress of minorities in the city management profession¹ (Wagner, 2017).

The black excellences of Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, and many others will cease to resonate in modern-day society if we continue to be governed by past mentalities. The value of these leadership practices among Black men in modern workplaces is unknown. Despite servant leadership dialogs that often begin by acknowledging Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, and other prominent African American leaders, little research explores Black men's leadership in municipal governments (Sims, Carter, Sparkman & Durojaiye, 2021). Blacks in cities across America have not experienced the quantity or quality of municipal government services, nor has there been black representation to articulate solutions to address these inconsistencies (Connely, 2021). The decision to lead may be based on one's leadership self-efficacy and influenced by community mishaps (Sims, Carter, Sparkman & Durojaiye, 2021).

Leadership diversity is critical for any organization, but local governments represent culturally diverse populations. Engaging in conversations about race at an individual level is essential but insufficient in fixing racial inequities in service delivery and leadership roles. Nervousness at the organizational level must be understood and rectified to combat historical

¹ CRT aligns with the objective of this research by allowing African-American professionals to speak about their experiences being black and pursuing city management opportunities.

barriers (Gooden, 2014). People of all colors and backgrounds reside in communities with unique businesses, so it is equally imperative for City Councils and Public Administrators to be diverse and reflective of their constituents. In many professions, the lack of diverse representation would be inconsequential, but it is significant in city services because it impacts the lives of African-Americans starting at City Hall (ICMA, 2021). While these general perspectives permit faceted leadership methods, more research is needed to account for the leadership styles of Black men specifically (Sims, Carter, Sparkman, Morris & Durojaiye, 2021).

Professional Associations

Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) membership association that awards degrees in the field of public administration, public policy, public affairs, non-profit and related fields with over 300 institutional affiliate universities at U.S. and non-U.S. universities. NASPAA standards require programs to promote a climate of inclusiveness in public institutions (NASPAA, 2022). Striving to ensure their members and overall profession reflect the people and deliver exceptional public services to constituents. The ICMA is the local government's race equity, and social justice thought leader. The National League of Cities suggests that the United States has approximately 19429 municipal governments. However, African-American City Managers are underrepresented in local communities nationwide. Multiple cities across America have many African-Americans residing within city limits, but leadership in most areas is predominantly white. Cities are conducting consistent racial equity assessments of budget decisions and making choices driven by a desire to address inequities and systemic racism (NLC, 2012).

The National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA) is the foremost and progressive organization steadfast in evolving Black leadership in local and state administrations. The NFBPA was a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established in 1983. With over 2,500 memberships, NFBPA has a national reputation for designing and implementing superior leadership development initiatives of unparalleled success (NFBPA, 2022). ICMA, formed in 1914, is a prominent association of local government professionals devoted to creating and sustaining thriving communities. Since its inception in 1914, the ICMA has continued to serve several vital functions for professional local government management executives. The association has more than 11,000 associates to identify and speed the adoption of leading local government practices to improve residents' lives (ICMA, 2022). When African-Americans are underrepresented in their community, they are less likely to engage in political processes or believe elected representatives will advocate on their behalf. It is incumbent upon these organizations to call out the lack of diversity in leadership roles and demand that organizations work to improve this problem.

Municipal organizations must be representative of the population they serve regardless of race or socioeconomic status. The organizational culture and climate of an organization have many similarities. Both are focused on the "internal social-psychological environment of organizations and the relationship of that environment to the individual meaning and organizational adaption." Leveraging diversity among local leaders reduces systemic barriers in policing and programs to improve people's quality of life. Critical issues that impact communities across the county require a diverse workforce of transformational ideas and unique perspectives. City Managers at the helm of public agencies are delegated with heavy burdens by city councils and society (ICMA, 2022). Organizations like the NFBPA, ICMA, and NASPAA

need to challenge public administrators at the helm of municipal governments to implement programs to increase diversity in leadership positions. Diversity is an effective way to resolve community problems and to produce innovative ideas for policy panaceas to address policing issues. Assessing racial equity's performance management and accountability dimensions is central to delivering public services and overhauling a mentality that disserves people in communities across this country (Gooden, 2014).

Community Conundrums

There are unique challenges that communities can overcome by hiring minorities to run municipal organizations. African-American administrators could substantially impact citizens' discernment of access to institutions and equitable representation in service delivery. All of this becomes noteworthy given that the city manager is a hired position that works at the city council's pleasure (ICMA, 2021). Public Administrators are now at a critical juncture to advance health, housing, and educational equity among vulnerable African Americans. To advance this equity, we must first understand the issues that create these disparities and the elements that can contribute to an effective, multilevel response. (Henry, Jacobs, Sabbs, Holden, & Braithwaite, 2020). Communities across this country face different challenges that demand innovative ideas. Public service values are essential and enduring beliefs, ideals, and principles shared by community members about what is good and what is not (Gooden, 2014). For example, a manager's race must never be a factor in hiring practices because it can be detrimental to the organization's overall success and does not validate a person's ability to resolve community problems. The elected city, town, county council, or other governing bodies hire professional local government managers to manage the organization's daily operations. These appointed

managers are nonpartisan and nonpolitical and oversee local governments' day-to-day business ethically, efficiently, and transparently (ICMA, 2022).

Public Administration is about managing programs and services that impact citizens across many aspects of life. Wart (2014) proclaims that governing bodies should work with professional recruiting firms to find knowledgeable professionals in planning, budgeting, leadership, and economic development. Governments can contract with recruiting firms to find the best applicant for the job to limit conscious or unconscious bias. Despite continuing growth in Black and minority ethnic (BME) employees entering the workforce in leadership roles remains disproportionately low. Wyatt (2015) suggests several conceivable obstacles to BME leadership evolution, and strangely little attention has been given to BME professionals' voices in questioning prevailing conventions about the factors that influence their leadership journeys. A detailed report produced by Policy Link (2022) argues that to achieve equity, we must deliver results to the populations that need them the most, wisely recommending that the government shrink the gaps in data collection for disenfranchised populations. It recognizes challenges faced by particular groups, such as Black, Latino, Native American, Southeast Asian, and young men of color. Too many people of color are subjected to persistent toxic stress, violence, or the incarceration epidemic. As long as men of color continue to fight an uphill battle with law enforcement, job attainment, and achieving economic success, our communities will continue to have a racial divide (ICMA, 2014).

Hiring Challenges

When the city manager job was first introduced to better urban government management in the early 20th century, there remained unfinished business in political and governance institutions. America was a society that had not yet formed the 19th amendment to the

Constitution, permitting women to vote. It took decades longer to begin demolishing segregation and expanding civil rights. More than 60 years after the council-manager government structure was created and the most primitive city managers were hired, the first African American entered the profession in 1968 when Compton, California, hired James C. Johnson. Today, several hundred African-Americans work as the chief executive officer (or as a deputy or assistants) in areas across the United States. Moreover, while that number has increased, it is still a tiny fraction of this country's city and county management demographic (ICMA, 2019).

A governance undertaking is any activity that society directly entrusts to its government regarding public preferences regarding a policy (Bertelli, 2019). There are many aspects of these matters for a city manager and elected officials to consider without seeming prejudiced. Denhart (2014) believes that Public officials can include and incorporate citizens in the decision-making process and collaborate with them in all stages of the decision-making process, including implementation and evaluation of the decision. City managers, regardless of race, are obligated by the ICMA Code of Ethics or their state association's ethical code. Part of that requirement acknowledges treating all people equally with the quality of inclusivity to reinforce public trust (Shafritz, 2016).

While finding and attracting a wider pool of job candidates is essential, the broader and bigger that pool, the more challenging it is to screen. The distribution of African-American employment is uneven across firms. Research shows that African Americans have more significant employment in central city establishments than suburban ones. The research investigates the empirical regularity by evaluating the hiring process's steps, and the part race plays. The author assesses whether race affects the applicant attaining the position. The researcher examines if employers place black applicants lower in the hiring queue, which puts

them at a disadvantage in getting the job. The investigation attempts to root out why black hiring firms are more likely to African American positions than white hiring agents (Stoll, Raphael, 2004).

Public Trust

Little support indicates that good public administration improves public trust in government or administrative processes (Perry & Christensen, 2015). People perceive the world from their experiences, and in many cases, those encounters are bad. Nowadays, communities want to know if they can trust their elected representatives to hire managers who can build relationships with citizens from all walks of life. Taxpayers want to live in communities where the administrators are good servants of their money but possess cultural competency. Gooden (2014) claims that good government is a characteristic of cultural competency. First, public administrators should strive to understand better the demographical shift increasing diversifying the landscape. Second, they should continue to customize public services, foster cross-sector partnerships, and rely on non-profits' shared cultural expertise in representing these diverse communities.

Wart (2014) claims that a vital difference is required when discussing leadership, especially in the public sector. Primarily, organizational leaders have been provided influential opinions about which community difficulties need addressing. Their concern is how to deliver services or products through their organization successfully. However, public trust is often the foundation for successfully solving big problems inside and outside the organization. Public administrators have little control over the powers that tend to undercut trust in their work. Nevertheless, the rising distrust of government

undeniably affects the environment in which public administrators work (Perry & Christensen, 2005).

The senseless and unsympathetic murder of African-American men has undoubtedly been one of the more prominent criminal acts ever committed by an individual sworn to defend the life and safety of people. The vast majority did nothing to justify a death punishment and should have gotten due process in their dealings with law enforcement. Sadly, such circumstances have become commonplace in the lives of African-Americans when they come in contact with police. Such terrible experiences continue to erode the trust between African-Americans and community leaders who urgently need rebuilding if our country achieves its total capacity (ICMA, 2020).

The public interest is the outcome of a conversation about shared values rather than the sum of personal self-interests. The public will never believe that elected officials are working to better community challenges if there is a lack of public trust. Therefore, public servants do not merely act in response to the demands of "customers" but rather concentrate on building relationships of trust and alliance among citizens. Striving to ensure their members and overall profession reflect the people and deliver exceptional public services to constituents (Dehardt, 2016). In the manifestation of displeasure for unlawful and unequal police officers' acts, many citizens of the United States are expressing their constitutional right to protest or participate in civil disobedience peacefully. The difficulty of the government obstacles demands citizen involvement and acceptance, if not active cooperation (Denhart and Denhart, 2016). Perhaps Black municipal leaders possess something their non-Black peers lack or peculiar talent for derailing opposition to development initiatives and calming people's frustration with public service delivery (Owens, Drake, & Brown, 2021).

Municipal Leadership

Black male leaders in the workplace lead others, act on their behalf by placing their developmental needs first as they endorse leadership, and be involved despite workplace microaggression they may experience (Owens, Drake, & Brown, 2021). Organizations have long sought ways to improve workers' performance from top to bottom for a long time. Caillier (2014) suggests that transformational leaders can increase performance because of their ability to set challenging and clear goals, a position that has received empirical support. Social or community problems are problems that, by their very definition, concern people across the county. Regrettably, socially and economically powerful bodies, such as government officials, interest groups, or elected officials, often define these problems and the solutions.

On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old African American, was killed by a white law enforcement officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, MO, a suburb in the St. Louis metropolitan statistical area (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). Community protests were planned and received international attention in response to the shooting. At times, activists burned cars and buildings and gridlocked streets (Downs, 2014). Police answer to protestors and civilians was violence and force, using military vehicles, waving semiautomatic weapons, launching tear gas and rubber bullets at demonstrators, and arresting activists and journalists (Benchabane, 2016; Downs, 2014). Cultural incompetence can be detrimental to individuals in police and criminal justice policy matters. Many police departments have been charged with cultural insensitivity and assumptions about people based solely on their cultural background leading to cultural profiling of citizens in their jurisdiction. The lack of diversity at the top of municipal organizations leads to unresolved issues that have historically affected people of color.

Public administrators must look introspectively at their organizations and implement policies to help change the face of public service (Gooden, 2015).

Guy and Rubin (2015), Public leaders needed morality no more than a hotel worker carrying out his daily responsibilities. Conversely, the expectation that administrators will uphold values and norms has always measured how organized administrative activity contributes to and impacts society. Public Service leadership is a complex idea and, every so often, becomes a generalization, and the conception is socially constructed and, therefore, contested (Teles, 2015).

James Burns (1978), a political scientist, was the first to conceptualize transformational and transactional leadership while keeping track of world leaders' traits. Political scientists usually describe leadership according to their views of the issue and rely on the aspects in which they are most interested. As a result, political science has hardly progressed to a point where it could be identified as a consensual conceptualization and treatment of direction. It relates to other concepts, such as 'influence,' 'power,' and 'authority,' which contribute to the broad array of competing meanings (Teles, 2015). Localities must collaborate with community members within and outside of city limits to plan, develop and implement appropriate programs to meet the needs of its taxpaying citizens (Miao, Umemoto, 2011). Ferguson, Mo, residents had no role in shaping uneven policies that impacted the community, eventually snowballing into a moral quandary. African-Americans are more likely than Whites to be pulled over by the police, twice as likely to be searched by law enforcement, and 2.5 times more likely to be shot by a police officer. Unfortunately, these problems will continue if we do not work to increase diversity at the upper levels of municipal organizations (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). Leadership is defined as the position of controlling a group of people. That control can only be navigated through the

articulation of words and the power of the public. Leadership begins with one of humans' five senses, the ability to listen and work to diagnose the cause of a problem. Transformational leadership can be distinguished from traditional styles of leadership, namely, transactional leadership. Transformational leadership refers to inspiring subordinates to rise above their self-interests for the organization's effectiveness and goals (Caillier, 2014).

Transformational leadership at the top of municipal organizations is the starting point for reducing division between police, elected representatives, and the community. The lower the level of government in the United States, the more the government is engaged in direct service delivery. Fundamental to any thought of citizen participation in decision-making and the design of public services is the appreciation of citizens in a democracy and that democratic governance actively provides opportunities for residents to shape their communities (Kettl, 2015). Problem-solving through community-based organizations (CBOs), neighborhood associations, and tenant organizations are common forms of place-based practice. Equity in African-American city/county management and mentoring will help improve the diversity in city government on all levels and across functions (Gooden, 2015).

Why Mentoring Matters

The idea of mentorship, or the professional training of a protege by a more experienced mentor, originates from Homer's classic poem, *The Odyssey*. Homer's poem was printed about 800 BCE, around 1200 BCE, when the character Odysseus, king of Ithaca, was preparing to leave for Troy (History of mentoring, 2017). Mentoring is usually seen with entry-level employees because they are trying to gain knowledge to move into management. Mentorship programs and mentoring are the guiding light to increase diversity policies throughout every community in America and abroad. City Managers are in positions to help aspiring managers

resolve complex issues around policing practices, equitable services, and community trust. African-Americans pursuing and occupying these roles need mentors with a record of accomplishment in solving problems. A successful mentoring relationship provides positive results for both the protege and mentor through expanding knowledge, proficiency, energy, and resourcefulness (ICMA, 2016).

Mentors are usually leaders in their respective fields. Mentors in public administration are experienced in solving executive-level problems and have reached a point where they can groom their proteges to overcome conundrums in the profession. The study researched African-American leaders to understand their leadership experiences and the impact of racial bias in microaggressions on their engagement (Sims, Carter, Sparkman, Morris & Durojaiye, 2021). Strong leadership is required to improve local government's efficiency and effectiveness because the challenges are extensive. The operational and capital improvement budgets of municipal governments are directly and indirectly affected by fiscal issues at the federal and state level. More specifically, as budget cuts have transpired on the state level, state funds for local government programs and initiatives have decreased. Mentors are starting to recognize that their role involves being both a coach, confidant, and critical friend. A significant presence of Black leadership in decision-making, lawmaking, and the government of cities leads to the substantive advantage of Blacks as a collective (Owens, Drake, & Brown, 2021).

A meaningful mentoring relationship can assist the mentees' psychosocial development and be a powerful, life-changing event. Mentoring benefits the mentee and mentor because executives need to increase and sharpen their skills. The mentor offers career-advancing expertise to guide the protege in presenting themselves in a way that leads to professional development. This relationship increases the visibility of the protege to decision-makers in the

organization who may influence career opportunities. African-Americans looking to become city and county managers can utilize these opportunities to advance into assistant to or assistant city manager roles. (ICMA, 2022). There is a lack of African-Americans in city manager positions, so mentor opportunities can help increase diversity. Aspiring City/County managers must develop mentoring relationships with administrators with the experience to navigate municipal quagmires that could tarnish their careers. BML may serve to help the interests of Black civil society and improve policy deficiencies. Such interests are “outlined” by leaders as cohering with the apprehensions, values, and urgencies of the Black community (Owens, Drake, & Brown, 2021).

Mentor support provides information for strategic thinking, resource access, problem-solving, and two-way communication with feedback and reflections. Relationships are established and sustained through respect, professionalism, open communication, attentive listening, friendly dispositions, and trust. The mentor should know the functions of government and help the mentee acquire new skills. These relationships are usually long-lasting and people-focused, and the connection should become symbiotic. Mentoring programs have become very popular mainly because organizations face the retirement of a significant number of their workforce. Still, they can also be used to groom future African-American city leaders. Working in local government often means planning for the big picture. Planning for the future needs of groups or areas in the community can be absorbing challenges that demand diverse opinions to ameliorate the problem. Mentorship in local government is about more than sharing guidance and management skills; it is about putting leaders in positions who can speak and result in the issues we face in housing, law enforcement, and public policy (ICMA, 2020).

Summary

Despite the increase of African-Americans in public administration roles, the fight to overcome racial barriers remains pervasive. The control lever, in this case, is in the hands of Mayors and Elected Officials of municipal governments. Breaking through the "glass ceiling" is an obstacle most minorities encounter throughout life. Black municipal leadership (BML) may influence the scale and character of public housing removal, redevelopment, and community policing (Owens, Drake, & Brown, 2021). It is essential to consider why municipal governments must be diverse at the organization's higher echelons. A diverse workforce helps local governments influence residents who reside and work within city limits. As American cities increasingly become diverse, so should the leaders at the top of city governments. It is incumbent upon residents to hold their elected officials accountable and demand that they hire the best applicant to fill these high-level positions and work toward being more reflective of the people they serve. The burden lies at the feet of elected officials and public administrators who have the power to change organizational practices instead of merely kicking the can down the road.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This dissertation chapter provides information about the research design, population, sample, data collection approaches, and breakdown. An interpretative phenomenological analysis primary method allows the participants to thoroughly express their views of their lives as City Managers in municipal government. The participants were selected and invited to partake in the research based on criteria chosen to create a homogenous sample. Semi-structured interviews and surveys were used to collect data to capture the participants' professional experience and mentoring relationships with other managers. The most effective way to compare African-American City Managers to their counterparts is to evaluate all the factors through appropriate samples, which compares apples to apples to reject this notion or offer incontrovertible evidence. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provides rich and detailed first-person accounts of a specific experience.

The primary purpose of this qualitative investigation was to give voice to the lived experiences of African-American City Managers working for County and City organizations. The secondary intent of the research was to assess internal and external mentorship programs and their impact on their careers.

Pilot Study

A pilot study on the topic in 2017 (but it focused on black department heads instead of black city managers) explored the interpretative phenomenological analysis. The pilot study helped define the research design and data-collecting methods for the research project. The pilot study was a way to determine how often the participants would be interviewed and if follow-up interviews were needed. As an outcome of the pilot study, I decided it would be beneficial to

utilize surveys to gather demographic information and audio-record the semi-structured interviews.

Research Design

African-American City Managers' lived experiences, including their mentoring relationships with other managers, were investigated with a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological research study. Qualitative research methods include 'small-group discussions' for analyzing theories and semi-structured interviews to seek views on a focused topic to personally understand a complaint, experience, or event (Smith, Nizza, 2019). Due to the richness of the data collected from using qualitative research, this type of methodology was selected for this 7-question topic for an in-depth investigation that could uncover all-encompassing data on a matter currently uncommon in the literature. A phenomenological theoretical approach was utilized for this research because it permits the study to assess the phenomenon through the lens of participants who have direct experience with the issue at city hall (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The interpretive paradigm was the best-suited perspective for this study as it "is grounded on the human desire to understand self and others" (Humble & Morgaine, 2002). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provides rich and detailed first-person accounts of a specific experience. With IPA, the goal is to get as close to the lived experience of participants so that it can be studied in detail. Accordingly, IPA researchers target insight into the experience from the participant's perspective, capturing the emotions surrounding the experience and how people understand it and make sense of it (Smith, p.4).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used as the research methodology for this exploration. Phenomenological in nature, due to its association with understanding experience in its terms, IPA allows qualitative researchers to explore how others make meaning of substantial life experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). IPA engages in a double hermeneutic, meaning "the participants are working to understand the phenomenon, and the researcher is trying to comprehend the participant's world" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 53). This research intends to produce vital information to implement steps to expand to a pool of Black applicants seeking city and county management roles. (Creswell, 2017).

The participants

As IPA is idiographic, a smaller sample size is recommended for studies using this approach (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA analyzes cases thoroughly to provide detailed accounts of participants' experiences, and studies with larger sample sizes have produced less satisfying interpretative work (Smith, 2011). The participant's contributions were critical to the research development due to the phenomenological method used for this study (Smith et al., 2009). A sample of six African-American city/county administrators participated in this study, as Smith et al. "indicates that between three and six participants can be an appropriate sample size" for an IPA project (2009). The following outlines are intended to provide background data about each participant to allow the reader greater awareness of what they encounter as public administration professionals.

Population

The study population will be executive-level African-American City & County managers working in public organizations. This qualitative research endeavor aims to understand why the

representation of African-American City Managers is significantly low. The research involves recording information about the individual's pontificate as barriers to achieving a high-level position. It is essential to understand the perspectives of the individuals who have experienced challenges with city councils to recommend solutions to create change (Mitchell, 2018).

Interviewing several individuals currently in the City/ County Manager role in communities ranging from 30,000 to 100,000 in the total population will give some perspective on this problem. Individuals aspiring to become City Managers usually attain a master's degree in public administration, public policy, or a similar discipline. Administrators at the top of municipal organizations exemplify public administration concepts by implementing them. Local government is the civil administration of towns, cities, counties, and districts. It can be challenging, but these bodies must work together to manage a particular geographic area. The theories around public service and leadership are essential because local governments oversee our fire departments, trash services, public swimming pools, parks, and law enforcement. City Managers are servant leaders genuinely concerned for the advancement of the people residing in their communities. Their goodwill and passion transcend the business community and staff members working for the organization (Denhart, 2015). Participants must articulate their story freely, on their terms, taking the time to reveal and think about what to say and express their points of view, outlooks, and apprehensions without feeling judged.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used to pinpoint potential participants for the research "because they can permit the research project awareness into a particular experience" (Smith et al., 2009). IPA studies aim to illuminate individual lived experiences. The overall sampling strategy is to identify a closely defined set of people for whom the experience has been significant (Smith,

Nizza, pp. 14-15). Systematic sampling is vital to thoroughly investigate this phenomenon and provide suggestions to improve the lack of diversity in the upper levels of municipal governments. The sample will provide insight into states and localities that are more likely to hire African-American managers by assessing the population size, demographics, unemployment rates, and geographic location of the municipalities relative to this research. Our culture and upbringing significantly impact our success in this world. People engage with the world and make sense of it grounded on their historical and social outlooks. Qualitative researchers hunt to understand the circumstance or problem by gathering information personally from individuals impacted by the matter (Creswell, 2017).

Sampling provides measurements that can be used to validate the rationale that there are far fewer black city managers at the top of municipal governments. A good sample size allows multiple comparisons across cases and gives sufficient data to master the processes involved in doing IPA (Smith, Nizza, 2020). A list of twelve City/County Managers who fit the selection criteria was created to recruit participants. An email was sent to a closed group of six participants requesting their participation in the research project.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to present questions that lead to in-depth responses from the participants. Good IPA research questions focus on a particular contextualized experience and are open and exploratory (Smith et al., 2009). The interviewer gathers data in a qualitative research project from the interviewee. My role as the researcher facilitated research through surveys, investigative interviews, and audio recordings. As an IPA researcher, I engaged in a double hermeneutic process throughout the research study's data collection, and analysis stages, which required my interpretation of the participants lived experiences working in municipal

governments. As a qualitative research approach, Husserl first conceptualized and theorized phenomenology (1931) to frame the lived experiences of people and the meaning of their experiences. The aim is to gather the participants experiences and sense-making about their lived experiences. Its depth of awareness makes it exceptionally suited to investigate experiences perceived as highly significant.

Data Collection

I employed surveys and semi-structured interviews for the participants to obtain relevant and significant data for this examination. These data collection methods provided the critical data necessary to understand this phenomenon better and address the research questions.

Data Analysis

Upon conclusion of the data collection, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and surveys were analyzed according to the steps detailed by Smith et al. (2009) for IPA research. The IPA data analysis steps include: (1) submerging into the original data by analyzing and re-analyzing each transcript and listening to the audio recording of the interview, (2) initial documentation by probing semantic content in the transcript to find anything of interest, (3) observing exploratory remarks from your initial level of analysis to create emergent themes, (4) searching for associations across emergent themes by applying abstraction, opposition, contextualization, numeration, and purpose (pp. 96-98); (5) moving to the following interview to emulate the process mentioned above; and lastly (6) looking for connections across interviews. As the researcher, I streamlined the coding process by doing it manually. The first step in coding was understanding the data and its relevance to the study. During the second pass at coding, I scrubbed through the data line-by-line, added more detail, and tailored the list of codes. This process allowed me to find patterns, reanalyze the data and seek out any emerging

themes for the final analysis. Lastly, I started grouping codes into categories and establishing themes to create a narrative for the interpretative analysis.

Limitations

Generalizability was the primary limitation of this research study. The findings from this investigation cannot be generalized to the entire population. Another limitation of this research is the sample size used in IPA research. There is no way the experiences of the six participants in this study embrace the degrees of experiences of African American city/county managers.

The IPA approach recommends a small sample size because it provides a case-by-case analysis to understand African-American managers' perspectives on mentoring in municipal organizations. As the sole researcher, I collected and analyzed the data and coded and determined the themes. I utilized bracketing to eliminate researcher bias, yet, the human factor was present and potentially influenced the study results. Outside points of view were not allowed to influence the themes and maybe limited the research outcome.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this exploration referred to the sample used to respond to the study questions. Participants in the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach were delimited to being African-American city and county managers, working at the helm of municipal governments, holding at least a Master's degree, and having five years of full-time experience in a manager/administrator position. Furthermore, the data collection method did not include written reflective journal entries. Semi-structured interviews can also be vulnerable to unintentional bias, either on the interviewer's behalf or the interviewee's (Adams et al., p. 148-149). Therefore, questions were structured and asked in a clear, unbiased way to provoke honest feedback.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made to conduct the interpretative phenomenological analysis of African-American City/County Managers' lived experiences and the impact of mentoring relationships. The first assumption was that the information collected from the participants would provide adequate data to understand their lived experiences concerning their professional and the benefit of developing a mentoring relationship.

The second assumption is that the participants delivered truthful, in-depth replies to the interview questions and the survey. An informed consent form outlined voluntary participation in the study, provided an opportunity to withdraw from the study, and provided techniques for participant anonymity throughout the investigative process. The third assumption is that the participants in the study would commit to the data collection process by participating in the 45-minute interview and anonymous survey. The grouping of primary (semi-structured interviews) and secondary (survey) data sources for this study were combined to understand the lived experiences of African-American City/County Managers lived experiences and mentoring relationships with others in the profession.

Strategies for Trustworthiness

Credibility was established in four primary ways to demonstrate trustworthiness in the study: member checking, researcher surveys, and field notes. Member checking, "an approach for maximizing trustworthiness," occurred throughout and after the interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012). During the interviewing process, the participants were probed for clarity on specific topics; copies of the transcription were sent to the participants for accuracy after each interview. Additionally, I took notes during the interviews to capture the contextual features of the experience and any noteworthy instants or feelings that emerged throughout the procedure. I

disseminated anonymous surveys to all the participants for demographic information and to understand their perspectives on the lack of diversity in the field. Lastly, using multiple data collection methods, methodological triangulation occurred through semi-structured interviews with each participant and the participants' surveys and audio recordings (Denzin, 1978).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative analysis was to give voice to and understand the lived experiences of African-American City/County Managers at the helm of municipal governments. This research explored the lived experience of African-American city/county managers and the impact of mentorships on the profession. The homogeneous sample--as indicated by the IPA method--included six African-American city/county managers recruited via my contacts. Data were collected using surveys and semi-structured interviews with each participant that were audio recorded. After data collection, I followed the data analysis steps for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, as Smith et al. (2009) outlined. The survey data and interviews were transcribed to develop emergent themes amongst the participants. The interpretative analysis produced rich, in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon, which will help fill the void in the current literature on the lived experiences of African-American city/county managers and the impact of mentorships on the profession.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This qualitative, interpretative phenomenological examination gave an outlook on African-American experiences working in municipal governments. The study was intended to analyze how these public administrators experience mentoring relationships with others in the field. The study was conducted based on the researcher's interpretation using the process defined by Smith et al. (2009) for statistical analysis of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis studies. This chapter examines the information gathered through the survey and semi-structured interviews, then summarizes the results collected and the analysis processes. In-depth interviews are the most common way of gathering data for IPA analysis, and conducting an excellent in-depth interview is necessary for all IPA researchers (Smith, p. 19).

Chapter Four includes brief descriptions of the six participants to allow the reader to understand each participant's experience. Following the participants' perspectives, any developing themes are discussed using excerpts from the participants' surveys and interviews to support the explanation for each theme. A summary of the focal points is provided after the chapter. Table 1 provides demographic figures for the six partakers. Pseudonyms replace the participants' names to protect their privacy throughout the study.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information Name

Pseudonyms	Age Range	Years of Experience	Education Level	Current Job Title
Terry	30-40	5	Master's Degree	Manager in Transit
Sherry	50-60	30	Master's Degree	County Administrator

Darryl	40-50	20	Master's Degree	City Manager
Calvin	30-40	10	Master's Degree	County Administrator
Michael	60-70	40+	Master's Degree	City Administrator
Ivan	60-70	40+	Master's Degree	Retired City Manager

*Pseudonyms are used for the participants' real names to protect their identity and privacy.

Participant #1- Terry

Terry is a black male between 30-40 years old and is a manager in transition (MIT) with the ICMA. He was once a fellow for the ICMA and has worked in assistant city manager, Town Manager, and County Administrator roles. Terry has five years of experience in the executive position. He holds a bachelor's degree and a Master's degree in Public Administration. Terry decided to step away from the public sector for a while to run his own business. The participant did not have a mentor when he was at the helm of a municipal organization.

Participant #2 - Sherry

Sherry is currently a county administrator in the Midwest. She is a black woman between 50-60 years old. Sherry went from being a department head to an assistant city manager role. This experience helped Sherry move up into the position of city manager and become a county administrator. She has a bachelor's and master's degree in urban planning. Sherry possesses over 30 years of experience in the profession. The participant has a few trusted mentors she can contact for personal and professional advice.

Participant #3 - Darryl

Darryl is currently the City Manager in the Midwest for a college town. He is a black male between 40-50 years old and has over 20 years of experience in government. Darryl started his career as an assistant to the city manager before becoming a city manager, then deputy city manager, and back to the city manager. He holds a bachelor's degree and a Master's degree in Public Administration. He is currently thinking about pursuing a Doctorate in public administration. The participant does not have a professional mentor whom he can contact for advice.

Participant #4 – Calvin

Calvin is a black male between 30-40 years old. He gained extensive experience being a fellow for a municipal organization before moving into the city manager's office. Calvin went from an Assistant to the City Manager; to Assistant City Manager to City Manager and is now a County Administrator with over ten years of experience working in public service and managing staff. The participant holds a bachelor's degree and a master's in public administration. Calvin is currently completing a Doctorate in the public administration program. He now has a few mentors he can lean on for administrative advice. In this case, a "Manager in Transition (MIT) Status is unemployed and seeking new management opportunities.

Participant # 5 -Michael

Michael is a black male who has 40 years of experience in city management. He is currently the city administrator for a community of 123,851 in the upper Midwest, where he reports directly to the city council. Michael has a bachelor's degree and a masters in personnel management. The participant has worked in the manager and assistant manager roles for government entities. Michael has never been the mentee, but he does mentor other professionals in the field.

Participant #5 -Ivan

Ivan is a Black male who has worked in municipal government for over 40+ years. He is currently semi-retired but does interim assignments every once in a while. Ivan holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in public administration. The participant has been a city manager primarily throughout his years of service in the profession. He does not consider himself a mentor, but some professionals contact him when they need advice on a community issue.

Table 2. Participants Survey Answers

	Terry	Micheal	Calvin	Sherry	Darryl	Ivan
Do you believe there is a lack of African-American City Managers/Administrators at the helm of municipal governments?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How many years have you worked in the city manager/administrator's office?	5	40+	10	30	20	40+
What was the first position you held at the executive level?	Assistant City Manager / Administrator	City Manager / Administrator	Assistant to the Manager	Assistant City Manager / Administrator	Assistant City Manager / Administrator	Assistant City Manager / Administrator
How would you describe the city manager/administrator who hired you? Please select all that apply.	White Male	White Male	White Male	White Male	White Male	White Male
Do you think there is any value in having a mentor?	Definitely yes	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Definitely yes	Definitely yes	Definitely yes
Do you think it would benefit municipal organizations to establish internal mentorship programs to increase diversity?	Definitely yes	Might or might not	Probably yes	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Definitely yes

Results

The research study was guided by seven investigative questions to obtain in-depth and unadulterated answers from the participants. As the researcher, I analyzed the data and transcribed the interviews to uncover emergent themes. The transcripts were also uploaded to Dedoose software to develop common themes among the participants across the data sources. Utilizing Smith et al.'s (2009) data analysis process, codes were developed through note-taking, repeated review, transcripts, and survey questions. The outline recommended by Smith allowed me to interpret better and understand each participant's perspective and experience working for public sector organizations. The steps were emulated for each participant to identify similar codes between the participants. Four themes about the participant's experiences emerged while exploring the research questions through the analysis procedure.

Themes

Exploration of the data and its subsequent theme development generated themes related to the research questions and the focus areas within the research. The common themes uncovered from the interpretative phenomenological analysis of the transcribed interviews and survey questions are listed below. Contextual data validating each theme, including quotations from the participants' data sources, is also documented.

1. Self-awareness and knowing the organization
2. The Importance of Relationship building and mentoring
3. Being the First Black City Manager
4. Advancement in the Profession

The following presents an in-depth account of the thematic discoveries determined through a detailed analysis of the participants' survey questions and interviews. Direct quotes represented the coding, and the participants' experiences will be underlined to support each theme.

Self-awareness in the organization

The theme, Self-awareness, derived from the participants' regular expressions of how they think about themselves working for an elected body at the top of a municipal organization. It includes certain behaviors to meet such expectations or avoid continuing certain stereotypes. During the data collection method, each participant mentioned a deep awareness of self that they often experience as an African-American city/county manager. It is an ever-present and consistent cognitive process involving repeated questioning of how they present themselves in their work environment. The participants articulated the unspoken Need to make conscious choices about the way they interacted with council members, their staff, and their spoken and written communication. It fulfills the expectations that these managers perceive of others regarding their competency and professionalism being African-American in this field. Here, Calvin describes others' perceptions of him as an assistant city manager.

The city manager who hired me was on the verge of retiring, and I considered applying for the position. I knew I had the skills and experience to do the job. However, I was told during the interview process that I had rubbed some people the wrong way. Therefore, I knew it was unlikely that I would get promoted to the position, so I decided it was perhaps time for me to move on (Calvin, September 2022).

When asked what he thought he did to rub people in the organization wrong, Calvin responded, "Probably because I hold people accountable, and most people do not like when that happens."

Terry felt parallel to Calvin in that,

Sometimes, as an African-American city manager reporting to an all-white council, it feels like you are walking on eggshells when you hold people accountable with whom they have a history. Staff members would pick up the phone and call the mayor or an elected official whenever they felt the manager was making moves they disagreed with or represented change (Terry, August 2022).

I had a couple of particular incidents that caused me to become noticed. The Mayor noticed I had more ability than the job I was in, so he started giving me jobs above my pay grade, so I gladly accepted. When the new Mayor came in and met with me and asked what job I was interested in... he assumed I wanted to run another department of some sort.... And I told him I had no interest in running another department. He said so what do you want to do.....I said I was prepared to be the deputy mayor and run the operations of the whole thing. He leaned back in his seat. I said if you give me fifteen minutes, I will explain to you why I am the best person to run the government because I have been preparing for years, and at the end of that interview, he offered me that job. Well.....This goes back to when people start seeing you in a specific role. They have difficulty in terms of imagining you could do anything else. I learned early on in my career to overcome the views others held about me and my abilities (Interview, Michael, October 2022).

Navigating through the Politics. It was evident through the interviews that the participants understood they had to navigate politics to be perceived as professional and competent by elected officials and the leadership team. The politics caused the managers to feel they had to remain status quo or behave in a certain way to be considered for advancement

within the organization. Terry talked about how as a Black manager, he felt he could not respond to staff criticism about change out of fear that he would lose his job.

I had a councilwoman swear at me once because she did not like how I handled a complaint about some kids playing in a local park. How can I kick kids out of the park when they are not doing anything wrong? Moreover, if they were acting out, call the police department, not the town manager (Terry, August 2022).

When asked if federal politics has impacted politics at the local level, Sherry responded, "Absolutely, it has!"

Before 2016, everything was going great. The ICMA² finally recognized my organization in areas that had never received recognition. I worked for a supportive governing body that wanted to change how we delivered services to our constituents. Working with a group of people who respected me and shared the same vision for the community. However, after the election of 2016, I found myself working for an all-white male council, and things quickly went downhill. I decided it was best to move on because the new committee and I did not see eye-to-eye (Sherry, August 2022).

There will always be individuals who want to question your ability to manage or lead other people. And that is why when I am mentoring people seeking to move up to a higher calling....I always tell them I do not stay in one job too long because I get pigeonholed. It makes it harder for you to move up if they only see you as this and they have no evidence that you've been preparing; they have no evidence that your skill set has

² International City/County Management Association (ICMA) is for local government professionals dedicated to creating and sustaining thriving communities.

expanded, they have no evidence that you are thinking has evolved or that you have embraced what leadership is all about (Interview, Michael October 2022).

In addition to fitting the mold of what others deem professional, African-Americans felt they had to prove they belonged in the administrator position and were competent to complete the task outlined in the job description. Darryl explained how some council members would disregard pertinent information concerning issues in the community if it did not impact the district they represented.

Microaggression. It was evident through the interviews that the participants took their education seriously. All participants had graduate degrees and several years of experience in the profession. As a result, these African-American managers spoke of holding themselves to higher standards by working twice as hard as everyone else to advance in the field. With emulating experience and education as their white counterparts, African-American City/County managers endure similar levels of microaggression across the profession. Microaggressions³ can be engrained in unconscious bias and preconceived notions about other people and groups we unintentionally hold.

There is this level of proof.... it is like I have to prove that I know what I am talking about regarding community issues. My credentials are being questioned when I have over 20 years of experience in the field and a master's degree. Some elected officials say they care but never act on any solutions. (Darryl, July 2022).

³ Microaggression: a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2022).

When you work in a new field, you need to learn about the field. It is not always about your experience..... sometimes, it is more about your institutional knowledge and understanding of the organization. I worked with a guy in one city who was in a director-level position and worked for the town for a long time, and he had no higher education, which kind of surprised me (Calvin September 2022).

The Importance of Relationship building and mentoring

The participants discussed the impact relationship building with other professionals, and mentoring had on their careers. Many participants believe their jobs would not have blossomed without mentoring or relationships with other managers who could bring perspective to the issues they would encounter in the profession. Forming a connection and building relationships with white and black managers gives aspiring managers more tools to be successful.

Sherry shared her perspective on the value of relationship building and why mentoring matters.

I never thought about becoming a city manager until I attended a golf event with a city manager I worked for years ago. At the time, I was a director of transportation, and I was happy in my position and working for him. I do not recall what we were discussing, but I remember the manager from an adjacent community asking why I was not an assistant. I responded by saying I was not opposed to the role, but it was never something I ever thought about doing. Shortly after that, I was promoted to assistant city manager, and I never looked back. My manager took me under his wing and taught me how things were done at the executive level of city government. He is still one of my mentors to this

day, and I reach out to him whenever I need some professional advice (Sherry, August 2022).

While doing my fellowship with the ICMA, I met a guy who showed me the ropes and how to treat people in the organization. He was well-known and liked by everyone because he had been there for so long. I used what he taught me, and it helped me become the leader I am today. Whenever I need some advice dealing with a personal or professional problem, he is always available to answer any of my questions (Calvin, Interview, September 2022).

Establishing mentorship programs. One main objective of this research was to understand how effective a mentorship program would be in increasing diversity in municipal governments. None of the participants worked for an organization with a mentorship platform, but some were fellows for another organization.

A formal mentorship program within an organization can benefit the individual and the municipality. It prepares people for the next career stage when the opportunity presents itself. I have never worked for an organization with this type of program for staff to use, but I definitely think it adds value in more ways than one (Sherry Interview August 2022).

Being the First Black City Manager. The participants described what it was like to be the first African-American City Manager⁴ for a municipal organization. Although

⁴ City Manager - An official employed by an elected council to direct the administration of a city government (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1999)

the participants had to work hand in hand with the elected officials in the community, their experiences were still somewhat similar.

As a County Administrator, I remember working for a not-so-diverse community in the Midwest. During the hiring process, the governing body made it abundantly clear that diversity was an issue, and they wanted to address it head-on. It was one of the reasons why I decided to take the position. However, I noticed that the council was not on board with some of my recommendations to make improvements. After being with the organization for two years, nothing changed, and no new policies were implemented. The council had no intentions of changing things outside of hiring an African-American for the County Administrator position. I take my education and experience seriously and I came into the profession to get things done, not sit around doing nothing (Calvin, Interview September 2022).

I was the first black city manager for a community years ago, and an article was printed about me being the first black city administrator for my current organization. However, I am not the first African-American to be at the helm of this organization, but I am the second in the last forty years. Nevertheless, when I was hired to manage one city years ago, the mayor happened to be an Arab American⁵.... she was the first Arab in the mayor's seat in the United States way back then. I am not saying this because I think there is a cause and effect here. She understood the value of diversity and was keen on hiring me. I do not know if that would have happened if she were never been mayor

⁵ Arab Americans are those who immigrated from or are descendants of immigrants from predominantly Arabic-speaking nations in Southwest Asia and North Africa (Middle Eastern American Resources Online. 2009).

because there has not been a black manager since, and she was just a one-term mayor (Interview, Michael October 2022).

Changing the face of public administration. The participants recognized that the only way to increase diversity was to effectively change the face of public administration.

Terry state that when you think of public administration in general, whether federal, state, or local, you think of white men.

Most managers are older White men who pave the way for younger White men to follow. A few White managers understand a need for Black managers and work to hire minorities in department head and ACM roles. However, they are insufficient to make a significant difference (Terry Interview September 2022).

Being the City Manager or Administrator does not mean you will be able to overhaul community or organizational problems. It takes a concerted effort from you, the council, and the people in the community. The taxpayers must attend council meetings and demand change from their elected leaders. I worked for a predominantly Black community, but the mayor, city manager, and city council were all white. Nobody called it out, and change did not manifest until a policing incident transpired, and people became upset, and change happened. However, it should not take police-involved shootings or community tragedies for people to do the right thing. Often, the elected officials do not have solutions to resolve challenges within the community because they have never had to deal with them firsthand (Darryl, Interview September 2022).

It is always exciting to be the first person of color to break through the glass ceiling, but then the spotlight is on you. In this profession, you are only successful if you

can accomplish things for your constituents and your organization. There are only so many actions a manager can do unilaterally. The council plays an essential part because it sets the agenda, and the manager ensures that the outcomes or objectives are achieved. Simply put, the manager works for the elected body (Sherry, Interview August 2022).

Dealing with Blackness. The participants expressed how they had to remain self-aware of how they presented themselves during the interview process with elected officials.

I said I purposely dressed a certain way.... and you know, I thought to myself, make sure to talk a certain way and did not use colloquial language or anything like that. I would usually wear a grey suit with a black tie or a dark blue suit with a red tie. The last thing I wanted to do was offend someone by how I dressed or spoke. Whenever I interviewed for a city manager position, I tried to make people comfortable with me (Ivan Interview October 2022).

When I was overlooked for the city manager position because I had apparently rubbed some people in the organization or on the council the wrong way, I started paying close attention to how I interacted with people until I accepted a job with another organization (Calvin Interview September 2022).

Advancement in the field. The underrepresentation of mentors for African-American city/county managers left a void for young professionals to connect with people who see the world from their perspectives. Terry was working as a fellow when he felt it was time to seek advancement opportunities.

As a fellow, I was responsible for helping prepare the annual budget for the manager's office and working closely with the fleet division. That experience and exposure to the

governing body helped me build enough confidence to start looking for assistant opportunities. I interviewed for a position in the northeast, and the manager offered me the job. I took the experience from working as an assistant and used it to land my first job as a county administrator. (Terry Interview, August 2022).

Terry felt that, for once, he had a seat at the professional table and was able to make decisions to impact people's lives positively. Micheal was working as a department director, but he had a deep *desire to move up in the organization*.

I met with the new mayor to discuss my future because he recognized I had more ability than the job I was in and started giving me assignments above my pay grade.... so to speak, which I gladly accepted. The new mayor asked me what job I wanted, managing a different department or something. Furthermore, I told him I had no interest in running a department. I said I was prepared to be the deputy mayor and run the operations of the whole thing. I said if you give me fifteen minutes, I will explain to you why I am the best person to run the government because I have been preparing for years, and at the end of that interview, he offered me that job (Micheal Interview, October 2022).

Micheal said that when people start seeing you in a particular role, they have difficulty imagining you could do anything else.

Lacking African-Americans in leadership roles. The participants explained that they noticed a lack of Black people in leadership positions throughout their careers. These experiences validated their realities and inspired them to pursue executive-level positions. Darryl was a manager in transit when the city manager from another city reached out to look for a deputy manager. Darryl had established a professional relationship with the manager but never

expected a deputy opportunity for career advancement that led him to become the first Black city manager of the organization. Calvin was in a similar position, but it did not work the same for him.

I was hired as an assistant to the city manager, and he quickly made me his assistant. When I found out the manager would soon be retiring from the profession, I prepared myself to apply for the manager position. I did a great job managing my projects and getting things done in the assistant role, but my downfall was holding people accountable for their responsibilities. I was the first African-American assistant to the city manager and assistant city manager, but the council decided to hire someone else to fill the manager seat. I eventually took a position with another municipality and coincidentally became the first Black manager for that organization (Clavin Interview September 2022).

Throughout my career in local government, I have always worked for organizations where all department heads and executive leaders were White. Actually... there was not any diversity at the mid-level of management either. The only people of color were the folks picking up the trash or patching the holes in the roads. It was not until later in my career that I became an assistant city manager. And since then, I have tried to hire Blacks, Latino's Asian-Americans. I tried to cultivate a diverse environment (Ivan Interview October 2022).

There has always been a lack of Black, Latino, male, and female in the manager and department head roles. I was in the profession for forty years before I retired, and I watched it slowly become more diverse....so even though we have made strides, more work is still needed (Terry Interview August 2022).

Summary

This chapter provided detailed reviews of the six study participants allowing the readers to become better familiar with the managers in this research and their distinct perspectives of their experiences as African-American administrators. Additionally, this chapter exposed the thematic findings from the data collection and analysis process delineated in Chapter Three. The responses from the participants' semi-structured interviews and survey entries yielded the following themes: Self-awareness and knowing the organization, the importance of relationship building, mentoring, being the first Black city manager, and advancement in the field. The findings from this study reveal the importance of relationship-building and receiving mentoring from others in the profession. The participants in this research explained how beneficial building networks are for managers to be successful. Excerpts from the participants during the data-collecting process reinforced each emergent theme. The next chapter, Chapter Five, explains the findings related to the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the connection to the results. In response to this study's discoveries, recommendations to increase diversity at the upper levels of municipal organizations. Suggested bits of advice for future research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the study and the discoveries from the findings discussed in Chapter 4. In detail, it provides a synopsis of the research questions, a dialogue of the themes, links to the theoretical framework, implications for the profession, and recommendations for future research. The perspectives of African-American city/county managers in municipal governments' is narrowly acknowledged in the literature, even though Black and Brown people reside in cities across this country. Africa-Americans are underrepresented in leadership roles titled City/County Manager. Understanding the lived experiences of city/county managers who are African-Americans can provide vital information to increase diversity in these roles. More than 60 years after the council-manager system of government was recognized and the earliest city managers were selected, the first African American, James C. Johnson, joined the profession in 1968 and was hired by Compton, California. Today, hundreds of African American city and county managers function as the manager (or as deputy or assistant) in cities across the United States.

Furthermore, while that number has increased over the years, it is still a tiny percentage of the city and county management demographic (ICMA, 2022). The insufficient number of African-American managers leading municipal organizations to provide mentoring opportunities leaves aspiring Black managers without the guidance and coaching required to be successful. This research was intended to fill the void in the existing literature, establish new data on the lived experiences of African-American city/county, and the impact of the mentoring relationship

Grounded in Derrick Bells' Critical Race theory, the study applied an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The participants in this research were provided a chance to share their experiences as Black

city/county managers working at the helm of municipal organizations and the impact mentoring relations had on their careers.

Discussion of Research Questions

This section of the research delivers an overview of the findings and the relationship to the research questions used in the study.

Research Questions 1: Please describe your current position and the career path/professional experiences that have led to your current position.

The African-Americans who participated in this research project discussed the career proficiencies that led them to the city manager's office. The management professionals shared similar experiences that led them to the upper levels of the organization. All the individuals held graduate-level degrees in public administration, urban planning, criminal justice, etc. While some participants joined a fellowship program through the International City/County Management Association, others took more of a traditional path by working as a department head⁶ or as an assistant to the city manager. It gave the participants enough experience working with elected officials to pursue assistant city/county managers opportunities. One commonality between the (6) participants was the experience of being the first black city/county manager of a municipal organization. The participants build relationships with other professionals around the area through their work as a fellow or assistants to the city manager. Those connections provided advancement in the field and ultimately helped them achieve the title of City/County Manager.

⁶ A department head reports to the city/county manager to ensure that overall day-to-day operations run smoothly.

The participants in this study were hired as an assistant or deputy city managers by a white male or female manager.

Research Questions 2: Please describe any obstacles or difficulties encountered while pursuing upward mobility in municipal organizations.

The African-Americans who participated in this research that encountered moving upward in the organization described their experiences in the two emergent themes of *Lack of diversity in the organization* and *Knowing your audience*. Each participant shared views about increasing diversity throughout all levels of city and county governments. Only two participants in the study experienced challenges moving up in an organization. One encounter push back working as an assistant city manager seeking to move up into the city manager position. The participant was told he would not be promoted because he rubbed some people wrong. The organization was not very diverse, and he was the only Black person in a leadership position. The other participant also occupied an assistant city manager position and did not attain the city manager position he applied for, even though he worked for the organization twice, once in the capacity of an assistant to the city manager and several years later as an assistant city manager. White males with less experience in city management beat out both African-Americans for the position.

Research Question 3: Have you participated in a mentoring program? Would you please describe the experience you gained and the program's benefit?

The Black city/county managers in this research never participated in a formal mentoring program, but most have professionals in the field whom they consider influential mentors. The individuals in this study who have mentoring relationships with other cities/county managers provide positive examples that have benefited their professional careers. Sherry credited one of

her mentors for advising on an issue slowly eroding trust between elected officials and the community. Terry explained that one of his mentors helped him prepare his resume to apply for a management position. His mentor provided advice during the interview process from start to finish. Calvin explained that his mentor taught him to *navigate politics and* build positive relationships with others in the organization. The participants believe that a mentorship program would have been beneficial as they worked their way upward in the organization. However, the participants felt that having a constant mentor to reach out to for professional advice is more effective than a short-term mentorship program.

While the participants shared some positive examples of being mentored by other public administrators who look like them, they also believed that a manager's experiences supersede a person's skin color because they can speak to solutions to overcome organizational or community problems.

Research Question 4: What value does mentoring bring to African-American City Manager's perspectives on their personal and professional lives?

The African-American city/county managers who participated in this study articulated how their professional mentoring relationships added value to their lives from the thematic finding through mentorships and relationship building. The participants provided ways mentoring relationships with other professionals added value to their professional lives. Darryl expressed that mentoring allows managers to challenge their perspectives to resolve problems by communicating with more experienced administrators in the field. Sherry stated that mentoring brings value for African-American city/county managers working in more challenging areas or communities that are not diverse because the manager can use other professionals as sounding boards before implementing change. She believes this is significant value because managers

struggle with balancing competing interests, and often there is no correct answer. Calvin considers mentoring valuable in organizational terms and molding a professional into an effective leader. He believes mentoring is an effective coaching and training tool for career development, no matter the profession one is pursuing. It brings value to African-Americans' professional and personal lives across all industries and fields.

The African-American participants of this research found mentoring valuable to their lives and the profession. However, they acknowledged that there is not a significant number of Black city/county managers in leadership positions to connect with on a mentoring level. When asked if they would consider mentoring younger professionals, all the participants in the study answered yes, and most were already mentoring other professionals.

Research Question 5: Are mentorships an effective method to help African-Americans obtain City Management positions? Why or why not?

The participants in the study expressed how mentoring impacted their careers and *Advancement in the field* of public administration and helped them become city managers. For many, mentoring is a way to become more knowledgeable about the vexing issues that city and county organizations encounter through networking and relationship-building with long-term managers. Sherry credited her mentor for allowing her to work in the city manager's office and continuing to provide support. Calvin explained how one of his mentors reached out to people in the field when he was seeking new opportunities. Ivan explained that one of his mentors supported him while working in the industry before he retired. His mentor established a meet-and-greet and networking breakfast for African American city managers attending the NFBPA or ICMA conferences.

The participants did not elaborate on how mentoring relationships added value or impacted their personal lives outside of establishing long-term friendships. However, it was evident that the participants felt mentoring added value to their professional lives and helped them remain competitive. When asked if they preferred to be mentored by a White manager or a Black manager, they found value in different races, genders, and ages but felt that a Black manager could better relate to their experiences

Research Question 6: Do you believe municipalities should establish mentoring programs within the organization to help increase diversity in leadership positions? If so, could you please explain why you feel this way? If not, please explain why.

The participants in the study expressed how government organizations *lack diversity at the upper levels*. Recognizing the importance diversity can have on an organization, participants discussed the need for public administrators to be more cognizant. Most of the participants felt that there were tools available for city/county managers to hire people of color. Three participants believed that organizations could make it a priority for Human Resources departments to establish internal programs that allow directors and assistants to develop relationships with younger professionals in the organization.

The participants believed that governing bodies must prioritize diversity for the management team and set realistic goals for them to achieve. Some participants felt it would be difficult for smaller organizations to create mentorship programs within because they lack the resources of bigger municipalities. However, they felt that organizations could be more equitable when sending individuals to conferences or welcoming the ideas of lower-level staff members. Sherry explained how internal mentorship programs were a remarkable succession of planning strategies for municipal organizations to groom and coach people looking to grow. Michael

articulated that organizations could hire Diversity, Equity & Inclusion directors to help change the face of the organization and become more reflective of the community. Darryl felt that diversity and mentoring programs had to be a priority for the city council and the manager. Terry and Calvin expressed the importance of equity and its impact on organizational morale. From their perspective, managers need to be passionate about helping younger professionals no matter the color of their skin. Equality and equitability set the tone from the top and give people some perspective about the organization's leadership.

Research Question 7: What other suggestions do you have for approaches to increase diversity in City Management positions?

The participants in the study articulated ways that organizations could *Acknowledge the phenomenon* and *Change the face of public administration*. Workplace diversity transpires when organizations hire individuals with distinct characteristics, such as ethnicity, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, and gender. The objective is to establish a culture where individual differences are welcomed, all employees are treated equally, and opportunities for growth and advancement are obtained. Establish mentorship programs to ensure everyone has the chance for social mobility and to build relationships in the organization. Create an inclusive mentorship program to help younger professionals become more knowledgeable about the functions and practices within specific departments. Conduct diversity training to bring awareness and create meaningful cultural and sensitivity training.

Discussion of Findings

Discussion of Finding Chapter 4. Outlined the research findings and illustrated four emergent themes from the data collecting process. Excerpts from the survey questions and semi-

structured interviews were provided to highlight relevant and consistent themes throughout the investigation. Each theme is discussed in greater detail, explaining its connotation as it relates to the lived experiences of Black city/county managers and mentoring relationships, its connection to the pertinent literature, and its alignment with the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory. Additionally, the connection between the implications of the study, and recommendations, as a result of the study is explained.

Theme One: Self-Awareness and Knowing the Organization

The participants expressed the importance of remaining *self-aware* and knowing the organization while leading a municipality in a manager/administrator role. The managers believed they had to exemplify behaviors not expected by their white counterparts. Micheal acknowledged that he could not take actions that would be overlooked if he were a white city manager. Municipal governments must create new techniques to manage effectively and develop strategies for securing democratic and organizational accountability. The fuzzy-boundary problem within public administration makes it challenging to implement change agents to improve impaired functions (Kettl, 2015). The participants experienced *microaggression* while working in the upper levels of municipal organizations. Terry stated, "I have never worked for an organization where the governing body had an open line of communication with the employees to keep tabs on the manager. I finally registered that I had to *know the organization* in and out to succeed because people wanted to see me fail." Sherry also expressed that employees in her organization would contact the elected officials when they got wind of changes coming down the pipeline from the administrator's office. The participants shared their concerns about *being judged harshly* for making policy changes and holding people accountable who had long-term relationships with elected members. Darryl stated, "The council knows they should not

communicate with staff about the organization's internal workings, but most still engage. Then they want to question your judgment or remind you that they have known most of the employees for several years." Terry recalls a situation where the administrative assistant was arriving to work under the influence of alcohol. When he put the employee on administrative leave pending an investigation, one of the council members became upset, wanting him to let it slide. The participants felt the need remain self-aware while *navigating through the political* barriers that surfaced from time to time. Starratt (1991) discusses how leaders should be aware of inequitable social and political power and privilege arrangements legitimized by assumed rationality, law, or custom.

Association to the theoretical framework. This study's premise was to explore the lived experiences of African-American City/County managers at the helm of municipal governments, using the double hermeneutic method of interpretative phenomenological exploration. As a result, the research findings uncovered the realities of the six individuals who participated in the study. Critical Race Theory starts with the view of racism being embedded in the fabric of our social order, and it is both natural and normal to people in the culture. Critical Race Theory helps understand the pervasive inequities in municipal organizations and elected representatives (Wagner, 2017).

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argue that a trademark theme of CRT is that racism is ordinary instead of aberrational and profoundly ingrained in U.S. society. They argue that the white supremacy system obliges essential mental and physical purposes. Furthermore, the subtle characteristic of being ordinary makes White racism difficult to identify and, therefore, more challenging to root out in society. Most African-American managers/administrators believed they were held to a different standard than their White counterparts in the same role. Municipal

management became attractive to African-Americans because it allowed them to give back to their communities and watch change happen. The research shows how white-dominated leadership deploys procedural rules and microaggressions to marginalize Black participants in some municipal government settings by questioning their education and ability to lead (Bohonos & Johnson, 2021).

Theme Two: Being the First Black City Manager

The research revealed that each participant in the study broke through the glass ceiling of becoming an organization's first black city/county manager. Consequently, most participants experienced challenges during the hiring process or after accepting the position. Terry explained that the governing body unanimously approved his hire, but he faced significant pushback overhauling a status quo environment. Terry recalls several staff members becoming upset when the county decided to ban smoking in city-owned vehicles and inside administrative offices. Sherry expressed that she had a great relationship with her council, which consisted of (all-White male and female members), but it eventually spiraled downhill when a new board of (all-White male members) was elected into office. She believed her old council was inclusive and welcomed innovative ideas to streamline organizational processes, while the new board opposed creative changes that would alter the old way of doing things. Micheal stated that the governing body questioned his experience and knowledge because he was not yet a credentialed manager, even though being credentialed was not a hiring stipulation. In 1995, Delgado argued that people of color speak with personal experiences regarding the fact that racism is deeply structured in society. The storytelling structure gives the people a framework that warrants the term, voice (Wagner, 2017).

Calvin and Terry experienced challenges with councils not setting realistic goals for the manager or council members questioning the manager for pursuing initiatives they wanted the managers to spearhead. The manager is accountable to the governing body for running the organization efficiently and effectively, and directions from the committee are to the manager, not to the employees (Bourey, 2022). Managers must make recommendations based on what is best for the government but must be grounded in political reality. Employees should never go directly to the council without the manager's consensus. They must understand that the manager has to make recommendations and whether or not the staff agrees, the buck stops with the manager (Bourey, 2022). In research by Brookefield (2014), Black employees endure disrespectful microaggressive treatment from a white city employee for about 15 minutes before formal proceedings. In this instance, the white employee avoided eye contact, refused to allow entrance into a conversation, and used physical postures to exclude the Black employee. City Council members need to increase their consciousness of personal bias by recognizing how they use their platform to weaken racial privileges and marginalizations within the community and organization (Bohonos & Johnson, 2021).

Association to the theoretical framework

Critical Race Theorists attempt to interject the cultural viewpoint of the members of minority groups. It is achieved by merging the shared history of the oppressed and using it to reconstruct the society that crumbled under racial hegemony's affliction (Wagner, 2017). Like White managers, African-American city/county managers make tough decisions impacting the community's longevity and the residents' way of life. Chief Operating Officers for municipal organizations must have the education and practical experience to manage the government successfully. When a Black applicant's work experience and educational background meets the

stipulations outlined in the job posting, they should not have their leadership skills or management abilities questioned.

Theme Three: Importance of Relationship Building and Mentorship Programs

The participants in the research study stressed the importance of building relationships and mentoring opportunities with other managers. Most participants have individuals they can converse with about professional and personal matters. The association was beneficial on a personal level because it allowed managers to know people, meet their families, and establish lifetime friendships. On a professional level, it provided a platform for managers to solicit advice on policy and program changes in their communities. The participants have informal and formal mentor relationships with other administrators in the field. A mentoring connection is where both the mentor and mentee mature personally and professionally. Most of the participants in this interpretative research have mentors and mentees who provide direction and guidance.

Association to the theoretical framework

The African-American managers in this study felt that relationship-building was critical to professional success. Mentoring is an effective way of passing on knowledge and developing other professionals. Differences in school funding include underfunding districts with lower-value properties, many of which consist mainly of children of color. Many African Americans are already at an academic and psychological disadvantage by the time they reach university campuses (Quigley & Mitchell, 2018). One of the main objectives of Critical Race Theory in education is to aid students in identifying and exposing the causes of social inequality in their own lives (Wagner, 2017). The CRT-based program exposes individuals to the social-political properties of racism by connecting to mentorship the harmful effects of inadequate power, the advancement of whiteness, and racist policies (Vargas, Saetermoe & Chavira, 2021).

Sherry, Terry, and Ivan expressed the positive effects mentoring and relationship connections have on their personal and professional lives. Micheal, Terry, and Darryl explained that they never had an official mentor to help them navigate difficult times, but they have mentees who can call them whenever they need advice or a sounding board. When the participants were asked who they felt supported them on their leadership journey outside their families, they said they were mentors or close friends. The participants who had constant mentoring by a seasoned manager believed that the relationship prepared them for the position they were pursuing. A few of the participants felt that participants felt mentors intentionally exposed them to developmental experiences and were then willing to help them process those experiences, sometimes sharing examples from the mentor's leadership journey. Others found support from mentors, parents, or friends who encouraged them to continue their education and to work on a committee. All the participants felt that mentoring and relationship building brings value to the profession and lives of city/county managers.

Theme Four: Advancement in the Profession

The participants in this research expressed how important it was for them to grow in their professional roles and advance in the profession to higher positions. Some participants did not attend college to become city managers; the part grew on them over time. However, after working with others in the post, they quickly realized it was their calling because individuals in city/county management positions had a unique opportunity to shape public services and community programs. Ivan recalled working as a fellow for an organization and driving the city manager to a meeting when it hit him. He eventually developed a relationship with the city manager and quickly started planning his future. Darryl pursued an MPA degree because he wanted to work at the highest levels of a municipal organization. He knew that his master's

degree would set him apart from others in the profession. Micheal worked in the private sector when he was laid off and landed a position teaching at a local university. A professor said he would be great working in government, and Micheal has never looked back. Terry and Calvin worked as fellows for a municipal organization and utilized the opportunity to advance within the field. Sherry worked in several department head positions before she realized that city manager was where she belonged. The participants in the study were fascinated with the job aspect, which led them to achieve advanced degrees and opportunities that would allow them to excel in the profession.

Association to the theoretical framework

Wagner's Critical Race Theory (2017) explores the concept of Black city/county managers remaining underrepresented compared to their presence across U.S. cities. These statistics suggest that, in addition to racial differences in tenure and advancement, there are persistent disparities based on gender. Cities and county forms of government are beginning to understand their internal and external strengths and weaknesses. Council-manager governments are intended to inspire city managers to execute diverse priorities to the liking of the elected officials. The power structure is often hierarchical, meaning the organization has different power levels. Those at the top exert the most power, with power moving up or down the organization like an elevator. Decisions drift from the top down, leaving those at the bottom with minor involvement in the process. The priorities of a city council should be to hire competent managers, regardless of skin color, to listen to the community, and make changes to antiquated practices that, over time, become ineffective. A study by Griffin & Harris (2013) framed by critical race theory (CRT) is derived from legal scholarship that analyses the American legal system's role in upholding white supremacy.

In many instances, career advancement is a common interest for those rooted in the experiences of the more privileged groups. The power structures within city government can sometimes create inertia, and the Achilles heel of the organization is often left exposed. If the organizational priorities of the manager diverge from those of the council, it causes a rift throughout the community and the organization. White people are advantageous because of the system that has been created and what it protects, leaving the subgroups or minorities, like people of color, at a disadvantage in the system. When unfortunate incidents occur between police officers and Black people or all white elected officials glance over the needs of predominately Black neighborhoods, the notion that we are all created equal becomes a talking point. Racial power and white supremacy are maintained over time, and those in powerful positions play a central role in the change-making process (Wagner, 2017).

Many white managers are afforded advancements in the profession because of whom they know, not what they know, or simply because of their race. According to Wagner, the core idea of Critical Race Theory infers that race is seen as a social construct that is not merely a product of individual perceptions, prejudice, or bias but embedded in the fabric of this country. Elected officials and governing bodies that overlook African-Americans pursuing city/county positions for White managers and Black Managers at the helm of municipal organizations fail to create mentoring opportunities for other black professionals. Increasing diversity in the upper levels of municipal organizations will be improbable. Institutionalized racism is normative, sometimes legalized, and often manifests as an inherited disadvantage. It is structural, having been engrossed in our institutions as routine, practice, and law, so there need not be a distinguishable wrongdoer (Wagner, 2017).

Unexpected Findings

This study's focus was to unveil African-American administrators' authentic experiences relating to the lack of diversity in municipal governments. The managers spoke about their positions and professional responsibilities. The participants also talked about *relocating to a different area* to get an opportunity to work in the city manager's office. Calvin explained why he had to move across multiple states to get his first position as assistant city manager in a city that lacked diversity. Darryl shared a story about resigning from an assistant to the city Manager position for a lateral opportunity in a more significant community.

It was evident that the men believed they had to be willing to relocate to different parts of the country to achieve their career goals. Perhaps it is because an insignificant number of white managers are eager to hire young black professionals. Sherry feels that too many people are willing to turn a blind eye to African-Americans pursuing leadership positions in municipal organizations. The thematic findings of *Advancement in the Profession* surfaced during the analysis; surprisingly, all six participants worked as an organization's *first Black manager/administrator*. However, this finding could result in African-Americans not applying for manager positions in communities that are not culturally diverse.

Engaging In IPA Methodology

An interpretative phenomenological analysis was designated for this research because it allowed me to understand the lived experiences of African-Americans in city management positions and the impact of mentorships. By applying the ideographical components of IPA with critical race theory, I gathered in-depth perspectives of each participant's interpretation of their professional lives. With IPA, the objective is to get as close as possible to the lived experience of participants so that it can be examined in detail (Smith et al., 2011).

The IPA methodology for this study was impactful regarding the intended and actual outcomes and could be used in future research. I found that conducting a survey was helpful and informative. The pilot study allowed me to change the research methodology regarding data collecting and interviewing the participants. A detailed case analysis of each participant was completed before moving to the next, along with the conclusion and transcription. The IPA process outlined by Smith et al. (2011) was throughout and required significant time and dedication. IPA researchers seek to understand the experience from the person who has had it to elicit detailed descriptions, trying to capture the emotions surrounding the experience and how people understand it and make sense of it. The personal meanings associated with lived experience are fundamental in IPA, as is how the experience relates to people's views of their world and relationships. (Smith et al. 2011).

Implications for Practice

Some might wonder why the lived experiences and mentoring relationships explicit to African-Americans in Municipal Organizations are necessary topics to investigate. Why is exploring these issues critical to advancing the field? The future of public service will be disadvantageous if we fail to increase diversity and repair the loss of trust among citizens and public administrators. Residents want the people making decisions for the community to be scrupulous. Municipalities cannot properly function without compromising, listening, and developing relationships with their citizens. Community participation allows community members to actively contribute to policy decisions that impact their way of life and build an inclusive environment where community feedback never goes unheard.

City/County managers and elected officials must work collaboratively to increase diversity in leadership positions at the top of municipal organizations while simultaneously

addressing community issues. Municipal leadership is the guiding light to better policies throughout every community in America and abroad. Administrators are positioned to represent their constituents and policy prescriptions to resolve complex issues. At the local level, a manager with solid leadership skills and a good understanding of the community they lead will connect well with their residents. A municipal organization's effectiveness is evident when its leaders reflect the people they serve.

Communities will continue criticizing actions taken by public administrators if they believe it disenfranchises people of color in the country. Although black and brown people reside in communities across this country, there is a lack of black and brown leadership at the top of municipal governments. Despite their experience and educational successes, African-Americans pursuing high-level positions continue to encounter obstacles (ICMA, 2014). This section will summarize the implications for practice as an outcome of the research discoveries via recommendations for African-American city/county managers to increase diversity at the upper echelons of municipal organizations.

Recommendations for African-American City Managers

To challenge their departments, particularly human resource directors, to find creative solutions to increase diversity. Black city managers working for municipal organizations are responsible for implementing policies that inspire positive organizational change. The participants in this study share similar views about the *lack of diversity in the upper levels of municipal organizations*. It is incumbent upon African-Americans professionals to create opportunities for others to follow. I recommend that Black city/county managers remain true to themselves and foster an environment welcoming diversity, inclusion, and equity. The city/county manager is responsible for carrying policies at the government's direction of the

governing body through the day-to-day management of city functions, including the oversight of city operating departments. Critical tasks associated with this administrative position include hiring and supervising department heads, recommending and implementing the annual budget, and ensuring quality service delivery. Managers need to obtain buy-in from the governing body to hire Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Directors (DEI) to analyze the organization and recommend changes.

African-American city/county managers need to form mentoring relationships with young professionals in the field and advise them when the opportunity arises. Public services are not only about giving back to the community; it includes giving back to those lacking professional relationships to succeed in the field. The participants in the study expressed having higher expectations of themselves, having to work harder, and having their education and experience questioned. African-American city/county managers need effective working relationships with elected officials to create a changing environment. Mentoring the next generation of leaders to manage villages, townships, cities, and county governments is critical to the success of this country. City managers and human resource directors must implement programs to expand diversity in police departments and management positions.

Recommendations for Mayors and Governing Bodies

Elected officials play the most critical role for municipalities to thrive and be sustainable for future generations. Elected officials evaluate a city manager's expertise based on experience, education, and affiliation with professional associations. The type of college degrees and fields of education are crucial factors affecting city managers' role expectations. More experienced, highly educated, and professional-network-affiliated managers are more likely to embody the insight on how to make government more efficient and effective. Most of the participants in this

study had their competency and expertise questioned, even though they were highly educated, connected to professional associations, and had extensive professional experience. The African-Americans expressed that their knowledge on several topics would often be considered or heard by some elected officials.

The participants in this study talk about *navigating politics* and neutrality while serving in the city/county manager role. The underrepresentation of Black city/county managers at the helm of municipal governments can be abated if elected representatives prioritize hiring Black and Brown professionals who can meet the job expectations. Attenuating barriers and rationalities planted in bigotry can manifest when council members make it a priority on their list. The research identified instances where white job seekers were hired over Blacks with the same qualifications and, in some cases, more experience. Elected officials must remain open-minded when recruiting professionals for the manager role and avoid falling into the affinity bias trap. Acknowledging the phenomenon and taking actionable steps to improve hiring processes will give qualified African Americans a chance to compete for city/county manager jobs. Elected officials must create a hiring environment where all managers feel welcome and accepted, not just those who resemble them. Municipal professionals and primarily elected officials must prioritize promoting the hiring of African-Americans in leadership positions throughout the organization. Those councils willing to select qualified Black managers to run the municipal agencies work to build strong relationships by actively listening and making people feel welcomed. As the participants stated, subtle acts of discrimination and microaggression, verbal and non-verbal, can impact Black management professionals' feelings about the elected body.

Directions for Future Research

Due to the inadequate number of studies linked to African-American city/county managers regarding experiences and mentoring relationships, the following recommendations for future research will increase the pertinent and necessary scholarship pool on this matter. Studies incorporating non-phenomenological qualitative methodologies, quantitative inquiry, or mixed methodology would gather additional data on African-American managers' lived experiences and mentoring journeys to expand the type of research on this phenomenon.

Utilizing numerous sampling methods to detect subsets of this population (e. g., those working in department heads, mid-level managers, and supervisor roles) would not only increase the scholarship on this matter, but it may also broaden the findings, allowing for more range and depth of new information on this topic. The small sample size used in this investigation and the experiences of African-American administrators were restricted and limited to a homogenous selection because of the IPA approach. More research on African-Americans in municipal organizations is needed to understand Black professionals lived experiences. A more extensive sampling of Black City and County administrators would yield more significant input on this topic.

The sample in this study worked for municipalities across the country, but the issues they faced seemed to be similar or the same encounters from staff complaining to elected officials, experience, and education being questioned and passed over for someone with less experience in the role. Research is needed to investigate the psychological impact that racism has on a Black city manager's professional life. Limited scholarship explores these conundrums about African-American City/County Managers at the helm of municipal organizations.

The results of this study reveal the lack of Black managers to mentor other professionals looking to advance within the field. Therefore, more research on the mentoring experiences of African-American administrators is warranted to implement change and mentoring programs to establish relationships.

A qualitative study to compare the experiences of African-American city/county managers to their white male and female counterparts would be beneficial in highlighting the inequalities in the field among these groups. Moreover, the findings from the study might provide an opportunity to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for Black professionals.

Conclusion

City government is a complex field that requires practitioners with the proper knowledge to resolve community problems. City and County Managers face significant challenges impacting the organizations and communities they serve, and they are tasked with implementing municipal initiatives to expand the delivery of public services. As the chief administrator, city/county managers work at the pleasure of elected officials to align department heads and other key staff members with the council's agenda.

This study aimed to understand why African-American City/County managers lack leadership positions and the impact of mentoring on the profession. Through this investigation, I captured the experiences of six African-American public administrators, either retired or currently occupying the city/county manager role. The participants shared what it is like to be a Black manager from their perspectives and their experiences. There is new information to be added to the limited literature on this population. In this investigation, through survey questions and semi-structured interviews, the managers in the study were given a chance to have their perspectives heard and significantly contribute to the research and the profession. Although this study merely scratches the surface in unlocking the lack of diversity in the upper echelons of municipal governments, it offers insight that is not usually considered or recognized in city/county government policy, procedures, and operations.

In the Wilsonian tradition, public administration built its case for strong administration on the postulation that it could devise mechanisms for elected officials to oversee administrative decisions effectively. The power structure in municipal and county governments often complicates change, creating conflict between elected officials and the manager. Kettl (2016) states that the division of labor between the governing body and the city/county manager is

mainly between “policy” and “administration,” with the manager being responsible for the administration component. The distorted boundary between elected and appointed positions continues to impact public administration’s everyday problems, like providing equitable services and being reflective of the community. When the views of the elected body diverge from those of the manager, the one holding the most power will prevail. In this scenario, it would be the governing body. Increasing organizational diversity has to be a priority for the elected officials and the city/county manager. If not, the organization will remain status quo, and change will become improbable. There must be a transformation in how elected officials and city/county managers think if we want to change the face of public administration and those in leadership positions.

Mentoring programs are practical tools to increase the representation of Black and Brown people in management positions in municipal agencies. Elected officials and city/county managers must make it part of the organization's vision and values to be more diverse. I genuinely hope that the outcomes of this research will initiate serious conversations and dialogue in municipalities across the country, in organizational policy and executive leadership development, specifically as it relates to minorities running municipal bodies. More importantly, I hope this research will not only serve as the framework for more inquiries on the experiences of African-American city/county managers but it will inspire those with the power and ability to implement change to take action. Increasing diversity is not only crucial for City/County Managers, Department Heads, and Mid-Level Managers, cultural competency and awareness of elected officials, are equally indispensable.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Email / Call for Participation

IRB NUMBER: FY022-318

PI: Johnny Mays

Recruitment Email / Call for Participation

Email Subject: CALL FOR PARTICIPATION: The Lack of Diversity in the Upper Echelons of Municipal Governments

Hi {{Participant_first_name}},

My name is Johnny, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Public Administration program at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. I am investigating the lack of African-American City Managers in local governments for my dissertation. I am emailing you to ask for your participation by sharing your knowledge and experience regarding diversity matters in local government via Zoom interviews.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous. Further information regarding participation is below. Upon completing this study, I plan to use the findings for my dissertation at West Chester University and publish research in peer-reviewed journals. I want to share my professional background with you. I have worked in local government for 20 years. Most of my experience has been as a frontline worker or mid-level manager. I have worked in a community with a population as low as 4,000, a mid-size community with 54,000 residents, and a community with 168,000 residents. These municipalities were located in Kansas, Texas, and Missouri. Although the organizations I worked for were in different states with diverse residents, there was always a common theme at the highest level of the organization. My study seeks solutions to increase diversity in the City Manager's capacity.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, please fill out this brief survey form: {{An updated live link will be included here upon IRB approval}}

Best,

Johnny

Do you have any questions you would like answered now? You may contact me as the principal investigator Johnny Mays, jm921091@wcupa.edu

If you prefer to speak with someone else, you may contact my Doctoral Advisor, Dr. Kristen Crossney, at kcrossney@wcupa.edu

Appendix B:
Interview Opening Script

Thank you so much for agreeing to let me interview you today. As you know, I am Johnny Mays, a DPA student in the Public Administration & Public Policy Program at West Chester University. As indicated on the informed consent form, the interview will cover the research topic of "The Lack of Diversity in the Upper Echelons of Municipal Governments." Participation in this research is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis so that notes will be taken through the process. This discussion aims to gather your experiences and perspective as an African-American city/ county administrator. I will ask a sequence of questions connected to this topic. You are encouraged to share whatever you believe is suitable to answer the questions. The interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Appendix C:
Sample of Interview Questions

The interview questions below will be used to increase the lack of diversity in the upper levels of municipal governments.

1. Please describe your current position, as well as the career path/professional experiences that have led them to your current position
2. Please describe any obstacles or difficulties encountered while pursuing upward mobility in municipal organizations.
3. Have you participated in a mentoring program? Would you please describe the experience you gained and the program's benefit?
4. What value does mentoring bring to African-American City Manager's perspectives on their personal and professional lives?
5. Are mentorships an effective method to help African-Americans obtain City Management positions? Why or why not?
6. Do you believe municipalities should establish mentoring programs within the organization to help increase diversity in leadership positions? If so, could you please explain why you feel this way? If not, please explain why.
7. What other suggestions do you have for increasing diversity in City Management positions?

Appendix D:
Survey Questions

1. Do you believe there is a lack of African-American City Managers/Administrators at the helm of municipal governments?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age?
4. How would you describe yourself? Please select all that apply.
5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
6. How many years have you worked in the city manager/administrator's office?
7. What was the first position you held at the executive level?
8. How would you describe the city manager/administrator who hired you? Please select all that apply.
9. What is the gender of the manager/administrator that hired you?
10. Do you currently have a professional mentor?
11. Do you think there is any value in having a mentor?
12. Do you think it would benefit municipal organizations to establish internal mentorship programs to increase diversity?

Appendix E
Presentation of Codes

INITIAL CODES	CATEGORIES		THEMES
	Emergent Codes	Category Names	
Navigating through the politics	Dealing with blackness	Being an African-American City/County Manager	Self-Awareness and knowing the organization
maneuvering through the organization	Need to prove yourself		
Desire to move up in the organization	Education and experience questioned		
Need to prove yourself	Rubbing people the wrong way		
Changing the face of public administration	Navigating through the politics	Knowing your audience	Being the first Black City Manager
Higher expectation of self	Being judged more harshly		
Being judged more harshly	Having to work harder		
Challenges of finding a mentor	Motivated to help young professionals	Connecting with other Black Managers	Importance of relationship-building and mentorship programs
Dealing with blackness	Challenges of finding a mentor		
Acknowledging the phenomenon	Feel that public service is a way of giving back		
Motivated to help young professionals	Acknowledging the phenomenon	Lack of Diversity in municipal organizations	Advancement in the field
Feel that public service is a way of giving back	Changing the face of public administration		
Building relationships with other Black managers	Desire to move up in the organization		
Lacking African-Americans in leadership roles	Establish mentorship programs		