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IS THIS SEAT TAKEN? AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PERCEPTIONS OF ASCENSION IN THE FEDERAL OFFICE OF INSPECTORS GENERAL COMMUNITY

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IS THIS SEAT TAKEN? AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PERCEPTIONS OF ASCENSION

IN THE FEDERAL OFFICE OF INSPECTORS GENERAL COMMUNITY

By

DONRICH LAMONT YOUNG

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
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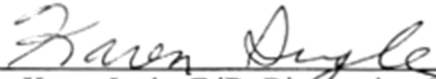
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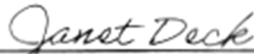

by

DONRICH LAMONT YOUNG

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Big Three: Ray C. Schultz, Susie M. Young, and Colonel (Ret.) Frank J. Preston, Jr., U.S. Army.

Ray C. Schultz (November 29, 1924 - May 2, 1990) was my maternal grandmother and first babysitter who I knew as Granny. She was a beautiful woman who some might describe as a "fire-cracker." She embodied friendship, altruism, hard work, and an undeniable love for her family. As a little boy, she introduced me to the importance of caring for others and a love of coffee (which I still have today). I hope that you are smiling down with pride and joy.

Susie M. Young (March 3, 1920 – March 12, 2014) was my paternal grandmother and an amazing matriarch. Grandma Susie, as I called her, was one of the most loving and caring people I ever had the pleasure of being around in my 42 years on this earth. She was the epitome of hard work, discipline, and empathy, and one who was respected by all. I was always amazed how she had the ability to make all of her children and grandchildren feel special as though they were each her favorite. I recall receiving handwritten letters from her when I was completing my undergraduate studies. She always reinforced the significance of being good to others and would put "a little something" in the envelope. The ten-dollar love letters as I called them will never be forgotten.

Colonel (Ret.) Frank J. Preston, Jr., U.S. Army (April 29, 1935 - September 6, 2020) was not blood, but he was absolutely family. The Colonel entered my life in 1993 as my Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC) Instructor at Fort George G. Meade High School. Over the next 27 years, he grew to be my mentor, my fraternity brother, my friend, and family. I have

often described him as the angel God sent in a season of need. He saw something in me before I saw it in myself, and he cultivated much more from within. He left an indeniable mark on my life. I hope that he, too, is beaming with pride right now at this accomplishment.

Lastly, I dedicate this to young boys and young men of color everywhere who have been told that they can't do it, shouldn't try it, and won't be it. As someone who was told that I was not college material and lacked the capacity to attend a four-year university, I stand before young men to tell them about the goodness and power of God. When man says no, fret not, because the Father has the final say. Be bold, be vivacious, and walk with a sense of pride from whence you come. YOU ARE ROYALTY and never allow anyone to tell you different, for your communities and your people need you to be bastions of the past, which produced some of the greatest leaders ever known. Be inspired. Be great. Be blessed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jeremiah 29:11 teaches that God indeed has a plan for us, and it is to help us and give us a future. I am often left speechless when I sit back and think about how wonderful, patient, kind, loving and remarkable my God is. I am beyond humbled at what He has done in my life. I will always honor and love him for who He is.

Mrs. Danelle Renee Young, J.D., and Mr. Dawson Lamont Young, my wife and son: please know that my greatest joy, responsibility and accomplishment lies in being your husband and your father, respectively. Danelle, you have had a front row seat to the ups and downs of the journey and this would not have been possible without your unwavering support. You have been an absolute trooper since Dawson's birth on November 27, 2020, when our lives changed forever. Thank you for shouldering so much of the load with a newborn baby so that I could tackle the final heat of this race. You are an amazing woman of God who never ceases to amaze me. On our wedding day, I described you as the Proverbs 31 woman, full of virtue. You continue to be all that and even more. I love you to the moon and back. Dawson, you are too young to understand this all, but I thank God every day for you, and I am so proud to be your dad.

To my dissertation committee, I cannot thank you enough. Dr. Karen Ingle (Chair), Dr. Janet Deck, and Dr. Adamavi "Maurice" Ahyee, you all are indeed THE DREAM TEAM. From the first time Dr. Deck and I spoke on the phone, I knew there was something very special about her. She has been a sound mentor, a true leader in my journey, and a representative of the best that the Kingdom of God has to offer. Dr. Ingle's amazing temperament, academic brilliance,

and sincere energy have been comforting throughout this experience. Dr. Ingle always made time for me and was willing to go the extra mile. I could not have asked for anything more from a chair. Dr. Ahyee, I am so grateful for your wise counsel and guidance going back to my time at Grand Canyon University (GCU). Thank you for hanging in there and staying connected to my work and process.

To my family, both immediate and extended, thank you for all your love and support. To my mother, Carolyn P. Schultz-Young, LMSW: thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader. You will never know how much I have appreciated our long talks about everything ranging from the Word of God to politics. You have always taught me what hard work, love, empathy, kindness, and humility were all about. This has been some journey and would not have been possible without you.

To my father, Richard H. Young: for as long as I can remember, you have been a symbol of what manhood looks like. Your hard working, nose to the grindstone approach is what made you successful in two careers of service, both as a senior enlisted solider and as a government civilian leader. You have taught me the significance of character and integrity, often taking the "hard right over the easy wrong." You are loved, appreciated, and I hope that I have made you proud.

Proverbs 27:17 teaches us that "as iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." This scripture captures the essence of my 23-year experience as a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. To the Brothers of the Epsilon Chapter "Star of the East," thank you all that have contributed to my journey. Special thanks to Brothers Dan Hardy,

Dr. Michael "Geez" Gary, Jr., Dr. Gary Clarke, Dr. Tarron Richardson, and the delegation of Epsilon brothers in Atlanta, better known as Epsilon-South. I also want to recognize a few other fraternity brothers who have been helpful along this road, Rev. Dr. S. Isaiah Harvin, Dr. Ray Crawford, Todd Clark, Esq., and Marlin Thrower. Thank you for always answering the call, offering honest feedback, and praying for me.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge two gentleman that have been professional colleagues and friends for nearly the past decade. Brother Jason Moran: you were a great boss and mentor professionally and have been an amazing fraternity brother and friend. Kyle Myles: you have also had an exclusive look at this roller coaster ride known as doctoral studies. You have been beyond supportive as a colleague and supervisor. You have grown to be one of my "go-to" people and a respected friend.

To my GCU crew, thanks for everything. Dr. Jennifer Toop-Williams, Verna Burney, and Jay Millner: we all began the journey together at GCU and, although our paths might have gone in different directions, we've remained connected. May God keep us strong and bonded as friends and respected colleagues.

Concluding this process would not have been possible without the support and participation of the gentlemen who participated in my study. I am so very appreciative of your candor, time, and willingness to support my research.

Last but certainly not least, I have to acknowledge Dr. Sara McCaslin. Anyone who has gone through this process understands the significance of a good editor. Dr. Mac is the best in the business, and what a blessing she has been to have on my team.

ABSTRACT

The federal law enforcement community is one which should be diverse and reflect society as a whole. Traditionally, federal law enforcement, and specifically the Office of Inspectors General (OIG) Community, has been occupied by White males at all levels. This qualitative exploratory case study examined the perceptions and lived experiences of eight African American males currently employed in or recently retired from the federal OIG community. The research findings resulted in the emergence of three themes: (1) mentorship, (2) treatment and opportunities, and (3) underrepresentation. The implications and recommendations which evolved from this research study may contribute to the development of future diversity, inclusion, and recruitment initiatives in the federal OIG community.

Keywords: ascension, barriers, critical race theory, federal, general schedule, office of inspector general

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I. INTRODUCTION

This research examined African American male perceptions of ascension in the Federal Office of Inspectors General (OIG) community. The 45th presidential administration has arguably operated unlike any other in U.S. history (Bond & Teodoro, 2019). The current administration's activities have introduced the American public to a sector of high-level government servants known as Inspectors General (Fine, 2017). The U.S. Department of Justice, Inspector General Michael Horowitz, became more recognizable during the investigation involving Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Fisher, 2019). The Intelligence Community Inspector General (ICIG) Michael Atkinson testified before Congress as to a government employee who provided allegations against the Trump administration for illicit contact with Ukrainian officials.

While very newsworthy, some public introductions of government gatekeepers known as Inspectors General (IGs) have presented a preeminent platform for Office of Inspectors General (OIGs) and their work. OIGs are independent law enforcement agencies designed to provide oversight to various government entities (Apaza, 2016). OIGs comprise a small sub-sector of a federal government system with extensive layers. Almost all federal government agencies have an OIG, tasked with the agency's accountability function (Apaza, 2016). More specifically, 70 federal government agencies have active OIGs (Fine, 2017).

Federal OIGs were created in the 1970s to combat fraud, waste, and abuse within designated departments and agencies (Ginsberg & Greene, 2016). OIGs were founded under the

Carter administration as independent organizations responsible for audit, investigation, and evaluation of government programs that expended funds to the American public (Ginsberg & Greene, 2016). OIGs were formed to assist Congress in the conduction of its oversight function. The OIGs were legislatively established under the Inspector General Act of 1978, which was later amended in 1988 and reformed in 2008 (Ginsberg & Greene, 2016). When initially enacted in 1978, the IG Act outlined the mission of OIGs and identified the scope of OIG work (Apaza, 2016). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) were some of the first agencies to form OIGs.

During the amendment of the IG Act in 1988, authority was expanded to smaller federal government agencies, and the reporting requirmeents of all IGs were increased (Ginsberg & Greene, 2016). IGs are well known for investigating employee misconduct cases, performing program audits within its specific government agency, and providing oversight of initiatives in which the agency's funds are expended. Most OIGs have the authority and duty to investigate matters affiliated with a single agency, and some OIGs have expanded delegation of authority (Ginsberg & Greene, 2016). The role of OIGs has become more expansive over the years. OIGs were not previously thought of as significant law enforcement agencies in the past but were considered to be auditing organizations. OIGs have also been more significantly viewed over the years as their notable criminal investigations have increased (Schudson, 2018). OIGs conduct investigations, audits, and examinations to determine if government personnel are operating according to agency standards with high character and efficiency (Schudson, 2018).

OIGs have independent and statutory law enforcement powers granted to them from both the Inspector General Act of 1978—to include its amendment and reform—as well as the

Homeland Security Act of 2002 (Apaza, 2016). Before the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States, OIGs acquired their arrest powers through special deputation from the U.S. Marshal Service (USMS). Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, a federal reorganization occurred relative to law enforcement entities. On November 25, 2002, the 107th Congress passed into law HR-5005, known as the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (DHS, 2002). Under the law, the Office of Inspector General for the newly formed Department of Homeland Security began operations wherein all other OIGs were granted statutory law enforcement authority (DHS, 2002). The expansion of law enforcement authority and delegation in 2002 further solidified OIGs as legitimate federal law enforcement agencies. OIGs are multifunctional organizations that maintain independence even though they are funded under a department's more massive budget structure and can investigate its elements. OIGs investigate criminal and civil violations and conduct audits of internal and external programs (Fine, 2017). OIGs are responsible for examining personnel and organizational efficiency within their respective agency. OIGs also peer review one another under the leadership and guidance of the Council of Inspector Generals for Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE; Fine, 2017).

Representation Within the OIG

The federal government recognized the need for diversity and made efforts to achieve representative bureaucracy in the federal government system (Naff, 2018). According to Naff (2018), through a diverse civil service, representative bureaucracy ensures that varied communities have input in the decision-making apparatus impacting them and other Americans. Before former President Bill Clinton implied that diversity was good for the federal government workforce, Congress took progressive steps to diversify the federal government by enacting the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (Naff, 2018). Although the OIG community is a subset of the

more extensive government system, the OIG community still has issues concerning diversity. Based upon the unique and vital function of OIGs, a broad and diverse perspective by the men and women entrusted to carry out the mission is beneficial to the pursuit of efficient and effective governance.

Additionally, OIGs have the task of protecting the American public—with particular emphasis on the government coffers—through their law enforcement status and capacity to combat fraud, waste, and abuse. This study uncovered the perceptions of ascension gathered by African American males employed in the federal OIG community. The study was critical because it examined African American males, a minority group in the federal OIG community. The study focused on the lived experiences of African American males employed in the federal OIG community within the southeastern United States.

Background of the Study

To adequately address diversity, representative bureaucracy, and minority ascension within the Federal OIG Community, a discussion must take place on the historical foundations that set the groundwork for the current state. The United States has a somewhat tattered history with race relations and the achievement of equity within the federal government workplace (Quarles & Nalty, 2016). In 1948, President Harry S. Truman officially integrated the armed services, although some two years later, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps still functioned as segregated services (Quarles & Nalty, 2016). Following Truman's order to integrate the services, African Americans—primarily males—were utilized to fill a workforce gap despite their non-treatment as military equals (Quarles & Nalty, 2016). According to Quarles and Nalty (2016), African American men, some of whom were college educated, were relegated to less significant roles such as cooks, mess hall attendants, or valets for White officers. Meanwhile, their equally

situated White counterparts were often commissioned as officers and presented with key leadership opportunities and positions (Bristol & Stur, 2017).

African American soldiers expressed frustration as they were treated like second-class citizens when they fought for a country that did not claim them (Bristol & Stur, 2017). From a social, economic, or educational perspective, World War II's segregated armed services offered little opportunity for upward mobility for African American soldiers (Bristol & Stur, 2017). Contrarily, similarly situated White soldiers received the benefits that African American soldiers desired but were denied (Bristol & Stur, 2017). As integration increased in the armed service, so did the harsh reality of second-class citizenship for African American soldiers (Lucks, 2017).

According to Lucks (2017), civil rights icon Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was concerned with the mistreatment of young African American men serving in the armed forces. Many African American young men eagerly enlisted based on the belief that service in the armed forces would offer them educational and vocational advancements (Lucks, 2017). Instead of knowledge, enhanced skills, and academic support, many African American soldiers came home from the Vietnam War with trauma—the by-product of war—and no real pathway to a better life (Lucks, 2017).

White soldiers returned home from the war to a different reality than their Black counterparts. Their welcome home included government subsistence with educational expenses and housing through government-backed home loan programs for veterans (Lucks, 2017). The discussion around military service and subsequent inequities is significant. World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War introduced African Americans to significant employment opportunities with the United States government (Lucks, 2017). The initial engagement between African Americans and their employment with the federal government was one that had its share

of problems based upon fundamental inequities in treatment. The growth and expansion of the federal government in the 1960s presented more employment prospects in the civil service that were not previously available to African Americans (Bell, 2015).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided equal opportunities to all racial and ethnic groups. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 expressly prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Aiken et al., 2013). Nearly three decades later, stark inequities remained for the underrepresented class of federal government employees. According to Wallace and Allen (2016), a 1995 directive by President Bill Clinton expanded opportunities for underrepresented groups subjected to institutionalized discrimination. One of the battlegrounds for the examination of the policy was within the federal government system.

Following exhaustive legal review and protracted court battles regarding the impact of President Clinton's directive on the majority of the population, the administration clarified the depth and scope. More specifically, the directive—also known as Affirmative Action—was not designed to adversely impact the majority in an attempt to even the playing field for the underrepresented (Wallace & Allen, 2016). The federal government workforce is America's largest employer, which presents an opportunity for the government to launch significant initiatives in the diversity and inclusion policy area (Borry et al., 2019). In 2011, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13583, which required federal agencies to incorporate diverse perspectives into hiring practices and promotions (Borry et al., 2019). As society becomes more diverse, so should the federal workforce (Borry et al., 2019). The discussion of diversity and inclusion goes hand-in-hand with the concept of representative bureaucracy. Per Andrews et al. (2016), representative bureaucracy creates positive effects within public organizations' positive effects. Andrews et al. (2016) suggested that representative bureaucracy

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makes for a greater sense of community. Furthermore, representative bureaucracy becomes a demonstration of the partnership between communities and the government.

According to the 2016 annual report published by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, White males held 52.4% of the Senior Level Pay Positions (SLP) within the federal government. Black males, on the other hand, accounted for only 5.5% of SLP in that same year. Hispanic males accounted for 3% of SLP in 2016, followed by Asian males who occupied 2.4% of SLP (EEOC, 2016). The General Schedule (GS) is a pay system primarily designated for federal white collar workers with a scale of grades 1-15 (Olson et al., 2000). White males held just over 23% of GS grades 1 through 6 positions, but accounted for nearly 49% of traditional management or leadership grade positions, GS grades 14 and 15 (EEOC, 2016).

Black males represented 8.5% of GS grades 1 through 6 and 5.3% of GS 14 and 15 positions. Hispanic males accounted for 3.8% of grades 1 through 6 and 3.2% of grades 14 and 15. Asian males comprised 1.8% of GS grades 1 through 6, but 5.4% of grades 14 and 15 (EEOC, 2016). Although Black males have slightly increased their presence in federal government leadership by acquiring senior-level GS and SLP positions, they are still disproportionately behind their White and Asian male counterparts (EEOC, 2016). Moreover, Black and White women are achieving leadership positions in the federal government at a higher rate than their Black male counterparts (EEOC, 2016). The above-identified statistics reinforce the need for more considerable discussion in the area of diversity and inclusion. The United States government should represent its citizenship so that civil servants function in a fair, balanced, and ethical manner.

The Federal OIG Community is a small piece of the law enforcement apparatus in the United States. Although the contact between federal OIG personnel—Agents and Auditors—and

the Black community is different from state and local law enforcement, consideration is necessary to understand biases and attitudes around race. The federal government's ability to actively engage underrepresented communities will promote favorable relationships between the government and the public. Rodgers (2019) suggested that race was a crucial factor in contemporary labor markets. Furthermore, organizations should conduct appropriate assessments on making improvements regarding race relations and the residual influence on the labor market (Rodgers, 2019). The current research study examined historical data and perspectives associated with institutional inequities while also evaluating African American male perceptions of ascension in the Federal OIG Community.

Theoretical Framework

The research study examined the critical race theory (CRT) theoretical framework, which emerged during the civil rights movement. Many of the issues initially taken up by CRT scholars mirrored those managed during the civil rights era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT was unique and was evaluated from a legal perspective by both practitioners and legal scholars (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT scholars have deemed the element of race central to both law and policy in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT suggests that race and factors associated therein are continual considerations in most American systems (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). According to Bell (2015), CRT is a theoretical framework used to investigate racism, law, and power in a post-racial and color-blind society. CRT confronts systems rooted in White supremacy and privilege while also working towards remedies. CRT exposes racism as a principle to the most powerful systems in the nation.

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Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for the Study
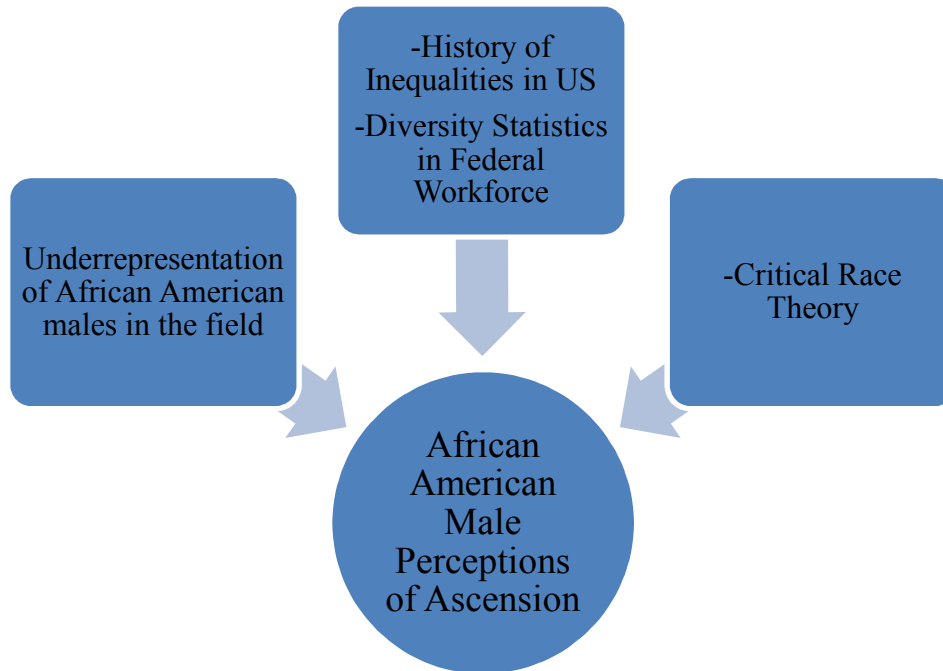
According to Regoniel (2015), the conceptual framework is significant for identifying both independent and dependent variables through visual aids. The conceptional framework aims to bring a particular phenomenon into focus (Joyner et al., 2018). Moreover, the conceptual framework should also connect to the theoretical framework(s) and highlight the phenomenon (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The research study evaluated a theoretical framework rooted in both history and social dynamics. CRT is a critical component to the complex relationship between race, equity, and justice within the United States. Moreover, the conceptual framework in this study aimed to intertwine the history of African American men in federal government service—with particular emphasis on the law enforcement community—with their positioning within that

given work community. The study delved into the social and systemic factors that have influenced the lack of African American male diversity in the subset of the federal law enforcement community, known as the OIG community. Further, this research discovered what perceptions African American males employed in the OIG community have regarding their opportunities to ascend to leadership positions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to describe the lived experiences of African American males employed in the federal OIG community. This exploratory case study also examined African American male perceptions of upward mobility in the federal OIG community. The research focused on eight African American males currently employed or recently retired from a federal OIG at grades GS-12 and above. The participants were located in the southeastern region of the United States. The participants' population also had federal experience ranging between 5 and 20 years in their particular discipline within the federal OIG community.

Significance of the Study

The focus of this case study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of African American males employed in the Federal OIG community. The researcher also hoped to bridge a gap in an area of underrepresented research. Prior research studies have examined minority ascension within the federal government civil service (Bell, 2015). Previous inquiries examined African American women evolving into the Senior Executive Service (SES) of the federal government system (Wilkerson, 2008), Black male ascension within Fortune 500 companies (Williams, 2014), and even African American males in the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Corps (Williams, 2019). To date, it appears there have not been any relevant studies

exploring the professional journeys of African American males in the federal OIG community. With African American males representing only 5.5% of senior-level pay positions in the federal government workforce (EEOC, 2016), there is a clear divide concerning recruiting, developing, and promoting African American males. This research study addressed multiple societal elements within the OIG, such as race and inequalities.

Overview of Methodology

The research study was qualitative in methodology. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research consists of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. Within the world of social research, qualitative studies have become known for their use of assumptions and interpretive frameworks as a measure of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 42). Qualitative research is the investigation method utilized to answer a complex social problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 43). Qualitative research unravels and addresses a phenomenon or social issue which requires further exploration (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 47).

Qualitative research instigates the how and why of a social phenomenon that is not easily understood (Yates & Leggett, 2016). When evaluated in its most authentic form, quantitative research cannot discover the dynamics of a phenomenon in the same way as qualitative research. This study investigated the complex social issue of African American male perceptions of ascension in the federal OIG community. The qualitative research approach was the most appropriate for unraveling the complicated social features captured in this study.

Research Design

The approach to this study was a case study design. The case study design was selected based upon the capacity to focus on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2017). The case study research design is sufficient when answering what, how, and why

something occurred (Yin, 2017). The purpose of this research study was to explore African

American male perceptions of ascension in the federal OIG community. The research aligned

with the elements of an exploratory case study. According to Yin (2017), the exploratory case

study design answers the "what" questions while also allowing multiple research forms of

evidence to include documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations.

Research Questions

R^1: What are African American male perceptions of promotion and upper-level leadership

opportunities in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

R^2: What do African American males perceive as barriers to promotion in the federal Office of

Inspectors General community?

Data Collection

Data collection is one of the most central components of adequately conducting a

qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection and integrity in the process

were as necessary as what information developed from the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), collecting data through the interview process was

procedural. Following the procedures, from obtaining informed consent to protecting

participants' identities, was necessary for the study's validity. Equally significant to the

process was developing an interview guide or protocol (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interview guide was needed for direction and assisting in maintaining interaction

between the interviewer and interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher developed

an interview guide linked to the research questions presented. The population for the research

study was African American males employed in the federal OIG community. The sampling

frame for data collection was African American males employed within the federal OIG

community, located in the United States' southeastern region. Professional networking organizations such as the National Organizational of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association (FLEOA), and the Council of Inspector Generals on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) assisted in the identification of study participants. The study participants also ranged in experience from 5 years to 20-plus years. These research participants also included African American male participants who recently retired from the federal OIG community.

Upon the conduction of participant interviews, it was important to manage the collected data. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ethical considerations are central to the data collection process. Ethical considerations covered a wide range of elements including but not limited to gaining permission from the participants' employers, recording information, storing information securely, purposefully sampling, and minimizing field issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study consisted of making appropriate contact with the various federal OIGs in order to gain approval to conduct the study utilizing their personnel. Based upon the structure of most OIGs, the Offices of General Counsel (OGC) were the approving entities. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted before data collection.

Per Creswell and Poth (2018), purposeful sampling occurs when the researcher is intentionally sampling a group of participants that can best inform the researcher about the problems under examination. Based upon the lack of prior research conducted with this subject area, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate for conduction of the study. Qualitative researchers have more latitude with respect to forms of data and modes of collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection included recorded participant interviews. The data was then maintained on a biometric thumb drive device and stored in a locked fireproof safe.

Procedures

The data analysis of this qualitative case study evaluated data incorporated thematic analysis. According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is the process of encoding qualitative information. Thematic analysis is also consistent with the development of behavioral themes, which are, at times, involved in nature (Boyatzis, 1998). The overarching goal of thematic analysis is to capture subjects and patterns existent within the data. The Otter voice recording software application assisted the data analysis function in the study. The Otter application allowed the researcher to record and transcribe the participants' interviews verbatim. Theme development through reoccurrences resulted from data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data analysis procedures in this study were as follows:

- reviewed all audio recordings of interviews

- transcribed all interviews verbatim via the Otter data management application

- participants validate transcriptions for accuracy.

- conducted analysis data using codes

- segmented data in a matrix to determine theoretical clarity

- revised codes as new themes

- determined the categorization and identification of recurrent themes.

The researcher showed respect to participants by allowing them to express their opinions and make personal decisions as long as it was not detrimental to another individual personally. The researcher established an open policy in furtherance of respect and justice wherein participants were reassured that their participation was voluntary. If participants felt uncomfortable by the level of inquiry, they had the right to disengage. Under the element of

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beneficence, the researcher protected the respondents' data. The researcher also made available the internal training program and particular member-centered data. Participant information regarding confidential workplace occurrences within certain federal government agencies was also protected not to compromise the participants or their employers. The researcher removed any data associated with the participants and provided random ID numbers per Southeastern University's IRB procedures to offer anonymity.

Limitations

The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore African American male perceptions of ascension within the federal OIG community. The population for the research was African American males employed in the federal OIG community. The sampling frame for data collection was African American males employed within the federal OIG community in the United States' southeastern region. The study posed potential limitations regarding the sampling frame and more significant implications. The small sample size of the study created some limitations. However, the limited sample frame and the study's unique nature presented opportunities for future research in other geographical areas. The small size of the OIG community as a law enforcement body was also a limitation with the study.

Definition of Key Terms

Ascension: Upward mobility or professional promotion to include observable career accomplishments that can be reliably judged by others (i.e., pay, work accommodations, benefits) (Gamble & Turner, 2015)

Barriers: Policies, procedures, practices, or conditions that limit or tend to limit employment opportunities for members of a particular race, ethnic or religious background, gender, or for individuals with disabilities (EEOC, 2016).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): Suggests that race and factors associated therein are continual considerations in most American systems (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

General Schedule (GS): The primary pay system of the federal government civilian workforce. The GS schedule ranges from 1-15, with leadership positions typically serving GS-14 and GS-15 level positions. GS-14 and GS-15 level employees are generally believed to be candidates for senior leadership positions and upward mobility to the Senior Executive Service (SES) (Choi, 2018).

Group Racial Discrimination: The exclusion of a member of a different racial group (usually minority group) from activities and information otherwise extended to the non-minority group (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Individual Racial Discrimination: Negative overt or covert attitudes and behaviors held/enacted by individuals based upon racial stereotypes or other sources of biases (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Senior Executive Service (SES): Within the Federal Government, Senior Executive Service (SES) members serve in the highest key leadership positions. Overall, the SES represents the corps of federal leaders with the authority and influence on critical policies and decision-making processes (Benjamin, 2017).

Summary

This qualitative case study focused on African American males employed in the federal OIG community and their ascension perceptions. The research consisted of an exploratory case study that examined the lived experiences of African American males employed in the federal OIG community. The researcher also investigated their ascension opportunities into leadership roles and the perceived barriers impeding their desired ascension. The research considered the

factors of race and equity in the United States with particular attention paid to race and justice within the context of civil service employment. The conversation of race and justice within public service employment transitioned into introducing the federal OIG community. Although there has been some level of scholarship conducted regarding African American men's ascension in other professional disciplines (Whitaker, 2013), there is little evidence of other studies undertaken to explore African American ascension perceptions in the federal OIG community. Additionally, the study provided valuable information for consideration in the minority recruitment and strategic plan for many federal OIGs.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to describe the lived experiences of African American males employed in the federal OIG community and examine their perceptions of upward mobility in the federal OIG community. The research focused on eight African American males currently employed or recently retired from a federal OIG, at grades GS-12 and above. The participants were located in the southeastern region of the United States and had federal experience ranging between 5 and 20 years in their particular discipline within the federal OIG community.

Table 1.

Population of African American Males in the U.S. Categorized by Age

Age	Amount	%
Under 5 years	1,540	7.7
5 to 9 years	1,558	7.8
10 to 14 years	1,567	7.8
15 to 19 years	1,548	7.8
20 to 24 years	1,561	7.8
25 to 29 years	1,697	8.5
30 to 34 years	1,392	7.0
35 to 44 years	2,460	12.3
45 to 54 years	2,443	12.2
55 to 64 years	2,201	11.0
65 to 74 years	1,312	6.6
75 to 84 years	495	2.5
85 years and over	196	1.0
Total	**19,969**	**100**

Despite the significant numbers of African American men living in the United States, insufficient numbers of African American men serve in senior-level administrative positions within the federal government, including in the federal OIG community. According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), there are nearly 20 million African American males living in the U.S. Furthermore, data retrieved from the United States Census Bureau (2018) captured the population of African American males by age as shown in Table 1.

However, only 168,543 or 8.6% of federal government employees are African American men. Limited research has been made available regarding African American males employed in the federal OIG community

For example, and overview purposes, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General (HHS/OIG), was evaluated in greater detail. HHS/OIG (2020) reported that Congress enacted the Inspector General Act of 1978 to ensure integrity and efficiency in government under which the Office of Inspector General was created in 2002. HHS/OIG (2020) is led by an Inspector General appointed by the President and is subject to Senate confirmation. HHS/OIG is the largest OIG in the federal government, with approximately 1,600 employees. HHS/OIG combats fraud, waste, and abuse and improves the efficiency of Health and Human Services programs. These divisions are responsible for fighting waste, fraud, and abuse in Medicare, Medicaid, and more than 100 other Department of Health and Human Services programs. The majority of HHS/OIG resources go towards the oversight of Medicare and Medicaid—programs that represent a significant part of the federal budget and affect this country's most vulnerable citizens.

Also, according to the HHS/OIG (2020), the division's mission is to provide objective oversight to promote the economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and integrity of Health and Human

Services programs, as well as the health and welfare of the people they serve. The organization's vision is to drive positive change in Health and Human Services programs and in the lives of the people served by these programs. Per HHS/OIG (2020), the Immediate Office of the Inspector General's Office has three goals which include fighting fraud, waste, and abuse; promoting quality, safety and value in Health and Human Services programs, and for Health and Human Services beneficiaries; and advancing excellence and innovation. The Immediate Office of the Inspector General is directly responsible for the Office of Inspector General's mission's overall fulfillment and for promoting effective management and quality of the Office of Inspector General processes and products. For example, the immediate staff serves as liaison to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services, reviews all existing and proposed regulations and legislation, and promotes activities and accomplishments through the media and other external entities. The immediate staff also compiles and issues publications that provide an overview of the divisions' work, including the annual strategic plan, which outlines the vision and priorities that guide the office.

This study is concerned with the underrepresentation of African American males who serve in positions of leadership and or management within the federal OIG community. It is not known how African American males employed within the federal OIG community perceive their opportunities at ascension into positions of leadership. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the lived experiences of African American males desiring ascension within the federal OIG community. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to this qualitative case study. Chapter 2 provides the literature pertinent to the two research questions that guided this study:

1. R[1]: What are African American male perceptions of their opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

2. R^2: What are the measures which African American males perceive as barriers to promotion in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

Critical Race Theory

This study utilized the CRT as the lens through which African American males employed in the federal Office of Inspectors General community can share their perceptions of their opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership and their perceptions of barriers to promotion. An amalgamation of the literature indicates that there are seven central tenets of CRT:

- the permanence of racism

- experiential knowledge and counter storytelling

- interest convergence theory

- intersectionality

- whiteness as property

- critique of liberalism

- commitment to social justice

The Permanence of Racism

The permanence of racism explains racial discrimination as an endemic and permanent experience of people from racially diverse backgrounds, which influences the political, economic, and social aspects of American society (Bohonos, 2020; Cabrera, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Smith, 2020; Yao et al., 2019). In America, race is a social construct used to distinguish one racial group (Bohonos, 2020; Cabrera, 2018). Various races are described as being superior, while others are deemed as inferior. Further, institutional, cultural, and interpersonal practices create advantages for some racial groups and disadvantages for others

(Ladson-Billings, 2013; Smith, 2020; Yao et al., 2019). Ladson-Billings (2013) proposed that racism is not an isolated act but an ingrained practice in American society that many individuals often overlook and is a normalized daily life component for people of color.

Experiential Knowledge and Counter-Storytelling

Experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling recognize that individuals from diverse backgrounds have unique knowledge that should be valued and is critical to understanding race relations (Blessett et al., 2016). Counter-narratives provide essential perspectives of public administration curricula (Han et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ross & Stevenson, 2018). Han et al. (2020) indicated that unique family histories, biographies, and narratives are essential for understanding one's daily experiences with racism. Counter-storytelling is fundamental and adds context to the objectivity of positivist perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Accordingly, counter-storytelling provides a voice to historically marginalized people and serves to illuminate and critique normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes and seeks to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially those held by the majority (Gist et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Starke et al., 2018).

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence is grounded on the premise that although individuals from diverse backgrounds wish to achieve racial equality, advances will only take place when those in power, (White heterosexual Christian males) join forces to alleviate racism (Griffen, 2017; Lewis & Shah, 2019; Rollock & Dixson, 2016). Ogletree (2004) reported that according to Bell (1980) efforts to improve racial equality only occur when White people perceive that it will be profitable or at least cost-free to serve, hire, admit, or otherwise deal with African Americans on a non-discriminatory basis. When they fear—accurately or not— that there may be a loss,

inconvenience, or upset to themselves or other White people, they turn away from hiring African Americans and other minorities and are less prone to promote them, as well.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term used to describe the lived experience of individuals based on racial identity, racism, and other identities such as gender, class, religion, ability/disability, and sexual orientation (Delgado, 2010; Hancock, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Intersectionality in CRT suggests that individuals experience multiple forms of inequality in different contexts, and over time, these intersections can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias.

Intersectionality has two key elements: (A) an empirical basis, which is an intersectional approach needed to understand the nature of social inequities and the processes that create and sustain them; and (B) activism, which aims to generate coalitions between different groups to resist and change the status quo (Ladson-Billing, 2013). Ladson-Billings (2013) theorized that it is often difficult for individuals to grasp the concept of intersectionality in America because the concept of intersectionality is organized along with binaries such as African American or White, right or wrong, yes or no. However, Ladson-Billings (2013) proposed that individuals move into the complexities of real life by recognizing that people represent multiple identities.

Whiteness as Property

Whiteness as a property was first described by Harris (1993) as "assumptions, privileges, and benefits" (p. 1713). According to Harris (1993), Whiteness is associated with specific characteristics that are deemed as valuable assets that White people seek to protect and, in some cases, have been protected legally. Manning et al. (2015) noted that Whiteness could be exchanged for certain privileges, such as access to higher paying careers, better neighborhoods, and higher quality schools.

Critique of Liberalism

According to Donnor and Ladson-Billings (2017), a review of liberalism is related to individuals' criticism of objectivity, color blindness, and race neutrality. Such concepts act as camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society. Embracing color blindness ignores that inequity, opportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not easily be remedied by ignoring race in contemporary society. Individuals committed to social justice must consistently challenge how racial advancements are promoted through White self-interest and a color-blind ideology. Individuals already in positions of power are not adversely affected by the inequity resulting from racism and other forms of oppression.

Commitment to Social Justice

Commitment to social justice refers to establishing equal participation of all groups (DeMatthews, 2016; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Pulliam, 2017). Social justice also includes the equal distribution of resources and physical and psychological safety and security for all individuals and groups. Ladson-Billings (2013) stated that social justice emphasizes positive change on behalf of those who are oppressed and vulnerable. Another social justice goal is eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, religion, and national origin (DeMatthews, 2016; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Pulliam, 2017).

Experiences of African Americans in the Workplace

African American employees and managers in the U.S. report that there are challenges associated with their lived experiences in the workplace (Assari & Moghani-Lankarani, 2018). After investigating if the links between socioeconomic backgrounds, working in mostly White workgroups and perceived discrimination differed for African American males, Assari and Moghani-Lankarani (2018) proposed that African Americans from higher socioeconomic

backgrounds tend to work in predominantly White workplaces, which increases their perceived discrimination. To test the associations between socioeconomic backgrounds, workplace racial composition, and perceived discrimination in a nationally representative sample of 1,775 employed African American adults who were either male ($n = 676$) or female ($n = 1099$) and who were all enrolled from the National Survey of American Life. Their study measured gender, age, educational attainment and household income, workplace racial composition, and perceived discrimination. Per the study findings, high income and high education households worked in predominantly White workgroups, which was, in turn, associated with more perceived discrimination. There was not a difference in gender association between the Senior Executive Service (SES), workplace racial composition, and perceived discrimination. As a result of the study, Assari and Moghani-Lankarani (2018) concluded that although the workplace's racial makeup may be a mechanism by which high socioeconomic backgrounds increase discriminatory experiences for African Americans, males and females may not differ in this regard. The researchers also suggested that policies are needed to reduce discrimination in racially diverse workplaces, particularly for African Americans who work in predominantly White work environments.

Pitcan et al. (2018) examined the lived experiences of workplace racial microaggressions (context, experience, costs, and coping) among 12 early career professional African Americans employed in predominantly White organizations. The study's purpose was to understand the experience of racial microaggressions by highlighting and amplifying the voices of professional African American men working in mostly White organizations. The participants were all under 40 years old and had less than 10 years of professional experience working at predominantly White organizations. The study indicated that the participants confirmed that microaggressions

produce an environment that excludes African American men, subsequently encouraging them to conform to White masculine norms. The influence of microaggressions proved to be more frustrating than blatant racism.

The participants also indicated that they felt that their performance had to be beyond reproach to maintain a positive representation of all African American men and protect against differential responses toward errors between them and their White peers. All participants noted that they needed to work two or three times as hard as their White counterparts. There was a psychological cost of experiencing and advocating against discriminatory behaviors. As a result of the study, Pitcan et al. (2018) recommended further research to examine whether age or career experience influences organizations. Thomas and Gabarro (1999) conducted a 6-year study of leaders in three companies and reported that people of color had to manage their experiences of racial microaggressions in predominantly White careers more strategically than their White peers and prove greater competence before winning promotions. Wooten and James (2004) found that African American leaders who do rise to the top are disproportionately handed "glass cliff" assignments, which offer excellent rewards but carry a higher risk of failure. Robert et al. (2019) reported that because African American employees feel a heightened sense of difference among their mostly White peers, their ability to contribute is diminished. According to the Toigo Foundation, as cited by Roberts et al. (2019), there is an expectation for African Americans to serve as "cultural ambassadors" who address the needs of other African American employees, which leaves them doing two jobs: "the official one that they were hired to do, and a second one as a champion for members of the person's minority group" (p.7). Across industries, sectors, and functions, African Americans also experience the "diversity fatigue" that arises from constantly

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engaging in task forces, training, and conversations about race as they are tapped to represent their demographic.

African American leaders, in particular, struggle with feeling inauthentic at work. As cited by Roberts et al. (2019), Hewlin and Broomes (2013) noted that many minorities feel pressured to create "facades of conformity," (p.8) suppressing their values, views, and attributes to fit in with organizational ones. As cited by Roberts et al., (2019), Hewlin and Broomes (2013) found in a survey of 2,226 workers in various industries and corporate settings that African Americans create these facades more frequently than other minority groups do and feel the inauthenticity more deeply. For example, they might conform with coworkers' behavior, "whitewash" their resumes by deleting ethnic-sounding names or companies, hide minority beliefs, and suppress emotions related to workplace racism. As a result, African American workers feel less supported, engaged, and committed to their jobs than their peers. Moreover, African American managers receive less psychosocial support than their White counterparts (Roberts et al., 2019). African American employees are less likely than White employees to say that their company's mission or purpose makes them feel their job is essential, that their coworkers will do quality work, and that they have opportunities to learn and grow. African American leaders are more likely than White ones to leave their organizations as a result (Roberts et al., 2019).

Employment Laws

Aiken et al. (2013) stated that the first landmark piece of legislation to combat unfair discrimination practices was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was presented by President John F. Kennedy, which made discrimination in schools, public facilities, government, and other institutions within the United States illegal. Title VII of the act also

prohibited employers from making decisions about an employee based on racial assumptions and stereotypes about their traits, abilities, or performance (Rutherglen, 2015). Because the federal government was excluded from the meaning of "an employer" (pg.740) in the Civil Rights Act when Title VII was enacted, it did not provide a judicial remedy for federal government employee racial discrimination (Rutherglen, 2015).

According to Aiken et al. (2013), federal employees who experienced racial discrimination had to seek justice on other judicial grounds such as executive orders prohibiting discrimination, the Fifth Amendment's equal protection component, and other civil rights statutes. According to the current data, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is the most critical agency of all the agencies that evolved from Title VII (EEOC, 2015). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was established on July 2, 1965, to enforce federal laws, rules, and regulations that discriminate against a job applicant or an employee in any work situation legal in the United States (EEOC, 2016). In 1972, Congress added Section 717 to Title VII, which renounced the federal government's exemption from employment discrimination (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2016).

Per literature presented by Fredrikson-Goldsen and Espinoza (2015), in 1969, President Nixon signed Executive Order 11478 into law. The executive order emphasized the need to offer equal employment opportunities in the federal government and prohibited any type of public service discrimination. The executive order also authorized federal agencies' executives to institute affirmative programs for promoting equal employment opportunities and reinforced regulations designed to prohibit minority discrimination in every aspect of employment practice, advancement, personnel policy, treatment, and development in the federal civil service (OPM, 2016).

In 1978, the Civil Service Reform Act was enacted. The Civil Service Reform Act law sought to ensure that workforce diversity was attained in the federal government through human resource practices such as recruitment, compensation, performance appraisal, and career management, among others (EEOC, 2015). The Civil Service Reform Act states that a properly administered Federal personnel management system should provide the United States people with a competent, honest, and productive workforce reflective of the nation's diversity. In a similar vein, the first merit system principle provides that Federal recruitment should endeavor to achieve a labor pool from all segments of society. Congress placed affirmative recruitment requirements into the Reform Act to help meet the diversity objective. Under USC 7201, it required the Office of Personnel Management to oversee agency-conducted recruitment efforts designed to eliminate minority underrepresentation.

The Reform Act was followed by the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which facilitated the amendment of Title IV to caution judicial officials against intentional discrimination in the federal government (EEOC, 2015). The law covers most employers with at least 15 employees as well as most employment agencies and labor unions (EEOC, 2015). Those employers protected under the law are subject to investigations by the Commission in discrimination (EEOC, 2015). If the investigation proves discrimination, the Commission will try to settle the charge; if the Commission is unsuccessful, a lawsuit is the next step (EEOC, 2015).

The Civil Rights Act also required establishing and maintaining an equal employment opportunity program in each agency and executive department (OPM, 2016). Executive Order 11478 also made changes to the roles and responsibilities of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. According to Fredrikson-Goldsen and Espinoza (2015), Executive Order 11478 requires the Commission to direct and make additional federal policies that provide equal

opportunities for all federal government employees and applicants. The Commission is also responsible for issuing rules, regulations, orders, and instructions to federal departments and agencies in instituting this executive order (Fredrikson-Goldsen & Espinoza, 2015). Ash et al. (2019) stated that President Carter's federal Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 restructured various government aspects, such as recruitment, compensation, performance, evaluation, discipline, career management, employee organizations, and also dealt with workplace discrimination. According to Brewer and Kellough (2016), the Civil Service Reform Act's primary requirement was to ensure that the federal government's workforce is as diverse as the nation as a whole. One of the means for the Civil Service Reform Act to ensure diversity was the introduction of Title III. According to Title III, each federal agency must develop and implement special recruitment programs to eradicate the low participation rate of minorities within its workforce (Fredrikson-Goldsen & Espinoza, 2015). Nelson (2016) stated that to accomplish this goal, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management created the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program.

Weatherspoon (2018) reported that federal agencies are required to have two formal plans addressing the goal of full representation in their workforces. One is the Affirmative Employment Plan administered by the EEOC, which has requirements for structuring the agencies' programs for recruiting minorities, women, and persons with disabilities and reporting to the EEOC on program structure and workforce demographics. Agencies are required to determine the representation of all targeted groups in each significant occupation within an agency or department and then compare the agency's minority group representation with the representation of these groups in comparable professions. Agencies then must develop plans to correct significant underrepresentation identified in their

workforces by this process.

Federal agencies' other plan is the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program administered by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The OPM requires agencies to develop strategies to increase the number of identified groups within the agencies' recruitment pools based on the Affirmative Employment Plan analysis. While both of these plans require agencies to actively recruit minority candidates to increase diversity in the civil service, the programs must operate within the merit system and not as an exception to it. The programs do not set hiring quotas, nor do they grant any preferential treatment in hiring. All candidates must compete on their own merits and receive active consideration only if among the best qualified available candidates for a vacant position (Weatherspoon, 2018).

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2020), the following are some of the critical elements of the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program:

- Workforce analysis determines the low participation rate of minorities and develops quantifiable indices to measure the progress towards enhancing the representation of minorities.

- Workforce-planning requires positions and grade levels to be filled later during the evaluation process.

- Recruitment traces the techniques an organization uses to spot and create minority opportunities for every class identified as having low representation within the organization.

- Barrier removal entails the elimination of barriers that may impede the employment rights of a particular affinity group.

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- Training and job development involve upward mobility programs that provide advancement opportunities for minorities historically underrepresented at senior grade levels.

Factors Affecting African American Representation

Vaughn (2018) reported that despite well-documented gains made by minorities in expanding their representation in the federal workforce, the aggregate underrepresentation of African Americans in the federal workforce makes it clear that federal agencies' affirmative employment programs have not yet achieved their goal. Achieving a workforce that reflects the diversity of the American population will require government agencies and their managers to be aware of representation issues, sensitive to demographic realities, and committed to action that will result in real progress for the African American minority. In addition, affirmative action programming must occur in an environment rife with challenges such as agencies' ability to adequately address under-representation problems while evaluating attitudes, awareness, and environments surrounding the issues.

Erdreich et al. (1996) asserted that the managers' and supervisors' attitudes and awareness have always had a key role in achieving diversity in their workforces. They make the hiring, placement, and promotion decisions within the merit system rules. Their attitudes and focus are of great importance in increasing the representation of African American males and females in federal jobs. Therefore, managers and supervisors should be held accountable for achieving a workforce that is as diverse as the available civilian labor force. Only 35.3% of White respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 63.1% of African American respondents agreed or strongly agreed, and 70.7% of other minorities agreed or strongly agreed. In the aggregate, only 41.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. The above statistics suggest that

a substantial majority of supervisors and managers do not feel responsible for increasing

minority representation in their work units, while the much higher agreement rate of minorities

also suggests that increasing the representation of minorities in the managerial ranks should

increase African American representation.

According to Erdreich et al. (1996), since so much of federal civil service employment is

in areas with few African Americans, managers are likely to perceive their workforces as having

appropriately representative numbers of African Americans, given the demographics of their

local communities. This perception is expected to make managers less concerned about

increasing African American representation in their work units. While affirmative employment

programs have helped expand representation in the federal workforce, racial and ethnic

discrimination, be it subtle or overt, still exists and can even affect federal job opportunities for

minorities. According to earlier research by Roberts et al. (2019), there remain measurable

differences in minority and non-minority federal employees' employment-related experiences,

and not all these differences can be explained by variations in education, experience, and other

merit-based factors. Furthermore these differences support approximately 2,000 separate formal

charges of discrimination based on African American origin filed annually in a broader context.

These measurable differences and the belief that they exist are reflected in the individual

discrimination complaints filed each year by African American employees in various federal

agencies, the class action complaints pending or settled in several federal agencies, and periodic

findings of discrimination by the EEOC involving African American employees.

Federal departments and agencies should develop integrated strategies for increasing the

representation rate of African Americans in the workforce (Brown & Kellough, 2019; Fuller,

2016; Gooding, 2018). Gooding (2018) wrote that it is necessary to have entry-level positions in

principal agency occupations at locations with large African American populations to increase the African American applicant pool from which candidates for employment apply. According to Gooding (2018), by hiring at entry-level positions, there will be an increase in African American managers' numbers to provide more mentors for African American employees within the agency and a greater connection with African American communities. Moreover, Gooding (2018) suggested that a hiring model of this nature develops a professional pipeline for African American professionals and a community's footprint in these agencies. This approach also emphasizes the importance of senior-level leadership in efforts to achieve a fully diverse workforce so that line managers, in turn, are motivated to pursue the goal of full representation of African Americans in the workforce. Federal departments and agencies should ensure that their managers and supervisors have comprehensive and accurate data about the current picture of ethnic and minority groups in the agency's workforce and that they are committed to doing their part towards achieving the statutory goal of full representation. Because African Americans remain significantly underrepresented in the federal workforce and the obstacles to full African American representation are particularly severe, agencies should devote a more significant proportion of their recruitment resources to hiring well-qualified African American males (Erdreich et al., 1996).

Strategies to Overcoming Barriers

Historically, African American males' most significant social currency has been their reputation for being triumphant through challenges. However, despite substantial investments in career advancement, education, and support for feminine values, African Americans' rewards and their commitment to hard work have not kept pace with their ambitions (Anderson, 2018). Professional African American males desire leadership roles as educated and experienced

individuals, yet organizations' perpetual practice flouting their qualifications prevails. The concept of personal resilience has also been attached to African American males; however, the definition of resilience is under continual refinement, igniting disputes among several theorists (Howard & Irving, 2014). Notwithstanding the numerous meanings, the overarching implication of resilience identifies with perseverance and the ability to endure through adversity. While there are noticeable barriers that remain perpetually existent for African Americans in leadership, there are practices that successfully withstand and ultimately overcome these obstacles.

Over the years, theorists and researchers have identified obstacles and barriers that serve as an antecedent to leadership formation. The development of leadership partially resides in acquiring resilience (Howard & Irving, 2014). As defined, resilience can positively adapt or maintain progress despite experiencing adversity (Bouie, 2018). This term is associated with buoyancy, adaption, elasticity, and betokens the capacity to speedily recover from misfortune, hardship, and change .

Conger (2004) stated, "Leaders are born and made" (p.136) and offered the theory that individuals who contend with numerous elements that structure their individual leadership development have opportunities at success. The aspects of leadership development examined by Conger (2004) include experiences, bosses, organizational incentives, and hardships that shape their resilience. Resilience embodies the knowledge of oneself, one's values, and a level of optimism (Bouie, 2018). From professional career development to leadership opportunities to pursue personal goals, resilience is the key element that taps into the individual's ability to identify the complexities of experiences and learn from disappointments and success (Anderson, 2018). Although resilience has been regarded as individual behavior, maintaining positive social relationships and effectively leading are associated with social resilience.

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Cacioppo et al. (2011) defined social resilience as the capacity to foster, engage in, sustain positive relationships, and endure and recover from life stressors. This trait emphasizes the transformation of adversity into personal and collective growth of existing relationships and the development of new relationships. Similar to emotional resilience, this framework of social resilience classifies itself among terminologies concerned with adapting, transforming, and persistence despite adversity (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). However, distinct from personal resilience, social resilience is intrinsically multilevel and emphasizes the individual's capacity to work alongside others to attain endpoints and maintain a successful group dynamic. In Table 2 below is a list of factors that identify social resilience, and the defining attributes of those factors (Cacioppo et al., 2011).

Table 2

Factors That Identify Social Resilence

FACTOR	*DEFINITION*
Capacity and motivation to perceive others and empathetically	To be socially resilient, one needs to understand the diverse experiences and perceptions of other persons from their perspectives and to supportively engage those understandings in a way that promotes bonding and coordinated activity.
Feeling connected to other individuals and collectives	Acceptance by stable, positively valenced relationships and groups fosters well-being whereas social exclusion, or ostracism, has deleterious effects on health and well-being.
Perceiving others' regard for the self	Recognizing (or slightly overestimating) others' regard for the self, promotes connection with others. Underestimates of one's standing in the eyes of others-as is typically the case for chronically lonely, shy, socially anxious, low self-esteem, or anxiously attached individuals-often leads to defensively self-protective behaviors that can create further distance from others.
Communicating caring and respect to others	Acceptance is communicated to others by responsive acts that signal concern for their well-being and understanding and validation of them as individuals. Because reciprocity norms are ubiquitous in social life, communicating concern and respect for others is likely to foster responsive behavior on their part.

FACTOR	*DEFINITION*
Values that promote the welfare of self and others	Values such as benevolence (concern for others with whom one has frequent contact) and universalism (concern for humanity) facilitate prosocial cognition, motivation, and action, such as altruism, tolerance, cooperation, empathy, and trust. These values complement rather than contradict health self-interest.
Ability to respond appropriately and contingently to social problems	Socially resilient persons recognize that many problems are inherently social; such problems require appreciation of the nature of one's interdependent situation, and their solution depends on successful coordination of information and action between self and other. Thus, socially resilient persons promote constructive, team-oriented, problem-solving strategies while avoiding individually focused strategies and social pressures that stifle open communication.
Expressing social emotions appropriately and effectively	Social resilience allows people to express social emotions such as gratitude, compassion, jealousy and loneliness in constructive ways. It also promotes appropriate responses to others' displays of social emotions, though such responses as sympathy, forgiveness, and respect.
Trust	Trust refers to the belief that others can be relied upon and to the willingness to act on the assumption of the other's benevolence. When people trust, they may open themselves to potential exploitation, but more important, they signal their constructive intent to others, thereby inviting cooperation and mutually beneficial actions. Socially resilient people are neither insufficiently nor uncritically trusting; rather, their trust tends to be situationally contingent (which includes prior experience with the same persons).
Tolerance and openness	Socially resilient individuals' value diverse perspectives and recognize that many tasks require coordination among persons with differing backgrounds, values, and priorities. Social resilience implies not merely acceptance of diversity but the intention to incorporate diverse perspectives into group activity. Non-resilient persons seek to eliminate diversity by excluding individuals who differ or by accentuating pressures towards uniformity.

Influence of Racial Minorities in Executive Positions

Moffett et al. (2014) stated that minority leaders in the federal government either view

their role as inks between management and the minority group or as facilitators of minority

interests. Rocco (2015) stated that these powers are frequently contradictory and maybe troublesome if not difficult to achieve simultaneously. A substantial number of minority leaders overwhelmingly saw their part as to "effectively advocate for the benefit of, or give authority to realize, expanded minority group cooperation and information" (Rocco, 2015, p. 412), using their administrative powers to expand the representation of minority groups within federal organizations. Van Lenthe et al. (2015) suggested that minority leaders accept the notion they must assume substantial promotion roles, particularly for underrepresented minority groups. Acknowledgment of such a part maybe a consequence of the vicinity of more minority executives at larger numbers in the pecking order. Most minority directors choose trade-off procedures to improve the representation of minority groups (Rocco, 2015). Such practices show minority executives are willing to support the upward movement of minority groups in the federal government.

Perception of Discrimination and Upward Career Movement

Allen (2017) wrote that even with federal laws that prohibit discrimination based on race and promote diversity in the workplace, racial discrimination is affected indirectly. Numerous studies documented the effects of racial discrimination on the promotion of minorities in the workplace. For instance, an earlier study in 2005 revealed that as many as 24.8% of African American employees attributed their promotion to connections rather than merit, compared to 15% for White workers (Howard & Irving, 2014). This conclusion was supported in a similar study by Kim and Noh (2014), who concluded that minorities experience disparate treatment in the promotion process. Kim and Noh (2014) observed that even though current employment laws prohibit employment variations in the federal government, minorities are still underrepresented within these agencies, particularly in the senior management positions. In this respect, Omori and

Smith (2015) suggested that to improve fair human resource practices and promote diversity in the executive ranks, personnel on review boards for executive selections should be more ethnically and racially diverse.

Discrimination exists both in state and federal agencies, from recruitment to executive appointments (Smith, 2015). In an earlier study conducted by researchers at Harvard University, it was found that resumes with African American-sounding-names like Lakisha were 50% less likely to be considered for an interview than equivalent applicants with White-sounding names like Emily (Cooper et al., 2012). In the federal government, racial consideration is pervasive and intentional across all occupational levels. For example, a report published by the U.S. Department of Labor indicated that FedEx recruitment agents instituted deliberate discriminative actions against about 21,000 job seekers in 15 states in America (Cooper et al., 2012). In comparison, the mid-size and large corporations strive to circumvent the federal regulations on equal opportunity. A common approach in studying women's level of representation in the workplace is by examining the outcomes of discrimination on the lower and mid-level employees' qualifications. The method examines how racial bias contributes to the unequal distribution of executive positions in federal agencies (Hoi, 2013).

According to Omori and Smith (2015), minority races are at a disadvantage compared to Caucasian workers for promotions within their organizations. However, Hoi (2013) also appreciated the possibility that race may not directly or negatively impact executive promotions in an organization. Many survey studies have investigated the level of self-reported racial discrimination that minorities experience in the workplace. Despite the broad support for affirmative action at the federal level, the frequency of discrimination in the allocation of job positions is significantly high (Omori & Smith, 2015). For example, one survey found that 30%

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of African Americans and 20% of Asians and African Americans believe that they have been overlooked for a promotion due to their ethnicity or race (Hur & Strickland, 2015). The frequency of self-reported discrimination is crucial in the study of racial disparity in executive employment because African Americans who experience high levels of bias are less likely to seek senior positions in an organization (Omori & Smith, 2015). Thus, the diminished performance and efforts at work and acquiring new skills give rise to merit and lack of proper qualifications required to hold such positions.

Workforce Diversity in Federal Agencies

Verma (2015) stated that while diversity examination has occurred, it is still a topic absent from a perspicuous sense or as a measure identifying workforce diversity. A perception exists that diversity represents the existence of diverse minority groups in the workforce, and although this perception follows the logic, these various groups' mere presence within an institution does not necessarily represent diversity in senior management appointments (Verma, 2015). In their research, Hewins-Maroney and Williams (2013) stated that equal employment opportunity data revealed that the percentage of White males in upper-level management positions transcends other groups in public institutions. This form of inequality happens despite the numerous publications calling for enhanced workplace diversity in the federal government. Verma (2015) stated that a diverse federal workforce is significant not just for emblematic purposes, but because bureaucratic decisions are anticipated to be more receptive to society when the workforce mirrors America.

The researcher further indicated that workforce diversity extends well beyond diverse minority groups up to senior management levels. Literary texts on workforce diversity recommend that significant achievements have been made in the alliance of minorities in federal

sector institutions, even though most achievements are still at the entry-level to mid-level job appointments (Verma, 2015). The literature indicated that the scarcity of diversity in senior management job appointments is problematic, keeping in mind that the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 has been active for decades. According to a study conducted by Whitford and Lee (2014), the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 has not provided any significant advantages to African Americans in federal employment. However, Verma (2015) stated that workforce diversity is an aggregate of representation, utilization, and inclusiveness in organizations' hierarchies.

Workforce diversity demands that each job classification and category consider the general population in which the institution exists. Sabharwal (2014) stated that although diversity in the workplace has developed, it is more significant than just presenting individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Sabharwal (2014) further asserted that the meaning of diversity reaches far beyond the customary perspective that essentially centralized on race and represents the broader aspect of workforce diversity. Sabharwal (2014) further stated that the idea of incorporation is progressively imperative in the exchange of differing qualities within the working environment. From numerous points of view, this advancement reflects societal values in the work environment. For instance, Americans usually hold two convictions: everybody merits a chance (equivalent open door, at times alluded to as leveling the playing field) and that all individuals ought to be treated with respect and admiration (Sabharwal, 2014). The estimation of fairness, appreciation, and open door for all relates to the foundation of working environment differences.

Comprehensiveness is a win-win combination along these lines: it produces open doors for development, adaptability, and adjustment in the commercial center for the representative and

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the association. Moreover, Sabharwal (2014) noted that workforce diversity transpires across comprehensive surroundings that harness varied workers' complete talents and creativity, supporting their motivation, retention, and recruitment. Wynen and Ruebens (2015) stated that workforce diversity represents workers from various backgrounds and cultures who feel welcome in the workplace. Smith (2016) stated that White women have the supremacy of representation in each federal workforce level while minorities lack the due and deserving representation in the entire federal workforce.

Also, African Americans are predominantly represented in the middle and bottom levels of federal employment positions, from the perspective of responsibility and title (Smith, 2016). African Americans are poorly defined and rarely promoted to senior-level grades such as GS-15 (Smith, 2016). Hur and Strickland (2015) stated that the federal government's diversity has improved over the past 20 years. Jakubik et al. (2016) indicated that workforce diversity strategies are still incorporated in recruitment and selection strategies, and are located in programs designed to provide training awareness, sensitivity, and skills. As for defining workforce diversity, Hur and Strickland (2015) provided two methods for explaining workforce diversity: (a) a strict method that explains the diversity in respect to affirmative action and equal employment opportunity and (b) a broader method that exemplifies workplace diversity that includes the cultural differences of employees within the organization. Moreover, workplace diversity must also include demographic and other minority groups of the workforce. The researchers further stated that federal government organizations currently have workers from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Sabharwal (2014) proposed a different method in calculating diversity in federal sector organizations by explaining that present research studies regarding workplace diversity have

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sometimes overlooked progression in employment opportunities for minorities within federal institutions. Despite numerous research studies scrutinizing minority employment and workforce diversity, studies have not identified how to adequately monitor and evaluate workforce diversity and the employment of minorities in federal sector organizations (Elias, 2013). The following five assessment factors were recommended by Sabharwal (2014):

1. Determine the degree to which diversity programs and EEO have effectively included minorities and women in public organizations.

2. Identify the conduciveness of the organizational structure to promote the upward mobility of minorities and women in the workforce.

3. Determine whether public organizations' systems foster minority inclusiveness at the top-level positions.

4. Estimate the extent to which governmental and public agencies embrace diversity.

5. Contrast the degree of social integration in different organizations and organizational levels.

Hur and Strickland (2015) explained the idea of workforce diversity from an affirmative action standpoint, asserting that by ensuring all ethnic and racial groups, genders, and age groups in the same organization have equal opportunity for advancement and representation at each level of the hierarchy, workforce diversity will be achieved. Sabharwal (2014) stated that literary text on workforce diversity has not captured in great length the effects of diversity or thoroughly investigated its extent. Sabharwal (2014) also indicated that because the after-effects of workforce diversity are unclear, unlike in mainstream workplace environments that encompass human biographies and real risks, it is important to conduct further research through primary studies involving workers. Further, Hur and Strickland (2015) noted that workforce diversity is

still a significant problem in public organizations. Additionally, because representative bureaucracy dictates that federal sector institutions reflect the nation's population, the standard for evaluating workforce diversity must be associated with this principle.

Summary

The review of literature captured that there are nearly 20 million African American males residing in the U.S.—albeit half of those are under the legal age— (U.S. Census, 2018). During the same duration of time, however, only 8.6% (164,543) of African American males were identified as federal government employees. The literature also introduced Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a central component to the larger discussion of African American males and their representation in the federal workforce, with specific emphasis on the federal OIG community. CRT emerged during the civil rights movement and suggests that race is central to both law and policy in the U.S. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Within the context of CRT exists seven central tenets as highlighted below.

- The Permanence of Racism

- Experiential Knowledge and Counter Storytelling

- Interest Convergence Theory

- Intersectionality

- Whiteness as Property

- Critique of Liberalism

- Commitment to Social Justice

The tenets offer color to the examination of race and its significance in societally, but moreover, why significant challenges continue to demographics of citizens such as African American

males. For instance, the permanence of racism explains racial discrimination as an endemic and permanent experience for people from diverse backgrounds (Bohonos, 2020). Similarly, Whiteness as property effectuates the assumption of privilege and benefits extended to White Americans, subsequently subrogating second tier status to non-white minorities in virtually every sector of society (Harris, 1993).

The strained nature of race places challenges on members of diverse groups, particularly as it relates to workplace matters. The trickle-down effect of tenants such as permanence of racism and or Whiteness as property directly influences the lived experiences of African Americans in the workplace. According to Assari et al. (2018), African American managers and employees often have their lived experiences altered in the workplace. Scholars such as Wooten and James (2004) identified that racial microaggressions, poor assignments contributing to the "glass cliff," and strategic misplacement has all contributed to a sense of despair for African American employees, specifically those in leadership. The pressures and stressors of race also translate into a sense of inauthenticity by African American leaders further toxifying their work environments and placing challenges on their abilities to succeed (Roberts et al., 2019).

The pervasive nature of discrimination over the years has contributed to the misbelief by White managers within organizations that there is appropriate minority representation, when in fact many organizations function in silos (Erdreich, 1996). The silo effect creates some confusion with the ability to adequately evaluate diversity and equity with the framework of a functioning organization (Erdreich, 1996). Despite the discrimination and challenges presented, the literature identified the fact that African Americans have traditionally demonstrated a level of social resilience by agreeing to work with others (Howard & Irving, 2014). More specifically,

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Howard and Irving (2014) suggested that African American males have historically exhibited high levels of resilience in social and professional settings.

Notwithstanding the resilience manifested by African Americans in difficult professional settings, the inequalities experienced have contributed to the introduction of remedies in the policy and legislative space. These remedies have come in the form of employment laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided equal opportunities to all races and ethnic groups (Aiken et al., 2013). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 expressly prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Aiken et al., 2013). The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 was in part, designed to protect federal employees from unfair treatment and practices (EEOC, 2015). The two laws described above were constructed with due consideration to the equal protection doctrine of the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Aiken et al., 2013).

The Inspector General community celebrated 40 years of existence in 2018. The youth of the IG community has directly contributed to very limited research having previously been conducted regarding diversity and professional opportunities for minority groups. No known research to date addresses the ascension of African American males employed in the federal OIG community. The literature review touched on the fact that inequalities have existed which negatively impact ethnic minorities in both the public and private sectors.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to describe the lived experiences of African American males employed in the Federal OIG community and examine their perceptions of upward mobility in the federal OIG community. The research focused on eight African American males currently employed or recently retired from a federal OIG at grades GS-12 and above. The participants were located in the southeastern region of the United States and had federal experience ranging between 5 and 20 years in their particular discipline within the federal OIG community.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a qualitative research methodology is appropriate when there is a need to gain a detailed understanding of a complicated issue. Race and equity within the federal OIG community is a complex matter. Furthermore, qualitative research is vital for creating and expanding social change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on the elements associated with the required level of study and exploration in this exploratory work, qualitative research was the most advantageous methodology for a study of this nature.

As stated above, the qualitative methodology addresses a complex reality of circumstances and situations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the qualitative methodology addresses the meaning of actions within a given context (Queiros et al., 2018). While the qualitative methodology focused on a phenomenon being examined and realized, quantitative research offered a different path for realizing the end. The quantitative methodology addressed

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the study from the context of what could be quantified with statistics and numerical data (Queiros et al., 2018).

The qualitative research methodology is appropriate for addressing a complex social problem. More specifically, qualitative researchers study social issues in their natural settings to make sense of or interpret a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that delicate social issues are not necessarily best understood in quantifiable ways but rather through an intense and detailed exploration of the social phenomena provided by the lived experiences of individuals who occupy the given space. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research begins with assumptions and interpretive/theoretical frameworks connected to further examination of social or human problems. The nature of the issues examined in this study consisted of extensive social issues.

This study examined the influence of several socio-historical components such as race, employment discrimination, and inequities. The study aimed to capture real and intimate perspectives on African American ascension in the federal OIG community by African American men employed in or recently retired from the federal OIG community. The subjects were indeed qualified to participate in this study on the state of African American male ascension within the federal OIG community.

Description of Research Design

The qualitative research methodology is connected to five of the most commonly applied design types. Creswell and Poth (2018) identify five approaches to qualitative research design: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. The narrative design focuses on the lived experiences of a single individual and the individual's life history (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The narrative itself captures stories, epiphanies, and historical experiences of the

subject in a more detailed fashion. The narrative design is mainly biographical and must rely on the researcher's interpretation and description when judging the quality from a validity perspective. Should the narrative equate to the phenomenon studied, it can also be used to study a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Although narrative study captures the story of a single individual or multiple individuals, phenomenological research describes several individuals' lived experiences within the context of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological design emphasizes the commonalities experienced by study participants as it relates to the phenomenon addressed. Phenomenology is also different from the perspective that it takes more substantive inquiry to reach a point of investigative satisfaction. Phenomenology consists of a detailed set of multiple interviews, in most cases, to collect the necessary data from study participants. Phenomenology does not rely entirely on interviews as it also has the capacity to data source poems, observations, and documents. Furthermore, phenomenology is unique insofar as it can have subjective and objective perspectives based upon study participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology requires as few as three to five participants, and as many as 10-15 (Moustakas, 1994).

Grounded theory research design is different from phenomenology and narrative in that it deviates from personal experiences and accounts. Grounded theory design pursues the discovery of a theory or a unified theoretical proposition and functions from the premise that data from participants who have experienced the process is used by the researcher to formulate a general explanation or theory, shaped by the views of a significant number of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Grounded theory inquiry is more structured than narrative research and phenomenology so that the explanation(s) derived are more substantial from a validity

perspective. Grounded theory is also regimented as the researcher attempts to explain the movement or action derived within the scope of the process outlined. In addition, grounded theory is typically identified by the use of 20 or so participants who take part in the process-oriented research study.

Ethnographic research design emphasizes the identification of shared patterns in a larger group than observed in the grounded theory process and focuses on culture-sharing groups that are largely and similarly situated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Under ethnographic research principles, the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The achievement of the researcher's description and interpretation develops through extensive observation of the culture-sharing groups. More specific to ethnography is that its focus is on culture-sharing groups within the context of their daily experiences. In short, ethnographies aim to create a blueprint for a specific group based upon observations.

Case study was the selected design for this qualitative research. Case study design involves studying a case (or cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2017). Case study research is characterized by intense periods of use, along with periods of misuse (Tellis, 1997).

In case study research, the case or cases may be relatively fixed entities such as individuals, small groups, or organizations, giving real-life meaning and depth to things (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ability to examine the real-life context of race and its influence on African American male ascension in the federal OIG community is one reason for engaging the case study design. The case study design is unique because of the focus on a real-life contemporary bounded system, considered a case or fixed system in terms of cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bounding applies frames to manage contextual variables (Harrison et al., 2017).

Bounding is consistent with the researcher setting boundaries and parameters to the case or cases via the inquiry level, which brings the real-life context into focus. Furthermore, bounding involves the researcher's influence on the inquiry, such as the types and levels of participants' questions. The concept of bounding is taken up in case study design because the real-life context phenomenon and the boundaries are not always evident (Yin, 1994). As such, the interjection of a specific type of inquiry becomes necessary.

The additional design aspect associated with this research study was a multi-case design. According to Tellis (1997), case study research provides multi-perspective analysis, which means that the researcher does not just consider the participant's voice but also the participants' relevant group and the interaction between them.

Through generalizations from multiple cases, themes emerge for the development and presentation in subsequent research findings. The multi-case design increases the sample size and strengthens the probability of replicating patterns in the results (Yin, 1994). The multi-case design was selected and applied in this study due to the desire to achieve more fruitful and robust findings. The multi-case design was appropriate due to the nature and context of the study.

The focus of this research was African American male perceptions of ascension in the federal OIG community. The exploratory case study was selected as the preferred method for this research. The flexibility permissible within this category was most appropriate for a few reasons. First, the exploratory case study aims to explore a phenomenon through the use of the data collected. Though race is a factor of consideration, the phenomenon of interest in this study is how African American males employed in the federal OIG community perceive opportunities for ascension. There is no known prior research concerning African American male perceptions of ascension in the federal OIG community.

The categorical layout for exploratory case studies also allows for an appropriate connection to pilot studies. Based on the limited nature of scholarship in this area, the exploratory case design was the most suitable for this study. The exploratory case design can also be functional without propositions on the front end, as is the requirement in other studies such as the descriptive. In the exploratory case study area, the unit of analysis—individuals in this instance—defined the case, also known as the topic. The exploratory case study was appropriate for utilization in this study because the nature of exploration called for a stated or intended purpose in a more open-ended way for future judgment as to its validity.

Participants

The qualitative case study design utilized in this study focused on subject interviews as data collection. The subject interviews were conducted with participants who fit distinct criteria. First, the participants were all African American males currently employed, previously employed, or recently retired from positions within the federal OIG community. Second, all participants were geographically located in the southeastern United States. The third criterion for participation was that subjects had between 5 years and 20 years of federal experience. All sample frame members were appropriately evaluated to ensure that they satisfied all candidacy requirements for ideal study participants.

Study participants were identified following a community-wide solicitation by the researcher to industry networking and support organizations. A flyer and letter outlining the nature of the research were sent to representatives from the National Organizational of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), requesting dissemination to their membership to identify participants better. Additionally, the same information was provided via electronic mail to various distribution lists of industry employees, many of whom participate in collaborative

industry working groups. The outreach resulted in the identification and commitment of eight

professionals who met the criteria and agreed to participate in the research. The research

participants in the study will henceforth be identified as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3.

Participant Descriptions

NAME	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	EMPLOYMENT LEVEL	YEARS EXPERIENCE	EDUCATION LEVEL
Participant P-1	Recently Retired	Management-Level	25+	Graduate Degree
Participant P-2	Currently Employed	Professional-Level	5-10	Undergraduate Degree
Participant P-3	Currently Employed	Management-Level	25+	Graduate Degree
Participant P-4	Recently Retired	Management-Level	25+	Undergraduate Degree
Participant P-5	Recently Retired	Management-Level	25+	Undergraduate Degree
Participant P-6	Currently Employed	Professional-Level	15-20	Graduate Degree
Participant P-7	Currently Employed	Professional-Level	15-20	Undergraduate Degree
Participant P-8	Currently Employed	Professional-Level	15-20	Undergraduate Degree

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is critical in the conduct of qualitative studies. Most

notably, the researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is performed ethically and

appropriately (Fink, 2000). The researcher collects the required data, maintains the data, and

serves as the primary instrument wherein interviews are utilized. The researcher must also be

responsible for ensuring that all environmental factors are addressed to include the location of

the interview, rapport building and comfort of subjects, and satisfactory completion of all

documents of approval required by institutional review boards and agency review departments

(Orb et al. 2000). The researcher must ensure the due diligence and integrity of the study, particularly as it relates to following the necessary data collection protocols. The researcher's responsibilities include identifying subjects for research and following specific guidelines to achieve an academically sound and verifiable research project. The aforementioned responsibilities exists to ensure the researcher is compliant with appropriate academic guidelines.

The role of researcher in this qualitative exploratory case study was significant because of the researcher's connection to the subject matter. The researcher has been employed in the federal OIG community for over 20 years and has had direct experience with the dynamics associated with African American male ascension and the examination of opportunities therein. The researcher has served in several professional-level positions ranging from grades GS-7 through GS-14, or the equivalent therein, and the researcher has also served in leadership roles on an acting basis, in addition to working collaboratively on special projects involving diversity and inclusion as well as employee rights and advocacy.

The researcher for this study followed guidelines set forth by the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, the researcher took the necessary steps to acquire feedback and legal review from the Office of General Counsel (OGC) personnel at a prominent OIG within the federal community. The researcher's background and history within the OIG community was beneficial in determining what formal steps were required for conduction of the study, release of information, and identity protection relating to participants. Based upon the fact that federal OIG do not have IRB, the OGC was the appropriate internal office to provide adequate guidance regarding potential issues with the conduction of the study; none of which were identified. The OGC consulted in this matter acknowledged no substantive issues of note or concern. According to Orb et al. (2000), qualitative research studies are

performed in comfortable and familiar environments. The researcher exercised flexibility

regarding this requirement due to the pandemic being experienced throughout the United States

Measures for Ethical Protection

The protection of subject participants was a priority for the researcher (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Other scholars have indicated that while ethical review boards from universities and

different types of organizations do an efficient job of addressing potential ethical matters within

the process of a research study, the responsibility to protect participants and manage ethical

issues belongs to the researcher (Orb et al., 2000). Ethical protections are the actions and steps

taken to protect participants from harm and disclose comprehensive findings (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Ethical protections are also a necessary component of the social researching process.

Researchers must mask the participants' names to offer anonymity to those who agree to

participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical protections are also necessary to ensure the validity

of the research being performed. In social research, study participants remain anonymous. The

subjects' capacity to be protected solidified the rich, transparent, and open dialog that they

provide during the data collection phase.

This qualitative exploratory case study involved the use of protective measures in

furtherance of an appropriate research study. In the initial phases, this study demonstrated

respect for persons by transparently recruiting subjects through industry networking groups. The

researcher contacted NOBLE and presented a copy of the study guidelines and criteria for

participation. The researcher also highlighted a list of protective measures to be taken. The

researcher engaged initial contact with interested participants for the purpose of gaining a

commitment to participate. Once research participants agreed to take part in the study, the

researcher identified all protections to be taken to protect the study participants.

Numerical identifiers protected subject identities, thus participant numbers identified subjects in place of their actual names. Additionally, all compromising identifying information was removed. Biographical data and relation information were extracted for non-attribution, and study participants were provided with an informed consent document from the researcher, along with a verbal commitment to protect their identities at all costs. The measures taken were extreme care and concern for the professional status of subjects currently employed in the federal OIG community. The protection of subject identities was necessary so that none of the participants were retaliated against by their respective employers because of their participation.

Research Questions

R^1: What are African American male perceptions of opportunities for promotions and upward level leadership in the federal Office of Inspector General community?

R^2: What do African American males perceive as barriers to promotion in the federal Office of Inspector General community?

Data Collection

The researcher collected data in this qualitative exploratory case study throughsubject interviews. Qualitative interviews allow the researcher to explore in an in-depth manner unique to interviewees' experiences (McGrath et al., 2019). Interviews also allow for insight into how different phenomena are experienced and perceived (McGrath et al., 2019).

The researcher conducted telephonic interviews during this qualitative exploratory case study and developed a semi-structured interview guide for performance of the interviews, based upon the research questions and phenomenon being explored. The interview guide consisted of nine questions and took into account ethical matters and all factors considered by the academic community when conducting research. The researcher interviewed eight African American males

currently employed or recently retired from the federal OIG community and located in the

Southeastern United States.

The interviews were performed telephonically with due consideration given to all parties

and their physical health based upon the COVID-19 pandemic. The telephonic interviews were

recorded with the participant's permission through the use of the Otter digital recording

application. The Otter application was also used for the production of a transcript report for all

interviews conducted. The transcripts were subsequently reviewed and validated by the

interviewee prior to being released to the researcher for data analysis..

Validity and Reliability

The data collection process is connected to the overall credibility of the research. The

study's credibility creates public confidence that the data can be acted upon and received

appropriately and ethically (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Achieving credibility in the study requires

that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that participants feel comfortable that their personal

information or participation will not compromise their employment or any form of relationships,

whether personal or professional (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). The researcher obtained the

necessary informed consent from participants and protected subjects' identities by removing their

names, titles, employers, and any other attributable data that could compromise their identities.

The steps above further supported the study's validity as many scholars suggest that credibility,

validity, and reliability are achieved through rich and unincumbered interview feedback.

Purposeful sampling was performed in this study to ensure that the appropriate population of

candidates was used to increase the probability of obtaining richly connected data to address

further the phenomena investigated.

Procedures

The ability to procedurally frontload some processes in this study was critically important. For instance, recruiting participants identified by a professional industry group known as NOBLE. Creswell and Poth (2018) stressed the procedural importance of the interview process when collecting data. More specifically, the significance of receiving informed consent from participants and appropriately protecting their identities was necessary in this phase. The process for collecting data was followed by the researcher. Upon contacting NOBLE, the researcher provided solicitation flyers along with a cover letter outlining the nature of the study for distribution to NOBLE members. As a result, eight candidates were identified as likely participants.

The researcher contacted each candidate to confirm their receipt of the study outline and their willingness to participate. All eight subjects reported a desire to participate upon review of the outline. The outline identified critical factors such as anonymity and informed consent. Upon the appropriate review of the informed consent documentation and a pre-interview session with the researcher, participants signed and returned their informed consent. The semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone to remain compliant with COVID-19 pandemic guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and validated using the Otter digital recording application, in preparation for the data analysis process. All interview transcriptions and other relevant data were securely maintained in a locked fireproof safe only accessible by the researcher and through a numeric digital passcode.

Methods to Address Assumptions of Generalizability

In qualitative research, there has been much dialog as to the appropriate nature of generalizability. Within the data analysis and interpretation phase of qualitative case study

research, there is a point where the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the collection of cases equates to the development of generalizations. According to Smith (2018), generalizability is typically associated with a quantitative study and generalizability is a term ordinarily used to define quantitative research in positive ways.

While generalizability is often connected more directly to quantitative forms of study, the lack of statistical probability cannot be a complete discredit against a qualitative study's strength and validity. Qualitative research functions differently in how it reconciles the development of generalizations. In qualitative research, generalizations can be made from the relationship between the study results and the population. Naturalistic generalizability is reached based on recognizing similarities and differences in the reader's results (Smith, 2018). Moreover, naturalistic generalizability occurs when the research connects with the reader's engagement regarding their own lived experiences (Smith, 2018). Naturalistic generalizability is appropriate for qualitative inquiry because it connects to the lived experiences and human emotions related to those same experiences. Qualitative inquiry is designed to address the phenomenon and lived perspectives; thus, naturalistic generalizations have merit.

Another generalizability of note is inferential generalizability. Inferential generalizability is also apparent when the researcher seeks transferability. Transferability generalization occurs when a case-to-case relationship is observed (Smith, 2018). Within the scope of inferential generalizability exists the requirements for the presence of a harmonious connection between two elements. Theoretical generalizability is present when the researcher can glean lessons about social oppression and forms of resistance from one context to another (Smith, 2018). Multiple

generalizations have been identified; however, one was more pronounced and applicable to this qualitative case study.

The presence of generalizability is not necessary for the validity and/or rigor of a qualitative research study. The absence of such does not dilute the rich and fruitful accounts presented within this type of inquiry (Phoenix, 2018). Within the context of this qualitative exploratory case study, theoretical generalizability was the most appropriate to be applied. Due to the intricate nature of social dynamics explored from African American males employed in the federal OIG community, theoretical generalizability was fitting. In this instance, theoretical generalizability provided the opportunity for the researcher to engage the theme development process following the data collection sequence. The research participants offered information about their thoughts and perceptions of their opportunities. Though understanding the variation of generalizations that could be connected to this study, the research adequately addressed which generalizability was most relevant.

Data Analysis

The data analysis component affiliated with qualitative research is often represented in tables, matrices, and narrative forms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis must effectively convey the findings, which are often demonstrative in some of the formats above. The data analysis protocols involve organizing the data, segmenting the data, and coding the data for theme development (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher began the data analysis process by organizing the data. The organization process consisted of printing out hard copies of all interview transcripts as well as having the electronic versions available for review and data extraction.

The data was then segmented using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, wherein participants were listed, along with the interview questions and subsequent responses. The segmenting and graphing in Microsoft Excel was key to preparing to perform thematic coding. Thematic coding is an essential component of the analysis process as it plays a critical role in the research findings. The coding process involves examining the data received from subjects, dissecting it, and categorizing it into common themes developed from study participants in the aggregate.

A comprehensive review of all interview transcripts on the part of the researcher was necessary. Additional field notes were taken during the transcript review process, and the establishment of specific categories was required in this analytical process. The next step within the data analysis phase consisted of color-coding terms and phrases. The color-coding of words and phrases was pivotal to the practice of the theme development within the study. As terms and phrases were segmented and re-evaluated, themes began to evolve and offer color to the data collected. A greater level of dissection into the themes and surrounding elements brought the data analysis into focus within this study.

Summary

This qualitative case study focused on the phenomenon of African American male ascension in the federal OIG community. The qualitative case study methodology was selected as it is the most appropriate mechanism for gaining a detailed understanding of a complex social issue or set of issues(s) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The case study design was selected because of the capacity to take entities such as individuals, small groups, or organizations and give real-life meaning to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design adds depth to the situations it explores. Based on the dynamics

examined in this study, includingAfrican American male ascension in the federal OIG community, the case study design was the most appropriate approach.

This study is considered exploratory because exploratory case studies are more flexible than explanatory or descriptive studies (Yin, 1994). The exploratory case study explores any phenomenon in the data, which emphasizes the researcher (Zakaria, 2007). Exploratory case studies are requisite when addressing pilot studies or small-scale studies. For this reason, this exploratory case study is an adequate means to handle this level of research. This study engaged a small-scale population while focusing on a subject area with little known prior research.

This qualitative exploratory case study involved a sample population of eight African American males currently employed or recently retired from the federal OIG community in the southeastern United States. In this study, subjects interviewed were identified for participation through the networking and support organization known as NOBLE. The participants were all educated and experienced African American males who achieved different levels of success in their federal OIG employment.

An interview guide was the instrument used to collect the interview data in this study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Otter recording application. Upon review of the subsequent transcripts, the collected data was analyzed via the use of thematic coding.

The thematic coding process began with organizing the data, segmenting the dating, and coding the theme development data. Thematic coding was essential to the researcher's ability to understand the results of the collected data. The process also included dissecting and de-conflicting information through the segmentation to be appropriately coded for the preparation of researching findings. Categories were created using color-coded tabbing during the analytical and thematic coding process. Upon completion of the process, relevant themes were developed

from the data and directional information to be presented in the findings and recommendations sections.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to describe the lived experiences of African American males employed in the federal OIG community and examine their perceptions of upward mobility in the federal OIG community. The research focused on eight African American males currently employed or recently retired from a federal OIG, at grades GS-12 and above. The participants were located in the southeastern region of the United States and had federal experience ranging between 5 and 20 years in their particular discipline within the federal OIG community.

Methods of Data Collection

Data collection is a central component of conducting a qualitative research study and following procedures ranging from obtaining informed consent to protecting participants' identities and is necessary for a study's validity, and equally significant to the process is developing an interview guide or protocol (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A data collection tool linked to the research questions presented was developed. The population for the research study was African American males employed in the federal OIG community, while the sampling frame for data collection was African American males employed within the federal OIG community and located in the United States' southeastern region. The study participants ranged in experience from 5 years to over 20 years from professional-level, non-supervisory personnel to supervisory employees within the leadership and management chain and those recently retired from the federal OIG community. The National Organizational of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) assisted in the identification of study participants.

Upon the completion of participant interviews, managing the collected data was of significant importance. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ethical considerations are central to the data collection process and cover a range of elements, including, but not limited to, gaining permission from the participants' employers, recording information, storing information securely, purposefully sampling, and minimizing field issues.

The study consisted of making appropriate contact with the various federal OIGs to gain approval to conduct the study utilizing their personnel. Based upon the structure of most OIGs, the Offices of General Counsel (OGC) were the approving entities. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted before data collection began. Based upon the lack of prior research conducted within this subject area, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate for conduction of the study. Per Creswell and Poth (2018), purposeful sampling occurs when the researcher is intentionally sampling a group of participants that can best inform the researcher about the problems under examination. Data collection for this research included recorded participant interviews where the data were maintained on a biometric thumb drive device and securely stored in a locked fireproof safe.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are African American male perceptions of their opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

Findings

As it relates to African American male perceptions of opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership in the federal OIG community, the participants of this study indicated that there were various factors limiting promotion opportunities. Some of the factors impeding

ascension for African American males in the federal OIG community included lack of mentoring opportunities and preferential treatment given to similarly situated non-minority colleagues. The study participants provided some responses of note, including the following:

- P-1: "Opportunities for promotions were often measured by the number of minorities already in management."

- P-1: "The perception of opportunities for growth a lot of times depended on the willingness of African American males and females to push the system."

- P-1: "There would be limitations if there were already Black managers, so you would have to decide to wait until they retire or leave the agency because they weren't going to have too many Black managers at the same time."

In addition to P-1 offering his feedback on African American male opportunities for promotion, P-1 identified his perception of non-minority colleagues and their probabilities for advancement. Participant P-1 framed his responses regarding his non-minority colleagues' promotion such a way that there was a connection point between non-minority colleagues ascending and his ability to be considered for advancement opportunities. Participant P-1 also added,

- "The White guys and females were getting promoted without quantifiable results. They were also getting promoted whether they had a mentor or not and for doing less work."

- "They base a lot of their promotions off what they thought was potential, but I always felt like I actually had to have some results that were measurable."

- "Non-minorities that I came up with often times did not study as hard or put in the extra work to become a subject matter expert and learn their craft because they didn't have to."

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Research question one findings continued with feedback provided by participant P-2 who referenced the relational nature of promotions and opportunities within the federal OIG community. P-2 identified the significance of someone in leadership taking a vested interest in an employee's future career path and the fact that if that interest was to occur, the employee's career trajectory could be altered in a positive way. More specifically, P-2 offered personal accounts of his thoughts in this area, factoring in his own experience. The following are a compilation of similarly positioned thoughts by participants:

- P-2: "I was blessed; I had a management team that saw something in me that I didn't see. They took me at an early age in my career and started to groom me towards leadership in terms of having me read leadership books, attending trainings,and travel."

- P-2: "I felt they had a vested interest in my success. On the other side, I have a lot of friends that are OIG employees, and they have never had opportunities to develop."

- P-2: "Minorities have not been provided opportunities to grow and nourish into leaders."

- P-4: "My overall experience in the OIG community has been positive, and the mobility opportunities have been there for those that wanted to take advantage of them."

- P-4: "When I started, we had a pretty good mentoring program. I was hired with three other individuals and they brought us in and assigned us a mentor each, and that mentor you know would help us."

- P-5: "If you have a Black supervisor, a Black male or female would have a greater opportunity for advancement. If you have a White supervisor; you will not see that. White employees are given more opportunities under a White supervisor."

- P-6: "The open door definitely exists at the local level. I've found it to be just fine as it relates to having that door open and being able to go and discuss things with your management. I've always taken advantage of that as well."

- P-8: "My agency has historically had issues with racial discrimination problems as a whole, to include OIG, so based upon that the agency had a policy in place unofficially that they had to hire so many minorities and make certain opportunities available based upon you know, past discrimination issues."

While P-2 conveyed having a positive experience because of a management team which invested in him in a positive way, he was honest in the declaration that not all minorities are as fortunate. The feedback from P-2 and others regarding non-minority colleagues and their ascension was encapsulated in the following:

- P-2: "Well for one, they (non-minorities) get all the opportunities for training, they get invited to private events on the weekends, they get to golf, bowl and attend sporting events with their senior executives. I have also seen the same individuals get promoted and not based on merit, but rather their political capital. The promotions should be based on merit."

- P-2: "For the other guys and girls that are not minorities,they were strategically set up to become frontrunners for management positions, and I feel like minorities have not been given the same opportunities to develop."

- P-2: "They (non-minorities) get first shot at national programs, specific projects and special programs coming out of headquarters. This gives them exposure to the senior executives, and they have opportunities to develop relationships that minorities do not. When it's time for promotions they are ahead."

- P-4: "Often times in this community people are hired because they are friends or had a prior relationship with the manager. The first opportunity for promotions typically goes to those who are friendlier with the management team, you know people like working with people like themselves, and that look like them, maybe even live in the same neighborhood. They may even be more interested in those who have similar hobbies and backgrounds. I think non-minorities have a slight advantage for promotion potential in some instances."

- P-6: "I've come to realize you know it's not what we know or how much we've accomplished, it's who we know. The big part of who you know is if people are willing to accept your differences, embrace them as something beautiful and still bring you into the fold. You don't look like them and may not speak like them or have a differing view of the world and society."

The findings associated with research question number one suggested that African American males perceived their opportunities at promotion and upper-level leadership positions in the federal OIG to be limited. The limitations are largely based on inequities in treatment between African American males and their non-minority colleagues African American male opportunities for mentoring, growth, and professional development serve as segues to opportunities at promotions, yet those developmental opportunities are few and far between. The African American male study participants acknowledged that their prospects of competing for promotion and advancement were increased by the establishment of a mentor or having a Black supervisor. African American males employed in the federal OIG community perceive the treatment and viability for success of their White peers to be starkly different than that of their own and are of the opinion that White colleagues are often beneficiaries of privilege, which

contributes to them being promoted. The study participants also acknowledged that non-minorities are embraced more socially, which satisfies the very relational aspects of the promotion process.

Research Question Two

What do African American males perceive as barriers to promotion in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

Findings

The findings which emerged were direct concerning perceived barriers, taking a more explicit look at what study participants viewed as barriers to promotion for African American males and analyzing how perceived barriers influence non-minority colleagues in the federal OIG with respect to promotion and upward mobility. African American males in the study perceived their race as a significant barrier to opportunities for promotion and advancement. Participant P-5 stated that a barrier for African American males is long-standing racism and "the majority probably doesn't even understand it but they feel comfortable with their own kind and they will see what they want from White people, while they may not see what is definitely in the Black employees." According to participant P-7,

 I mean our ethnicity and our skin color is a barrier because for so long these guys (White guys) have been on top and at some times are so stuck in the old days and still want to run things like they did back then.

The feedback provided by P-5 and other participants supported the perception that African American males are placed at a disadvantage by their race. The very disadvantage created by race appears to also create the system of double standards in how Black males are evaluated versus their similarly situated White counterparts.

The disparate treatment received by some African American males in the federal OIG community has roots in a system of double standards and indifference, particularly relating to the attributes of Black males. Participant P-3 stated that "race is a definite factor because African Americans are not seen in the same way" and went on to explain that "we are not seen in the same light even if we rise to a certain level, we are still viewed differently." The belief by African American males employed in the federal OIG community that they are viewed differently and subsequently treated differently was affirmed by supplemental statements made. Participant P-3 also indicated that "the other perception for African Americans is that you were only hired because of Affirmative Action, which can be a hurdle to overcome." The systematic concern regarding the barrier of belief that African American males are somehow only present because of special hiring programs and not deserving of an opportunity to be hired in the first place, translates into difficulty with upward mobility. The difficulty achieving success with upward mobility was captured by P-3 who stated the following: "So when I'm seeing Black men and women that are good and qualified,and they have tenure on the job, but are not being promoted, and so I came to realize that those were real life barriers."

The discussion of barriers also highlighted an interesting aspect which should be addressed. Just as participants identified the negative perception by majority members of the federal OIG community concerning Black males only being hired under special program such as affirmative action, there is also concern of a false narrative relating to African American males. P-6 advised that "I've been told by senior managers at my agency that they are having a hard time finding qualified African Americans to fill these positions which is completely not factual." The participants of this study were consistent in the viewpoint that many of the negative impressions concerning their presence in the federal OIG workforce can translate to challenging

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working relationships with non-minority colleagues' tensions, and undue anxiety. The lasting impact of these barriers on African American males were captured in the following statements:

- P-6: "You feel like, I can't be off days, I can't be myself and I have to play this game."

- P-1: "So as a Black man, White managers did not necessarily want to talk to me."

- P-1: "It was a challenge at times just being Black and making people feel comfortable with you."

- P-1: "Black people face the most amount of discrimination and the least amount of hiring."

The discussion surrounding barriers for African American males employed in the federal OIG community would not be complete without presenting the full complement of responses relating to this sub-topic. Some participants experienced fewer barriers in their journeys to promotion within the federal OIG community, but not all participants shared negative experiences pertaining to barriers set before them. Participant P-2 expressed the following: "I haven't had any barriers in the OIG community because people invested in me." One interesting position surfaced related to Black male ascension, which was that of systemic change as expressed by P-4: "The only limitation I really came up against was my own limitation of not being mobile and willing to relocate to Washington, D.C."

A very important aspect of the discussion on barriers within the context of research question two were the perceived barriers for similarly situated non-minority colleagues. By addressing the barriers presented to not only Black males but also non-minority colleagues, the opportunity to achieve a better understanding exists. As such, the feelings concerning non-minority barriers were essentially that barriers are not nearly as present for similarly situated White colleagues. African American males perceive their similarly situated non-minority

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colleagues as having few things stopping their opportunities for progression in the most basic terms. For instance, P-2 stated, "To be candid I have not seen any barriers for them." This participant went on to say that White colleagues are "given training, special projects, and the opportunity to build relationships with the powers that be at the senior executive level." This statement meant "they will get exposure over a minority candidate, and they are provided opportunities for greater responsibility." In summary, participant P-2 stated, "I haven't seen any barriers."

Participant P-2's comments support the level of dialog outlined in theme one wherein the relationship-centric opportunities are relevant and available to White colleagues. Similar sentiments were captured by P-5 who advised that "non-minority colleagues have had little to no barriers to get promoted." Participant P-8 stated, "I have perceived no barriers for my non-minority colleagues, but things at my agency are done pretty fairly, and information is put out at the same time wherein everyone has an equal opportunity to pursue promotions." P-8 also mentioned in the prior section that his agency instituted policy changes in the areas of hiring and promotion due to past discrimination issues. P-4 shared this statement: "I have not observed many barriers for non-minority colleagues. They are also more likely to get promoted in place and not be required to relocate for a promotion."

African American male federal OIG employees were observant of smaller scale challenges being presented to their non-minority colleagues. While the majority of the participants were of the belief that White colleagues employed in the federal OIG community experience no barriers, there was an acknowledgement of a barrier connected to a White male, in addition to some universal barriers impacting all federal OIG employees regardless of background. P-6 made this comment: "I know a White colleague for instance who is very

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knowledgeable, but his barrier pretty much is that they don't know him. He doesn't hang out enough." Participant P-6 explained to his White colleague that "you need to get to know some of the people in leadership more" and that participant P-6's position was described as follows: "If he just took time to hang out them which he's been invited, he probably would have been promoted." The personal account provided by participant P-6 was useful for demonstrating that while there might be some barriers for White employees, they are not equitable but for the universal barriers.

With regard to universal barriers impacting all personnel in the federal OIG community, the most notable is a lack of opportunities based upon the structure and size of most OIGs. While the federal OIG consist of approximately 72 different agencies, the OIGs are smaller components of larger government agencies, unlike the more traditional agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation or United States Secret Service. Due to most OIGs operating at a fraction of the size of the larger more traditional agencies, there are limitations with the number of positions available at all levels. Participant P-1 suggested that while non-minorities have a sense of entitlement and no significant barriers, but also recognized the impact of the universal barriers on White employees. More specifically, P-2 stated that "non-minority colleagues were forced to deal with the barrier imposed by a limited number of positions and promotional opportunities".

Themes

Themes are attributable, descriptors, elements, and concepts with common points of reference tied to the research questions (Vaismorsadi et al., 2016). The key themes in this case study were mentorship, treatment and opportunities, and underrepresentation.

Theme 1: Mentorship

The majority of study participants provided feedback highlighting the importance of mentorship in the professional lives of African American males seeking ascension in the federal OIG community. The participants referenced the concept that if African Americans were fortunate enough to have an African American manager, their opportunities for mentoring and development were greater. For instance, participant P-1 commented as follows: "Early on I had a mentor who was a Black veteran, and I was fortunate to develop a relationship with him wherein he became my mentor." One of the principal components unveiled from the mentorship theme had to do with early relationships and investments. The African American participants identified that their professional experiences were better when they had the fortune to be recruited, hired, or mentored early on in their careers. Participant P-8 advised that, "The guy that recruited me was an African American male, and he was the supervisor in my first office, so that was pretty much my mentor with respect to things I needed to do in order to get promoted into management." This participant further explained that "he assigned me certain roles and gave me opportunities so that I could compete for promotions if I wanted to."

The theme of mentoring appeared to be two-pronged based on the perspective that it was present with subject group members early in their careers and that it was substantive when the employee was under the supervision of an African American manager. The significance of having a mentor who might also be African American was the feature of several participant statements. Participant P-6 stated, "Let me start by saying that at local, I was blessed and lucky to have a Black manager when I came over to the OIG community." This position is further explained by P-6 as follows:

My manager was Black and very, very open at the local level about giving you

opportunities to be mentored, to act in a leadership capacity. He was also open to you

taking on duties to help you understand budgeting and other administrative aspects of

things.

Along similar lines, P-5 advised that "if you had a Black first line supervisor or Black second

line supervisor, as a Black male I seem to have a better path or someone making more

opportunities available to me." This participant went on to say that "if you were in an office

where you did not have a Black supervisor, you might not have those opportunities."

When furthering the discussion concerning mentorship and the connection to African

American management personnel, the findings indicate that Black males employed in the federal

OIG community felt as though they would be better positioned to compete for promotion when

under the leadership of a Black manager. Participant P-7 identified this perception when making

this statement: "When I had African American managers, I was offered opportunities to go to

training and take developmental assignments in order to compete one day for a promotion."

Participants also pointed out that the probable success connected to an African American

manager was not mutually exclusive to African American employees but to a broad and diverse

subordinate group of employees. The participants of this study were uniform in their perspective

that OIG employees who receive adequate mentoring have greater probabilities for success.

According to one participant, when he began his OIG career, his agency had a fairly structured

field training program which benefited all employees. Participant P-4 stated that "when I started,

we had a pretty good mentoring program." This participant explained further that "I was hired

with three other individuals, and they brought us in and assigned us a mentor each, and that

mentor you know, helped us."

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Theme 2: Treatment and Opportunities

The second theme to emerge was how participants viewed their treatment and opportunities for advancement in the federal OIG community, and this theme also captured the perceptions of African American males regarding how they viewed their similarly situated non-minority colleagues being treated and/or presented with opportunities for advancement. One of the perceptions that resonated with the participants was the notion of a double standard in the way African American males were treated versus their non-minority colleagues.

African American males employed in the federal OIG expressed feeling as though they were challenged to produce more in terms of quantifiable results, whereas their non-minority colleagues were often given the benefit of doubt. The sentiment of awareness as to the perceived double standard was captured by participant P-1 who stated the following: "When I was in a management position and hired three Black people in a row, the perception of me completely changed." He went on to clarify that "all of a sudden, I went from being a superstar with great scores to being deemed as pretty average." Participant P-1 further explained that, "my White counterparts throughout the agency who had all-White offices never thought about it or had to deal with the same scrutiny. I still had a very diverse office." He also stated, "I had one of the top executives in the agency who was a presidential appointee come down to spend the day with me to mainly talk about the personnel in my office. He said to me that we can't have all-Black offices." The participant's response was also quite clear: "I responded to him that lucky for me I didn't have an all-Black office, but I hired the best people for the job." Participant P-1 also stated, "I always focused on quantifiable results, whereas my White colleagues never had to because they would get promoted without having achieved them."

The concept and awareness of a professional double standard was supported by multiple participants. The study results suggested that there were systematic inequities with respect to valuating the contributions of the workforce within the OIG community. For instance, P-3 stated, "Your skills aren't seen the same or in the same way. You are graded or viewed on the curve." This perspective was clarified by a subsequent statement: "If you got the position, you must have had some type of shortcut when in reality my experience has been like most of the African Americans in federal law enforcement have had advanced degrees and significant experience." African American males employed in the federal OIG community were also challenged with managing additional stressors which might not have been present for their White colleagues. According to Participant P-2,

> In terms of authenticity, I feel like I have to act a certain way because I'm African American. You know, I have to dress a certain way, talk a certain way. I have to present myself a certain way so that I won't be perceived as an angry Black man or lazy Black man.

This participant went on to state that "I feel like I have to work harder than my non-minority counterparts because the non-minority managers have a vested interest in them, and they overlook some of their flaws when I feel like I have to be perfect." Moreover, there appeared to be a sense of frustration developed by Black males employed in the federal OIG community regarding the belief of established double standards. P-1 captured that frustration by saying, "Blacks have the capacity to do the work; stop creating false hurdles or making up things that only exists for them, that group of people."

Connected to the impression of a professional double standard was also the belief that White colleagues were afforded a certain amount of privilege. The assertion of privilege in this

instance was one that gave White colleagues an advantage over their Black counterparts, for no reason other than being favored by the dominant group because they looked like members of the dominant group. This perception by African American male federal OIG employees was highlighted by participant P-5 who indicated the following,

> When I was at my former OIG there was a situation where multiple Black employees were promoted but had to relocate to Headquarters to do so. While we caught hell and knew not to speak on it publicly, there was a similarly situated White male who refused to take the relocation to Headquarters.

Participant P-5 goes on to explain that "they negotiated with him and allowed him to only do two years at Headquarters before giving his choice of any office in the country to relocate to." However, "None of the Black employees were offered anything like that."

The theory of privilege, while agreed upon, was challenged in a way by a participant who opined that it was hurtful for those receiving the privilege. Participant P-1 believed that, by not forcing non-minorities to strive for excellence, they were hindered. More specifically, P-1 stated, "Non-minorities were done a disservice in many instances because they did not have to be excellent. They were entitled and did not have to apply for opportunities but were getting picked for promotions and opportunities without having to apply." African American males employed in the federal OIG community did provide some interesting pronouncements related to privilege and how privilege is managed to a degree. Black males employed in the federal OIG community felt as though Black managers created favorable situations for Black employees. The difference, however, was that Black managers exercise a sense of fairness to all employees across the board. The belief that White managers did not function in the same ways was captured by Participant P-7 who advised that "the difference is the supervisors. You might have some non-minority

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supervisors who don't do the same things for both sides; whereas, African American supervisors treat minorities and non-minorities the same." This was further clarified: "With non-minority supervisors, sometimes it was blatant, right in your face in terms of differences in treatment."

Participants also shared feelings of being looked at differently and not embraced socially at the same rate as their non-minority colleagues. The social embrace was significant because social doors opened to non-minority colleagues were beneficial when competing for promotions or advancement opportunities. The aforementioned perspective was captured by P-6 in this statement: "So because the relationships are happening, they [White colleagues] are being granted access to managers in a social capacity who feel obligated to help them maneuver the system and move things around to help them get promoted." Participant P-6 stated that "these are the people that look like them and trust me, these are the people they are hanging out with." Study participants deemed promotion opportunities in the federal OIG community as very relational; according to the African American male participants, the social embrace by non-minority managers towards subordinates who look like them translated into the ascension of those very subordinates. For example, P-6 shared an account of how the difference in treatment between African Americans and non-minorities can impact the work status of OIG personnel. According to P-6,

> We had a promotion opportunity come up locally, and when I inquired if everyone in the office would get a chance to act in the position for a time, in preparation of the announcement coming out, so that we could speak to having acted. I was shut down by the supervisor.

Participant P-6 further explained that,

The supervisor, however, assigned one of his buddies who looks like him as the acting in the position for an extended period of time. When the position was finally announced, the person that was acting was selected for the position full time. In summary, "he was set up for success."

Additionally, some study participants lamented the perception that their work, talents and strengths were not appreciated or even viewed equally. The aforementioned belief was captured by participant P-7 who stated,

In my previous agency I never ever applied for promotions because I didn't think I would get it, or it would be a fair shake. You know I heard horror stories about African American employees who scored higher on the promotion exams and continued to get looked over for another who was ranked 300 out of 300 on the list.

African Americans achieving higher test scores and rankings in a formatted process and being overlooked is a concrete example of the devaluation of the African American contributions. Contrary to the devaluation of Black male contributions, exists a system which has expanded the equity gap between minority and non-minority employees. The end results of which was spotlighted in a remark by P-4:

I have not really observed any barriers for non-minority colleagues. They are generally more likely to get promoted in place in the office that they work in; whereas, the minority employee will have to be willing to relocate. If they are, they might be willing to promote the minority employee, should they agree to move. Minorities are less likely to get promoted in place.

Theme 3: Underrepresentation

Throughout the data collection process, a consistency emerged in the dialog centered on the underrepresentation of African Americans in the federal OIG community. The study participants identified that one of the issues potentially impeding the promotion of African American males was their lack of presence in the community. Participant P-6 stated, "When I came on the job almost 20 years ago, it felt like it was only about 1% of the workforce represented by Black men. I look up 20 years later, and it still seems to be 1%." Black males also shared in the perception that it was difficult to promote African American males if you did not first hire them. The conversation regarding underrepresentation was also slightly interwoven with features from theme 2 as to the treatment and opportunities resulting in a continued underrepresentation. The perceptions of African American males employed in the federal OIG community regarding their underrepresentation were understood in a few different ways.

The first perception of underrepresentation by African American males employed in the federal OIG community was that recruitment was a concern. A position evolved that if Black men were not being recruited and subsequently hired, it would be difficult to promote them. Participant P-3 directly reiterated the aforementioned sentiment by stating "The problem is we haven't done a good job of recruiting because the number of African American employees is so few and lends itself to a repetitive system because don't any succession in place." The underrepresentation of African Americans impacted not only those Black males desiring to acquire employment opportunities in the federal OIG but also those few who were already hired. According to Participant P-2,

> Specifically, when I recall going through training and I was in class with personnel from
> other OIGs and the group was predominately White males, and these guys were going to

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be assigned to work in very urban centers like Chicago, Detroit and Atlanta for instance,

which all have very high concentrations of African Americans.

This participant further explained that "I was alarmed by that. It doesn't make sense to have OIG personnel in a city like Detroit and not one Black person." Participant P-2 made a substantive point concerning the lack of representation for multiple reasons. The contingency of few Black male federal OIG employees failed to serve those employed by offering additional support nor did it adequately dress the need for relatability in communities of color. P-2 went on to state, "I think the agencies should reflect the communities we serve. We have to have people that have a seat at the table. Senior executives have to buy into the diversity and inclusion model."

According to the participants of the study, one potential remedy to addressing the issue of underrepresentation as it relates to African American males was to evaluate elements of the hiring process. More directly, participant P-5 addressed the hiring process in this manner,

If you have an interview team, selecting official or whatever the case may be, I would not

trust that to be a single White person. It needs to be a selection team that includes Black

males, Black females, Latino males, Latino females.

 This participant further explained that "it cannot be a White person who has sole selecting authority, you need to have minorities involved in the process or you just will not get minority hires the way they should be hired." Moreover, the residual effects of not addressing representation is that the workforce is flooded with the same individuals from similar backgrounds. An unbalanced system that bypasses equity serves to promote a continual challenge regarding the underrepresentation of one group and overabundance of another. More specifically, study participants deemed advancement opportunities to be slanted in the favor of non-minorities.

African American males provided strong statements as to their presence in such small numbers within the federal OIG workforce. Participant P-6 stated,

> I've been in meetings and only seen a few that looked like me in the room, so I raised my
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> hand and asked what we doing to about diversity and inclusion, only to be privately told
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> that I shouldn't bring that up, and I'll never get promoted if I continue to do that.

According to P-6, the lack of African American male presence in the federal OIG community translated into a similar lack of presence within the hierarchy. The participant's position was captured in this comment: "What I noticed quickly is that you had very few minorities sprinkled in as it related to leadership positions but that there didn't seem to be a real understanding of the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workforce." Black males employed in the federal OIG community were persistent in the belief that they were less likely to get promoted because there were fewer of them in the field to compete for opportunities. Participant P-4 stated, "I think the opportunities for non-minorities are a little greater due to, in my opinion, is because they are typically in the various offices I've worked." He explained this further: "Normally, I was the only minority, so most of the offices I worked in were all White males." and continued by sharing that he has worked at several different OIGs but only worked with a handful of Black males in his job series and even fewer Black females or Hispanic professionals.

Participant P-7 supported the connection between the underrepresentation of African American males and the limited promotion possibilities of that very population. According to P-7, "non-minorities stand better chances for promotion simply by the fact that it was more of them being able to go for these promotions or being asked if they would like to be promoted." Participant P-3 shared a similar sentiment by stating the following: "I don't see them (non-minorities) having any barriers. I think all things considered, if there are positions available, they

are in a good position to get them." Furthermore, this participant stated that "we have barriers to getting those positions because non-minorities dominate the field by sheer numbers. They don't necessarily have the same barriers, and they have more opportunities than us." The discussion as to the disparity between minorities and non-minorities employed in the federal OIG community led participants to also reference the significance of how relational promotions are. Participant P-2 advised,"Promotions are relational for one and the OIG community consists of predominately White males, and a lot of managers are White males." Along similar lines, P-2 also stated, "They (non-minorities) are taken under the wing and given full access. The powers that be walk them through the hiring process." The relational nature of promotion possibilities, lack of African American males employed, and the size of the federal OIG community were all contributors to the development of underrepresentation as a common theme. The above position was encompassed in a comment by P-4 who stated "The biggest barrier I see is that the number of African American professionals is so small, and the OIGs themselves are small, so when it comes to available opportunities, there are limitations for the underrepresented."

Evidence of Quality

One of the key features to ensuring sound scholarship within qualitative research concerns the validation and evidence of quality. The validation and evidence of quality associated with this research study consisted of transcript validation, thick and rich description, the peer review process, and memoing, also known as note-taking. The transcript validation process consisted of the researcher conducting participant interviews utilizing structured questions formulated using an interview guide to conduct the participant interviews. Additionally, the interviews were recorded using the Otter digital application. The transcript validation process continued with a review of the transcripts by the researcher for accuracy and

clarity. The researcher's reviews were followed by subsequent reviews by the individual participants as to their particular interview, and all participants provided approval of their transcripts.

An additional element to the evidence of quality concerns the thick and rich description of data. Per Creswell and Poth (2018), the tenets of thick and rich description allow the reader to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the subject participants and setting under study and also requires the researcher to explain or present a framework that describes the details of the inquiry. The thick and rich description mechanism provided clarity in understanding the data presented by the subject participants.

The evidence of quality procedure would not be adequately adhered to without the inclusion of a peer review process, which offered a reliability check wherein an external evaluator familiar with the research can help determine if the phenomenon were adequately explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The peer review process is often developed through engagement with the dissertation committee. Throughout the process, the dissertation committee members assisted in providing proper feedback and commentary resulting in a more detailed analysis.

The final component to the evidence of quality section which is relative to this qualitative exploratory case study is memoing, also known as note-taking, throughout the data collection and analysis process. The researcher in this qualitative exploratory case study enhanced the subject interview process through note-taking and also utilized note-taking to aid the coding process for the purpose of clarification and theme development.

Summary

As it relates to African American male perceptions of opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership in the federal OIG community, the participant responses to research question one indicated the factors that limited promotion opportunities. The factors included a lack of mentoring opportunities and preferential treatment given to similarly situated non-minority colleagues. Related to research question two, African American males perceived their race as a significant barrier impacting their careers in the federal OIG community with respect to promotion and upward mobility as well as negative perceptions about them (e.g., there are no qualified African American candidates to hire and when Black males are hired it is only due to affirmative action). Conversely, African American males employed in the federal OIG community did not perceive many barriers for their similarly situated White colleagues with the primary barrier being the lack of promotion opportunities based upon organizational size and structure.

The theme development process in this case study resulted in the establishment of the three themes: mentorship, treatment and opportunities, and underrepresentation. Most study participants provided feedback highlighting the importance of mentorship in the professional lives of African American males seeking ascension in the federal OIG community. The study also revealed how participants viewed treatment and opportunities for advancement in the federal OIG community, including how African American males perceived similarly situated non-minority colleagues being treated and/or presented with opportunities for advancement and a perceived double standard in the way Black males are treated versus their non-minority colleagues. In addition, a consistency in the emergence of dialog centered on the underrepresentation of African Americans in the federal OIG community, participants identified

one of the issues potentially impeding the promotion of African American males was the number

of African American males employed in the community.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to describe the lived experiences of African American males employed in the federal OIG community and examine their perceptions of upward mobility in the workforce. The research focused on eight African American males currently employed or recently retired from a federal OIG, at grades GS-12 and above. The participants were located in the southeastern region of the United States and had federal experience ranging between 5 and 20-plus years in their particular discipline within the federal OIG community.

Methods of Data Collection

The data collection was a central component of this qualitative research study and included procedures necessary for the study's validity, such as obtaining informed consent and protecting participants' identities. Equally significant to the process was developing a data collection tool (Creswell & Poth, 2018) linked to the research questions presented. The population for the research study was African American males employed in the federal OIG community, and the sampling frame for data collection was African American males employed within the federal OIG community and located in the United States' southeastern United States. The study participants ranged in experience from 5 years to 20-plus years from professional-level non-supervisory personnel to supervisory employees within the leadership and management chain as well as those recently retired from the federal OIG community. The assistance of

professional networking organizations such as the National Organizational of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) aided in the identification of study participants.

The study consisted of making appropriate contact with the various federal OIGs to gain approval to conduct the study utilizing their personnel. Based upon the structure of most OIGs, the Offices of General Counsel (OGC) were the approving entities. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted before data collection began. Due to the lack of prior research conducted within this subject area purposeful sampling was the most appropriate for conduction of the study. Per Creswell and Poth (2018), purposeful sampling occurs when the researcher is intentionally sampling a group of participants that can best inform the researcher about the problems under examination. Data collection for this research included recorded participant interviews where the data was maintained on a biometric thumb drive device and securely stored in a locked fireproof safe.

Summary of Results

This qualitative exploratory case study resulted in multiple findings which connected to research questions one and two. Per the research conducted in this study, the factors deemed to be limiting the ascension of African American males employed in the federal OIG, and the community included a lack of mentoring opportunities extended to Black males and preferential treatment extended to similarly situated non-minorities. Additionally, the participants of this study identified their race as a significant barrier impeding their success and upward mobility. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Critical Race Theory (CRT) suggests that race is an integral factor in every aspect of life. The consequential nature of race in the professional lives of the African American males employed in the federal OIG community who participated in the study was in direct alignment with the tenets of CRT.

This qualitative exploratory case study yielded additional findings concerning African American male perceptions of barriers to ascension within the federal OIG community. The most significant additional barrier came in the form of an underrepresentation of minorities as a whole, and Black males, specifically. Lastly, the study unraveled what the participants deemed as a limitation for all individuals regardless of ethnicity or background: the small size and scale of most OIGs presents limitations with respect to upward mobility for all employees. However, the lack of minorities employed in the federal OIG community still presents cardinal disadvantages for African American males and other minorities. Based upon sheer numbers, the probability of non-minority colleagues ascending into upward mobility leadership positions at a disproportionate rate is highly likely and even anticipated.

An important element to truly understanding the resulting data concerns the researcher's ability to analyze and categorize the data into common themes. The procedure of analyzing and categorizing data into themes is known as thematic coding. Per Vaismorsadi et al. (2016), themes are attributable, descriptors, elements and concepts with common points of reference tied to the research questions. The key themes unveiled in this case study were mentorship, treatment and opportunities, and underrepresentation.

Mentorship was believed to be an essential part of an OIG employees' growth and development for a few principal reasons. Participants suggested that by acquiring a mentor, OIG employees were better positioned to receive opportunities such as special projects, developmental assignments, and agency directed work; all of which will provide a significant platform for exposure to senior leadership officials. Furthermore, study participants identified how relational the federal OIG community is at this time. The relationship-centric nature of the community suggests that opportunities are more likely to be presented to individuals who have a

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good relationship with senior management officials. Study participants also indicated that members of the ethnic majority are more likely to receive access to senior managers for the purpose of rapport building and relationship enhancement. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Non-Hispanic Whites represented 79.26% of Senior Executive Service (SES) positions throughout the federal civil service (OPM, 2017). The federal OIGs are a subset of the larger government system, thus inferences can be drawn as to even lower percentages in the OIG community. Based on demographics associated with SES members, mentoring, relationship-centric opportunities, and developmental assignments often go to those with whom the senior leaders are comfortable with and resemble them. The African American male federal OIG employees interviewed during the study advised that they were engaged less by white managers, but when they had an African American manager, they were more likely to receive mentoring and support.

An additional point of emphasis regarding the concept of mentoring had to do with the necessity and connection point. Per the participants in this qualitative exploratory case study, mentorship can be pivotal to the success and trajectory of African American males who are afforded opportunity and investment by those within their leadership chain. Conversely, there was the perception that non-minority colleagues were not mandated to have a mentor in order to be promoted. Subject P-1 even offered this: "I did try getting other mentors that were non-African American, but they were not interested in talking to me." The inequity in how mentoring and support opportunities are disseminated in the federal OIG community reinforces why there were and continue to be institutional issues of concern.

The proximity to ascension for African American males in the federal OIG community was also connected to treatment and opportunities. In the paragraph above, the inequity in

mentoring and developmental opportunities was discussed and how the lack of opportunities and engagement was critical to the overall treatment of African American males. Black males acknowledged the double standard they were up against that required them to produce more quantifiable results. Black males also believed that their similarly situated White colleagues were not required to achieve the same results or produce at the same rate. Along similar lines, Black males believed that their White counterparts were also the beneficiaries of a certain amount of privilege, wherein they received the benefit of the doubt in many cases. The privilege also resulted in non-minority colleagues being looked at more favorably in a variety of ways ranging from their work product, promotion potential, and even from a social engagement perspective.

Mentoring along with treatment and opportunities were identified as principle themes which evolved in this study. Lastly, underrepresentation was the final theme which emerged. The lack of Black male presence in the federal OIG community is interconnected to the issues with mentoring, along with treatment and opportunities. The participants of this study identified the challenges related to the promotion of African American males because there were few to none available to promote. In short, Black males felt as though more Black males had to first be hired before they could be considered for promotion or advancement.

The underrepresentation of African American males in the federal OIG community highlights a flaw in the recruitment plans embraced by many OIGs. Furthermore, the underrepresentation speaks to the double standard insofar as Black male contributions are not valued in the same way. Multiple research participants in this study lamented being viewed differently than their non-minority counterparts and stated that being viewed differently served as barriers in their careers.

Discussion of Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are African American male perceptions of their opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

This qualitative exploratory case study sought to identify African American male perceptions related to opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership advancement in the federal OIG community. The research determined that Black males employed in the federal OIG community viewed some barriers to their ascension with the most notable being a lack of mentoring and developmental opportunities. Participants indicated that African American males were not being embraced professionally or personally in similar fashions as their non-minority colleagues.

Furthermore, Black males adopted a solid position that within the concerns regarding their treatment existed both the double standard against them and the privilege extended to their White counterparts. There was also a sentiment of transparency when the study participants captured the fact that the federal OIG has some limitations affecting all employees, namely organization size, scale, and structure. The federal OIGs are typically structured as smaller elements of a larger federal government entity. Unlike the more traditional law enforcement agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration, or United States Secret Service, the federal OIGs are a fraction of their size. Due to the limited size and, in some instances, the scope of work, the federal OIGs have different organizational structures which limit promotion opportunities. Black males also deemed the structural limitations to be counterproductive to them because the limited positions in leadership placed ceilings on how many minorities were promoted.

Research Question 2

What do African American males perceive as barriers to promotion in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

African American males employed in the federal OIG community determined their race to be the most significant barrier impeding upon their ascension. Black males acknowledged the pervasive nature of race and the fact that racial disparities are embedded in society as a whole. Participants in this study also recognized that race has influenced the subculture within the federal OIG community. Race and negative emotions around race then created the foundation and development of certain barriers. For instance, this research study determined that Black males were not being offered employment opportunities in the federal OIG community. The lack of opportunities was attached to the narrative that qualified African American males were difficult to find and hire. Race appeared to be the barrier to the success of African American males.

Both research questions reflected some duplicity in the answers. Black male federal OIG employees provided information concerning perceptions of their ability to be promoted. The respondents identified that their promotion potential was hindered by factors such as the disparity in their treatment and limitations in the number of promotions based on size, scale, and structure. The aforementioned elements not only contributed to the Black male perceptions of promotion potential but also served as perceived barriers by the same respondent group. The respondents of the study identified the underrepresentation of Black males in the federal OIG community. The lack of Black males employed in the workforce translates into a level of circumspection concerning the capacity to elevate African American males. The lack of Black

male presence in leadership positions also proved to be a moral deterrent for the minority workforce within the federal OIG community.

Study Limitations

The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore African American male perceptions of ascension within the federal OIG community. The population for the research was African American males employed in the federal OIG community. The sampling frame for data collection was African American males employed within the federal OIG community in the United States' southeastern region. The study posed potential limitations regarding the sampling frame and more significant implications. The small sample frame of the study created some limitations as it only concentrated on Black male federal OIG employees in the United States' southeastern region. Most federal OIGs are national organizations with offices and/or personnel located throughout the domestic U.S.

The federal law enforcement community is significant as a whole when evaluating it from a size and scope perspective. The federal OIG community, however, is a smaller subset of the larger law enforcement apparatus. The sampling frame in this qualitative exploratory case study has limitations in the aggregate. The majority of OIGs are headquartered in Washington, D.C. or the surrounding area. Furthermore, members of the national leadership teams within most OIGs are co-located at the headquarters facilities with other managers also assigned to field detachments throughout the country. This study only examined the perceptions of Black males employed in the OIG within one small region of the country, and as a result of the targeted examination of participants within the southeastern region of the United States, a limitation emerged.

A secondary limitation concerned the professional pedigree of participants. Structurally, most federal OIGs have two major divisions: audit and investigations. The audit divisions within most federal OIGs conduct audits of programs within that particular agency and often have external audit functions as well. The investigations divisions within most federal OIGs are tasked with conducting criminal and or civil investigations both internally and externally. The study engaged participants employed exclusively in one division which created an additional limitation.

Implications for Future Practice

The federal OIGs can take some critical steps to address the inequities and underrepresentation occurring within their agencies. The first and most critical action that must occur is a direct and honest acknowledgement of the problem. Tough conversations regarding the past practices that have created the current situation are required to move forward effectively. According to Lopez-Littleton et al., (2018), training and education on racism are needed in the public sector workforce. Conversations of this magnitude must occur with senior executives and those who make policy at the agency level. While it might appear to be a standardized response, the idea of creating a program to address diversity and inclusion within an agency is also a helpful contribution towards the achievement of the larger goal of creating a more balanced organization.

This qualitative exploratory case study also yielded significant implications for future practice and identified a few key areas which should be addressed moving forward. Mentoring was identified as an important aspect of Black male development in the federal OIG community. The development of concrete and structured mentoring initiatives that demonstrate the expertise, potential, and abilities of Black males will be important for the future of African American males

in the federal OIG community. Additionally, the inclusion of Black males in mentoring, leadership, and developmental programs will also assists senior executives in succession planning. Providing opportunities for Black males to participate in mentoring and developmental activities will improve the perception that programs of this nature are not truly available to minorities.

This research study was also integral for addressing the disproportionate treatment of African American males employed in the federal OIG community. The perception of double standards regarding how Black males believe they are treated in the federal OIG community leads to the need for fundamental change. Continued inequities rooted in privilege and in-group dynamics which often excludes minorities will only exacerbate the problem. Improvements can be made in this area through the creation of thoughtful discussions and programs aimed at addressing the topic. The use of town hall meetings, culture sessions, sensitivity training, and even mediation training are all appropriate anecdotal efforts towards improvements in this area. Open dialog between senior executives and the workforce is also necessary for developments concerning treatment and opportunities. Lastly, creating programs and other events that offer minority employees exposure to senior leaders will be necessary and beneficial for growth regarding this sub-topic.

Law enforcement agencies as well as other agencies, businesses, and organizations, should initiate intentional recruitment of African American candidates. A more intentional and somewhat targeted campaign is necessary as it relates to building bridges between law enforcement organizations and communities of color. Through exposing communities of color to ethically sound and fair law enforcement personnel, the relationships between those communities and members of law enforcement can be improved. Law enforcement of all levels and disciplines

should be represented by African Americans, and the bridges to better relationships and trust in the community are formed when greater methods of recruiting emerge.

Tools such as internships, camps, symposiums and other activities are designed to build trust and confidence in the profession (Cain, 2020). Programs such as internships, camps and symposiums are important for improving relations between law enforcement and the community. Programs as previously described are also helpful for marketing the agencies for improved public perception and recruitment purposes (Cain, 2020). These concepts can be implemented across the country to offer greater diversity opportunities for upward mobility in the workforce for all minorities.

The capacity of federal OIGs to develop diversity and inclusion programs can be imperative to addressing the issues of underrepresentation while also reshaping the narrative that there are not enough qualified African American male candidates. Along similar lines, shifts in diversity and inclusion will also show Black males employed in the federal OIG community (or desiring employment in the federal OIG community) that they are valued, wanted, and have opportunities within the field. The implications discussed are not only limited to the OIF but are relative to other agenices, organzations, and businesses.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research design for this study was a qualitative exploratory case study. The study resulted in the identification of a few recommendations for future research. First, additional research should be performed to better understand the perceptions of ascension and promotion opportunities by other underrepresented male groups in the federal OIG community, to include but not limited to Hispanic, Asian, and males of multi-racial backgrounds. Secondly, additional research should be performed to better understand the perceptions of ascension and promotion

opportunities by underrepresented female groups in the federal OIG community, to include but not limited to African American, Hispanic, Asian, and females of multi-racial backgrounds. Third, future research should be conducted to better understand perceptions of ascension and promotion opportunities in the federal OIG community by minority group personnel (as identified above) assigned to the headquarters detachment, as opposed to a regional or local field office. Lastly, future research should be conducted with ethnic minority personnel employed in the federal OIG community but segregated by their respective divisions. A qualitative or mixed-methods study would be the most appropriate manner of better understanding the phenomenon of perceptions within the federal OIG community.

Conclusion

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to describe the lived experiences of African American males employed in the federal OIG community and examine their perceptions of upward mobility in the workforce. The research focused on eight African American males currently employed or recently retired from a federal OIG, at grades GS-12 and above. The study participants were all college-educated government servants with experience ranging from 5 years to 20-plus years of federal service. The data was collected through participant interviews and utilized a data collection tool to lead the discussion in those interviews. The interviews were designed to answer two research questions. Research Question 1 was as follows: What are African American male perceptions of their opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership in the federal Office of Inspectors General community? Similar in nature, Research Question 2 asked the following: What do African American males perceive as barriers to promotion in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

Per the research conducted in this study, the factors deemed to be limiting the ascension of African American males employed in the federal Office of Inspectors General community included a lack of mentoring opportunities extended to Black males and preferential treatment extended to similarly situated non-minorities. Additionally, the participants of this study identified their race as a significant barrier impeding their success and upward mobility. This qualitative exploratory case study yielded additional findings concerning African American male perceptions of barriers to ascension within the federal OIG community. The most significant additional barrier in the form of an underrepresentation was of minorities as a whole, and Black males, specifically. Lastly, the study unraveled what the participants deemed as a limitation for all individuals regardless of ethnicity or background.

This qualitative research study identified two limitations deemed fundamental to the research that posed potential limitations regarding the sampling frame as well as more significant implications. The small sample frame of the study created some limitations as it only concentrated on Black male federal OIG employees in the United States' southeastern region while most federal OIGs are national organizations with offices and or personnel located throughout the domestic U.S. By focusing on the engagement of OIG employees in the southeast only, some restrictions were placed on the study. The second limitation concerned the professional pedigree of the study participants: Most federal OIGs are segmented into two divisions, namely Audit and Investigations. The study limitation concerned all participants being employed in one division rather than a balance of the two.

The implications for future practice focused on the reinvestment by government and law enforcement agencies into communities of color and targeted recruitment of members from those very communities to serve in law enforcement positions. This qualitative case study recognized

the significance of a long-term strategic plan to increase engagement, recruitment and promote an improved relationship with minority communities on the behalf of law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the implications for future practice also captured the need for current change in the form of the development of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

This study resulted in four recommendations for future study. The first recommendation suggested the conduction of additional research with other minority males concerning their perceptions of ascension and promotion opportunities in the federal OIG community. Second, the study also suggested the performance of additional research focused on minority females employed within the federal OIG community. The third recommendation concerned ascertaining perceptions of ascension and promotion opportunities by the designated minorities above who are employed at the headquarters level and not the regional or field levels. The final recommendation encouraged future study focused on the expansion of the sampling frame by inquiring as to the perceptions of minority group members based upon their respective work components.

The findings of this study are intended to enhance and assist the federal OIG community in the areas of diversity and inclusion by offering rich feedback and detail by a segment of the workforce. This research was not performed for divisive means but rather to initiate honest and noteworthy dialog regarding issues which are significant to not just the federal OIG community, butother agencies, businesses, and organizations. It is important to mention the fact that the while participants in study offered some difference in their perspectives, they were all very candid. Furthermore, the participants in this study were not Black males with troubled histories in the federal OIG community such that this research could serve as a platform to unload their grievances. To the contrary, the make-up of this participant group included multiple managers,

one senior executive, and non-supervisory employees who were touted for management but elected not to pursue at the time. This study was in no way intended to be perceived as an indictment on White males or majority figures in the federal OIG community. Moreover, it is the hope and desire of the investigator that this study would be fruitful in the advancement of diversity and inclusion in the federal OIG community and public service organizations everywhere.

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APPENDIX

Appendix:

Interview Guide

<u>Interview Guide</u>

Is this Seat Taken? African American Male Perceptions of Ascension in the Federal Office of

Inspector General (OIG) community.

Time of the Interview: _____

Date: _____

Location of the Interview: Phone

Interviewer: Donrich L. Young, Ed.D, Candidate- Southeastern University

Interviewee: _____

Position/Title of Interviewee: _____

Years of Federal Government Service of Interviewee: _____

Highest Level of Education: _____

_____

_____

Study Description: The study is being conducted to examine the perceptions of African American males seeking ascension in their employment within the Federal Office of the Inspector General community. The study intends to increase understanding around both barriers and components of success for African American males seeking upward mobility in the federal OIG community. The research aims to highlight the viewpoints of an underrepresented population of professionals within the federal OIG community.

Reseach Questions

R^1: What are African American male perceptions of opportunities for promotion and upper-level leadership in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

R^2: What do African American males perceive as barriers to promotion in the federal Office of Inspectors General community?

Interview Questions

(Warm-up): What were your initial impressions of the culture within the OIG community?

1. How would you describe opportunities presetend to you for mentoring, coaching and developmental opportunities?

2. What is your perception of the mentoring, coaching and developmental opportunities presented to similarly situated non-minority colleagues?

3. How would you describe your opportunities for promotion and advancement?

4. What is your perception of the opportunites for promotion and advancement for similarly situated non-minority colleagues? Please support why you have the perception that you do?

5. How would you describe any perceived barriers you have experienced to your upward mobility in the Federal Office of the Inspector General community? Please describe what you believe to be the basis of said barriers, if you perceive them to exist?

6. How would you describe any observed barriers which were presented to similary situated non-minority colleageus? Feel free to elaborate and or offer examples?

7. How would you describe your accessibility to managers and leaders at your agency with regard to discussions concerning your professional development?

8. What is your perception of the accessibility to managers and leaders provided to your non-minority colleagues with regard to discussions of professional development? Please support your position with greater details if possible?

9. What are some recommendations of ways in which organizations/agencies can increase African American male recruitment, and ascension into the leadership ranks?

BONUS: What else would you like to contribute to this study regarding African American male ascension to leadership positions within the OIG? (or something similar)

BONUS: Ability to be authentic?

BONUS: Are the barrriers and challenges as significant for black women?